

Inclusive Early Years Funding



About IEYF

The Inclusive Early Years Fund (IEYF) is a new payment for settings who provide early education through government funded hours.

The IEYF is to help settings become more inclusive by developing setting-wide inclusive practices, reducing reliance on individual child-based funding applications and enabling early intervention for children with SEND.

Eligible settings will receive a lump sum payment in September 2026. The Department for Education has indicated that IEYF payments will also be made for 2027/28 and 2028/29.



The IEYF is additional to SEN Inclusion Funding (SENIF) and Disability Access Funding (DAF). You can read more about IEYF [here](#).

How can IEYF be used?

Funding should be used to develop **sustainable inclusive practice** across the whole setting - it should not be used for support for individual children. This will help settings to support early identification of additional needs, enable setting-wide inclusive practice and reduce the reliance on individual child-based funding.

This can be achieved by focusing funding in four specific areas:

- Staff training and development
- Improving environments, resources, and routines
- Strengthening early identification and assessment processes
- Enhancing partnership working with families and other services

Getting started

- Think about the common needs that children have presented with in your setting over the last few years - what else could be done to support these needs?
- Complete an audit of the environment across the setting - what is working for children with SEND and what could be improved?
- Complete an audit of staff knowledge, confidence and skills - what gaps are there and how can these be addressed?

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Ideas for use - Staff training and development

Action planning

- Release the setting SENDCO to complete a SEND audit - what is working, where are the gaps in provision? Ask staff to complete a quick survey about where they feel they need additional training around SEND and inclusion. Use this to develop a SEND action plan for the next 12 months.
- Use dedicated SENDCO time to coach staff in new strategies and give all staff reflection time with the SENDCO to evaluate the impact.



Top Tip - Time spent coaching and developing staff will lead to sustainable improved inclusive practice!

Whole staff training



- Arrange whole staff training sessions so that all staff can access the same high-quality training. This might include training on new whole setting initiatives such as using Makaton in all rooms, using Attention Autism strategies, understanding behaviour as communication or understanding how to develop a 'total communication' approach. Use your audit to inform your choices.
- If you are part of a chain with multiple settings, discuss how you can use this network to spread and share inclusive practice. For example, do one of the settings have a practitioner who is experienced and skilled in supporting Autistic children? If so, could they become an 'Autism champion' and spend time in the other settings to model best practice and help coach staff. The same approach could be taken with other champions, such as communication, mental health or physical skills.
- Dedicated SENDCO time could be used to plan an inclusion focus in staff meetings to promote and reinforce agreed strategies.

Top Tip - Discuss any identified training needs with EYILS so that tis helps us to plan our training offer! We can also signpost you to high quality external training.

Ideas for use - Environments, resources and routines

Visual and transition supports

- Create a consistent visual timetable in every room, including objects of reference, photographs and symbols.
- Funding could provide a subscription to a symbol generating program such as Widgit and resources to create a visual timetable.
- The visual timetable could be enhanced by adding recordable sound buttons to each part of the timetable in common languages within your setting.



Tidy up

Top Tip - ask parents who have English as an additional language to record phrases linked to the routine on the sound buttons!

Equipment and resources

- Create sensory support bags for each room containing items such as chewy tubes, fidget tools, simple light toys.
- Provide height adjustable tables and sand/water trays so that children in wheelchairs or specialist seating can join their friends to play at the table.
- Provide equipment for sensory regulation such as spinning chairs, swings, indoor climbing frames/steps and peanut balls.
- Provide a range of seating options such as beanbags and chairs with supportive arms.
- Provide outdoor equipment that caters for a range of abilities and needs, such as larger push-along tricycles for children not yet using pedals.



Top Tip - ensure that all sensory resources such as chewy tubes are bought from reputable retailers and meet safety standards.

Environment

- Create a calm area in each room where children can go for self-regulation, including an enclosed space for children use.
- Create a sensory garden in the outdoor area that is touch and taste safe for children who explore using all of their senses.
- Use flexible lighting options if strip lighting is too bright.



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Ideas for use - Early Identification and assessment

Dedicated SENDCO time

- Release the setting SENDCO to work with room leaders and individual staff on how to identify emerging needs using high quality observations and assessment tools.
- Coach individual staff in the strategies that can be put in place across the whole setting to support early and emerging needs



Top Tip - Time spent coaching and developing staff will lead to sustainable improved inclusive practice!



Staff training

- Ensure all staff are confident in using the assessment tools within the setting. This might be through a staff meeting using anonymous case studies to moderate assessment level, using their knowledge of typical child development to inform assessments.
- Access training on new screening tools such as the PSED screening tool. Discuss how this will be used across the setting and what the next steps will be if a delay is identified.

Top Tip - We recommend using the Stoke Speaks Out Child Development Tool to track children's development and progress. You can download this for free [here](#).

Audits and tools

- Dedicate some SENDCO time to exploring audit tools such as the Sensory Toolkit - you can view this [here](#). This helps you to look at your provision and how it can be enhanced. It also gives helpful ideas and strategies to support children with sensory processing differences.



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Ideas for use - Partnership with families and other services

Partnership with families

- Create a 'Home Learning Library' with themed activity bags and books that families can borrow. These might focus on key messages such as toileting, dummy use, tooth brushing etc.
- Create target bags based on common SEND Support targets (eg 'ready, steady....go! games) containing resources and an explanation/activity sheet. These can be sent home with parents to support the child to work on these areas at home.
- Offer stay and play sessions at key admission times so that new parents and children can spend time in the new environment together.
- Ask staff and parents who speak multiple languages to help translate key messages so that all families can access these.
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Top Tip - Ensure the SENDCO is available at any transition sessions to discuss any emerging or existing needs with parents.

Partnership with other services



- Create strong links with local primary schools with release time for the SENDCO to visit the school to share information on the children that will be moving on to school. Discuss similar routines that could be in place in both settings (eg attention buckets, welcome songs etc) to provide consistency and familiarity for children.
- Use some dedicated SENDCO time to visit other settings within the city to share and observe excellent inclusive practice. SHINE nurseries are happy to share the strategies that benefit the children they support.
- Plan SENDCO release time to attend any Early Years SEND updates. or EY SENDCO sessions.

The ideas within this document were co-produced by SENDCOs from PVI settings and schools within Stoke-on-Trent alongside members of the Early Years Inclusive Learning Service. Special thanks to Abi Reed (St Mary's CofE Primary School), Alexis Weston (The Crescent Preschool), Amanda Sherratt (Woodlands Day Nursery - University of Staffordshire), Cheryl Capey (Rosy Cheeks Tunstall), Danielle Carnall (The Crescent Preschool), Julie Wood (Jackfield Infant School).