# SEND Inclusion in Mainstream Schools

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# SEND Inclusion in Schools: Why Procurement Is Becoming Part of the Conversation

Every school wants to be inclusive. The harder question is whether schools have the resources, environments and support needed to make inclusion work in practice.

Across England, SEND provision is under growing pressure. Schools are supporting more pupils with complex needs while managing stretched budgets and staffing constraints.

**Recent Sutton Trust polling found that two-fifths of school leaders have reduced SEND support, including cuts to teaching assistants and specialist staff.**

At the same time, national policy continues to promote more inclusive mainstream education. While widely supported in principle, delivering meaningful inclusion depends on more than policy direction. It requires people, training, space,

equipment and time.

Procurement alone will not solve the challenges facing SEND provision — but it is becoming an increasingly important part of how schools respond.

# Inclusion Starts with the Environment

While staffing is often the first focus, the physical environment plays a significant role in how pupils experience school.

Noise, lighting, layout and space can all affect a pupil's ability to regulate, concentrate and engage. For some, these factors can determine whether they are able to participate fully in the school day.

Schools are increasingly reviewing how their environments support SEND provision, with practical adjustments such as:

- Improved lighting and acoustics
- Clear signage and structured classroom zones
- Sensory or low-stimulation spaces
- Flexible seating and adjustable furniture
- Dedicated intervention areas

The aim is not to separate pupils, but to create adaptable spaces that support participation.

# A More Cautious Approach to SEND Products

The market for SEND-focused products continues to grow, but schools are becoming more selective in how they evaluate solutions.

Leaders are increasingly asking whether products meet a clearly defined need, how they will be used in practice, and whether staff have the training to support them effectively.

**"SEND-friendly" does not automatically mean effective — impact depends on context, training and consistency of use.**

This shift reflects a move towards more purposeful procurement, where decisions are driven by pupil needs rather than product categories.

# Furniture and Access to Learning

Furniture is often overlooked in SEND planning, yet it has a direct impact on comfort, posture and independence.

Schools are increasingly reviewing whether existing furniture supports different needs, including mobility, attention and flexibility in classroom layouts.

Considerations include:

- Adjustable seating and tables
- Accessibility for wheelchair users
- Flexible layouts for group and individual work
- Options for movement and sensory regulation

In many cases, small changes can remove significant barriers to participation.

# Assistive Technology: Potential and Challenges

Assistive technology continues to play an important role in supporting access to learning, from speech-to-text tools to communication devices.

However, schools are also recognising the importance of planning for long-term use, compatibility and staff confidence.

Without clear implementation strategies, technology risks becoming underused or ineffective.

# Outdoor Space as Part of SEND Provision

Outdoor areas are increasingly being considered as part of SEND strategy, offering opportunities for regulation, movement and social development.

Schools are exploring ways to create quieter, more structured outdoor

environments, including:

- Sensory planting and calm zones
- Accessible pathways and seating
- Small-group learning spaces
- All-weather surfaces and shelters

These spaces can provide valuable support alongside classroom-based provision.

# Training Remains Essential

Across all areas of SEND provision, one consistent theme emerges: resources are only effective when staff are confident in using them.

Schools are increasingly factoring training, guidance and ongoing support into procurement decisions, recognising that implementation is as important as the product itself.

**Even well-designed solutions can fail without the knowledge and confidence to use them effectively.**

# Inclusion as Everyday Practice

For many schools, inclusion is not defined by a single policy or purchase, but by a series of small, practical decisions made over time.

From classroom layout to equipment choices, these decisions shape how accessible and supportive a school environment becomes.

As pressures on SEND provision continue, procurement is emerging as one of the tools schools can use to remove barriers and support participation — when used thoughtfully and with purpose.