

Support Bases Guidance

For Headteachers and Leaders of SEND and
Inclusion

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Foreword

This guidance sets out what Southwark expects of schools running a support base, so that every child and young person (CYP) who attends one receives the same quality of education as their peers and makes strong progress.

In June 2026 the Department for Education published [*Inclusion bases in schools*](#), non-statutory guidance setting out six principles of effective practice. This document is the local companion to it. The DfE guidance sets out the principles and the national picture; this guidance sets out how Southwark expects those principles to be implemented here, alongside the local support and training available. Both should be read together, and schools running or planning a base should read the DfE Inclusion bases in schools guidance in full.

A change of terminology. Southwark previously used the term "gathered provision" to describe a school's internal decision to educate some of its pupils outside their mainstream classroom. That term has been retired. The DfE now uses **inclusion base** as the umbrella term, replacing SEN unit, resourced provision and pupil support unit, with two models beneath it:

- **support bases**, commissioned and funded by individual schools, academy trusts or local groups of schools
- **specialist bases**, commissioned and funded by the local authority

What Southwark called gathered provisions are now **support bases**. Southwark's resource bases and resourced units are **specialist bases**. This guidance is written primarily for support bases, though specialist bases may find the standards apply equally to them.

A change of scope. This guidance previously addressed provision for CYP with SEND alone. It now covers all the cohorts a base may support, including CYP who need support for behavioural or pastoral reasons, those at risk of suspension or exclusion, and those with low or declining attendance. The expectations are the same whichever cohort a base is designed for.

Southwark neither encourages nor discourages schools from opening a support base. That decision belongs to the school. Where a school does decide to open one, this guidance sets out what running it well requires.

This guidance should be read alongside the Southwark Inclusion Standards, the Ordinarily Available Provision, and the SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 years. It follows the same five-standard structure as the Inclusion Standards, so that leaders can move between the documents with ease. The appendix maps the six DfE principles onto those five standards.

Principles

- The CYP's views and aspirations should be central to all planning with and for them.
- Parents and carers should be partners in all decisions and discussions about how best to support their child.
- Leaders and teachers should have high expectations for every CYP, whatever their starting point.
- Teachers should set ambitious targets using appropriate assessments.
- All CYP should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Lessons should be planned to be engaging, to address areas of difficulty, and to remove barriers to progress.
- Assessment and intervention should follow a needs-led approach and should not be reliant on a diagnosis.
- Access to a support base should never be used as a sanction, or as a means of removing a CYP from the classroom. This applies to bases supporting behaviour and pastoral needs as much as to those supporting SEND.

What a support base is

A support base is a designated provision within a mainstream school, funded by the school from its own resources, for a small number of CYP who need specialist teaching and support for part or all of the week while remaining part of their mainstream school.

A support base:

- is part of the mainstream school and is not registered as an educational institution in its own right
- is designed with a particular target cohort in mind, whose strengths and needs drive the specification of the base and how it operates
- delivers specific teaching, interventions or support, in addition to or in place of mainstream classes
- may be accessed for a defined period or on an ongoing basis

A support base is **not**:

- a general learning resource area, a SEN department space, or a room CYP use for universal or targeted support on an ad hoc basis
- a place to send CYP as a consequence of their behaviour

- a route to an education, health and care needs assessment. Attending a base does not automatically lead to a needs assessment and should not be used to build a case for one

The continuum model

Support bases operate on a continuum between two approaches: as an **inclusive service**, where CYP access the majority of mainstream classes, and as a **specialist space**, where CYP do the majority of their learning in the base. Most bases sit somewhere between the two.

Figure 1: Continuum model



[DfE Figure 1: continuum model, adapted from Strogilos and Ward, 2024]

Where a base sits on this continuum is separate from how it is funded. A support base and a specialist base can sit at either end. Position on the continuum should be determined by the assessed needs of the cohort, not by the label attached to the provision.

Southwark expects schools to:

- be able to state explicitly where their base sits on the continuum, and why

- apply the continuum to individual CYP as well as to the provision, so that each CYP's time in the base reflects their current needs
- review arrangements regularly and prioritise movement towards more time in mainstream classes, while recognising that for some CYP long-term access to a base as a dedicated learning area is appropriate
- be able to explain to a family why their child is educated in the base, and why for the amount of time proposed, in terms of that CYP's needs and the outcomes sought

Before opening a support base

Schools considering opening a support base should work through the following before decisions about staffing or admissions are made.

Get the universal offer right first. An inclusive, high-quality universal offer across the whole school is a prerequisite for an effective base. Leaders should complete the Southwark Inclusion Self-Evaluation Audit Tool and address the priorities it identifies before setting up a base.

Notify the local authority. Schools should notify their Senior Advisor when opening a support base, and are encouraged to make contact early, at the point the option is being considered rather than once it is decided. Where a CYP who will access the base has an EHC plan, the school must also notify their EHC plan coordinator in writing, including parental consent. Southwark's Inclusion and SEND consultants can advise on the specification, cohort and operating model.

Engage in local area strategic planning. Schools should be clear about how their base contributes to meeting local need, and should share data on emerging needs and trends when requested.

Write a clear service specification. Even where the school is both the commissioner and the host, a written specification should cover:

- the intended cohort profile and developmental stage
- entry and exit criteria, including the approach to reintegration
- the staffing model, the role of school leaders, and access to specialists and health professionals
- the physical environment and operational capacity
- the curriculum and intervention offer
- the approach to inclusive practice and compliance with related statutory duties
- expected outcomes and how they will be measured
- quality assurance processes

- funding arrangements and long-term sustainability
- governance arrangements

Allow sufficient lead-in time. Readiness for opening includes staff recruitment and induction, training for both base and mainstream staff, environment set-up, communication with families, and safeguarding, curriculum and assessment planning.

Standard 1: Environment and Inclusive Setting

Leadership

- The headteacher has overall responsibility and accountability for the support base.
- A member of the senior leadership team holds overall strategic responsibility for the base. Where this is not the SENCO, and the base supports CYP with SEN, the SENCO should also be involved in the strategic oversight of planning, teaching and assessment.
- Operational, day-to-day responsibility for the base lies with a teacher.
- Senior leaders should maintain a visible presence in the base and spend time there regularly.
- Schools should have a clear, documented process for identifying the cohort, shared with staff and families, recognising that the cohort may change over time.
- Roles and responsibilities should be clearly communicated to all staff who are directly or indirectly involved with the base.
- Curriculum should be overseen by subject leads as per school policy.
- Leaders should ensure protected time for base staff to meet, discuss and review cohort needs and targets regularly, and for base and mainstream staff to liaise. Southwark recommends a minimum of one hour per week.
- Leaders should ensure each CYP has individual goals at their level in key areas, displayed visibly, known to all staff in the setting, with progression evidence gathered against them and reviewed at least termly.
- The arrangements for monitoring the quality of education in the base should be as rigorous as those used for mainstream classes.
- Leaders should consider how to share effective practice from the base across the whole school.

The physical environment

- The base should be located close to mainstream classes and shared spaces such as playgrounds and halls, ideally within the same building, so that inclusion is promoted and transitions are straightforward.
- All rooms should have a sensory audit completed, which may be supported by LA specialist teams, for example the AET environment audit. Following this, all CYP should have access to sensory activities and spaces.
- Spaces should be flexible, well-resourced and purposeful, with room for different activities as the needs of the cohort change: teaching, small group and one-to-one work, sensory activity, assessment, regulation and therapy.
- Multi-purpose spaces are usually preferable to permanently installed single-use facilities, and can support a broader range of learning and sensory experiences than a room designated only for calming.
- Spaces and resources should demonstrate that the CYP who use them are valued.
- Leaders should ensure a health and safety check of the space and environment, and that it is safe for the needs of the CYP, making adaptations where necessary.
- CYP should be involved in the decoration and design of the space.
- Where health professionals or specialists will work in the base, their views on the environment should be sought at the design stage.
- Where effective strategies for the physical environment are developed in the base, these should be shared across the school.

Belonging and CYP experience

- CYP accessing the base are members of their mainstream class and of the whole school community. Every CYP should have a named place in a mainstream class.
- There should be planned opportunities for engagement with the wider school community, including assemblies, trips, playtimes, clubs, school council and prefect roles, and special events.
- Schools should guard against CYP who use the base feeling, or appearing, less valued than their peers, and should celebrate and promote the base and the CYP who attend it.
- Schools should consider reverse integration, where mainstream peers spend time in the base, to promote inclusion in both directions.
- A buddy system, welcome pack, or the opportunity to bring a friend to the base outside lesson time can each support belonging.
- Every CYP should have access to visual supports for learning, communication and routines, individualised to their level of understanding. Depending on the CYP this may include a half or full-day visual timetable, a now and next board, chat or ALS boards, AAC set-ups, individual communication books, or choice boards.

- A positive, trauma informed and individual approach should be taken to support regulation and wellbeing. Some CYP will have an individual behaviour support plan.
- Behaviour should be tracked and monitored, for example using the ABC model.
- Careful planning should ensure CYP feel safe and supported during transitions within the school day.
- All CYP and families in the school should understand the purpose of the base and the strengths and needs of those who access it. Where the base uses a specific communication approach, the whole school might be encouraged to learn it.

Standard 2: High Quality Teaching and Curriculum

Access to qualified teaching

- CYP accessing a base should not have less access to a qualified teacher than their peers in mainstream classes.
- Where curriculum content or interventions are delivered, this should be led by a teacher. Where more specialist input is required, for example therapeutic, pastoral or medical, it should be led by an appropriately qualified professional.
- To teach a class of CYP with hearing impairment, vision impairment or multi-sensory impairment, a teacher must hold the relevant mandatory qualification in addition to qualified teacher status.
- Support staff should have clearly delineated responsibilities, clear role expectations, and protected time for planning and liaison with teachers.

Curriculum and assessment

- All CYP accessing the base should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, aligned with the mainstream curriculum and adapted to remove barriers rather than to reduce expectations when possible.
- All support bases should be implementing Southwark's Ordinarily Available Provision.
- The base and mainstream timetables should align as far as possible, so that maths in the base takes place when that year group has maths, maximising the potential for CYP to join mainstream lessons and minimising disruption to the rest of their timetable.
- Base and mainstream teachers should jointly design the curriculum. Where placements are time-limited, mainstream class teachers should be closely involved in curriculum planning, design and delivery.

- Where curriculum adaptation is required, it should retain links to the mainstream curriculum, covering the same topics, foundational skills and key texts where possible, adapted for pace and starting points.
- Where CYP are working significantly below age-related expectations, the curriculum should still prioritise purposeful teaching and learning. Some schools adapt the EYFS framework to support this.
- Bases should not be areas that lack clear curriculum intent and purposeful teaching and learning.
- Leaders should have a clear understanding of how the curriculum in the base enables CYP to make progress.
- Where there is a focus on play, these elements should be carefully planned and sequenced.
- Each CYP's timetable should contain a deliberate mix of time in the base, time with mainstream peers, direct teacher input, CYP-led learning within evidence-based provision, and targeted small group or individual work.
- The curriculum offer should be evidence-informed, reviewed regularly, and able to evolve as the strengths and needs of the cohort change.
- Where a CYP has an EHC plan, the curriculum in the base should be informed by their targets and outcomes.
- Wellbeing, confidence, independence, life skills and preparation for adulthood should be embedded in the curriculum from the earliest stages.
- Families should be kept regularly informed about the intended outcomes and content of the curriculum, for example through newsletters or the school website.

Specialist pedagogy

- There should be clear, shared principles of what specialist pedagogy is in this setting and how it is delivered, which may include sensory and non-subject specific approaches growing into subject specific teaching.
- Staff should use evidence-based strategies such as Attention Autism, TEACCH, Zones of Regulation, emotion coaching and the 5-point scale. Links to these strategies are provided for context and definitions only, not for direct training access.
- Support and training should be accessed from the Autism Support Team, Southwark Inclusion and SEND consultants and Cherry Outreach as needed.
- CYP should receive specialist teaching and input where appropriate or as set out in their EHC plan, for example speech and language therapy.
- Appropriate communication methods should be used and embedded for all CYP, for example visuals, Makaton and AAC.

Standard 3: Understanding Need

Baselining and assessment

- A baseline assessment should be completed for each CYP on entry to the base, using validated and reliable assessments.
- Progress should be tracked against clear baselines and reviewed regularly against intended outcomes, using a graduated response and regular assessment opportunities. For example, Cherry Branch Maps.
- Assessment approaches should align with the entry and exit criteria for the base, so that progress against entry criteria can be demonstrated and can inform decisions about exit.
- Progress for many CYP accessing a base will be small-step and non-linear and may not map neatly to age-related expectations. Schools should track progress across EHC plan outcomes, academic attainment, attendance and extracurricular participation, and should also consider engagement, wellbeing, confidence, social relationships, sense of belonging, behaviour, communication, independence, preparation for adulthood, and time spent in the base.
- Where schools develop or adopt alternative assessment tools, they should consider the evidence base for the tool, the needs and targets of the CYP who will use it, advice from specialists, alignment with whole-school approaches, and the effectiveness of the tool on review.
- Where appropriate, assessment should be joint across education, health, social care and advisory services.

Co-production with families and other stakeholders

- Parents and carers should be fully involved in any decision about how or where their child is educated within the school. Schools should not place a CYP in a base without involving their parents or carers in the decision.
- There should be written consent from parents and carers, and clear communication around entry, review and exit points.
- Parents and carers should be involved in decisions about how much time their child spends in the base, the curriculum and support planned, and plans for reintegration.
- SMART targets should be set, reviewed, and used to document progress.
- The educational provision should be reviewed termly with parents, carers and other professionals as appropriate. The mainstream class teacher should be involved in this.
- Family-centred planning should take account of any barriers families face in engaging, for example where English is not the main language spoken at home, or where a parent or carer is disabled or has additional needs.

- Schools should signpost relevant resources and support for families, and should share strategies that work in school which could be used at home, and ask families for strategies that work at home.
- All appropriate referrals should be made and communication across services should be joined up.
- Recommendations from specialists should be implemented and form part of the graduated response.

CYP voice

- All CYP should have a one-page profile or communication passport which is clearly visible in the room and available to all staff who work with them, including the mainstream class teacher.
- CYP should have an Individual Support Plan setting out provision and targets. See appendix.
- Schools should provide CYP with key information about the base before they join, including its location, the structure of the day, how many CYP attend, and the names and roles of staff, in accessible formats.
- While accessing the base, CYP should be kept informed about key events and changes in their mainstream class and the wider school.
- Schools should capture the voice of CYP accessing the base and use it to inform decisions, providing appropriate support for understanding and communication. CYP should be involved in creating their own targets.

Understanding the profile of the base

- Leaders should regularly review the profile of CYP accessing the base to identify trends, considering disproportionality and over-representation of marginalised groups, and should be actively anti-discriminatory in their practice.
- Leaders should consider how race, gender, socioeconomic disadvantage and other characteristics interact in shaping which CYP access provision outside mainstream classes, and how families experience that provision.
- All practice must be consistent with the duties set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Standard 4: Targeted Support and Interventions

Interventions

- Interventions should be tailored to individual need, evidence-based, and delivered by trained staff.
- Interventions are usually delivered in small groups of no more than four CYP, so that the group leader can move each individual's learning forward.
- School leaders should monitor the delivery of interventions for fidelity and impact.
- School leaders should include the base in their assessment of the overall quality of education.
- There should be planned opportunities for CYP to join suitable sessions in their mainstream class, built up gradually, building on the skills learnt during targeted intervention.

Locally available training

Training for school staff working in, or with responsibility for, a support base includes:

- Local Authority 5 Key Strategies
- Adapting the Curriculum for Complex Learners, targeted at leaders
- De-escalation, delivered by the Autism Support Team
- Cherry Outreach SEND Toolkits: Complex Needs in the Early Years, Developing Communication, or Early Literacy and Maths Skills
- Cherry Outreach Branch Maps introduction
- Using Visuals, delivered by the Autism Support Team
- Behaviour series, delivered by the Autism Support Team
- Safeguarding
- Education Endowment Foundation – [Scenario Space](#) training sessions

Professional development and workforce

- All staff, including those in leadership roles, should receive ongoing professional development, planned purposefully with intended impact identified, and evaluated over time.

- Base staff should have a role in building whole-school capacity, modelling and advising on effective strategies, and should have opportunities to learn from mainstream class teachers.
- The base should be positioned as a site of professional learning, coaching and modelling for the whole school.
- Recruitment and training policies should support the assumption that mainstream teachers expect to teach the CYP who access the base.
- Staff-to-pupil ratios should be appropriate to individual and group needs, and staffing levels should be sufficient to meet the needs of CYP in the base at all times.
- Schools should consider staff workload and wellbeing, including access to supportive line management, supervision or mentoring, protected liaison time, and proportionate expectations for planning, assessment and movement between the base and mainstream.
- Schools should support base staff to access peer support networks, including with special and alternative provision schools. Best practice schools will offer peer support and networking to other local schools, and local authority services will provide training opportunities for base staff across the academic year.

Transitions

- Transitions in and out of the base should be well planned and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.
- At phase transition there should be strong communication between both schools to avoid cliff-edges in support, so that starting points and prior knowledge are understood.
- Where placements are time-limited, schools should have a clear reintegration strategy, which may involve reintegration meetings with the CYP, their family and other agencies, with plans reviewed at regular intervals.
- Progress should continue to be tracked for a period after a CYP leaves the base, to check that reintegration is sustained.

Quality assurance

- Schools should ensure timely and rigorous quality assurance processes are in place, building on existing whole-school arrangements.
- Southwark expects at least three sources of quality assurance each year. These might include review by the governing body or trust, workforce self and peer evaluation, CYP and parent and carer voice, local authority review, or review from peer schools, special schools or external specialists.
- Where bases are commissioned across a group of schools or a trust, the group should visit at least annually, review outcomes, monitor use of places and ensure the offer remains appropriate, including observation of practice by a suitably qualified practitioner.
- Where a school has a base, Ofsted inspects it as part of the school inspection.

- Reports to governors and trustees should fully include the base. A curriculum report on mathematics, for example, should cover both mainstream provision and provision in the base.

Standard 5: Statutory Requirements

Statutory policies and processes

- Where CYP have an EHC plan, the school must inform the EHC plan coordinator of the base provision in writing and include parental consent.
- Schools must ensure that the provision specified in Section F is delivered, and must detail the base provision in all annual review paperwork.
- Schools should follow statutory guidance on any use of a part-time timetables, which should only be used in exceptional and temporary circumstances. Part-time timetables should support pupils spending more time in school over time, not less and the start time for the base should coincide with that of the wider school. See [Southwark's Reduced Timetable Guidance](#).
- All schools should have an intimate care policy and should follow statutory guidance on admission, toileting, safeguarding and medical needs.
- Where CYP have a sensory impairment, schools must liaise with the sensory teams at the local authority regarding the child's provision.
- Attending a support base does not automatically lead to a needs assessment and should not be used as a route to one.
- Leaders should use SEND funding sustainably to ensure high-quality provision over time, with an agreed annual funding review.

Publication and notification

- Schools should notify their Senior Advisor when opening a support base.
- Schools should publicise their base provision on their website, and, where it supports CYP with SEN, within their inclusion strategy, which replaces the SEN information report from December 2026.
- Schools should ensure their Get Information About Schools record is accurate and up to date in relation to their base provision.

Admissions and dual registration

- Admissions processes must align with the relevant statutory frameworks, including where a school is named in an EHC plan or a placement is made through offsite direction powers.

- Where CYP accessing the base do not have EHC plans, referrals should be informed by data and follow an agreed process which references entry and exit criteria and involves relevant professionals.
- Where a CYP attends the base from another school, they must be dual registered with their main school and the host school, and the host school must admit them in line with its published admissions arrangements and the School Admissions Code.
- Where placements are short-term or part-time across two schools, accountability, safeguarding, attendance and transport responsibilities should be agreed and clearly understood by both schools. Schools should also agree the approach to uniform, and consider the impact of long or complex journeys on wellbeing and readiness to learn.
- Where a CYP is directed offsite to improve their behaviour by accessing support from a base, the governing board must provide written notification to parents and carers.

Safeguarding

- All designated safeguarding leads should have oversight of the CYP attending the base.
- Designated safeguarding leads should have training in understanding the safeguarding needs of CYP with SEND.
- Designated safeguarding leads should share information with staff in the base as relevant, and communication should be effective.
- Staff working in the base should receive additional safeguarding training focused on the safeguarding needs of CYP with SEND. This can be delivered by the designated safeguarding lead or deputy.
- Staff working in the base should know how to report safeguarding concerns as per the school policy.

Health and safety

- All staff working in the base should have read Southwark's [Special Education Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Children: Guidance for the Management of Health and Safety Risks](#).
- Staff should understand the difference between a behaviour plan and a risk assessment.
- Suitable and sufficient risk assessments should be carried out for CYP in the base as necessary, and made available to all staff who work with them, including the mainstream class teacher, using Assure.
- Staff should know how to report health and safety concerns as per the school's policy.
- All accidents or incidents involving CYP in the base, and teaching and support staff, must be reported on Assure.

Appendix

Documents needed

- [Individual Support Plans: EYFS to Year 4, and Year 5 onwards](#)
- [Special Education Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Children: Guidance for the Management of Health and Safety Risks](#)
- Southwark Inclusion Standards
- [Southwark Ordinarily Available Provision](#)
- Southwark Inclusion Self-Evaluation Audit Tool
- [Inclusion bases in schools, Department for Education, June 2026](#)
- [SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 years](#)

How this guidance maps to the DfE principles

DfE principle	Southwark standard
1. Supporting inclusion in the school or local area	Standard 1
2. High-quality curriculum design	Standard 2
3. Effective data, assessment and outcomes	Standard 3, and quality assurance in Standard 4
4. Effective workforce and leadership	Leadership in Standard 1, workforce in Standard 4

5. Effective partnership working	Co-production in Standard 3, transitions in Standard 4
6. Inclusive and accessible physical environments	Standard 1
Commissioning	Before opening a support base, and Standard 5