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Inclusion Strategy

Monmouthshire's Children, Learning, Skills and Economy
Directorate

Inclusion Strategy (January 2025)

This policy sets out Monmouthshire Local Authority's Strategy for Inclusion.

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Introduction

Monmouthshire's last Estyn report, published in April 2020, recognised that a number of appropriate actions have been taken by Monmouthshire's Children and Young People's (CYP) Directorate to improve the identification and provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and that there is a passion and commitment to improve this further. However, a primary recommendation of the Estyn report stated that Monmouthshire must 'articulate a clear strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision'.

The creation of a broader Inclusion Service has meant that the articulation of an Inclusion (rather than SEN) strategy, supported by a broader suite of interconnected strategies and related policies, will now respond to this recommendation.

This document sets out Monmouthshire's Inclusion Strategy for children and young people. It establishes our vision and framework for developing an inclusive education system that gives all children the best start in life. Our Inclusion Strategy intends to bind together and develop various areas of work currently being undertaken across the authority to support Monmouthshire's corporate aim to have '*...a truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs*¹.

Within this strategy, 'inclusion' means, at its most simple level, children and young people belonging to and being included in their school or setting. In Monmouthshire, a truly inclusive education system is one where every child or young person, regardless of their abilities or differences, feels valued, supported, and enabled to succeed. By working collaboratively with schools, families, health and social care, and other stakeholders, we strive for a culture of inclusion where every child is valued for who they are and what they can achieve.

In Monmouthshire, inclusion is about understanding, from the child or young person's point of view, what they need to be included in education successfully, and actively creating the conditions for this to happen. The Welsh Government shares the view that inclusion benefits all within our schools and communities. This is outlined in the ALN Code², which states that inclusive education, where all pupils access common opportunities in ways relevant to their needs and ensure they fully belong to the school community, is of benefit to all. This crucial central notion highlights how inclusion is a continuous process "*...through which all pupils access common opportunities in ways relevant to their needs, and which ensures that they fully belong to the school community*².

¹ ['Taking Monmouthshire Forward' \(Monmouthshire's Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28\)](#)

² [Inclusion and Pupil Support \(Welsh Government, 2016\)](#)

Monmouthshire local authority has high aspirations for all its children and young people in vulnerable groups, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), and wants to ensure that they are central to everything we do and part of every decision we make. We are keen to ensure that all our children and young people are in a school or setting where they feel included, valued and invested in as individuals, and where their emotional and mental wellbeing, as well as their learning needs, are well met. We cannot achieve this in isolation; working collaboratively with our schools and partners is key to the success of our vision, as reflected in the Welsh Government Statutory Framework.

The way that education, health and care services are delivered to children, young people and their families has undergone significant changes, both nationally and locally. Education in Wales is in one of its most challenging periods. The Welsh Government has advanced an ambitious reform agenda, which includes, alongside the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW)³, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Educational Tribunal Act, 2018, and the associated Code, which has driven the need to redesign services and review working practices. These changes have come at a time when demand, both in numbers and in the complexity of need, is being placed on services.

The impact of the pandemic on our children, young people, their families and our communities, whilst predictable, has been more intense and extensive than many envisaged. The post-pandemic return to school has ensured an increased focus on the wellbeing of both staff and pupils. We now better recognise and understand the significant impact of poor emotional and mental wellbeing on attendance, engagement, and achievement.

There is much to be proud of in Monmouthshire regarding what has been achieved for children and young people in vulnerable groups and with ALN. However, improvements in outcomes, experience, engagement, timeliness, and attainment are set against several challenges and opportunities for the local authority and its partners. Recognising our role in working together to reduce inequalities in childhood and build a healthier, fairer Gwent, where everyone can live healthy, fulfilled lives, is central to our approach and acknowledges the broader social context of the challenges and change many families in Monmouthshire face.

This strategy aims to set out Monmouthshire's priorities to improve outcomes for children and young people in vulnerable groups and their families; this directly aligns with Monmouthshire's Community and Corporate Plan, which outlines specific key deliverables to shape this inclusion strategy within the 'Learning Place', including for:

- Improved school attendance and reduced levels of exclusion, which remove barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils.

- A truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs.

Vulnerable Learners

In Monmouthshire, we aim to provide high-quality support and provision for vulnerable learners, working together with children, young people and their families to coordinate inclusive and equitable policies and practices. For this report and to reflect the context within Monmouthshire County Council, the use of the term 'vulnerable learners' has been adopted. Vulnerable learners are defined as those who may be more likely to experience emotional, social and developmental barriers to learning. Vulnerable groups, therefore, include³ but are not limited to:

- pupils with additional learning needs (ALN)
- children who are looked-after (CLA) or care-experienced
- children and young people living in poverty
- excluded pupils, and those at risk of exclusion
- pupils with behaviour and attendance issues
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils (GRT)
- asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants
- minority ethnic pupils
- pupils from minority ethnic groups who have English or Welsh as an additional language (EAL/WAL)
- young carers
- pupils who are young offenders and children of offenders
- pupils with mental health issues and medical needs, including those learners Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS)
- pupils who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- pupils of service families / armed forces parents.

Estyn also outlines that 'disadvantaged pupils' are those who may face barriers to succeeding in school due to detrimental circumstances beyond their control. These may include financial and social hardships within their families, including:

- pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM)

³ This list is based on Estyn's 2020 report '[Effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils](#)' and the Welsh Government guidance 2020 '[Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners](#)'.

- pupils from low-income families

Not all learners from these groups will face barriers to learning or be at risk of underachievement. Learners from these groups may face a range of barriers and will therefore require different approaches, solutions, and support targeted to meet each learner's individual needs. In addition, learners may belong to one or more of the above groups simultaneously, depending on their individual circumstances.

'Inclusive education focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalised.' (UNESCO⁴, 2020)

Local and National Context

Monmouthshire County Council currently carries out its statutory duties by adhering to the current legislation, including;

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ratified by the UK in 1992,
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) ratified by the UK in 2009,
- Equality Act (2010),
- Social Services & Well Being Act (2014),
- Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015),
- Inclusion and Pupil Support (National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 203/2016).
- The Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal (2018) Act, Wales
- The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021

In 2023, the Welsh Government published its national mission⁵, which outlined a key objective of 'breaking down barriers so that excellent education opportunities and outcomes can be achieved by all learners' and highlighted the importance of the additional learning needs (ALN) reform of systems, provision and practices around person-centred practice and inclusive education.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 provides a statutory framework for supporting learners with additional learning needs (ALN) and is accompanied by a mandatory Code. The aim, as stated in the Code, is:

⁴ [Global education monitoring report: Inclusion and education: all means all \(2020\)](#)

⁵ ['Our National Mission - High standards and aspirations for all' \(Welsh Government, 2023\).](#)

'To support the creation of a fully inclusive education system where all learners are given the opportunity to succeed and have access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from, and enjoy learning'.

The views, wishes and aspirations of children and young people, and their parents/carers, are at the heart of the system and require a culture change in how professionals work with families and with each other.

Importance of Participation – A Children's Rights Approach.

Local Authorities need to have due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Chapter 5 of the ALN Code outlines the five principles of the Children's Commissioner's Right Way⁶ approach, as a way for local authorities to ensure they are paying regard to the human rights of children. These are;

- Embedding children's human rights
- Equality and Non-discrimination
- Empowering children
- Participation
- Accountability

Monmouthshire is committed to adopting a children's rights approach and embedding all five principles into its work with children and young people. Our strategic priorities are informed by Monmouthshire's pupils, parents and carers, schools and settings, and feedback from groups and individuals. The notion of participation means listening to children and young people, including those in vulnerable groups, and their parents and carers and taking their views into account. Participation should be understood as a process that is safe, enabling and inclusive, and that supports dialogue between children, young people, their families and professionals. Monmouthshire's Participation Guidance (Appendix 1) sets out the approach to active engagement with these vital stakeholders.

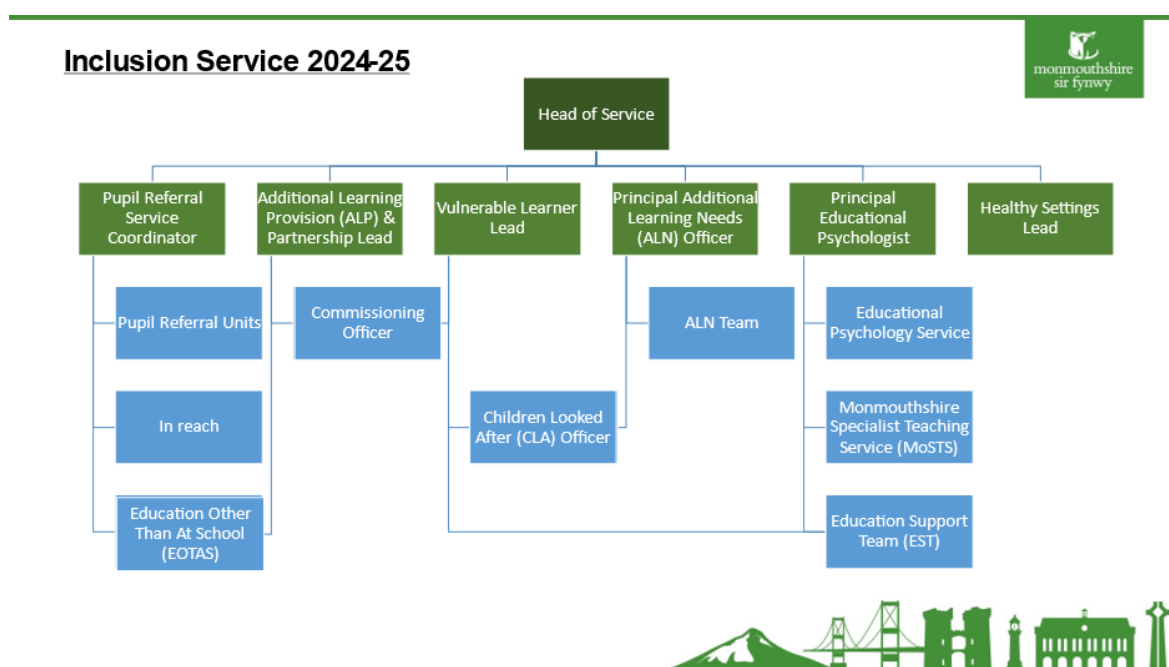
Monmouthshire Children and Young People's Directorate is committed to ensuring that these principles are embedded in all aspects of its work with children, young people, their families, schools and settings to support a fully inclusive education system.

⁶ [The Right Way: A Children's Human Rights Approach to Additional Learning Needs \(2022\)](#)

Monmouthshire's Inclusion Service

The creation of a Head of Service for Inclusion post in Autumn 2022 reaffirmed Monmouthshire's commitment to being an inclusive local authority, with the aspiration that all children and young people remain in their local communities and schools. The restructuring of the Inclusion Service allowed bringing together key professionals and teams supporting our most vulnerable children and young people, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 MCC Inclusion Service structure chart



The Vulnerable Learner Lead post, created in April 2023, included the remit and responsibility of the LACE officer (Looked after Children in Education) to promote the interests of Children Looked After (CLA) in education. The Vulnerable Learner Lead role also has responsibilities to promote the inclusion of all children and young people, including those at risk of exclusion. This role supports the management and reduction of exclusions by ensuring safer risk management for learner behaviours and reintegration support that promotes the use of trauma-informed practices and principles, ensuring that children, young people and staff remain safe.

The restructuring of the Inclusion Service strengthened collaboration and increased capacity to support schools and settings in Monmouthshire and to meet the varied, often entwined, complex needs of vulnerable children and young people.

Principles

The Inclusion Service is continually evolving to meet the changing needs of children and young people. The principles underpinning the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system, as outlined in the ALN Code (3.2), also guide the broader inclusion agenda. These principles form the foundation of Monmouthshire's Inclusion Strategy and include:

- Inclusive education
- A rights-based approach
- Person-centred practice
- Early identification, intervention and prevention
- Collaboration and integration
- Equity: a celebration of difference and diversity
- A bilingual system

The structure of Monmouthshire's Inclusion services and associated systems ensures that inclusive and equitable practices are in place to encourage the presence, participation and achievement of all children and young people from their local community, and to provide support for those at risk of underachievement, disengagement and exclusion.

The Inclusion and Pupil Support guidance (2016, Welsh Government) highlights a demographic of pupils who 'require extra support'. It states that 'pupils who are at risk of disengagement and social exclusion are more vulnerable, have more diverse needs and require more support than their peer group' (p. 30). Monmouthshire's Inclusion Strategy supports the following essential principles highlighted in this guidance:

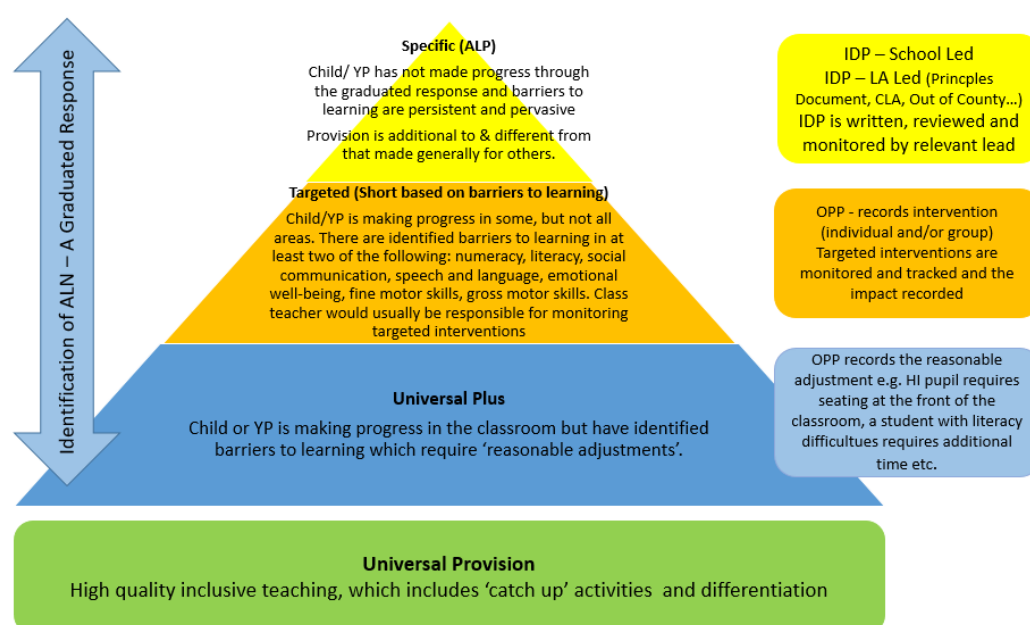
- Inclusion is a process by which schools, local authorities and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all children and young people.
- All children and young people should have access to an appropriate education that provides them with the opportunity to achieve their personal potential.
- An inclusive education service offers excellence and choice and seeks and responds to the views of parents, carers, children and young people.
- The interests of all children and young people are safeguarded.
- With the proper training, strategies and support, nearly all children and young people who require extra support can be successfully included in mainstream education.
- Mainstream education is not always right for every child or young person, but if it is not right at a particular stage, this should not prevent the child or young person from being included successfully at a later stage.

- Pupils not in mainstream education should have links with their peers in mainstream schools.

A Graduated Response to Need and Provision Pyramids

Monmouthshire's approach to inclusion is usefully illustrated and clearly outlined using our Provision Pyramid (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Provision Pyramid template for identification of Additional Learning Need (ALN)



The provision pyramid was developed to illustrate the graduated response to the needs of vulnerable learners, including those with ALN, that schools and settings need to adopt to identify and secure provision and/or interventions to meet the continuum of need. Although initially created for use within the ALN system, Monmouthshire has extended the use of the provision pyramid across all areas of inclusion services to enable a consistent approach for schools and settings to understand expectations and the support offered along the graduated response to meeting the needs of all children and young people.

The majority of children/ young people who are vulnerable, including those with ALN, will be educated in their local mainstream setting, with access to local health services and a range of leisure facilities that allow them to live their lives alongside their peers and achieve the best possible outcomes. A smaller number of children and young people will require more

targeted, specialised support and intervention to meet their complex needs. For these children and young people, a more flexible and creative approach is required, with education, health and social care working together to provide an integrated package of support.

Monmouthshire's Specialist Provision

In Monmouthshire, our model of specialist provision places Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) at the heart of identified mainstream schools. This model;

- Ensures that children and young people remain close to their communities.
- Provides opportunities for integration and inclusion with mainstream peers during both structured and unstructured times, as is appropriate to their individual needs. This benefits all children and young people and fosters a greater sense of valuing diversity and difference within schools and communities.
- Supports the development of social relationships, which can create long-lasting friendships that can give pupils the skills to navigate social relationships later in life.
- Promotes an inclusive culture in which the families of learners with ALN benefit from easier integration into the broader school community. Having an SRB within a mainstream school can reduce stigma about ALN and positively contribute to a society that is more accepting of differences and people with disabilities.

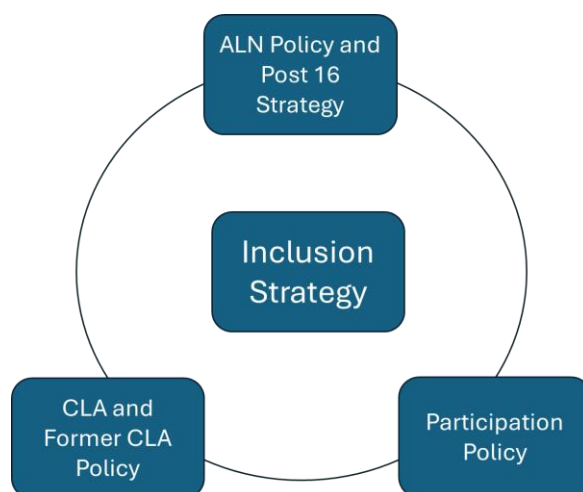
The focus on inclusion is clear in the continued development of a closer network and consistent model of specialist provision across the SRBs in Monmouthshire, alongside the expectations of the ALN reforms. The work in this area consists of improvements in SRB learning environments, continual workforce development (such as the Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Settings Project – see [Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Settings](#) for more information) and an improved curriculum offer.

Information about specialist provision in Monmouthshire is outlined in Appendix 2 (SRB Policy and Handbook).

The Inclusion Strategy Framework

This Inclusion Strategy is the framework for a suite of interconnected strategies, policies, training and interventions. Inclusion and equity are overarching principles that guide all education policies, plans and practices.

Figure 3: Examples of key policies within the Inclusion Service

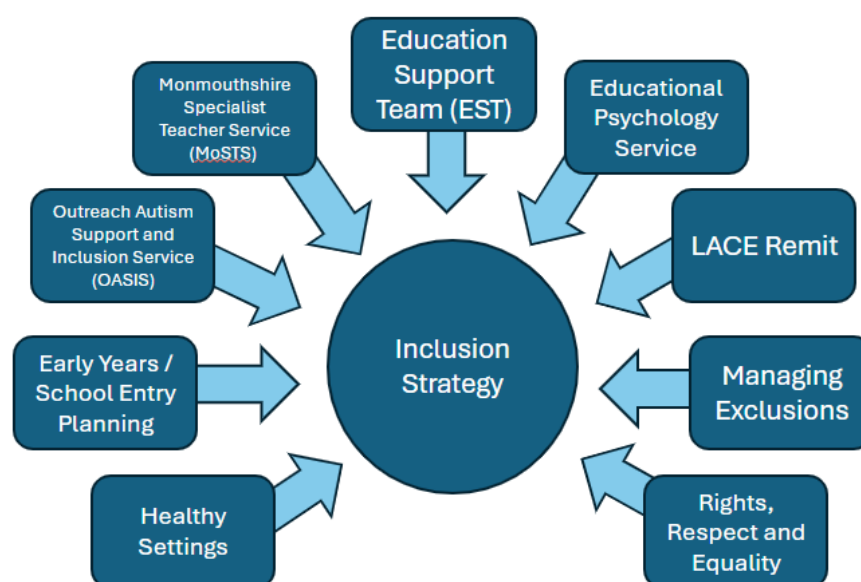


See Key Document 1 (ALN Policy) and Appendices 1 (Participation Guidance), 3 (Children Looked After Policy) and 4 (ALN Post 16 Strategy) for more details.

Early Intervention and Outreach

To adhere to the core principles of early identification, intervention, and prevention, the Inclusion Service provides a range of early intervention and outreach services. The core purpose of early intervention and outreach is to build capacity within schools to meet a range of identified needs, aiming to maintain children and young people in mainstream school placements and local communities wherever possible, and to upskill our wider workforce.

Figure 4: Early Intervention and Outreach Support



Professional Learning and Core Training

Having a robust professional learning and core training offer is a key element of the Inclusion Strategy, which aims to support more inclusive, equitable, enabling, and compassionate learning environments. In Monmouthshire, the Inclusion Service provides a wide range of professional learning to reinforce and support our approach to inclusion for all children and young people. This complements other professional learning and training offers provided by the regional Education Achievement Service (EAS), which address the impact of poverty and inequality on attainment, such as the Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) programme.

Our ongoing cycle of high-quality professional learning and training will:

- Build workforce capacity and skills to ensure all staff are equipped to support vulnerable learners effectively through a common understanding of language and skills that support inclusive practice in mainstream and specialist provision.
- Ensure consistency and quality, and help deliver equitable services to all children and young people regardless of their needs.

- Support the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people and staff and enhance understanding of behaviours that challenge, through trauma-informed and relational approaches.
- Promote equality and diversity to ensure that all children and young people feel valued and included through the 'rights, respect, equality'⁷ and anti-racism work.
- Enhance collaborative working between education services and other stakeholders, including health, social care, parents /carers.

As well as access to the annual cycle of professional learning and training offered from across the Inclusion Service, our schools have access to a high-quality suite of training portal pages that have been developed and reflect the broader offer of information, resources and recorded training. This training portal sits on the Monmouthshire internal SharePoint site and is accessible to all school staff and Monmouthshire professionals via this link ([Inclusion Training Portal Pages \(SharePoint\)](#)).

Figure 5 Core Professional Learning for Schools and Settings



⁷ [Rights, Respect, Equality \(RRE\) Guidance for Local Authorities \(Welsh Gov 2019\)](#) and [RRE Guidance for Schools \(Welsh Gov 2019\)](#)

Monmouthshire's Strategic Vision

Our Community and Corporate Plan outlines our aim to develop a 'truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs'.

What do we hope to achieve?

- A consistent, high-quality, inclusive educational offer that can meet the needs of children and young people from vulnerable groups, including those with ALN in pre-school, mainstream and specialist provision.
- More effective and equitable services which aim to reduce the impact of poverty and inequality.
- Provision that places clear emphasis on early intervention and preventive work, including in the early years.
- Specialist provision which is appropriately staffed and resourced and has the capacity to meet Monmouthshire's current and projected needs for children and young people.

How do we achieve this?

To achieve our vision of a truly inclusive education system, we need to continue to

- Build capacity in our schools and settings to meet a broader range of complex needs.
- Keep children and young people within their local schools and communities, as far as is possible.
- Collaborate closely and ensure the right people are working creatively to meet the needs of children and young people from vulnerable groups.
- Focus on person-centred practice where the strengths and needs of children and young people are well understood and informed by those who know them best.
- Focus on early intervention and preventative work.
- Utilise data, information and evidence to inform the services and provision provided and to shape those needed for the future.
- Offer a range of ongoing professional learning and support at all levels regarding inclusive and equitable practices to enable excellent teaching, high-quality intervention and sufficient provision in schools and settings.
- Promote the emotional and wellbeing needs of pupils, using a relational and trauma-informed framework to enhance the understanding of behaviour as a form of communication.
- Challenge non-inclusive, discriminatory and inequitable practices at all levels.

- Invest to save to achieve best practice and build sustainability for our current and future children and young people from vulnerable groups.
- Develop our high-quality specialist services and provision for children and young people that are delivered in a cohesive and consistent way and that are responsive, flexible, and agile.
- Develop an ongoing evaluation programme and utilise the data to inform and shape service delivery.

How will we know if the strategy has been successful?

- Children/ young people are attending, engaging and succeeding within their school or setting.
- Parent/carers will have a high level of confidence in Monmouthshire's ability to identify and meet their children's needs.
- The views, wishes, and feelings of children and young people, and their families, will be at the heart of all education planning and delivery.
- Schools and settings will demonstrate an increased ability to meet the needs of a broader range of vulnerable learners through engaging with the building capacity initiatives identified in this strategy. This would be evidenced by measures such as a reduction in the exclusions for learners from vulnerable groups, including those with ALN, those who are Children Looked After (CLA) and those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM); the number of vulnerable learners maintained in mainstream settings, staff confidence, knowledge and skills to meet a range of needs.
- Monmouthshire will have sufficient provision, with the capacity and infrastructure, to meet the current and projected needs of learners, providing high-quality outreach, advice and support to schools and settings across the local authority. Measures of success could include individual learner progress, a more skilled and specialist workforce and improved access to targeted and specialist resources.

Service Business Plans: Inclusion Service

Actions to support the implementation of the Inclusion Strategy are included in individual service Business Plans (see Figure 6 below), which are updated quarterly. Business Plans are monitored by the Children and Young People Directorate Management Team and also by the Corporate Performance and Data Team.

Figure 6 Inclusion Service Business Plans

Evaluation and Review

The Inclusion Strategy will be evaluated annually to ensure its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Progress towards meeting its objectives will be achieved through the following:

- Quarterly monitoring of Inclusion Service Business Plans and an end-of-year analysis of actions that have been achieved, partially achieved, and not achieved.
- Annual evaluation of professional learning delivered and the impact of training, through case studies or data analysis.
- Annual review of quality assurance processes.
- Service-specific termly or annual reports to the Directorate Management Team (DMT).

Key Document Links

Key Document 1. Additional Learning Needs Policy – [ALN Policy 2025 Final](#)

Some Key Documents rely on internal Monmouthshire links. If these do not work for you, or you would like a copy of any of these documents (in Welsh or English), please email ALN@monmouthshire.gov.uk.

Appendices

- Appendix 1. Monmouthshire's Participation Guidance
- Appendix 2. Information about specialist provision in Monmouthshire (SRB Handbook)
- Appendix 3. Children Looked After Policy
- Appendix 4. Monmouthshire's ALN Post 16 Strategy