



Inclusion Readiness in Schools:

Evidence on Capacity, Confidence
and Workforce Conditions

2026 Summary

The reality of inclusion

The inclusion landscape is evolving

Policy expectations around inclusion and wellbeing in schools are increasing. Workforce training on SEND and inclusion, new inclusion bases in secondary schools and additional specialist capacity in mainstream settings reflect the direction of national reform. The Schools White Paper (February 2026) sets out the framework through which these expectations will be pursued.

This **Thrive × ImpactEd research**, based on a survey of **1,018 education professionals**, examines how ready schools feel to deliver these expectations in practice.



Only **23%**
of practitioners say
they have sufficient
time and staffing.

Inclusion expectations exceed system capacity

Only **23% of practitioners** say their setting has sufficient time and staffing to translate inclusion and wellbeing expectations into daily practice.

Where staff report sufficient capacity, **92%** say their setting is ready to deliver inclusion and wellbeing in a joined-up way.

Where they do not, readiness falls to **41%**.

Capacity appears to be the strongest differentiator of readiness in the data.

92% readiness
where schools report
sufficient capacity.

41% readiness
where capacity is lacking.

Key research findings

Expectations are widely understood

85% of practitioners say they understand what inclusive practice requires.

However, only **52%** say national guidance and local expectations provide a consistent steer on what to do in practice.

Confidence higher in identifying pupil needs

Practitioners report strong confidence in identifying SEND and recognising mental health and wellbeing needs.

Confidence is lower in adapting teaching practice, coordinating external support services and embedding inclusive practice consistently across classrooms.



Inclusion pressures are straining the workforce

69% of practitioners say inclusion and wellbeing demands are placing strain on staff wellbeing and retention.

In many settings, inclusion is currently being sustained through staff effort rather than sustainable system capacity.

Inclusion expertise concentrated in specialist roles

Teaching staff are significantly more likely to report low readiness.

There is a **21 percentage-point readiness gap between teachers and SENDCos/safeguarding leads**, suggesting expertise in inclusion is often concentrated within specialist roles rather than distributed across the workforce.

Confidence reflects whole-setting conditions

Schools where staff across the team report understanding their role in supporting inclusion and wellbeing show higher confidence and readiness overall.

This suggests inclusion readiness is shaped by **whole-school workforce conditions**, not isolated initiatives.

Contact information

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Access the full Thrive × ImpactEd research

The full report examines:

- the workforce conditions shaping inclusion readiness
- practitioner perspectives from over 1,000 educators
- differences between school phases and leadership roles

 **Download the full research**