

Exclusion Prevention

Understanding Exclusion Prevention

Exclusion prevention is not about lowering expectations or excusing behaviour. It is about understanding the underlying drivers of behaviour and responding in ways that reduce escalation, improve regulation, and maintain belonging.

Neurodivergent learners are statistically more likely to experience exclusion. This is often linked to unmet needs in areas such as:

- **Sensory processing**
- **Executive function**
- **Social communication**
- **Processing speed**
- **Anxiety and trauma**
- **Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)**

Behaviours that present as challenging or disruptive are frequently indicators of dysregulation rather than deliberate defiance.



Why Prevention Matters

- Dysregulation increases when learners operate outside their window of tolerance.
- Anxiety, sensory overload, and executive function demands can escalate rapidly in busy school environments.
- Repeated sanctions without adjustment to provision can reinforce shame, disengagement, and school avoidance.
- Persistent absence and exclusion are strongly linked to poorer long term outcomes.

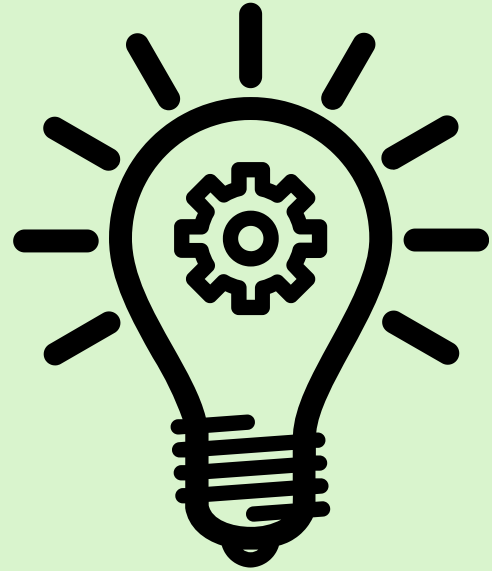
Prevention is proactive, relational, and structured.

Exclusion Prevention

Practical Strategies for Teaching Staff

Understanding and Planning

- Use the Assess–Plan–Do–Review cycle to identify patterns, triggers, and unmet needs.
- Complete individual risk assessments that consider sensory triggers, anxiety levels, and escalation indicators.
- Develop consistent behaviour support plans across staff to reduce unpredictability.
- Ensure plans are responsive and regularly reviewed rather than static documents.



Recognising Dysregulation

Distinguish between:

- Challenging behaviour that threatens safety
- Disruptive behaviour that interrupts learning
- Dysregulation driven by overwhelming emotion or sensory input

For neurodivergent learners, dysregulation is often linked to:

- Processing demands exceeding capacity
- Social confusion or misinterpretation
- Anxiety around expectations or perceived loss of control
- Transitions and key change points

Early intervention is significantly more effective than reactive consequence.

Relational Practice

Strong relationships reduce escalation.

- Prioritise connection before correction.
- Build predictability and psychological safety.
- Support a sense of belonging within the classroom community.
- Use restorative approaches to repair relationships after incidents.

Learners are more likely to regulate in environments where they feel understood.

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Trauma-Informed and Anxiety-Aware Approaches

Some learners may present with trauma histories or heightened baseline anxiety.

- Use indirect language where appropriate to reduce perceived threat.
- Offer choice within structure to increase autonomy.
- Reduce public correction where possible.
- Provide safe exit strategies or regulation spaces before escalation occurs.

For learners with demand-avoidant profiles, novelty, humour, flexibility and reduced direct demands can prevent confrontation cycles.

Teaching and Environmental Adjustments

Small adjustments can significantly reduce exclusion risk:

- Allow additional processing time before repeating instructions.
- Adjust rate, volume, and complexity of tasks.
- Scaffold task initiation to reduce executive load.
- Incorporate learner interests to increase engagement.
- Provide movement breaks or regulation opportunities proactively.

Consistency matters, but so does flexibility. Being “consistently inconsistent” in approach can be helpful for learners who respond to novelty.

After an Incident

Post-incident work should focus on learning and repair rather than blame.

- Conduct staff debriefs to ensure consistent implementation of plans.
- Support reflection when the learner is regulated.
- Review whether unmet needs contributed to escalation.
- Adjust provision accordingly.

The aim is to reduce recurrence, not assign fault.



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Belonging as Prevention

Exclusion risk decreases when learners:

- Feel known and understood
- Experience success in manageable steps
- Have predictable routines with appropriate flexibility
- See their neurodivergent profile recognised as difference, not deficit

Universal provision that supports regulation and executive function benefits all learners, not only those at risk.

