

## Inclusion Policy 2026

### Policy information

**Policy title:**

TCAT Inclusion Policy

**Applies to:**

All schools and phases within The Cornerstone Academy Trust, including Early Years provision where applicable

**Policy owner:**

Director of Education / Inclusion Lead / Trustee for Inclusion

**Linked strategic documents**

This policy should be read alongside:

- Inclusion in Mainstream Fund (IMF) Strategy (inc funding allocations)
- Trust and school development plans
- School-level Pupil Premium strategies
- SEND Information Reports and SEND policy
- Attendance policy
- Local school inclusion and pastoral procedures
- Behaviour Strategy policy
- Teaching and learning policy
- Curriculum policy
- Child Protection & Safeguarding policy
- Early Years policy
- Equality objectives and accessibility planning

**Approval and review**

This policy is approved by the Board of Trustees and reviewed at least annually, or sooner where required by changes to legislation, funding, guidance or the accountability framework.

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## 1. Purpose of this policy

This policy sets out the Trust's overarching framework for inclusion across The Cornerstone Academy Trust. It establishes the principles, structures and responsibilities through which TCAT removes barriers to learning, participation and belonging.

It is designed to ensure that work related to disadvantage, Pupil Premium, SEND, attendance, family partnership and wider vulnerability does not sit in disconnected plans or separate working silos. Instead, this policy brings them together within one coherent Trust model.

The policy is intentionally ambitious. It is not written as a narrow compliance document. It reflects our belief that

- *inclusive practice is central to excellent education*
- *strong inclusion work is inseparable from strong school improvement*

At the same time, it provides the strategy, application and accountability needed to ensure that funding, leadership, teaching & implementation are aligned. This includes Trust-level strategic use of Pupil Premium and wider inclusion-related funding, including the new Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) which we use to further strengthen our inclusive mainstream practice through a coherent, whole-school approach. ([GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk))

## 2. Our intent

At The Cornerstone Academy Trust, inclusion is not an additional strand of work. It is the lens through which we view all of our work.

We are clear that children do not arrive at school with equal access to opportunity. Poverty, SEND, weak early language development, attendance barriers, family circumstance, health, mobility, social and emotional needs, and wider lived experience can all shape a child's access to learning. We do not treat these realities as reasons to reduce ambition. We treat them as reasons to respond to need – with care and determination. This begins in the Early Years, where we *nurture ambitious learning for every child* and continues right through a child's time with us at TCACT.

Our aim is simple: **to remove barriers so that every child can fully participate, achieve strongly and a feel a deep sense of belonging to their school and the wider TCAT family.**

This policy is rooted in a moral commitment to breaking down barriers for all children, especially those at risk of underachievement. That commitment is sharpened by our approach to using evidence. The EEF's Guide to the Pupil Premium stresses that strategy should be integral to wider school improvement planning, with high-quality teaching at its heart. EEF guidance on SEND, attendance, parental engagement and digital technology points in the same direction: strong universal provision, careful diagnosis, early action and disciplined implementation – all supported through thoughtful partnership with families. ([EEF](https://www.eef.org.uk))

This policy therefore sits at the intersection between TCAT's values and insights drawn from education research. We have combined our own professional judgement with the best available evidence to create an evidence-informed approach for TCAT, in our context, for our children.

### 3. Why this matters

Educational inequality starts early and often widens over time. EPI's 2025 analysis shows that disadvantaged pupils tend to have lower attainment on starting school and that the gap widens as pupils progress through the system. Its work also points to absence as a key and growing driver of the disadvantage gap. ([Education Policy Institute](#))

The EEF's ongoing work on the Pupil Premium states that the disadvantage gap is already visible by the end of Reception, and its Early Years work with the DfE continues to emphasise the importance of high-quality interactions and early language development, particularly for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. ([EEF](#))

Recent national developments also strengthen the case for trust-wide coherence. The November 2025 Ofsted framework and school inspection toolkit place clear weight on inclusion, attendance, behaviour, personal development, leadership, governance and how schools typically operate in practice. The Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) methodology and best-practice guidance also make clear that mainstream settings are expected to embed inclusive practice through high-quality teaching, whole-school policies and early support. ([GOV.UK](#))

None of this is the reason we do the work. But it reaffirms our belief that the strongest schools can show a clear, coherent and evidence-informed approach to inclusion, rooted in what their children actually experience day to day. ([GOV.UK](#))

### 4. Scope

This policy applies to all TCAT schools, all staff and all pupils.

It is especially concerned with pupils whose access, participation or outcomes may be affected by barriers, including but not limited to:

- pupils eligible for Pupil Premium
- pupils with SEND
- pupils with weaker school readiness or less early language development than their peers
- pupils with poor attendance or patterns of disengagement
- pupils facing social, emotional or relational barriers
- pupils whose needs may cut across more than one category
- pupils who may not meet a formal threshold or label, but who the Trust deem are nonetheless at risk of underachievement

The policy also applies to those with leadership, governance or specialist responsibilities connected to inclusion, including Executive Leaders, Heads of School, SENDCOs, Pupil Premium leads, Early Years leaders, attendance and pastoral leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers, support staff, Trustees and other local governance structures.

### 5. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy:

**Inclusion** means the trust-wide design of curriculum, teaching, systems & structures, relationships and support so that all children, especially those facing barriers, can access, participate and succeed in the full life of their school and wider connectedness across the Trust.

**Disadvantage** refers to the barriers and reduced access to opportunity associated with socioeconomic hardship and related factors. Eligibility for Pupil Premium is an important indicator, but not a complete account of a child's lived experience.

**Pupil Premium** is additional government funding for publicly funded schools in England to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. As per EEF guidance, TCAT integrates use of this funding into wider school improvement planning. ([EEF](#))

**SEND** refers to special educational needs and disabilities as defined in statutory guidance. Within this particular policy, SEND is understood as part of mainstream inclusion, not a separate strategy.

**School readiness** refers to the child's growing ability to engage, communicate, regulate, participate and learn successfully in school. It is not a narrow checklist, and we will not use it to frame children or families in deficit terms.

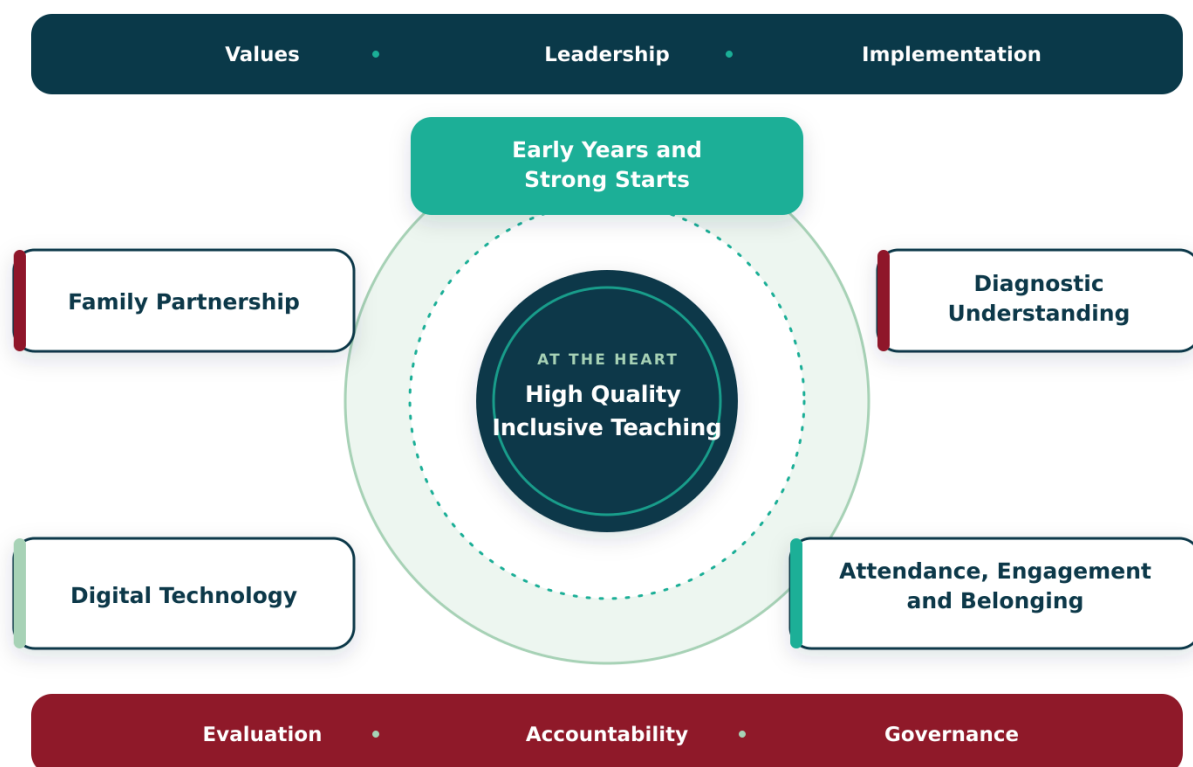
**High Quality Inclusive Teaching**, for TCAT, refers to strong everyday classroom practice characterised by strong relationships, clear explanation, checking for understanding, adaptive teaching, purposeful scaffolding, high expectations and a rich curriculum & learning supported by world-leading EdTech.

**Family partnership** means the deliberate work the Trust and our schools do with parents and carers to support children's learning, attendance, participation and belonging. We are clear that this is focused on learning and relationships, not inequitable access or superficial parental compliance. ([EEF](#))

## 6. The TCAT Inclusion Framework

The TCAT Inclusion Framework is the model that sits at the centre of this policy.

It is designed to prevent fragmentation by bringing together, within one coherent structure:



This means that the Trust does not treat Pupil Premium, SEND, attendance, behaviour, Early Years and family engagement as detached workstreams. Each remains important in its own right. Some carry distinct statutory or funding requirements. But the work is stronger when it is aligned through one framework.

This approach is well supported by current evidence and policy. The EEF's updated Pupil Premium guide explicitly advises schools to make strategy an integral part of wider school improvement planning. IMF guidance similarly sets out a universal offer based on high-quality teaching and whole-school policies and practices that enable children and young people who face barriers to learning to thrive. ([EEF](#))

***Barriers often sit in the interaction between the child and their learning & achievement; our job is to strengthen our provision so more children can thrive.***

## **7. Guiding principles**

### **a) High-quality teaching is the primary driver**

The EEF's Pupil Premium and SEND guidance both place high-quality teaching at the centre of effective strategy. High-quality teaching for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is effective for all learners. We therefore start with the classroom experience children receive every day ([EEF](#)).

### **b) Assessment, not assumption**

Labels can help identify entitlement and initiate support, but they are not a substitute for diagnosis of a pupil's needs and accurate identification of our 'best bets' for meeting them. All of our decisions are rooted in careful assessment, professional dialogue and a precise understanding of barriers.

### **c) The practitioner *is* the intervention**

Resources, packages and programmes matter, but they cannot substitute for skilled teachers. We invest in staff expertise, quality and consistency to ensure the very best adults are working with our children day in day out.

### **d) High expectations without exception**

Disadvantage, SEND, attendance issues or wider vulnerability must never become reasons to lower expectations or narrow entitlement. We work hard to ensure deficit narratives do not influence what we believe our children are capable of.

### **e) Culture before interventions**

Relationships, routines, belonging and strong classroom culture are foundational. Programmes and interventions should strengthen this core, not distract from it. We constantly review any and all programmes to ensure they are still delivering value for our learners and assess all interventions to ensure that they support (not hinder) learning and outcomes.

### **f) Early action matters**

We know that gaps open early. We therefore place strong emphasis on Early Years, school readiness, early identification and timely response. ([Education Policy Institute](#)).

### **g) Inclusion is everybody's business**

Inclusion is not delegated to a single leader or team. It is the responsibility of all staff and all leaders. We treat implementation of the approaches set out in the TCAT Inclusion Framework as a 'team sport'. Everybody knows their role in supporting the practices that support our children to thrive and leaders implement, monitor and evaluate progress and impact.

## 8. The domains of the TCAT Inclusion Framework

The TCAT Inclusion Framework is organised into a small number of domains that together define how we remove barriers and secure great outcomes. These domains are interconnected and therefore implemented coherently, with all elements reinforcing High Quality Inclusive Teaching at the core.

### Core: High Quality Inclusive Teaching

This is the core of the framework and our main driver of impact.

Every TCAT classroom is characterised by:

- clear explanations and modelling
- strong sequencing of knowledge and practice
- purposeful checking for understanding
- adaptive teaching based on live assessment
- effective scaffolding that supports independence
- predictable routines and calm classrooms
- high warmth balanced with high structure
- strong subject knowledge
- full access to the curriculum
- supportive and adaptive digital tools

EEF guidance on SEND in mainstream schools stresses the importance of excellent teaching, scaffolding, explicit instruction, flexible grouping and metacognitive support. These should not be seen as specialist additions for a small group of pupils. They are features of strong mainstream teaching and are especially important for pupils who face barriers. ([EEF](#))

Within TCAT, High Quality Inclusive Teaching is the non-negotiable foundation of our inclusion strategy. This includes a strong focus on oracy, reading, writing and mathematics, alongside full curriculum access and adaptive teaching within a well-designed, project-based trust curriculum. This is enabled and enhanced by cutting-edge technology and 1:1 devices that supplement, not replace, exceptional teaching.

### Domain One: Early Years and Strong Starts

TCAT will place particular emphasis on the early years, including Reception and Year 1, because this is where the strongest foundations for later participation, attainment and inclusion are built.

Our approach is rooted in the understanding that children first develop language through talk, relationships and repeated high-quality interactions. Early language, oral composition, self-regulation, physical development and secure routines are not bolt-ons to the curriculum; they are the foundations that enable children to communicate, participate and learn successfully. In Reception, the priority is to secure these foundations well through explicit teaching, purposeful provision and rich opportunities for children to rehearse, apply and embed what they are learning.

Alongside our ambitious and engaging curriculum, our Notice and Mentor strategy begins in Nursery and continues across the early years. This helps adults identify gaps in children's learning and pinpoint next steps, then respond with carefully targeted, personalised teaching and support. In this way, children are not offered a one-size-fits-all experience; they are helped to secure the knowledge, language and foundational skills they need through provision that is both ambitious for all and responsive to individual need.

Our strategic focus in this domain includes:

- high-quality adult-child interactions that extend language, model vocabulary and support sustained shared thinking ([ShREC approach](#))
- deliberate development of communication and language, including listening, attention, understanding and speaking in full sentences
- explicit teaching of self-regulation, routines and executive function so that children can focus, persist and participate
- strong physical foundations, including gross and fine motor development, that support independence and readiness for writing
- early literacy built through talk, phonics, oral composition, handwriting and meaningful opportunities to apply learning
- purposeful environments and warm, consistent relationships that help children feel safe, settled and ready to learn
- our Notice and Mentor strategy, beginning in Nursery, so that personalised learning sits alongside an ambitious and engaging curriculum from the earliest stages
- early identification of need through with timely support so that barriers to participation are addressed before they widen
- carefully supported transitions into school and from Reception to Year 1

Getting this right in the early years is one of the strongest inclusion levers available to us. When children develop secure foundations in communication, self-regulation, physical development and early literacy, we improve not only school readiness but long-term access to the full curriculum, stronger outcomes and greater equity for all pupils, regardless of starting point.

### **Domain Two: Targeted and responsive support**

Our universal classroom provision comes first, but some pupils will require additional support, adaptation or specialist input.

At TCAT, targeted support is carefully designed to be diagnostic, proportionate and time-sensitive. It is always connected back to the classroom, monitored for impact and adapted where necessary to ensure it is making a meaningful difference.

This may include:

- targeted academic support
- language and communication support
- SEND provision
- attendance support
- pastoral or relational support

- behaviour and self-regulation support
- structured use of teaching assistants and assistive technologies
- targeted preparation for key transition points

Support is carefully scaffolded, with clear intent in how it is designed and a planned reduction over time. We are alert to the risks of over-support and ensure support is not sustained beyond what is needed for a child's progress.

Teaching assistants and support staff are expected to offer the least help first, promoting pupil independence, metacognition and self-regulation. Strong communication between teachers and support staff ensures that any additional provision is closely aligned with classroom learning, enabling pupils to apply and embed their learning within the universal offer.

Our approach prioritises early support and strong inclusive mainstream practice, rather than waiting for diagnosis or statutory escalation before acting. Our one-to-one mentoring programme is a central mechanism to achieving this through its role in supporting early identification of challenges pupils may be facing, and strong relationship building and focused pastoral and academic support time achieved in these meetings. This is reinforced by the IMF methodology and best-practice guidance. (GOV.UK)

Where pupils have SEND, specialist support should sharpen and strengthen mainstream provision, not replace it unnecessarily.

### **Domain Three: Attendance, engagement, culture and belonging**

Attendance is one important indicator of inclusion, but not the only one. It reflects, in part, whether our pupils feel able, ready and supported to attend, participate and succeed in school.

We recognise attendance as a complex, multi-factor issue requiring a whole-school, diagnostic approach. The Trust supports this school-level work through central analysis, support and follow-up, recognising absence as a significant and growing driver of the disadvantage gap.

At TCAT, we therefore treat attendance as:

- part of this wider inclusion strategy
- a shared responsibility across staff in each of our schools
- an indicator of a pupil's connection to learning and school life
- closely linked to engagement, belonging and daily experience

Our approach includes:

- early identification of patterns of absence and disengagement
- careful, intelligent use of attendance and wider engagement data
- relational work with individual children to ensure they feel a sense of belonging and success in school
- Develop robust supportive relationships with families
- practical support to remove barriers
- consistent routines and expectations
- close attention to pupils who are present but not meaningfully engaged

- Timely interventions for pupils and families where the early signs of absence is developing.

This domain extends beyond attendance to the conditions that enable pupils to thrive. At TCAT, we deliberately build environments where pupils feel safe, known, valued and successful. This means establishing strong behaviour cultures, investing in warm and consistent relationships, and ensuring that routines and expectations are clear and reliable. We also work to secure meaningful participation in the full life of the school, so that inclusion is experienced day to day, not simply intended. This is explicit in our Behaviour Strategy.

This includes a strong commitment to equitable access beyond the classroom. Our extensive programme of extra-curricular opportunities, including before and after school provision, domestic residential experiences and international visits, is designed so that all pupils can take part. We take proactive steps to remove financial and practical barriers, ensuring that these experiences contribute to pupils' sense of belonging, aspiration and wider development, not just those who can readily access them.

#### **Domain Four: Family partnership**

At TCAT, we recognise the central role of families in supporting inclusion. We therefore extend our inclusion work to include families, working in genuine partnership to support their children. We do not frame families as 'hard to reach' or label them based on background. Instead, we reflect on how accessible and responsive we are as a Trust and as schools, and take deliberate steps to improve this.

We take a proactive approach to removing barriers to engagement, rather than locating them in families. This includes careful attention to the accessibility of our communication, routinely checking for literacy demands and digital access barriers, and adapting our systems and approaches so they are clear and usable in practice.

Strong, respectful relationships sit at the heart of this work. We prioritise consistent, non-judgemental engagement with families, supported by clear, timely communication focused on pupils' learning and development. Alongside this, we provide practical, specific guidance to help families support learning at home.

We are deliberate in how we design and deliver opportunities for engagement. Events and approaches are carefully targeted, monitored and evaluated to ensure they reach the families who need them most, and do not unintentionally widen gaps between those able to engage and those we are still working to support.

This work is embedded across the Trust as part of our wider inclusion, behaviour and culture priorities, with approaches that are sustained over time and adapted to meet the needs of different communities.

Through this, we aim to ensure our systems consistently enable families to be informed, confident and active partners in their children's education.

#### **Domain Five: Digital technology as an inclusion lever**

Digital technology is a distinctive strength at TCAT and a key lever for inclusive practice across the Trust.

We use technology deliberately to improve learning, recognising that impact depends on strong pedagogy and implementation, not the tool itself. Staff are trained and supported to use technology to strengthen explanation and modelling, enable practice and retrieval, improve assessment and feedback, and support adaptive teaching.

We are equally clear that, if poorly implemented, technology can widen gaps. Our approach is therefore disciplined and equity-focused, with careful attention to access, consistency and staff expertise.

At TCAT, digital technology is used to:

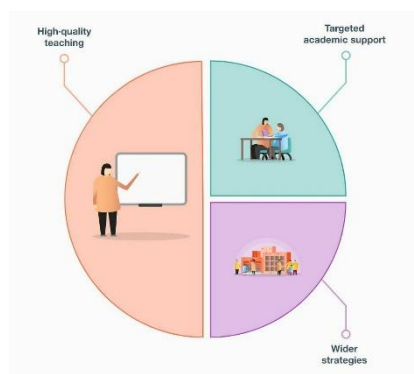
- **Guarantee access through 1:1 provision.** Our commitment to free 1:1 devices from Key Stage 1 upwards ensures all pupils can fully participate in learning, both in school and at home, removing a key structural barrier for disadvantaged pupils.
- **Extend learning beyond the classroom.** We use technology to create clear, engaging and accessible approaches to home learning, enabling pupils and families to stay connected to learning in meaningful ways.
- **Creating on-demand lesson recordings.** We record key lessons and inputs so that pupils are able to watch content back as required, including those who are absent or where they would benefit from reminding of key lesson points. Pupils are also able to tune in to these lessons remotely where they are away from school, but able to learn.
- **Support pupils with additional needs.** Technology is used purposefully to reduce barriers for pupils with SEND, including through adaptive tools, scaffolds and alternative ways to access and demonstrate learning. The technology often enables this to be provided seamlessly, without additional support being noticed or stigmatised by pupils' peers.
- **Strengthen targeted support.** Teaching assistants use technology to deliver precise, structured support, helping pupils who face barriers to access high-quality teaching and practice.
- **Enhance communication with families.** Technology enables timely, accessible and purposeful communication, strengthening the partnership between home and school.
- **Build digital literacy for life.** We ensure all pupils develop the knowledge, skills and habits to use technology confidently, safely and effectively. We take deliberate steps to ensure that limited access to devices or software at home does not restrict this. Our aim is that every child leaves the Trust ready to engage with further and higher education, and with careers that increasingly require strong digital capability.

Technology supplements, not replaces, expert teaching. Ongoing staff development, careful implementation and regular review of impact ensure that its use consistently supports inclusion and helps to close, rather than widen, gaps.

## 9. Pupil Premium within the Inclusion Framework

Following the EEF's updated Guide to the Pupil Premium, our strategy is part of wider school improvement planning with high-quality teaching sitting at the heart of our spending decisions. As per DfE guidance we use the evidence-informed 'tiered approach'. ([EEF](#))

TCAT has established a strong core set of principles the underpin our PPG strategy, which align strongly with our approach to inclusion more broadly. These are set out in our TCAT Pupil Premium Strategies –non-statutory policies that we produced with a view to having each individual school's statutory policy informed by, with the ability for schools to also adapt it according to context. The policies can be viewed here:



## 10. SEND within the Inclusion Framework

**TCAT takes an ambitious, Trust-wide approach to SEND across all seven schools. Every teacher is a teacher of SEND, and every pupil - whatever their needs - is entitled to feel safe, valued and successful. Inclusion is embedded in school improvement, curriculum design, professional development and quality assurance.** Trust-wide oversight is provided by the Head of Children's Services (SENDCo), supported by phase-based SENDCos, a Speech and Language Therapist, School Nurses and a dedicated SEND Trustee. Trustees receive regular reports on SEND trends, provision and pupil progress. Practice is aligned with the SEND Code of Practice 2015, the Equality Act 2010, SEND Governance Guidance 2025, the 2025 Ofsted framework, *Right Support, Right Place, Right Time* and Devon's Local Area SEND Strategy 2024–27.

**We prioritise early identification, rigorous assessment and timely support.** Universal screening includes Language Link; GL reading, spelling, mathematics and cognitive assessments; PASS; and phonics screening. This evidence is considered alongside teacher observation, parental insight, pupil voice and SEND Initial Referral Forms. All schools use the graduated *Assess–Plan–Do–Review* process so that provision is tailored, monitored and adapted. Decisions draw on Devon's Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision and evidence from the EEF, nasen and Whole School SEND, alongside advice from Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and specialists in communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health, sensory and physical needs, and health. Where further support is needed, the SEND team works with families to make timely referrals to Children and Family Health Devon, Early Help and Devon County Council SEND Operations.

**High Quality Inclusive Teaching remains the foundation.** Teachers retain responsibility for the progress of every pupil in their class, with SENDCos providing expertise to help identify and remove barriers. A broad, balanced and highly enriched curriculum is supported by clear routines, positive and relational behaviour approaches, accessible low-sensory classrooms, strong phonics and structured reading pathways, mastery-based mathematics and trauma-informed practice. Teachers use modelling, visual support, chunked instruction, scaffolding, language-rich and multisensory approaches, adapted tasks, alternative ways to record learning, personalised targets, pre-teaching and over-learning. One-to-one devices, cloud-based personalised learning and digital support tools provide further access where these strengthen teaching and independence.

**Pupils with SEND are entitled to participate fully in school life beyond the classroom.** Reasonable adjustments and personalised support enable access to trips, clubs, performances, sport, outdoor learning, curriculum visits and visiting professionals. Wellbeing and development are supported through School Nurse-led RSE and PSHE, health interventions, individual support and parent courses; the Mental Health in Schools Team and Early Help; Trusted Adult mentoring; the Reflect online wellbeing platform; familiar adults during unstructured times; and a staffed library available throughout and beyond the school day. Access to PE, playtimes and other activities is supported through appropriate equipment, environmental adaptations, assistive technology and proportionate risk assessment.

**Belonging, safety and respect are central to our approach.** Staff receive training in safeguarding, medical needs, mental health, attachment, communication and SEND. Consistent behaviour principles are applied with appropriate reasonable adjustments, while attendance barriers are addressed rapidly and collaboratively with families. Through Mentor Meetings and review processes, pupils contribute in age-

appropriate ways to target-setting, decisions about provision and discussions about their learning. Staff model respectful, inclusive language, and accessibility planning is used to reduce physical, curricular and social barriers continually.

**Families are treated as expert partners and encouraged to raise concerns early; teachers do the same so that needs can be explored and support planned promptly.** Partnership is sustained through regular communication, parents' evenings, consultation meetings, open evenings, annual reports, accessible documentation and annual EHCP reviews. Where needed, TCAT works closely with Devon SEND Support Services, Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, CAMHS, School Nursing, Children and Family Health Devon, Early Help, Family Hubs, Social Care, the Police and voluntary organisations.

Transitions between classes, phases and settings are planned carefully through handover meetings, strong links with feeder and receiving settings, additional visits, social stories, photo books and other personalised support. Accessibility is reviewed continually through audits and development planning. This includes clear signage, adjustable lighting, ramps, accessible toilets, mobility support and sensory-sensitive spaces; accessible fonts, Immersive Reader, Dictate, screen readers and captioning; and resources such as visual timetables, now-and-next boards, simplified or symbol-supported materials, PECS, Makaton and communication boards. Professional development responds to emerging needs and national guidance so that physical, digital, curricular and information access continue to improve.

EEF guidance reminds us that pupils with SEND have the greatest need for excellent teaching, while IMF guidance reinforces the importance of a strong universal teaching offer. We therefore hold two truths together: the quality of mainstream classroom provision remains decisive *and* some pupils need specialist support. SEND is connected to curriculum, teaching and belonging, but is not blurred with disadvantage, attendance or behaviour where pupils' needs require distinct understanding and action.

## **11. Leadership, implementation and accountability**

Inclusion improves when it is led well and implemented with discipline.

The EEF's Implementation Guidance (2024) is clear: effective change does not happen through intention alone. It requires a structured process, strong leadership behaviours and sustained attention to how practice is enacted day to day. The EEF's Pupil Premium guidance reinforces this, placing responsibility on leaders to ensure that strategy is tightly aligned with school improvement, rooted in high-quality teaching, and rigorously evaluated.

At TCAT, inclusion leadership is therefore:

- **Strategic and integrated.** Inclusion is not a separate strand of work. Leaders align inclusion with curriculum, teaching, behaviour, attendance and wider school improvement priorities.
- **Focused on implementation, not just intent.** Leaders move beyond planning to ensure that approaches are clearly defined, consistently enacted and embedded in everyday practice across classrooms and systems.
- **Grounded in evidence and diagnosis.** Decisions are informed by the best available evidence, combined with a precise understanding of pupils' needs, barriers and context.

- **Visible and informed by practice.** Leaders at all levels maintain a strong understanding of what pupils experience day to day, through regular engagement with classrooms, pupils and staff.
- **Disciplined in monitoring and adaptation.** Leaders use a small number of meaningful indicators to review implementation and impact, adapting approaches where needed while maintaining clarity of intent.
- **Collectively owned.** Inclusion is a leadership responsibility at all levels. Senior leaders, middle leaders and specialist staff work together to ensure coherence and consistency across the Trust.

This policy expects leaders to ensure tight alignment between:

- strategy and day-to-day practice
- high-quality teaching and targeted support
- Pupil Premium, SEND and wider inclusion planning
- attendance, behaviour and pastoral systems
- family partnership and communication
- resource allocation and intended impact

Leaders are also responsible for creating the conditions that enable effective implementation. This includes prioritising staff development, protecting time for training and collaboration, and ensuring that new approaches are introduced in a manageable and sustainable way. Weekly teacher CPD sessions regularly make explicit links to inclusion as a key thread that runs through professional practice – both within curriculum-focused discussions, and pedagogical development.

Governance plays a critical role in this. Trustees and local governance structures provide appropriate challenge and support, ensuring that inclusion work is ambitious, evidence-informed and making a tangible difference to pupils' experiences and outcomes.

Our approach is both ambitious and grounded. We are clear that improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those facing barriers requires coherence, persistence and strong leadership at every level.

## **12. Roles and responsibilities**

### **Trustees**

Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the Trust has a clear and ambitious inclusion strategy and that leaders are held to account for impact, implementation and statutory compliance.

They seek assurance that:

- inclusion is central to trust strategy
- barriers are identified and addressed well
- funding is aligned and used responsibly
- school leaders are implementing the framework effectively
- evidence used for assurance includes both data and first-hand understanding
- the Trust remains aligned with national expectations without becoming compliance-driven

- Trust Board reporting is a key mechanism for ensuring the above, with Trustees aware of the policy, strategy and the need to track and challenge implementation.

### **Chief Executive Officer and Executive Leaders**

Executive leaders are responsible for establishing the trust-wide model, ensuring coherence across schools and providing support, challenge and review.

They are responsible for:

- setting trust expectations
- aligning inclusion with wider improvement priorities
- ensuring funding and strategy are coherent
- reviewing trust-wide and school-level impact
- ensuring governance receives high-quality assurance

### **Heads of School / Headteachers**

Heads of School are responsible for leading inclusion in their setting in line with this policy.

They must ensure:

- the framework is visible in day-to-day practice
- staff understand expectations
- school-level planning aligns with the trust model
- local context is responded to intelligently
- review processes are robust and honest

### **Inclusion leaders, SENDCOs, Pupil Premium leads, Early Years leaders, attendance and pastoral leaders**

These leaders provide specialist leadership within the wider framework. Their role is to ensure strong integration rather than isolated systems.

They should support:

- precise identification of barriers
- coherent planning and implementation
- leader and staff development
- monitoring and evaluation
- communication with families
- alignment between classroom practice and targeted support

### **Teachers and support staff**

All staff are responsible for contributing to inclusive practice through:

- high-quality teaching and interaction
- strong routines and relationships

- adaptive teaching and careful observation
- shared responsibility for attendance, belonging and participation
- partnership with colleagues and families

### **13. Funding, resource alignment and compliance**

TCAT will align relevant funding streams within one coherent inclusion strategy.

This includes, where relevant:

- core school budgets
- Pupil Premium
- notional SEN funding
- SEND-related resourcing
- attendance and pastoral resource
- Inclusive Mainstream Fund and other relevant national inclusion funding

The IMF methodology is clear that the new fund is intended to support mainstream settings to strengthen inclusive practice and should sit alongside, rather than replace, core funding and notional SEN budgets. If / when TCAT received any IMF funding, this TCAT Inclusion Policy will act as a clear strategy for spending that money. ([GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk))

TCAT will therefore ensure that:

- spending decisions are aligned to identified barriers and strategic priorities
- funding does not create fragmented activity
- schools can articulate how resource is improving inclusive practice
- accountability is proportionate, coherent and rooted in impact

Compliance matters, but it must serve the work rather than distort it.

### **14. Monitoring, review and evaluation**

TCAT will monitor and evaluate this policy through two connected but distinct lenses: **implementation** and **final outcomes**. This distinction matters. The EEF's 2024 implementation guidance is clear that leaders should not look only at end results; they should also monitor whether agreed approaches are being understood, enacted and embedded well enough for improvement to take hold.

#### **14.1 Monitoring implementation**

Implementation monitoring is about checking whether the approaches in this policy are being put into practice as intended. This includes whether leaders and staff are clear about the model, whether agreed practices are visible in classrooms and wider systems, whether support is reaching the intended pupils and families, and whether implementation is manageable and sustainable in practice. Monitoring should be purposeful, proportionate and built into normal leadership routines.

At TCAT, implementation monitoring will focus in particular on:

- clarity and shared ownership across leaders and staff
- consistency of High Quality Inclusive Teaching
- alignment between classroom practice and targeted support
- quality of delivery in areas such as attendance, family partnership and digital inclusion
- staff training, support and readiness to implement agreed approaches
- barriers to implementation, including workload, inconsistency or weak uptake

This monitoring is intended to improve practice, not simply to prove compliance. It should help leaders identify what is working, what is getting in the way, and what needs to be strengthened, adapted or stopped.

**Reviewing implementation outcomes:** TCAT will also review a small number of implementation outcomes. These are the nearer-term signs that the policy is taking hold in practice, rather than the final outcomes we ultimately want for pupils.

These may include:

- leader and staff buy-in
- feasibility and manageability
- fidelity and quality of delivery
- consistency across classes, phases and schools
- reach, especially for pupils and families facing the greatest barriers
- sustainability over time

These implementation outcomes act as stepping stones towards stronger leadership, better teaching and improved pupil outcomes.

**Evaluating final outcomes:** Final evaluation is about whether this work is leading to meaningful improvement. Within this policy, TCAT will evaluate impact at three levels:

- **Leadership outcomes** – including stronger strategic leadership of inclusion, better alignment across plans and systems, and more disciplined review and use of evidence. The EEF's Pupil Premium guidance presents this as an ongoing leadership process, not a one-off exercise.
- **Teaching and provision outcomes** – including stronger High Quality Inclusive Teaching, better adaptive teaching, closer alignment between universal and targeted support, and more effective use of technology to widen access.
- **Pupil outcomes** – including improved sense of belonging and enjoyment, stronger attendance, and better attainment and progress. TCAT may also consider early development, participation in wider school life, and transition or destination indicators where relevant.

Judgements will be informed by a balanced range of evidence, including:

- attainment, assessment and progress information

- attendance, behaviour and participation data
- learning walks, lesson visits and wider first-hand evidence
- work scrutiny and review of targeted support
- pupil, parent and staff voice
- leadership review and implementation monitoring

Evidence collection will be useful, proportionate and timed to support decision-making. We will avoid generating unnecessary workload or collecting data with no clear purpose.

**Review and response:** Monitoring and evaluation will lead to action. Leaders at school and Trust level will use this evidence to decide what should be sustained, strengthened, adapted or stopped. We will not confuse activity with impact. We will ask, with honesty and discipline, what is working, where, for whom, how consistently, and with what effect.

## **15. Review cycle**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Trust, or earlier where needed.

The annual review should consider:

- effectiveness of the framework
- coherence between trust and school plans
- use of funding
- evidence of pupil impact
- implications of new research, policy or inspection developments

Schools will also review their local implementation through the year, feeding into trust-wide oversight and refinement.

## **16. Final statement**

The Cornerstone Academy Trust will be unapologetically ambitious for every child.

We will not allow poverty, SEND, weak attendance, low prior attainment or any other barrier to become an excuse for weaker provision or lower expectations. We will respond with strong relationships, high-quality inclusive teaching, early action, sharper diagnosis, better systems, disciplined implementation and stronger partnership with families.

Inclusion is not a bolt-on or a compliance exercise. It is central to excellent education and strong school improvement across the Trust.

Inclusion is not something we attend to for a few children once the main work is complete. It is the way the main work is done.

## **Appendix 1: Approval and review record**

### **Policy title**

TCAT Inclusion Framework and Policy

### **Owner**

Trust Executive / Inclusion Lead

### **Approving body**

Board of Trustees

### **Date approved**

2<sup>nd</sup> September 2026

### **Date of next review**

July 2027

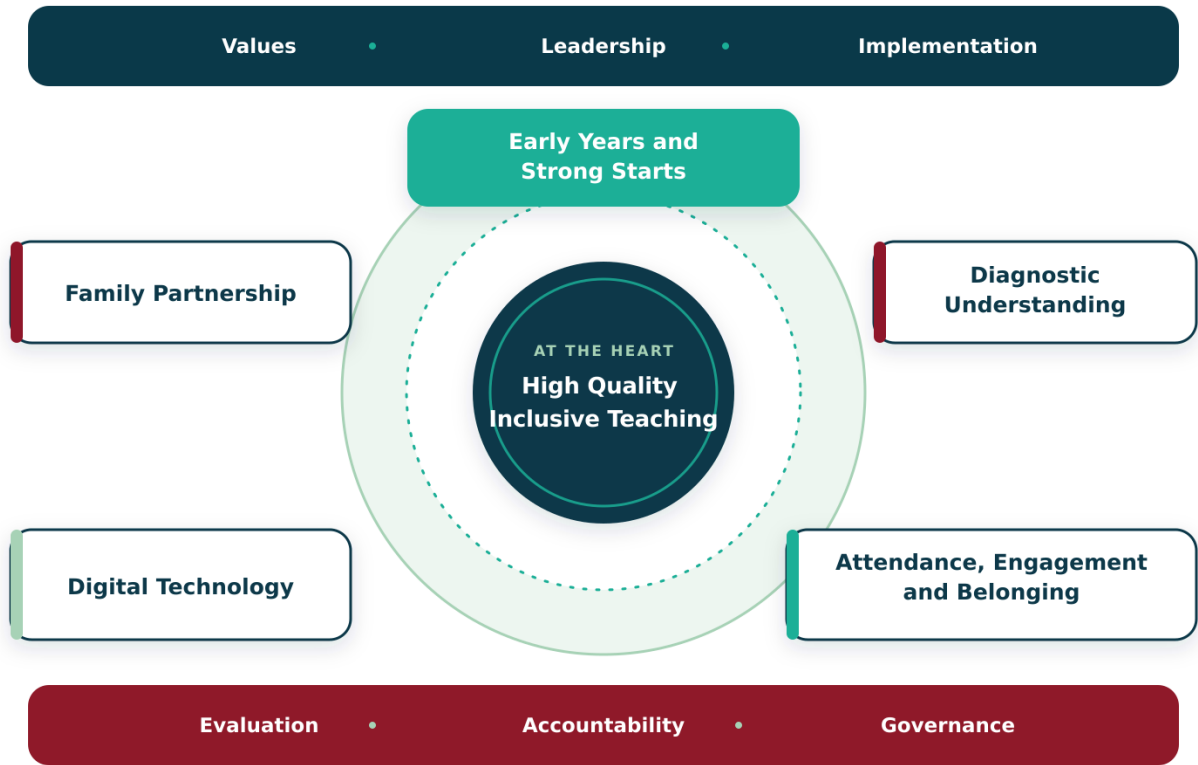
### **Version**

1

### **Review frequency**

Annual

Appendix 2: TCAT Inclusion Model



### **Appendix 3: Trustee / inspection narrative summary**

At TCAT, this Inclusion Policy brings together our existing work on disadvantage, Pupil Premium, SEND, attendance, Early Years and family partnership. Each area retains its own policy and statutory requirements; this policy aligns them and sets out our shared approach to inclusion across the Trust.

Through the TCAT Inclusion Framework, it shows how these elements connect in practice, with a clear focus on the day-to-day experience of pupils. Leaders are expected to ensure this is consistently enacted in classrooms and systems. Trustees and leaders review both implementation and impact.

#### **Who visitors should speak to**

Visitors should speak with leaders at all levels (including Executive Leaders, Heads of School, SENDCOs and attendance leads), teachers and support staff, pupils and parents, as well as Trustees and LAB members. Conversations should show that inclusion is part of everyday practice.

#### **What inspectors should see**

Evidence will be seen in pupils' daily experience, including:

- strong, consistent classroom practice
- adaptive teaching and aligned support
- full participation in lessons and wider school life
- effective use of technology to support access
- strong attendance and family engagement

Leaders, Trustees and LAB members routinely visit classrooms to check this is typical.

#### **Systems and evidence**

Inspectors will see aligned improvement plans, Pupil Premium and SEND provision, attendance systems, implementation review, staff development, use of technology (including 1:1 devices), and pupil, parent and staff voice.

#### **Governance**

Trustees provide challenge through regular Board and Education Committee meetings, with clear minutes and OneNote records. This is strengthened by school visits and direct engagement, ensuring alignment between reporting and practice.

#### **Overall**

Inclusion aligns existing priorities, is visible in practice, and is reviewed with discipline. Leaders and governors draw on data and first-hand evidence, and pupils experience inclusion through access, participation and success.

## Appendix 5: Key sources & Evidence-base

This policy is informed in particular by:

- EEF, **The Guide to the Pupil Premium** (updated 2025) ([EEF](#))
- EEF, **Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools** ([EEF](#))
- EEF, **Working with Parents to Support Children’s Learning** ([EEF](#))
- EEF, **Using Digital Technology to Improve Learning** ([EEF](#))
- EEF attendance evidence and attendance-related work ([EEF](#))
- DfE, **Inclusive Mainstream Fund for schools: methodology 2026 to 2027** ([GOV.UK](#))
- DfE, **Inclusive Mainstream Fund: best practice for schools** ([GOV.UK](#))
- Ofsted, **Education inspection framework: for use from November 2025 and State-funded school inspection toolkit** ([GOV.UK](#))
- EPI, **Annual Report 2025 and Breaking down the gap** ([Education Policy Institute](#))
- UCL Policy Lab, **Stop failing poor children: a new plan** ([University College London](#))