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# Belonging in School



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: School-level approaches for developing inclusive policy

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## What is the Belonging in School resource?

The Belonging in School resource is a set of **planning tools that schools can use to develop policies for educational inclusion**, particularly as they pertain to learners with **neurodevelopmental differences**. It details strategies for developing, implementing, and measuring inclusive policies. Even in the current climate of stretched resources and high demands on staff, **positive changes are possible at school level, in the short and medium-term**. This resource builds on contributions from a wide range of practitioners, researchers and community members as part of two inclusive education policy workshops in 2022-23.

The resource consists of this **Executive Summary** and two **main documents**, available as free downloads from <https://inclusion.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/>.

**Part 1: An Introduction to School-level Approaches for Developing Inclusive Policy.** Gives brief background on inclusion issues in the UK, and proposes characteristics of inclusive school policies. Introduces the Action Cycle and Four Planning Approaches, to help you decide if they may be right for your school. Shares 12 Suggested Changes schools could make for more inclusive practice.

**Part 2: A Practical Guide to Inclusive Policy Planning.** A detailed, hands-on document to help schools understand and engage in inclusive policy planning using the action cycle and Four Approaches. Also includes options and tips about collecting information and measuring the impact of your policy changes.

If you're new to our resource or want a brief overview of the topics and strategies covered in the other two documents, this **Executive Summary** is the right place to start.

## Who is this resource for?

Belonging in School is for **teachers, senior leadership teams, and anyone else involved in the provision of teaching and care in a school setting**. While these planning tools could be applied across any level of education, they will be most relevant to mainstream primary schools in the UK's education systems. The resource was designed to be approachable, free, and ready-to-use.

## What is inclusion?

"Inclusion" can mean many things in education (see Part 1, Introduction for more details). The term does not mean the same thing across contexts, or to different stakeholders. In Belonging in School, we adopt a **belongingness-centred definition of inclusion**, as this was a core idea in the original workshops and links to extensive research on school belonging and pupil outcomes. As our title signals, we focus on facilitating inclusion in terms of pupils' sense of belonging, by which we mean learners' subjective sense of **whether or not they are part of their school community, safe, and valued**.



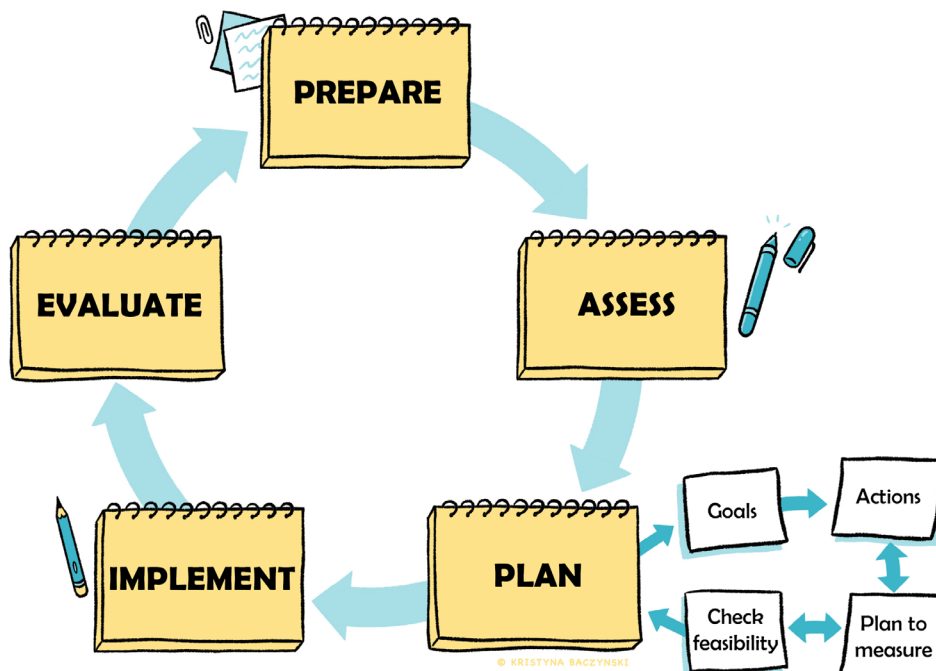
## What tools does Belonging in School include?

In this resource, our goal has been to provide tools and strategies through which schools can reflect on their choices, policies, and values around inclusion, and then draw on this information to create local, inclusive policies that meet the needs of more learners. We offer two types of tool: **planning approaches**, organised around a multi-step **action cycle**, and specific suggestions for **changes** to practice.

Belonging in School is designed to support a manageable process of identifying and implementing inclusive policies that **align with your school community’s priorities, constraints, and values**, rather than dictating exactly *which* policies should be implemented. Every school has unique circumstances, so what “inclusion” looks like will be unique too.

### The action cycle for planning inclusive policies

This five-step cycle moves through preparation, mapping current circumstances, planning, implementation, and evaluation (see diagram). It *is* a cycle rather than a one-time process, and we envision schools using the cycle multiple times, focusing on different areas of policy. The emphasis on process and planning is an opportunity: it asks for ongoing progress, not perfection. **Part 2**, our Planning Guidance Document, provides a detailed, step-by-step description of what each step of this cycle might look like in your school. It also includes guidance on how you can plan and carry out evaluation of your policy changes. Are they having the effects you hoped for?





## Four Planning Approaches

The **four planning approaches** are all structured around the action cycle. Each one represents a different way of looking at, and working towards, inclusive policies. The steps of the cycle thus include somewhat different questions or tasks, depending on the approach you choose. No approach is better or worse than another, but they may fit more or less well with your school's existing practices and goals.

The Four Approaches in the Belonging in School resource are:

1. Committing to “inclusion-as-belonging”
2. Participatory policy design
3. Inclusion by design
4. Committing to be a neurodiversity-affirmative school

### The two parts of Belonging in School

**Part 1** gives an overview of key ideas and terms present in the action cycle and each approach, to help you decide if they sound possible for your school, and if you want to find out more about one or more approaches.

**Part 2** steps through the action cycle and approaches, giving you the details you will need to choose what best suits your setting, apply an approach, and measure the impact of changes you make.

## Twelve Suggested Changes

In **Part 1**, we highlight **Twelve Suggested Changes** that schools could make in the short and medium-term, as an addition, alternative or precursor to an in-depth planning process. These changes cover a range of areas, including concepts and attitudes around inclusion (such as emphasising pupil belonging, mentioned previously), the school's sensory environment, continuing professional development, and daily stressors for pupils with neurodevelopmental differences.

## What should I do next?

If the Belonging in School resource sounds like it might help your school to develop more inclusive policies, we encourage you to proceed to **Part 1, An Introduction to School-level Approaches for Developing Inclusive Policy**, available free from <https://inclusion.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/>.

Please also share Belonging in School with your colleagues, or anyone interested in inclusion!

**There is no one-size-fits-all model for school inclusion. Our resources are designed to help schools create environments in which everyone feels *they can belong*. This can seem like a daunting process, but the action cycle, approaches, and 12 changes can help break down “inclusive policy” into smaller pieces where schools can take manageable steps toward positive change—even when they and their staff are facing many challenges.**



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