

INCLUSION STRATEGY

Cardiff Council • 2025



**STRONGER
FAIRER
GREENER**



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	Page 3
What is Inclusion?	Page 3
Inclusion in Cardiff	Page 4
OUR VISION	Page 7
OUR PRINCIPLES	Page 8
MAKING A DIFFERENCE	Page 9
OUR AREAS FOR ACTION	Page 10
Area for Action 1: Deepening and embedding Inclusive Practice	Page 10
Area for Action 2: Strengthening the engagement of our learners	Page 13
Area for Action 3: The right provision and the best support for learners	Page 16
Area for Action 4: Meeting the needs of ALL our learners	Page 18
Area for Action 5: Supporting and Strengthening Our Workforce	Page 22
NEXT STEPS	Page 24

INTRODUCTION

What is Inclusion?

Belonging is a fundamental human need. A sense of belonging reflects our deep-seated need to associate with, be accepted by and valued by members of a group. It has a significant impact on our well-being, enhancing motivation and happiness.

Learners who feel they belong are more likely to achieve, thrive and maximise their potential. We can all create inclusive environments which foster a sense of belonging by creating bonds, enhancing a sense of community and developing shared values and experiences.

We want all children and young people

to feel they belong in their school.

This is what we mean by Inclusion.



Inclusion in Cardiff

What do children and young people say?

In developing our Inclusion Strategy, we have listened to children and young people to understand how it feels to be a learner in Cardiff. Children and young people told us about their positive experiences in school, for example:

- **Their culture, language and religion is respected**
- **That there are adults in their school that they trust**
- **They feel included in group work or activities**

They also told us about aspects of school life which were less positive, for example:

- **Getting told off in front of the whole class**
- **Teachers giving more attention to the 'loud' pupils**
- **School rules not always being fair for everyone**
- **Seeing posters and signs which don't reflect people 'like me'**

We asked learners what was important to them and what made them feel included. Children and young people felt that:

- **Everyone, including those who are shy, anxious or feel different should be welcome, safe and treated equally**
- **Choice, participation and being taken seriously makes them feel respected, improves their confidence and leads to a better school for everyone**
- **They want adults in schools to notice when they are struggling, and they want someone to check in on them so that they feel safe and valued**
- **Their opinions and ideas should be sought especially if they are not confident or 'popular'**



What do parents and carers say?

We asked parents and carers about their children's experience of school and the support they received. Parents were very positive about school staff as role models, they recognised their skill and motivation in supporting learners. Other positives include:

- **Their children being cared for, feeling safe and being happy in school**
- **Receiving good feedback on the progress their child is making and knowing how to raise concerns if they need extra help**
- **Schools highlighting the importance of good attendance, celebrating positive achievements and having clear policies on behaviour**

A minority of parents and carers reflected less positive experiences in some aspects:

- **Some parents and carers thought the curriculum was not responsive enough and others that additional support is not always effective**
- **Whether there are opportunities for children to contribute their views and if children with specific aptitudes receive enough challenge and encouragement to maximise their potential**
- **That while policies on behaviour were clear tackling instances of bullying and poor behaviour could improve**



What does data tell us?

We have undertaken a data deep dive to discern patterns, trends and features of education in Cardiff. We are mindful that Inclusion is hard to measure and data can only offer a glimpse of some indicators, nevertheless they are an important component that aid our understanding. Our data sources include: attendance, exclusions, Pastoral Support Plans (PSPs), post 16 destinations and involvement with youth justice. Covid and its impact on schools and learners means that trends have to be interpreted with care. All that being said the data indicates:

- **Girls' attendance rates in the latter part of secondary school are a particular concern**
- **Across a range of indicators there is no clear relationship with ethnicity although very notable differences for some ethnic minority learners, in particular Gypsy, Traveller and Roma learners**
- **Socio-economic disadvantage appears to have the strongest correlation with adverse indicators. Generally, white children from low-income backgrounds have lower attendance, higher exclusions and are more likely to have a PSP. This translates into higher incidences in areas of Cardiff such as Ely, Caerau and Splott**
- **Over time exclusions (number of pupils and number of days) and PSPs have increased significantly. White boys who are relatively deprived and have additional learning needs and Gypsy, Traveller and Roma learners are very significantly over-represented in the figures**
- **Involvement with Youth Justice shows a clear relationship with living in a more deprived community with the areas of Fairwater, Llandaff North and Ely the most common home addresses**

Data on children who are looked after is affected by cohort size and reporting arrangements, but we

know that across the range of inclusion indicators many do not fare well and this is reflected in longer term outcomes and life chances. Alongside our own data we have a wealth of intelligence from Public Health Wales's School Health Research Network (SHRN) Data which provides a regular snapshot of 11- to 16-year-olds experiences of school life and their mental health and well-being. There are many positives to take away from this survey, for example, most learners feel their teachers accept them and levels of bullying are lower in Cardiff than in other parts of Wales. Less positive aspects of this survey that are notable for Cardiff include:

- **Only about half of learners in Cardiff feel truly part of their school community. Over 60% say they can talk openly to teachers, this is similar across Wales, however, Cardiff does report the lowest percentage**
- **Trust in teachers sits at around 40% and the percentage of learners that feel that their ideas are taken seriously hovers around 32%. Both are lower than Wales average suggesting the potential for strengthening learner-teacher relationships**
- **In 2017, 74% of learners felt there was support in their school when they felt unhappy or worried, this dropped to 59% in 2023. Relative to other local authorities we have moved from being in the top third in 2017, to the lower half by 2023. This suggests a need for renewed focus on school support initiatives to reverse this trend.**
- **Only 41% of Cardiff learners report that they have a say in planning and organising school activities. This is below the Wales average, and places Cardiff the 5th lowest ranked across all Local Authorities. This highlights the need to strengthen pupil voice in secondary schools**

Overall, while there is much to celebrate in Cardiff, there is more that we can do so that every child and young person belongs and feels included in their school or educational setting¹.

¹ See Annex for further details

OUR VISION

We want all children and young people to have access to an education that inspires them, helps them to thrive and supports them to achieve their aspirations and fulfil their potential.

There will be times when children and young people face pressures that make engaging with education more difficult. These pressures can come in many forms and are often unpredictable, for example familial changes, health issues and transition from one education setting to another. Children and young people are navigating a rapidly changing world with new pressures emanating from social media and Artificial Intelligence. We want schools and education settings to be safe and welcoming spaces for every learner. Achieving this requires collaboration; working together to build a sense of belonging and community and adapting provision to reflect the diversity and needs of all our learners.

We can only do this by working together in the interests of children and young people and that is why our strategy is underpinned by a clear and simple **vision**:

We work together and take collective responsibility for the belonging and success of all children and young people in Cardiff

While this vision may be simple, achieving it is not always straightforward. When high quality education works well it provides more than a learning environment, it provides support and stability for children and young people when other things in their life are changing or turbulent. But it does not always work as well as it should and that is not good enough.

We are ambitious for our learners and there are too many children and young people that find accessing education really challenging which results in non-attendance, withdrawal from school (such as opting for elective home education), anxiety, fixed term or permanent exclusion, the levels of which, remain a significant concern for us in Cardiff.

The areas for action set out in this strategy are designed to support us in developing a more inclusive education system over the next 10 years. These are ambitious and long-term goals which will require the commitment of all partners.



OUR PRINCIPLES

Reflecting what learners, parents, school leaders and stakeholders have said, the principles that will underpin our work are:

- **All children and young people have the right to be heard and taken seriously with respect shown for their identity, culture, language and beliefs**
- **All children and young people have the right to feel safe, connected, and accepted and have a trusted adult they can turn to for support**
- **We build and develop resilience including through supporting the emotional health and well-being of all learners**
- **Belonging is an ethos central to our vision, policies, curriculum, and provision; where diversity is celebrated and every member of our community feels valued and, is proactively included**
- **Behaviour is a form of communication and needs to be understood so it is responded to appropriately and effectively**
- **All barriers to education and learning need to be identified early in order to be considered and responded to effectively to offer the right support, in the right place, at the right time**
- **Families are central to decision making working in partnership with schools and providers to develop plans that respond to children and young people's needs**
- **All settings, services and provisions work together to provide an inclusive educational experience in the best setting for each child or young person**



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Partnership and collaboration underpin our approach, so in taking forward the areas for action set out in the next section of this strategy we will establish the Cardiff Inclusion Board to ensure there is visibility and accountability for us all working with pace, passion and purpose in bringing about the changes needed.

We want this strategy to have impact and to make a measurable difference to outcomes for children and young people in Cardiff. We will develop an implementation plan, including performance measures, milestones and roles and responsibilities. Our implementation plan will be mindful of the inequitable outcomes highlighted so starkly by our data to ensure we focus effort and resources. As corporate parents we have a collective responsibility to ensure that Children

Looked After (CLA) by Cardiff are prioritised in the work that we do. Their success in education is our shared responsibility, and their needs will be prioritised and supported at every stage from policy to practice.

Whether they are living in Cardiff or elsewhere, we will have systems in place to make their experience of education as positive as possible. This Inclusion Strategy needs to be seen alongside our Corporate Parenting Strategy and the commitments set out there.

If all children and young people belong and succeed, no child or young person would be excluded from school, all children and young people would be in provision appropriate to their needs and all young people would make positive progress into post 16 education, employment or training. We know these are hard things to achieve but they are the ambitions and aspirations that will guide us.

OUR AREAS FOR ACTION

Area for Action 1: Deepening and embedding Inclusive Practice

What is our aim

We want all learners to feel they belong. All schools and settings should foster a culture where diversity is valued, well-being is prioritised, and inclusive values are embedded in everyday practice. Across Cardiff we will have a shared understanding of inclusive practice and

pedagogy and all schools and setting will strive to achieve this. We will work collaboratively, using our new school improvement arrangements, to share expertise and effective practice to benefit all of our learners.

What is going well

Schools in Cardiff have a deep commitment to children's rights, with a remarkable 81.3% of Cardiff schools having achieved Rights Respecting Schools status, and 61.5% achieving their silver or gold award. Cardiff is making strong progress in creating inclusive, respectful, and opportunity-rich environments for children and young people. The city ranks higher than the Wales average for learners having a sense of belonging in school, underscoring the city's commitment and achievements. Initiatives like The Passport to the City offer both universal and bespoke experiences to ensure all young people across the city access opportunities.

Cardiff is working hard to ensure that children and young people from all over the world feel welcome, with 30 schools already awarded School of Sanctuary status and 19 more actively working towards it. Encouragingly, 77% of young people feel their culture, language, or religion is respected in school, and 85% say their teachers

greet them by name which fosters a sense of belonging.

This is further supported by targeted training for school practitioners on diversity in the curriculum and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training delivered in partnership with organisations like DARPL and Show Racism the Red Card.

To promote period dignity, all maintained primary, secondary, special and PRU settings in Cardiff receive a range of eco-friendly and reusable period products. Period products are also provided to learners educated outside of schools. Alongside this, funding is used to provide staff training and learner workshops on puberty and periods. Schools have embraced Whole School approaches to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing and are well on the way to having action plans in place to embed the Welsh Government Framework.

Why is this a priority

Feedback from our learners and survey data tells us that there are areas where we can improve inclusive practice. For example ensuring that learners are heard and that they have an opportunity to shape the decisions that affect them. Inclusive practices vary across schools, sometimes this reflects differences between the needs of learners, and sometimes it reflects the priority given to belonging. We want belonging

to be seen as an integral part of what makes a successful school, if learners do not feel valued they are less likely to engage and thrive. Belonging is a key component of the Curriculum for Wales, 'Enabling Learning' sets out how enabling adults, engaging experiences and effective environments all contribute to learners' developmental pathways.

How will we know if we have improved

All schools and settings will have a shared understanding of what it means to be inclusive and will be able to demonstrate approaches and provision that respond to the diversity of learners' needs and instil a sense of belonging.

All schools will continue to participate in the School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey so that we can monitor trends relating to inclusion and wellbeing. We will put in place more regular surveys encompassing special schools to gauge learners' views.



What are we going to do

- In partnership with our school community we will develop a “Cardiff Inclusion Framework” setting out our expectations of inclusive practice. Over time all schools should work towards adopting and embedding this framework. It will build upon existing examples such as Schools of Sanctuary, Rights Respecting Schools, Whole School Approach Emotional and Mental Well-being self-evaluation tool and the Inclusion Quality Mark. It will be bespoke to Cardiff, embracing all schools and ensuring that our priorities, such as CLA friendly practices and being an Anti-Racist Wales are embedded within it
- Ensure that all schools are using MyConcern to record and track safeguarding concerns as well as wider behaviour issues including bullying. We will take bullying incidents seriously and ensure that our reporting and recording of such incidents are dealt with appropriately and in line with Welsh Government guidance
- Building on our new school improvement arrangements we will consider how Collaborative Learning and Improvement Partnerships (CLIPs) could be used in the future to promote and exemplify excellent inclusive practice and share and develop approaches across all schools. Peer reviews of Inclusion, for example, could assist in developing our Cardiff Inclusion Framework
- Linked to the new school improvement arrangements, we will embed Collaborative and Planning practices between Inclusion Services and Schools, to ensure school improvement and inclusion are integrated
- Undertake a review of Cardiff Commitment to ensure that the range of activities and the excellent relationships that have been developed with employers across the city are used to best effect to support learners. This includes raising their aspirations helping in transitions to post 16 education, employment or training and targeting resources towards children and young people who most need support
- Continue to support schools to develop and embed Whole School Approaches to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing. This includes but is not limited to training in relationships and school connectedness through programmes such as Thrive, Understanding Behaviour and Relational Approaches to Attendance and Creating a Sense of Belonging



Area for Action 2: Strengthening the engagement of our learners

What is our aim

When learners are engaged they attend school, enjoy learning, feel empowered and participate in activities that build resilience. Engagement in learning has many components but one of the most critical means of promoting engagement is by ensuring that all learners have good speech, language and communication skills.

There is very good evidence that lower reading ability correlates with learners demonstrating

challenging behaviour. It stands to reason that if learners do not develop strong communication skills it will be more difficult for them to engage in learning. As our principles set out, behaviour is a form of communication. We want to ensure that all learners have the communication skills to engage as fully as possible in school life and benefit from the opportunities presented by Curriculum for Wales.

What is going well

Learners in Cardiff report a sense of belonging in school and 69% of pupils report that they do not feel left out of group work or activities. Although attendance has faced challenges since the pandemic, significant efforts across the city have led to improvements, with current data showing a positive upward trend.

Our ABSA (Anxiety Based School Avoidance) guidance includes practical tools and techniques, which supports schools' ability to respond positively to learners experiencing anxiety based school avoidance. Building on this our newly developed Anxiety Resource Pack provides school staff with practical tools

to support pupils experiencing anxiety, helping them remain engaged and active in their learning environment. Our approach includes trialling and embracing innovative initiatives such as the Cardiff AV1 virtual robot pilot to help learners reconnect with school life.

Beyond the school environment, the Youth Service plays a vital role through clubs and street-based outreach, ensuring young people are aware of the opportunities available within their communities. The Youth Service has provided bespoke 1-2-1 support to 5,809 young people across Cardiff, engaging young people and enriching their educational experience.



Why is this a priority

Disengagement comes in many forms, learners may not attend, they may not actively participate in school or even become oppositional and defiant displaying challenging behaviour. If children and young people are not in school, they miss out on learning opportunities and the wider social and emotional enrichment that school provides. In recent years the behaviours of some pupils have become more challenging, and exclusions have increased. More parents and carers are opting for Elective Home Education where they feel schools cannot meet their child's needs. There has been an increase in Pastoral Support Plans (PSPs) and their prolonged use is rarely in

learners' best interests. The number of children being permanently excluded where it is quickly apparent that there are underlying Additional Learning Needs that have not been identified or addressed, is a notable and very concerning trend.

The use of screening tools, such as Speech Links, Language Links and WellComm for assessing and addressing learners' speech language and communication skills is established across Cardiff primary schools and early years settings, but there is some evidence to suggest that use of these tools has diminished in some settings over time.

How will we know if we have improved

More children will progress to secondary school with oracy and reading skills that enable them to access the curriculum. If learners are more engaged we expect to see attendance and behaviour improve. Across all schools our first step in understanding challenging behaviour or poor attendance will be to consider and assess a learners' communication needs.



What are we going to do

- **Ensure schools use screening tools for assessing learners' speech language and communication skills with a range of strategies to respond to needs**
- **We will make Reading a priority by developing and rolling out a professional learning programme to enhance the teaching of reading and ensure all schools have clear and effective strategies and programmes to develop reading at all ages and abilities**
- **The Promoting Reintegration and Reducing Exclusions (PPRE) Project at Willows High School is drawing on best practice to pilot new approaches that deepen our understanding of excluded learners' unidentified communication needs. It aims to explore how early intervention can reduce disengagement and behavioural challenges. Based on the findings of this pilot we will consider how we can expand this across Cardiff**
- **To continue to secure improvements in attendance, our forthcoming Cardiff Attendance Action Plan will set out a range of measures to strengthen support to schools and parents, target priority areas such as girls' attendance in upper secondary school and support the attendance of CLA learners**
- **We know that transitions – of all sorts – can be a particularly challenging time for learners where engagement can decline. We will establish city wide protocols for transitions including between mainstream and specialist settings and for asylum seeker and refugee learners**
- **We will develop a Charter for our Children who are Looked After to support schools in ensuring they have policies and practices, particularly around admissions, attendance and exclusions which are 'CLA friendly' and recognise the importance of bespoke approaches to meeting their needs**
- **Our Vulnerability Assessment profiling tool plays an important role in identifying young people who may be at risk of being Not in Education, Employment or Training. We are reviewing and revamping this tool so that it can support us in identifying a wider group of young people at risk of disengagement where targeted interventions could support more positive outcomes**
- **Every learner who is persistently absent or is subject to a PSP or fixed term exclusion, if not already undertaken, should be screened for speech, language and communication difficulties**
- **De-escalation and Team Teach is the Cardiff approach to managing challenging behaviour. All schools should have training in these approaches and adopt a whole school approach to how these methodologies are deployed**
- **Strengthen the school-based counselling offer available to learners across the city in line with Welsh Government guidance**
- **Parents and educators are increasingly concerned about the impact of social media and smartphone use on children and young people and there is growing evidence of their harms. Schools across Cardiff are taking differing approaches to their use during the school day and are having to grapple with finding the right approach. Working with parents and school leaders we want to establish a city-wide approach for Cardiff schools that prioritises pupil wellbeing**

Area for Action 3: The right provision and the best support for learners

What is our aim

School is for every learner and attending a maintained mainstream school will be the right option for the majority of learners, providing opportunities to learn, thrive and maximise their potential. For some learners, school, in its traditional sense does not 'work', so school needs to change and adapt, for example through offering an alternative curriculum or alternative provision,

whether this is for a short period or on a longer-term basis. We want to develop the range and quality of alternatives to the traditional school model, both short and longer term, so that we can ensure the right provision for all our learners. Alternative provision should be a positive choice for our learners rather than, as can be the case now, something perceived as punitive.

What is going well

Many schools across Cardiff have adapted their provision and embraced opportunities to meet the diverse needs of their learners. A 'Cwtch' or nurture provision is now a common feature in our schools alongside programmes such as ELSA or Thrive. Bespoke curriculum provision has been developed and many learners thrive in mainstream settings due to the expertise and approaches adopted.

Our Virtual School, set up to support Children who are Looked After with all aspects of their education, is the first of its kind in Wales. The virtual school assists learners in overcoming any barriers to their success, supporting them to achieve their full potential. It provides advice and support to schools, social workers, supervising social workers, foster carers and, staff working within a residential

setting in all aspects of education. The Cardiff Commitment offers a wide range of opportunities to support children and young people and help broaden aspirations. Initiatives such as Open Your Eyes Week, aimed at Year 5–6 pupils all the way through to collaborative projects like the Construction Engagement Project, co-developed with schools and businesses, provide valuable insight into careers and work-related experiences.

Cardiff is committed to ensuring that the provision accessed by its young people is appropriate and responsive to their needs. To support this, a robust Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS) Quality Assurance process has been developed, aligned with the new Estyn framework to maintain high standards and continuous improvement.

Why is this a priority

The number of learners and parents opting for Elective Home Education has grown considerably in recent years. Elective Home Education is a parental right and not one which we want to undermine. However, the increase in Elective Home Education has been particularly pronounced and mainly a result of increasing numbers of learners citing anxiety and related conditions. PSPs, providing a

reduced timetable for learners, are being used for extended periods of time, often without clear plans for re-integration. Anxiety Based School Avoidance plans (ABSA plans), which are not recorded in the same way as PSPs, also appear to be increasingly common. These trends tell us we are not meeting learners needs and that the range of provision currently available needs to be reviewed and revised.

How will we know if we have improved

There will be fewer learners not in provision and the range and quality of alternatives to a traditional school offer will be enhanced. Fewer learners will be home educated because parents will feel that school can meet their needs and where PSPs or ABSA plans are used there will be a clear pathway to resume a full-time education in an appropriate setting.

What are we going to do

- We will re-double our efforts to support learners to access school, and where this is not possible further develop and enhance alternative provision as a pathway to help ensure that learners remain in school
- Learning pathways for Children who are Looked After may be disrupted owing to placement moves and so we need to ensure that provision is able to flex to minimise the loss of learning opportunities
- Develop a quality assurance process and framework for the alternative provision that schools commission for their learners
- Clearly define the graduated response/ approach that we expect to see adopted in response to challenges with attendance and behaviour. This framework, underpinned by early intervention and prevention, will be developed so that all schools can benchmark and review their own approaches. It will also build on the introduction of the Family Advice and Support Portal (FASP) to ensure that multi-agency support is an integral part of our graduated response. This will complement the work being done to develop the graduated response and provision that should be 'ordinarily available' in the context of Additional Learning Needs
- We will review and re-model our provision for learners educated other than at school (EOTAS) including PRU provision to ensure we are meeting the wide range of learner needs



- and that the offer is high quality. This will include improving decision making and the governance of Education Placement panels to ensure all learners are accessing education
- Work with schools to improve the quality and impact of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for our children who are looked after so that schools can maximise the contribution they make to supporting our children and young people to develop and thrive
- Empower young people to identify the provision that is suitable and accessible for them to ensure successful transition to education employment or training post-16
- Review the role and appropriateness of PSPs to enhance the return to school pathway. In line with Welsh Government guidance PSPs should be a short-term measure and reviewed every 6 weeks as a minimum
- Monitor the use of ABSA plans and increase the use of ABSA guidance and the anxiety pack to address low attendance due to anxiety
- Take forward the Open Schools Cardiff Initiative. Open Schools is intended to help schools better understand the needs of their learners and join the dots with the provision, support and opportunities available within the locality. This will allow schools to match learner needs with provision and importantly know that this has made a difference for the learner

Area for Action 4: Meeting the needs of ALL our learners

What is our aim

We want an education system where the vast majority of learners with Additional Learning Needs can thrive in their local mainstream school (regardless of language categorisation). We want learners who need a place in specialist provision to be able to access this quickly and as close to their community as possible. Moving forward it is our ambition that Cardiff should be able to meet the needs of all its learners in a maintained school or setting. We want all our education settings to be skilled and confident that they can meet the needs of children and young people with Additional

Learning Needs. We will strengthen our continuum of provision to enhance quality first teaching and adaptive pedagogy so that educators are confident in using teaching approaches and methodologies that reflect the wide range of learning needs. We will be more transparent about where and when more specialist provision might be accessed. We will develop the role and remit of Specialist Resource Bases and Special Schools to support other schools and fully utilise the incredible expertise we have.

What is going well

Following a period of significant change, schools are now far more confident in assessing Additional Learning Needs (ALN), in writing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and in leading the new ALN processes. They have embraced person-centred planning and, drawing on their understanding of the child and their family, are working collaboratively with them and other professionals to assess needs and deliver effective additional learning provision.

Schools can access and benefit from wide ranging local authority support services to enhance their practice and meet learner needs. Sharing of best practice through the many informal and formal networks such as the ALNCO forum reflects the expertise in our schools and settings and the desire to collaborate in the best interests of all learners.

Providing not only the right curriculum but also the right environment is essential for learners who need specialist provision. We are investing in new facilities including Ysgol Cynefin, Woodlands High School and Riverbank School on the Fairwater Campus as well as expanding Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) dramatically improving facilities for learners.

To meet the needs of all our learners, innovative approaches are being introduced through the Cardiff Commitment in partnership with wider council teams, schools and companies. One such initiative is the Flexible Supported Internship Programme which is creating meaningful pathways into employment and further education for post-16 learners with ALN.

Why is this a priority

In recent years a growing number of children have presented with more complex and more acute needs (across schools of all language categorisation). Specialist provision is expanding to reflect this, particularly the emotional health and wellbeing needs of learners, however there are not enough local specialist places to cope with the demand and not all learners have the right environment or curriculum. Developing local sufficiency would reduce our spend on much more costly independent specialist settings. As well as being significantly more costly, independent provision can 'dislocate' learners from their wider community.

While there has been growth in learners with more complex needs, there is also evidence that learners with Additional Learning Needs are under-identified. Enhancing inclusive practice will allow us to better recognise and meet the needs of learners with Additional Learning Needs in our mainstream maintained schools.

Mainstream Schools – role and responsibilities

Being Inclusive means that the vast majority of learners needs can be met within their local mainstream school setting.

Evidence, though, indicates that there are a significant number of children whose Additional Learning Needs are not being identified. This can impact learning outcomes in several ways and can often shows itself in adverse behaviour, poor attendance and exclusion. Additionally, some families are deterred from accessing specialist provision outside of their community even if mainstream school is not able to meet their complex needs.

Learners should only be referred for a specialist placement if there is compelling evidence that the learner's difficulties are severe and complex. The mainstream school or setting must be able to demonstrate that appropriate, relevant, purposeful action has been taken to support the child's learning and wellbeing, including seeking and implementing specialist advice and regularly, monitoring, and reviewing the impact of strategies and support over time.

Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs)

SRBs are an important and valuable element of provision, offering the opportunity for learners to remain within the environment of a mainstream school, while also receiving more bespoke and tailored provision to support their needs. The school and all its learners can benefit from the inclusive environment that an SRB can support and exemplify. The expertise developed within SRBs can also enhance mainstream teaching practices.

SRB provision in Cardiff has grown rapidly in recent years and is set to expand further. SRB provision has also diversified and is now catering for a wider variety of needs than perhaps initially envisaged. Moving forward SRBs will continue to play a vital role by:

- **providing learners with opportunities to engage with their peers and to benefit from a mainstream environment whilst also having specialist and expert provision within a smaller more bespoke setting; and**
- **supporting and nurturing a learner's developmental progress (particularly at primary age) to inform decisions on future provision and whether a more specialist pathway might be in the learners best interests**

Special Schools

Special schools provide a bespoke environment for learners with the most complex needs, where a mainstream environment does not support learners' development and where intensive and specialist therapeutic interventions are needed to support them in achieving improved outcomes. Special schools are centres of excellence in meeting the needs of learners with the most complex Additional Learning Needs and they have a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

How will we know if we have improved

Teachers will have a good understanding of metacognition and how children learn, whilst expertly using adaptive teaching techniques to meet the needs of all learners.

We will have sufficient places locally to meet the needs of children and young people with

Additional Learning Needs who require a specialist placement including in the medium of Welsh. This will mean that fewer children and young people have to travel long distances to go to school or will need to go to independent special schools. Families will say they are confident and satisfied with the support being given.

What are we going to do

- **Strengthening understanding of and approaches to adaptive teaching methods, curricula, and resources to cater to the unique strengths and challenges of each student, ensuring that every learner can reach their full potential and participate fully in the educational experience**
- **Work with schools and ALNCOs to improve identification of Additional Learning Needs so that more learners are identified at an earlier stage and provided with appropriate support within a mainstream school setting**
- **Provide clear guidance on where and when specialist provision might be appropriate for learners and ensure that decision making processes are as transparent as possible and well understood by all**
- **Continue to develop and strengthen our operating model for Special Schools and SRBs to collaborate and for them to provide professional learning opportunities to mainstream schools across Cardiff. By working together, we can further enhance the capacity of all schools to meet the wide-ranging needs of learners with Additional Learning Needs**
- **Develop our SRB provision over time to focus on: learners who require and can benefit from both mainstream and more bespoke specialist provision; and developing a deeper understanding of learners needs to inform decisions on future provision**
- **Bring forward proposals for an increase in the number of maintained specialist places available within Cardiff. We will explore the feasibility of developing community based special school provision potentially co-located with mainstream schools (akin to SRBs) to support learners to attend a school closer to their local community. We will ensure there are strong links between any new provision and our existing special schools**
- **Increase Welsh-medium specialist provision so that learners can be supported and parents can be confident that their child's needs will be met, in the language of their choosing**



Area for Action 5: Supporting and Strengthening Our Workforce

What is our aim

The skills, knowledge, experience and dedication of our workforce is the most powerful means of change we have. We also want our workforce to feel they belong – to their school or setting and to Cardiff as a learning community. Harnessing the potential of school to school to working as part of our broader approach to school improvement will be core to how we work together and develop a more inclusive Cardiff. While being an inclusive school has many dimensions Trauma Informed Practice provides an essential underpinning approach. To support us in developing more inclusive and nurturing schools we want all schools to benefit from trauma informed

practice training and for this to be supported by whole school approaches.

We want our education workforce to be diverse, and learners should see their schools and the school workforce as an extension of the communities they serve. It is particularly important that learners see people ‘like them’ at all levels within the school. We want to work with schools to find ways to attract a more diverse workforce as well as ensuring that we have the skills and expertise needed as we increase specialist provision.

What is going well

There is a strong commitment to professional learning. Between September 2024 and May 2025, the Central South Consortium (CSC) reported 88% of schools engaging in professional learning on the curriculum, teaching and assessment as well as 2,274 practitioner engagements. In addition to CSC’s provision, the Cardiff Curriculum Team has delivered over 100 projects that enrich and broaden the curriculum offer across the city. 85 Cardiff schools are actively supporting student teachers

in partnership with ITE providers. Alongside this Cardiff Council Teaching Assistant Academy has provided training to 277 members of the community, with 73% progressing into the profession.

Primary schools with Specialist Resource Bases are planning their first shared INSET day to strengthen the sharing of practice and professional learning. This will allow for further development and the deepening of school to school working.

Why is this a priority

Schools and school staff can access an array of resources and professional development opportunities to improve their professional practice, meeting their own personal development goals as well as those of their school. Professional learning is rarely ‘mandated’ but we want all Cardiff schools to become trauma informed. Trauma informed practice focuses on understanding trauma’s impact, supporting affected students and creating inclusive

safe environments. This requires a commitment to culture change and ongoing practice development alongside training and CPD. Ethnic diversity amongst our school leaders and teachers has improved slightly over time. But the ethnic diversity amongst our school leaders and teachers as opposed to the wider school workforce is not representative of the diversity of Cardiff.

Learners have commented on the importance of seeing their own diversity reflected in the school. This lack of ethnic diversity, especially within the Welsh-medium sector, means that Cardiff schools are potentially missing out on embracing the talents of our population. This data should give us all cause for concern: why are ethnic minorities not better represented in our schools and especially at the most senior levels?

	White British	Global Majority
Leadership	97.95%	2.05%
Teachers	93.89%	6.11%
Teaching Assistants	82.05%	17.95%

How will we know if we have improved

All schools in Cardiff will have accessed professional development opportunities linked to inclusive practice and can evidence how this has been adopted and integrated into whole school approaches as well as individual’s professional practice.

Our schools will become increasingly representative of the diversity we see in Cardiff, and we will have a sufficient and skilled workforce to meet the changing nature of specialist provision across maintained schools.

What are we going to do

- **Cardiff schools are demonstrating strong collaborative momentum through the successful establishment of Collaborative Learning and Improvement Partnerships (CLIPs). Every school is actively participating and in the first year attendance has been identified as a city wide priority embraced by all CLIPs. We will take forward Dysgu Caerdydd and develop school to school working as the cornerstone of school improvement**
- **We will have a common approach to trauma informed practice across all our schools giving us a consistent and shared language and philosophy that exemplifies how we support all learners in Cardiff. To do this we will roll out Trauma Informed Practice to all schools in Cardiff and seek to embed whole school approaches to being trauma informed.**
- **Governing Bodies set the strategic direction for their schools; they help to shape what matters and what gets done. Work is underway to diversify the make up of Governing Bodies. All Governing Bodies should in future have an ‘Inclusion Lead’ and we will work with Governing Bodies to develop the role description and clarify responsibilities**
- **Continue to make available the wide range of professional learning opportunities linked to Inclusive practice, such as professional learning that supports our aims to be anti-racist and counter racial prejudice, to effectively support ethnic minority learners and those with English or Welsh as a second language**
- **We will work with headteachers to develop a workforce strategy to support our inclusion aims. This strategy will encompass steps we can take together to increase the diversity of the workforce, particularly at more senior levels and within Governing Bodies. It will also consider how to ensure a sufficient and skilled workforce to support the expansion of maintained specialist places for learners in Cardiff including Welsh medium provision**

NEXT STEPS

Our next steps are:

- **Establish a ‘Cardiff Conversation’ – a forum for school and education leaders to discuss and learn more about the vision and ambitions of this Inclusion Strategy and how it might be embraced within their schools**
- **Set up the Cardiff Inclusion Board with representation from schools (headteachers and governors) to oversee the strategy’s implementation**
- **Develop a detailed delivery plan with timescales, milestones and measures for success**

