Last reviewed: October 2026
Next review due: Autumn term 2027

Cornerstone Academy Trust

Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)

Trust-wide policy for all pupils, adults working for or on behalf of the Trust and the wider school community

Policy owner	Head of Children's Services
Approval body	Board of Trustees
Updated	October 2026
Review cycle	Annual, or earlier following a change in law or guidance
Next review	Autumn Term 2027 or earlier if legislation, statutory guidance or technology materially changes
Applies to	All schools and operations of Cornerstone Academy Trust

This policy reflects the current statutory framework. References to 2026 SEND reform proposals are clearly identified as proposed changes and do not replace existing legal duties, terminology, EHC plan rights or the graduated approach unless and until legislation and commencement arrangements take effect.

1. Purpose and scope

This policy sets out how Cornerstone Academy Trust identifies and meets special educational needs and disabilities across its schools. It should be read alongside the SEND Information Report, Accessibility Plan, Inclusion Strategy (to follow Dec 2026) and the Trust's safeguarding, admissions, attendance, behaviour, curriculum, medical needs, complaints and data protection policies.

The policy applies to all pupils, staff, trustees, and volunteers. It recognises that high-quality provision for pupils with SEND is a whole-school responsibility and that every teacher is a teacher of pupils with SEND.

Our ambition is that all pupils, including those with SEND, leave primary education having felt safe, valued, included and successful, with the knowledge, skills, independence and confidence needed for their next stage.

2. Legal and policy framework/guidance

This policy has regard to the following current legislation and statutory guidance:

- Children and Families Act 2014, including the duty to use best endeavours to secure special educational provision
- Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments and avoid substantial disadvantage
- Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (January 2015, last updated September 2024)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children and relevant safeguarding requirements
- Statutory guidance on school attendance, exclusions and supporting pupils with medical conditions
- The School Admissions Code and statutory EHC plan consultation arrangements
- Devon Local Area SEND Strategy 2024-2027 and Devon's Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision framework, where applicable

The Trust will also consider published national and local guidance relevant to inclusive education, accessibility and SEND. Where non-statutory guidance is referenced, it supports but does not replace legal duties.

2026 Reform Context

The government's 2026 proposals, including SEND reform: putting children and young people first and Every Child Achieving and Thriving, signal possible future changes. Proposed Individual Support Plans, National Inclusion Standards, Targeted Plus support and Specialist Provision Packages are not treated in this policy as substitutes for the current statutory framework. Current SEND Support and EHC plan duties continue unless and until the law changes, while thought and planning are in place to adhere to such changes in a timely manner.

3. Definitions and language

A child or young person has Special Educational Needs (SEN) if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Special educational provision is provision that is additional to or different from that made generally for pupils of the same age.

A pupil has a disability under the Equality Act 2010 where they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A disabled pupil may or may not also have SEN.

The four broad areas of need are:

Area	Examples of needs that may be considered
Communication and interaction	Speech, language and communication needs; autism; social communication differences
Cognition and learning	Moderate or severe learning difficulties; specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia or dyscalculia
Social, emotional and mental health	Difficulties with regulation, relationships, anxiety, attention, engagement or emotional wellbeing
Sensory and/or physical	Hearing, vision, multisensory, physical and sensory-processing needs

The Trust uses the role title SENDCo to reflect responsibility for special educational needs and disabilities. This corresponds with the statutory SENCO role. We use the terms pupils, children and young people, EHC plan, children in care and previously looked-after children consistently and respectfully.

4. Vision: inclusion by design

Inclusion means proactively identifying and removing barriers to learning, participation, belonging and wider school life. Support will be needs-led and will not depend on a diagnosis, placement on the SEND register or a formal statutory process.
Ordinarily available provision will anticipate commonly occurring and predictable needs through curriculum design, teaching, communication, assessment, routines and the physical and sensory environment. The Trust will make reasonable adjustments, use delegated and notional SEN funding appropriately and review policies or practices that may place disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage.
Pupils with SEND will be supported to participate in lessons, trips and the social life of the school alongside their peers wherever appropriate. Inclusion does not mean identical provision. It means equitable access, meaningful participation, dignity, belonging and ambitious expectations.

Published inclusion strategy

As per current government guidelines, Cornerstone will publish an Inclusion Strategy on its website by 31 December 2026 as a condition of the Inclusive Mainstream Fund.

The Cornerstone approach in practice

Across Cornerstone Academy Trust, inclusion is delivered through one coherent Trust model. Our specific approach includes:

- Trust-wide strategic oversight through the Head of Children's Services, supported by phase-based SENDCos, speech and language therapy, school nursing and a dedicated SEND Trustee.
- Inclusion is embedded in school improvement planning, curriculum design, professional development, resource deployment and quality assurance.

- Individual Support Plans (SEND Support Plans) that include Strengths, Needs, Provision, Targets and Assessment data are in place for all children on the SEND register
- Regular SENDCo collaboration with Heads/Deputies and Heads of Year/Phase is in place across schools to support identification, share effective practice, coordinate support provision and improve consistency
- A graduated response rooted in high-quality classroom teaching, with targeted and specialist support adding to rather than replacing pupils' class membership and curriculum entitlement.
- Staff endeavour to use pupil voice and family knowledge in planning and reviews, with accessible communication and early resolution of concerns, as far as possible
- Quality assurance is led through classroom observations, work sampling, modelling, ISP reviews, pupil and parent voice, attendance, behaviour, participation, wellbeing and progress evidence
- Evaluation focused on whether provision improves access, belonging, independence and outcomes through assessment and teacher judgement —not simply whether an intervention was delivered

5. Aims and objectives

Identify needs and barriers early and accurately.

- Provide timely support without waiting for diagnosis or statutory assessment.
- Secure a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum for all pupils
- Ensure high-quality inclusive and adaptive teaching is the foundation of provision.
- Work in genuine partnership with pupils, parents and carers.
- Apply the graduated approach consistently and evaluate impact.
- Promote independence, participation, wellbeing and preparation for the next stage.
- Meet duties under SEND, equality, safeguarding, admissions and attendance law.
- Use resources transparently, equitably and effectively.
- Strengthen practice through planned CPD, quality assurance and governance.

6. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Core responsibilities
Board of Trustees	Approve and review this policy; assure compliance and strategic oversight; scrutinise inclusion, outcomes, funding and pupil experience; appoint a Trustee with responsibility for SEND.
SEND Trustee	Provide constructive challenge and assurance; meet leaders regularly; report to the Board while recognising that accountability remains collective.
Chief Executive Officer	Ensure Trust-wide implementation, resourcing, accountability and alignment with strategic priorities.
Head of Children's Services	Provide strategic leadership and Trust-wide oversight; lead the SEND team, including phase-based SENDCos and specialist colleagues; oversee consistency and quality across schools; advise leaders and trustees; coordinate professional development, quality assurance and external partnerships.

Heads of School	Ensure the policy is implemented; promote inclusive culture; allocate resources; monitor provision, accessibility, attendance and outcomes; ensure staff development.
SENDCos	Coordinate day-to-day SEND provision; support staff, assist assessment and planning; maintain records and the register; liaise with pupils, families and professionals; advise staff; monitor impact; coordinate EHC processes; collaborate across Trust schools to moderate identification, share practice and support transitions.
Class teachers	Remain responsible for pupils' progress and provision, including where support is delivered by assistants or specialists; identify barriers; adapt teaching; implement and review plans; communicate with families.
Support staff	Deliver agreed provision under teacher direction; promote independence; observe and record response; communicate progress & concerns promptly to teacher
All staff	Anticipate barriers, make reasonable adjustments, follow agreed plans, safeguard pupils, uphold dignity and contribute to an inclusive culture.

7. Partnership with parents and carers

Parents and carers are partners and experts in their child's development, strengths and needs. They will be involved when SEND is first considered. Planning and review of provision and outcomes will be shared. Staff will:

- Communicate concerns sensitively and promptly, including the evidence considered and the child's strengths
- SENDCos and Teachers will review SEND support plans at least three times a year and share with parents/carers for discussion. Teachers will share SEND support at parents evenings. Additional meetings/communications may take place throughout the term, as deemed necessary, according to need. Parental views during these communications may be recorded on child's ISP
- Provide sufficient notice and reasonable adjustments for participation
- Explain decisions about the SEND register, referrals, statutory assessment and any change in provision
- Signpost Devon Information Advice and Support for send (dias), disagreement resolution and mediation where relevant.

8. Pupil participation

Every pupil has the right to be heard. Participation will be enabled in a form suited to the pupil's age, communication preferences and capacity, rather than being conditional on conventional meeting attendance. Through a range of opportunities, including informal interaction with adults, mentor meetings, assessment of 'Pupil's Attitude to School and Self' and the use of GL Assessment Reflect, pupil voice is captured regularly.

- Pupil views will inform strengths, interests, aspirations and desired outcomes
- Pupil views will inform what helps, what creates barriers and what should change
- Pupil views will inform accessible target setting, planning and review
- Pupil views will inform feedback on participation, independence and wellbeing

Schools will use accessible communication, visual supports, augmentative and alternative communication, advocacy and trusted adults where required. Each pupil will have access to a designated group of staff in their year group with whom they can raise concerns.

9. Early identification and assessment

Identification is needs-led and not diagnosis-led. A concern should trigger proportionate assessment, reasonable adjustments and an Assess-Plan-Do-Review response without requiring the pupil to wait for an external assessment.

In terms of identification of needs, the following are used: staff informal and formal screening, and assessment and sharing of observations (child, parent, staff), as well as external professional assessment and advice. These may include:

- Attainment and progress data throughout the year
- Communication, interaction, participation and engagement
- Attendance, including emotionally based barriers to attendance
- Wellbeing, regulation and behaviour
- Sensory and physical access, independence and self-care
- Teacher observation, work, curriculum access and response to teaching
- Pupil and family views.
- Information from previous settings and other professionals.
- Screening or assessment tools, used and interpreted alongside wider evidence

Assessment will guard against under-identification and over-identification. Staff will consider English as an additional language, disadvantage, trauma, medical needs, attendance, care experience, developmental variation and other contextual factors.

10. SEND register and access to adjustments

A pupil does not need to be on the SEND register, have a diagnosis or have an EHC plan before receiving reasonable adjustments or early support.

Placement on the SEND register follows careful assessment and discussion with the pupil and parents or carers. The decision will distinguish SEN from short-term catch-up, medical, pastoral or EAL support, while recognising that needs may overlap. The evidence, decision, provision and review arrangements will be recorded and communicated.

The register will be kept current throughout the year. Removal will occur only when evidence shows that special educational provision is no longer required. Parents, the pupil and relevant staff will be involved.

11. Graduated approach: Assess, Plan, Do, Review

Stage	Actions
Assess	Gather a rounded picture with the pupil and family; identify strengths, needs, barriers, current provision and response; seek specialist advice if necessary.
Plan	Set outcomes, provision, reasonable adjustments, responsibilities, success measures and a review date.

Do	Deliver support primarily through inclusive classroom practice, supplemented where necessary. The class teacher retains day-to-day responsibility and works with the SENDCo and support staff.
Review	Evaluate impact against agreed outcomes; obtain pupil and parent views; consider implementation fidelity; revise, continue, intensify or cease provision according to evidence and changing need.

Interventions will be evidence-informed, purposeful, time-limited where appropriate, implemented with fidelity and assessed for impact. Provision will not continue indefinitely without evidence of benefit. Where progress remains limited despite relevant action, the school will consider further assessment, specialist advice, a Team Around the Family or an Education Health and Care needs assessment request for those with complex needs, in partnership with the family.

12. Ordinarily available, targeted and specialist provision

Provision is organised across three (to be 4 following SEND reform) connected levels:

Level	Description
Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (Universal)	High-quality teaching, accessible curriculum, predictable adjustments and inclusive routines available across classrooms and school life.
Targeted	Additional, focused provision based on assessed need, with defined targets/outcomes and review. It complements rather than replaces inclusive classroom teaching. Support is outlined in an Individual Support Plan (currently SEND Support Plan)
Targeted+	(New SEND reform proposed this new categorisation of support level to be provided in school school with input from education and/or health professionals. Support may include access to a 'support base') Support will be outlined in an Individual Support Plan
Specialist	Highly individualised provision and/or specialist advice for significant or complex needs, including provision specified in an EHC plan. (New SEND Reform proposes this support level will be provided through Specialist Provision Packages and may be delivered through a 'specialist base')

Movement between levels is not a success measure in itself. Decisions will be based on changing need, impact and the least intrusive provision that secures meaningful access and progress.

12. Curriculum access and inclusive teaching

All pupils are entitled to a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum. Teachers will use high-quality inclusive and adaptive teaching, including explicit instruction, scaffolding, flexible grouping, accessible materials and communication, technology, sensory and environmental adjustments, and suitable adaptations to assessment.

Provision will promote independence and preparation for the next stage. SEND support will not routinely be equated with adult proximity or one-to-one support. Any adult support will have a clear purpose, encourage agency and be reviewed.

Withdrawal from the classroom will be purposeful, proportionate and reviewed. Leaders will balance the intended benefit against curriculum entitlement, class membership and belonging. Support

outside the classroom will not become an informal exclusion from high-quality teaching or wider school life.

14. Physical and sensory accessibility

This policy links directly to each school's accessibility plan. Schools will review entrances, classrooms, circulation, toilets, quiet or calmer spaces, acoustics, lighting, signage, transitions and emergency arrangements. Environmental adjustments will be informed by assessed need and pupils' lived experience.

16. Admissions

Admissions will follow the relevant statutory admissions arrangements and EHC plan consultation processes. No applicant will be discriminated against because of SEND or disability, and reasonable adjustments will be considered proactively.

Where a school is named in a final EHC plan, the admission duties arising from that plan will be followed. Any consultation response will be evidence-based and consider what reasonable adjustments or additional provision may secure access. The school will not independently refuse admission simply because a pupil has SEND.

17. Education, Health and Care plans

The Trust will use its best endeavours to secure the special educational provision called for by a pupil's SEN. Provision specified in an EHC plan will be delivered, monitored and reviewed.

Annual reviews will be person-centred and will include pupil and parent views, progress towards outcomes, effectiveness of provision, preparation for transition and any proposed amendments. Reports and advice will be gathered and circulated within required timescales, and review paperwork will be returned promptly to the local authority.

Current EHC plan rights remain in force. Potential changes proposed through 2026 reform will not be applied in advance of legislation and formal transition arrangements.

18. Transition

Transition planning will be agreed on an individual basis It may cover entry into nursery or Reception, movement between classes and key stages, transfer between Trust schools, transition to secondary or specialist provision, mid-year admission, and reintegration following prolonged absence. Transition will typically include:

- Timely information-sharing with consent and appropriate data protection
- Planning between settings, staff, families and professionals, where necessary
- Planned visits/orientation, if appropriate
- Transition information photographs or visual information, if appropriate

19. Working with other services

Schools may work with Devon SEND services, educational psychology, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, school nursing, health visitors, mental health services, social

care, Early Help, Family Hubs, education welfare, police, voluntary organisations and other relevant professionals.

Consent, information governance and confidentiality requirements will be followed. Specialist advice will inform, not replace, school responsibility for teaching, reasonable adjustments and review. Families and pupils will be included in multi-agency planning wherever appropriate.

20. Staff development

Professional development is a planned and monitored entitlement linked to role, pupil need and school improvement priorities. It will include induction and continuing development for teachers, teaching assistants, leaders, trustees and relevant support staff.

Evaluation will consider changes in classroom practice, consistency, pupil experience and outcomes, rather than recording attendance at training alone. The Trust will engage with relevant national SEND and inclusion workforce materials introduced from September 2026 onwards.

21. Resources and funding

Core funding, delegated and notional SEN funding, top-up funding and any additional inclusion funding will be deployed according to assessed need, statutory duties, improvement priorities and evidence of impact.

22. Trustee monitoring and evaluation

The Trustee Board will receive assurance at least annually. School and Trust leaders will use a balanced set of educational and inclusion measures, including:

- Identification and movement on and off the send register
- Quality and impact of ordinarily available, targeted and specialist provision
- Participation in the curriculum and wider school life
- Independence and preparation for transition
- Wellbeing and sense of belonging
- Pupil and parent confidence and experience
- Timeliness of support and effectiveness of interventions
- Accessibility and reasonable adjustments
- Staff development
- Use and impact of SEN funding

23. Complaints and disagreement resolution

Concerns about school SEND support should normally be raised firstly with the class teacher, then Deputy, Head or SENDCo and then managed through the stages of the Trust complaints policy.

Different routes apply to disability discrimination claims and disagreements about EHC needs assessments or EHC plan decisions. Families will be signposted, as relevant, to Devon Information Advice and Support for SEND (DIAS).

24. Information, related policies and review

Key information

- SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

- Devon Information Advice and Support for SEND (DIAS): https://www.devonias.org.uk

- Devon SEND Local Offer: https://www.devon.gov.uk/education-and-families/send-local-offer/

- Devon Local Area SEND Strategy 2024-2027: https://www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/send-local-offer/working-together/devon-local-area-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send-strategy-2024-to-2027/

Related Trust and school documents

- SEND Information Report
- Inclusion strategy (to be published Dec 2026)
- Accessibility plan
- Safeguarding policy
- Attendance policy
- Behaviour policy
- Supporting pupils with medical conditions policy
- Data protection and records management policies
- Curriculum and teaching and learning policies

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner where legislation, statutory guidance, local arrangements or significant Trust practice changes.