

Case Study: Partnership for Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) at Ellesmere Primary School- Occupational Therapy

1. Project Details

Ellesmere Primary School, a thriving academy with 378 pupils including 36 nursery children, launched the **Partnership for Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)** project to enhance its inclusive education provision. The primary objective was to provide targeted Occupational Therapy (OT) support to staff, enabling them to better meet the diverse needs of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who represent approximately 22% of the school population.

The rationale for this intervention was grounded in the school's commitment to upholding its vision of *"Reaching for the stars"* and *"Opening children's eyes to the world of possibility"*, while responding to the increasing number of pupils requiring bespoke support for neurodiversity and sensory regulation. The project aligns directly with the school's ethos of respect, self-belief, and compassion, and complements its broad and ambitious curriculum, which, as noted in the October 2024 Ofsted inspection, is woven with reading and writing across subjects to support learning.

The intervention was intended to improve pupils' regulation of sensory and emotional needs, create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, and ultimately enhance pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour. This project is particularly important given the school's recent growth, the evolving class structures, and the need to meet the varied needs of a diverse pupil body.

2. Implementation

The PINS project was implemented through close collaboration with the Occupational Therapy team, who provided bespoke training tailored to staff needs identified via a comprehensive PINS audit. This training focused on equipping staff with practical OT

strategies, including Interoception techniques, to support pupils' self-regulation within the classroom context.

A sensory audit was conducted across all classrooms, leading to significant environmental adaptations aimed at creating calming, inclusive spaces. These included stripping back classrooms to natural, neutral colours and applying hessian backing on walls to reduce sensory overload. One classroom was designated as an **inclusive classroom pilot**, featuring flexible seating options such as standing desks, kneeling tables, and low lighting, thereby offering pupils autonomy over their learning environment and sensory input.

Additionally, **reading corridors** were established as safe, quiet spaces accessible during break and lunchtime for pupils who might feel overwhelmed. These corridors provide a retreat that supports emotional regulation and reduces behavioural incidents during unstructured times.

The project involved a wide range of stakeholders: teaching staff, teaching assistants, the OT team, school leadership, parents, and pupils. Regular communication and feedback loops ensured the approach remained responsive and adaptive. Key milestones included completion of the sensory audit, establishment of the inclusive classroom, launch of the reading corridors, and ongoing professional development sessions.

3. Evaluation and Impact

The evaluation of the PINS project drew on qualitative and quantitative evidence, including pupil behaviour data, staff feedback, parental engagement, and observation of classroom practice.

Improved pupil regulation and behaviour: Staff reported that pupils with diverse sensory and emotional needs demonstrated better self-regulation, requiring fewer removals from class for 'brain breaks'. Instead, the classroom itself became a 'brain break' environment, fostering continuous engagement.

Positive impact on attitudes to learning: Pupils showed increased enthusiasm and focus, benefiting from environments tailored to their sensory preferences. Behavioural incidents, particularly during break and lunchtimes, decreased significantly due to the provision of reading corridors.

Enhanced parental relations: Parents and carers welcomed the school's proactive approach, noting improvements in their children's wellbeing and engagement. This has strengthened trust and community partnerships.

Staff confidence and capacity: Through bespoke OT training, staff felt more equipped to support pupils' neurodiverse needs, leading to a more inclusive culture across the school.

These outcomes align well with the school's existing strengths highlighted by Ofsted, such as the warm relationships and effective support for pupils with SEND. The project also addresses the noted area for improvement regarding securing subject-specific knowledge by reducing barriers to learning through better regulation and inclusion.

4. Next Steps and Recommendations

Building on the success of the initial phase of PINS, Ellesmere Primary School has identified clear next steps to deepen and broaden the impact of the project:

Expand inclusive classroom provision: The upcoming inclusion panel on 6th February will review funding to enable more classrooms to adopt the inclusive design features trialled in the pilot. This will extend access to flexible seating, sensory-friendly environments, and calm spaces.

Extend reading corridors: Plans are underway to increase the number of reading corridors, making these supportive spaces available to more pupils across the school.

Parent engagement workshops: Hosting workshops will allow parents to see the adaptations in action, understand OT strategies, and foster a shared approach to supporting neurodiverse pupils at home and school.

Embed OT strategies school-wide: Continue professional development to ensure consistent use of OT approaches, such as Interoception, across all classrooms and key stages.

Monitor and evaluate impact: Maintain robust monitoring through behaviour data, pupil voice, and staff feedback to ensure the project evolves responsively and continues to meet pupils' needs.

For other primary schools considering similar interventions, it is recommended to begin with an in-depth sensory and needs audit, engage multidisciplinary teams early, and adopt a phased approach with pilot environments before whole-school implementation. Ensuring strong leadership support and staff training is essential to sustain inclusive practice.

5. Conclusion

The PINS project at Ellesmere Primary School exemplifies a forward-thinking, evidence-based approach to inclusion and neurodiversity within primary education. By integrating Occupational Therapy expertise with school-led initiatives, the project has created learning environments that genuinely accommodate diverse sensory and emotional needs, thereby enhancing pupils' wellbeing, behaviour, and engagement.

This case study highlights the critical role of environmental adaptations, staff capacity building, and community involvement in fostering inclusive education. The project supports and enriches the school's existing strengths, as recognised by Ofsted, and provides a scalable model for other schools seeking to improve outcomes for neurodiverse pupils.

Ellesmere's commitment to "*Reaching for the stars*" through inclusive practice not only benefits its current pupils but also contributes valuable insights to the wider educational community on promoting equity, wellbeing, and academic success in diverse school populations.

Images to support the culture of change at Ellesmere Primary School below:

Communication Board – Nursery



Inclusive classroom Year 3/4

Sofa area





Ellesmere
Primary School

Standing desks



Low/Mood lighting



We have even introduced low lighting in the admin office



Reading corridors around school





Ellesmere
Primary School

