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A MINI GUIDE TO

RETHINKING HIGH QUALITY INCLUSION

This free document has been created to support settings and schools in having necessary conversations about inclusion.

Introduction

Inclusion often gets treated like an add-on - a separate checklist, a standalone policy document, or a set of isolated interventions. But real inclusion is actually much simpler (and far more powerful):

High-quality inclusion is just high-quality teaching for every child.

When we strip away the jargon and overcomplicated frameworks, inclusion comes down to three basic things:

- Solid relationships,
- Safe environments, and
- Ensuring everyone is on the same page.

Keep it simple

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the endless stream of strategies, teaching styles, assessment frameworks, and new initiatives thrown our way. While pedagogical tools have their place, overthinking can distract us from what actually works.

- Focus on the core: You don't need a completely different set of rules for every student. High-quality inclusion is about doing the fundamentals well for all learners.
- Avoid "**inclusion fatigue**": When inclusion feels like a separate task on your to-do list, burnout happens. Keep it manageable by grounding your approach in basic, solid teaching.



Know your learners deeply

At the heart of any inclusive space is simply knowing the people in it. You can't support a child effectively if you don't really know how they tick.

- **Invest the time**: building real relationships takes time up front, but it pays off massively in the long run. It is also hugely important to value communication and information from a child's family and use this to enhance your teaching.
- **Read the room**: pay attention to how individual children react. What does actual engagement look like for them? How do they show you when they're uncomfortable, curious, or excited? Might a child appear fine, but actually be masking at school, then struggling towards the end of the day at home? Check in with families to ensure you understand your children as well as you can.
- **Focus on the big four** - are your students:
  - happy,
  - content,
  - engaged, and
  - learning?

If those things are present, inclusion is already happening.



Build spaces where children feel safe

Real learning doesn't happen if children feel on edge. When children feel secure in their environment, they naturally explore, take risks, and try new things.

Observe: Notice how children move through and interact with their space. Their confidence (or hesitation) will tell you if the setup is working for them.

Make it feel like theirs: A classroom shouldn't feel like a space where certain children are guests - it should feel like it has been designed for everyone e.g. symbol support in a learning space will be most beneficial for children with learning differences or disabilities, but it doesn't hinder children in the group who can cope without.

Stop making inclusion a separate strategy

There's a clear irony in writing a standalone "inclusion strategy" - separating inclusion into its own isolated policy misses the point somewhat.

- **Bake it into the main plan**: Inclusion shouldn't just be a separate binder on a shelf. Whether you're working in the early years, primary, secondary, or higher education, inclusion belongs right inside your core setting or school strategy.
- **Design for everyone first:** When planning curriculum, behaviour, or staff training, build it for your whole cohort from the start, rather than retrofitting it later.



Quick Check

- Am I keeping it simple? Am I prioritising actual relationships over extra paperwork?
- Do I know my cohort? Can I tell when a child is genuinely content versus just compliant?
- Is the space safe? Does our setup encourage quiet confidence and exploration?
- Is it integrated? Is inclusion part of our everyday strategy, or is it tucked away in a separate conversation?

NOTES

NOTES CONT.

By shifting our focus from "**managing inclusion**" to "**delivering great teaching**," we create spaces where every learner naturally thrives.

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About Stephen Kilgour

Stephen Kilgour is the SEND Advisor at Tapestry and he provides free support and training to nurseries and schools. He was previously the Deputy Head teacher at Cherry Garden, which is an Outstanding specialist school in London. If you would like any advice from Stephen, you can contact him on stephen@tapestry.net.

