Written Evidence submitted by Place2Be

Q1. How would you define 'inclusion'?

Inclusion represents an environment where every person can flourish and their individual needs are met. Inclusion involves actively recognising and removing barriers of access and empowering individuals to have equal opportunities to thrive.

Q2. What does good inclusion look like in a mainstream education setting?

Inclusive schools have whole-school policies and practices in place that prioritise mental health and wellbeing.

This involves:
- Identifying children and young people who are at higher risk of exclusion (e.g. those who are care-experienced, those with a mental health condition, Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND); those from minority or disadvantaged communities) and providing relevant early intervention and support;
- Understanding that behaviour is a form of communication; and therefore it is important to respond positively and constructively, not punitively;
- Having systems in place to understand barriers in access to education and engagement in learning, and overcoming these in a way that meets that child's needs;
- Engaging with parents and families to support the whole-school approach to wellbeing;
- Working with other providers (e.g. NHS, Alternative Provision (AP), mental health services), to deliver a stronger more connected wider system accessing appropriate specialist expertise as necessary to support and deliver the best outcomes for all children and young people.

Q3. How can inclusive practices reduce the likelihood of a school exclusion?

A Place2Be and University of Cambridge study published in Child and Adolescent Mental Health *('From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem')* indicates that in-school mental health support can reduce school exclusions:

- Data on over 6,712 four to sixteen-year-olds from 369 schools was analysed to compare fixed period school exclusion rates (suspensions) between the academic year before and the academic year in which the child attended counselling.
- The study found that despite more complex and severe initial difficulties, and facing greater adversity, children and young people who experienced school exclusion prior to counselling demonstrated a significant reduction in school exclusion in the academic year that the counselling took place.
- 74% of the students who had a fixed period exclusion before counselling had fewer reported exclusions in the year they attended counselling, reducing from an average of 24 half day sessions

missed to just over one session (1.4) in the academic year when counselling took place. More than half (56%) did not have any further subsequent exclusions.

By embedding a whole-school approach to mental health, including school-based mental health services alongside support for families and staff, and by focusing on the needs of the unique individual, we can see exclusions reduce and promote an inclusive culture.

Q4. Can inclusion be measured at a school level?

If a school is inclusive and focused on enabling every child in its community to flourish, with reduced barriers to learning and pupils who feel empowered, we would expect higher engagement with learning and improved wellbeing. When successful inclusion is determined by how far it meets the elements in the above definition, it can be measured in multiple ways:

1. Every individual can flourish:
   - Academically flourishing – A school can measure its success by monitoring the academic attainment of each pupil with consideration of their starting point, thereby showing the progress made in meeting their potential.
   - Socially flourishing – A school can measure their success by monitoring the satisfaction and wellbeing of pupils, through using pupil wellbeing surveys that can be repeated annually to record any progress. Schools should assess the pupil's responses to these surveys to learn about barriers that the students report. This can be used by schools to implement inclusive policies, remove these barriers and target those who are particularly vulnerable or need more support.

2. Every individual's needs are recognised and met:
   - NICE Guidance for 'social, emotional and mental wellbeing in primary and secondary education' (NG223) recommends that professionals take into account the individual needs, preferences and values of the people using their service (ie. the pupils) when putting together targeted support. A school can measure their success through adherence to the NICE Guidelines.

3. Recognising and removing barriers of access to education.
   - When a school successfully implements the inclusive measures in the whole school approach, recognising a child's individual educational, emotional and social needs, they should see improvements in pupils' academic, social and personal skills and attitudes.
   - This can be measured through data on attendance rates, behaviour incidents, and the frequency of school suspensions and exclusions.

Q5. What role can AP play in promoting good inclusion, creating a local inclusive culture across the schools in the area?

AP should be a place for pupils who require additional support to receive this, in preparation for them to reintegrate into mainstream settings. We do not believe that AP is appropriate for students to remain in for a long period of their educational journey.

AP should facilitate a constructive dialogue between themselves and mainstream settings to prepare both the student and the school for the pupil's return, advising the mainstream school on relevant adjustments that should be made to ease this process and ensure the setting is inclusive.

Staff in AP are often specially trained and skilled with knowledge that can be applied and utilised by mainstream providers.

Q6. Why is inclusion important?

Every child has a right to an education that meets their needs and allows them to thrive. Each child has unique skills, background, and experiences, all of which should be recognised by the school and provided the relevant accommodations to ensure they are appropriately supported.

In 2022, 1 in 6 children and young people aged 7-16 have a probable mental health condition, showing the importance of embedding inclusive practices to mental health and wellbeing in schools.

By embedding inclusive policies in schools, this helps every pupil to fulfil their potential and supports their long-term outcomes, both in terms of mental wellbeing, skills development and employability.

Q7. Which groups of children are particularly likely to benefit from inclusive practices?

A whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing would ensure that *every child* can receive the benefits.

However, we recognise from our practice that children who are more likely to experience school exclusions or struggle with their mental health are *particularly* likely to benefit from inclusive practices. This includes:
- Children with mental health conditions – 1 in 10 boys aged 5-19 are excluded in some form from school;
- Children from lower socioeconomic or deprived backgrounds;
- Children from GRT or black ethnic backgrounds, who have a higher rate of exclusions than the national average.
- Children who are care-experienced who have most-often experienced some trauma;
- Children with SEND.

It is key that inclusive practices are trauma informed and provide a holistic approach that focus on the development of the individual.

Q8. What are the benefits of inclusive practices in mainstream education settings?

Place2Be has nearly 30 years' experience providing school-based mental health support, based on robust evaluation and evidence. A whole school approach involves: Self-referral drop-in sessions with a

mental health professional, targeted support via one to one counselling and structured group work, support for school staff and parents, engagement with specialist services, and a dedicated, on-site mental health professional.

We have found that this whole-school approach has numerous benefits both for the wellbeing of the child, as well as the broader school system.

The targeted one to one counselling offered by Place2Be alone has delivered the following positive outcomes (please get in touch for specific references):
- Around two-thirds of children have improved mental health after counselling according to teachers, and a higher proportion of nearly three-quarters according to parents;
- Three-quarters of the children and young people who had been excluded from school for a fixed term before they had counselling, experienced fewer fixed term exclusions in the year they had counselling (as detailed in the answer to a previous question);
- Children's engagement in learning improves, as indicated by improved outcomes across three measures reported by teachers: impact of children's difficulties on their learning; attitude towards learning; and self-regulation/independent learning;
- Using a matched sample from DfE's National Pupil Database demonstrated that children who had 1:1 counselling appeared to keep pace with their peers academically, showing that the possible negative impact of mental health difficulties on their academic progress was mitigated;
- Around 79% of children who come to us with severe difficulties record an improvement in wellbeing after Place2Be support.

As well as improving educational outcomes, inclusive practices in a whole school approach noticeably benefits the health and wellbeing of the children. This quote is from a Head Teacher in one of Place2Be's partner schools, commenting on a pupil who received our support (names have been changed):

"Following the one-to-one sessions, we noticed a remarkable difference… Ceri enters school happy, independent and settled. She has responded extremely well to the sessions and presents as a totally different child – her head is held high, she smiles, she engages and attends school regularly. More importantly, she has equipped herself with the skills and confidence and is now ready for her next step in education."

Q9. How can APs and mainstream education settings better work together to foster a culture of inclusion across the whole local system?

There should be constructive and positive communication between AP and mainstream settings to prepare both the student and the school for the pupil's return to mainstream education.

Staff in AP are often specially trained and skilled with knowledge that can be applied and utilised by mainstream providers. The AP setting can use their expertise to assess the needs and challenges faced by the pupils whilst they were in mainstream education and support the school to make the relevant adaptations needed to facilitate the pupil's return and help them engage with education.

A multi-agency, integrated and collaborative approach is needed to agree joined-up solutions to address the underlying causes that lead to exclusions and suspensions.

Q10. What are the key barriers currently facing APs and mainstream education settings that may be blocking them from being able to successfully implement a culture of inclusion across the whole local system?

Funding

Schools need funding and resources to implement a whole-school approach to mental health that supports the wellbeing of every child in the school. A study by the NAHT found that almost half of school teachers said their school was preparing to cut back on non-essential services including mental health services a result of budgetary pressures.

Capacity

School staff and leaders should be given training to gain an understanding of children's mental health as part of their continuous professional development as well as in their initial teacher training. Place2Be runs two mental health training courses for school staff: Senior Mental Health Leads and the Mental Health Champions Foundation programme to build school staff's understanding of the importance of creating a positive inclusive culture.

However, capacity remains limited for teachers to make time for training and development. A DfE commissioned research report in April 2023 "Working Lives of teachers and leaders – wave 1" found that the biggest barrier to accessing CPD was the lack of time for CPD due to workload or competing priorities (66%), although the funding/ the cost of CPD (42%) and lack of cover (41%) were both commonly mentioned barriers.

Most teachers are struggling to carry out the core teaching responsibilities, meaning also providing mental health support represents an additional strain on their workload and headspace. An NAHT report found that staffing cuts are disproportionately likely to affect pupils with SEND, vulnerable pupils, and pupils with mental health needs.

Role of school governors and leadership

Governors are responsible for holding the school to account for their policies and procedures. There needs to be better recognition by governors of the importance of embedding inclusion within school practices. Lack of investment and direction from governors fails to ensure inclusive procedures are appropriately followed.

Ofsted and accountability

The central focus of Ofsted around academic attainment may lead schools to deprioritise softer outcomes such as the wellbeing of pupils.

Ofsted pressures for academic success can result in 'problem' children sometimes being excluded from school (known as 'off-rolling'), to minimise their impact on a school's performance. Better data is needed to assess the prevalence of this practice as it fundamentally opposes inclusion.

Q11. If you could make three recommendations to government to implement to better foster a culture of inclusion across the education system, what would those three recommendations be?

1. Ensure a whole-school approach is resourced and followed within all UK schools in line with the NICE NG223 Guidance on implementing this.
2. Introduce mental health as part of initial teacher training and in ongoing CPD for teachers, leaders, and education professionals. This will enable them to support their pupils and their own wellbeing.
3. Invest in schools to give them the necessary resources to build positive practices. Inclusivity and wellbeing should form part of schools' accountability or outcome metrics. For example, Ofsted inspections could be reformed to better account for culture and inclusive practices outside of purely academic results.

Q12. If you could make three recommendations to local authorities to implement to better foster a culture of inclusion across the education system, what would those three recommendations be?

1. Build collaboration between Integrated Care Systems and schools to jointly establish mental health services in a whole-school approach, including targeted support that appropriately resourced and functions in line with NG223 guidelines.
2. Local Authorities should forward plan to ensure they have enough school places that meet the needs of every child in their jurisdiction throughout each student's entire school journey. This includes ensuring enough school spaces that allow for specialist support, that are fully resourced and have the necessary skilled workforce. Better data capturing and sharing can support this.
3. Promote a positive culture where governors are ensuring staff have carried out the training and resources that are available to them, such as Senior Mental Health Leads training. There could be a designated lead for mental health and wellbeing at governor-level with oversight of all school policies to ensure inclusive practice is fully embedded.