



MAST Inclusion Strategy

Getting it right, right from the start

A Trust-wide approach to belonging, inclusion and flourishing

1. Vision & Values - Flourishing through Belonging

Our trust exists so that every child and every adult can flourish in schools where everyone belongs. We commit to safe, welcoming and ambitious schools, especially for those for whom the system currently works least well, by placing belonging and dignity at the heart of policies, practice and language. This is congruent with our Christian foundation across our church schools and with the commitment to the common good in our community school. Belonging is not an abstract aspiration; it is the lived experience of being known, valued and able to participate fully in school life.

2. The system problem

Across the education system, inclusion remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges facing schools. Despite significant effort, increasing expertise, and growing awareness of special educational needs, too many pupils continue to experience school as a place where they struggle to access learning, regulate their behaviour, or feel that they truly belong. This is not the result of a lack of commitment from staff. Rather, it reflects a deeper structural issue in how inclusion is currently conceived and operationalised within school systems.

In many cases, inclusion is still treated as something that happens after difficulty has emerged. Needs are identified reactively, often only once a pupil has begun to fall behind academically, present with challenging behaviour, or experience emotional distress. At this point, support is layered on through intervention, withdrawal, or external referral. While these responses are often well-intentioned, they are inherently limited. They rely on late identification, vary significantly between classrooms and schools, and place considerable strain on staff responding to complexity at the point of crisis.

This creates predictable consequences. Pupils experience repeated difficulty before support is put in place. Behaviour becomes a means of communicating unmet need. Teachers are required to manage complexity at the point of crisis rather than through design. Over time, this leads to an increasing reliance on specialist provision, rising exclusions, and widening gaps in attainment. Most importantly, it undermines pupils' sense of belonging within their school community.

At MAST, we do not view these outcomes as inevitable. They are the result of systems that are not yet designed to meet the full range of human need. Inclusion, therefore, is not primarily a question of additional provision. It is a question of how effectively the system itself has been constructed.

3. Our Trust position

In response to this, MAST takes a clear and deliberate position on inclusion. We believe that inclusion is not secured through the addition of support once difficulties arise, but through the

design of systems that anticipate and respond to need from the outset. This represents a significant shift from reactive models of inclusion towards a proactive, system-led approach.

This position requires us to reconsider where inclusion happens. Too often, inclusion is located within interventions, specialist provision, or the work of individual staff members. While these elements remain important, they cannot be the primary mechanism through which inclusion is achieved. Instead, inclusion must be embedded within the core offer of every classroom, every curriculum, and every school system. It must be visible in the way lessons are structured, the way routines are established, and the way relationships are built.

Central to this is the principle that high-quality teaching is the most powerful driver of inclusion. When classrooms are designed effectively, through clear routines, explicit instruction, careful scaffolding, and a strong understanding of how pupils learn, they become environments where a far greater proportion of pupils can succeed without the need for additional intervention. This does not remove the need for targeted or specialist support, but it ensures that such support is built upon a strong and consistent foundation.

Our position also recognises the importance of early identification. If inclusion is to be proactive, we must understand pupils' needs before they become barriers to learning. This requires systematic approaches to identifying need, rather than reliance on informal observation or external diagnosis. By identifying need early, we are able to adapt teaching, provide appropriate support, and prevent the escalation of difficulty.

Ultimately, inclusion at MAST is not a separate agenda or an additional responsibility. It is the way in which our schools are designed and operated. It is reflected in the consistency of our practice, the clarity of our systems, and the shared responsibility of all staff to ensure that every pupil can access learning and experience success.

4. Our model of inclusion

The MAST model of inclusion is designed to bring coherence to what is often a fragmented area of school practice. In many systems, identification, teaching and support operate as separate processes, resulting in inconsistency and delay. Our model addresses this by integrating these elements into a single, connected approach that functions consistently across all schools. Its purpose is not to introduce additional layers of provision, but to ensure that the core functions of the school operate in ways that are responsive to need from the outset.

The model is built on three interdependent elements: early identification, understanding need, and inclusion by design, supported by a coherent graduated response. These are not stages through which pupils move, but components of a system that operate simultaneously. Early identification provides clarity about need, ensuring that pupils are understood before difficulties become entrenched. Understanding need ensures that this clarity is translated into precise classroom practice. Inclusion by design ensures that teaching removes barriers from the outset. The graduated response enables additional support to be introduced where necessary, without removing pupils from the core of the learning experience.

The strength of this model lies in the way these elements interact. Early identification without changes to teaching has limited impact. High-quality teaching without a clear understanding of need risks missing key barriers. Additional support without a strong universal foundation becomes unsustainable and inconsistent. When these elements are aligned, they create a system that is both efficient and effective, reducing the need for reactive intervention and increasing the likelihood that pupils are able to access learning successfully.

5. Understanding need: The foundations of inclusive teaching

At the heart of effective inclusion is a shared understanding of how children learn and where barriers to that learning most commonly arise. Within MAST, we move beyond labels and categories to focus on the underlying dimensions of development that shape pupils' experiences in the classroom. This enables us to identify need earlier, respond more precisely, and design teaching that is accessible from the outset.

We understand that differences in learning are most often linked to how pupils communicate, process sensory information, move, organise their thinking, and regulate their emotions. These aspects of development are present in every classroom and influence all pupils to varying degrees. By organising our understanding around these areas, we create a shared professional language that supports both identification and practice across the Trust.

Speech and language form the foundation of learning. They determine how pupils understand instructions, engage with new concepts, and express their thinking. When language is overly complex or insufficiently structured, it can create significant barriers to learning. Our approach therefore emphasises clarity of explanation, deliberate teaching of vocabulary, and structured opportunities for pupils to develop and articulate their ideas through talk.

Sensory processing shapes how pupils experience the classroom environment. Light, sound, movement and visual complexity all influence attention and engagement. For some pupils, these elements can create distraction or discomfort that impacts their ability to learn. We therefore prioritise calm, predictable environments and thoughtful classroom design that reduces unnecessary cognitive load and supports focus.

Motor development underpins many aspects of classroom participation, particularly in tasks that require writing, drawing or physical organisation. Where these skills are less secure, pupils may experience fatigue or frustration that affects their engagement. Our approach recognises the importance of breaking tasks into manageable components, modelling processes clearly, and ensuring that pupils are supported to develop both access and independence over time.

Executive function refers to the mental processes that enable pupils to plan, organise, remember and regulate their thinking. Difficulties in this area can affect a pupil's ability to follow instructions, sustain attention or manage complex tasks. We support this through structured teaching, clear routines and the use of scaffolds that guide pupils' thinking and reduce unnecessary cognitive demand.

Social and emotional development influences how pupils experience relationships, manage their emotions and respond to challenge. Behaviour is understood within this context, not simply as compliance, but as communication. We prioritise consistent routines, strong relationships and adult modelling to support pupils in developing the skills they need to regulate and engage successfully.

These domains are interconnected and evolve over time. Together, they provide a coherent framework that enables teachers to anticipate need, adapt their practice, and design learning that supports all pupils.

6. Inclusion by design

Inclusion by design represents the practical application of this understanding within the classroom. It ensures that teaching is shaped not only by what is to be taught, but by how pupils will access, process and respond to that learning. When teaching is designed in this way, it reduces the likelihood that pupils will encounter barriers that require additional intervention.

This requires teaching that is explicit, structured and carefully sequenced. Concepts must be introduced clearly and revisited over time. Vocabulary must be taught deliberately. Tasks must be

scaffolded so that pupils are able to experience success while maintaining appropriate levels of challenge. Routines must be consistent and predictable, allowing pupils to focus their attention on learning rather than on navigating uncertainty.

By aligning teaching with an understanding of need, we create classrooms in which a greater proportion of pupils are able to access learning successfully from the outset.

7. Behaviour and inclusion

Behaviour is understood as closely connected to learning, development and experience. Pupils may struggle to regulate their behaviour when they are unable to access the curriculum, when expectations are unclear, or when they are experiencing cognitive or emotional overload. In this sense, behaviour is often a form of communication.

Our approach prioritises understanding alongside consistency. Clear expectations and routines are essential, but they are combined with a recognition of the underlying factors that may influence behaviour. By addressing these factors through teaching, environment and support, we reduce the need for reactive responses and create more sustainable patterns of behaviour.

8. Professional practice and development

Inclusion is a shared professional responsibility. Consistency across classrooms is essential to ensuring that pupils experience predictable, supportive learning environments. This is achieved through clear expectations, shared practice and ongoing professional development.

Through training, coaching and collaboration, staff develop a deep understanding of how pupils learn and how teaching can be adapted effectively. Over time, this builds both individual expertise and collective capacity across the Trust.

9. Implementation

Implementation is phased and deliberate. Initial focus is placed on establishing shared understanding, embedding early identification and strengthening classroom practice. This is followed by a period of embedding, where consistency is secured and variability reduced. Over time, inclusion becomes fully integrated into the day-to-day operation of schools.

10. Evaluation

The impact of this strategy will be assessed through a combination of pupil outcomes, attendance, behaviour data, staff confidence and pupil experience. Particular attention will be given to pupils' sense of belonging, as this reflects the effectiveness of the system as a whole.

11. Conclusion

The MAST inclusion strategy represents a deliberate shift from reactive models of support towards a system that is designed to meet need from the outset. By aligning early identification, understanding of need and high-quality teaching, we create schools in which all pupils are able to access learning and experience success.

Ultimately, inclusion is not something additional. It is the result of a system that has been designed well.