



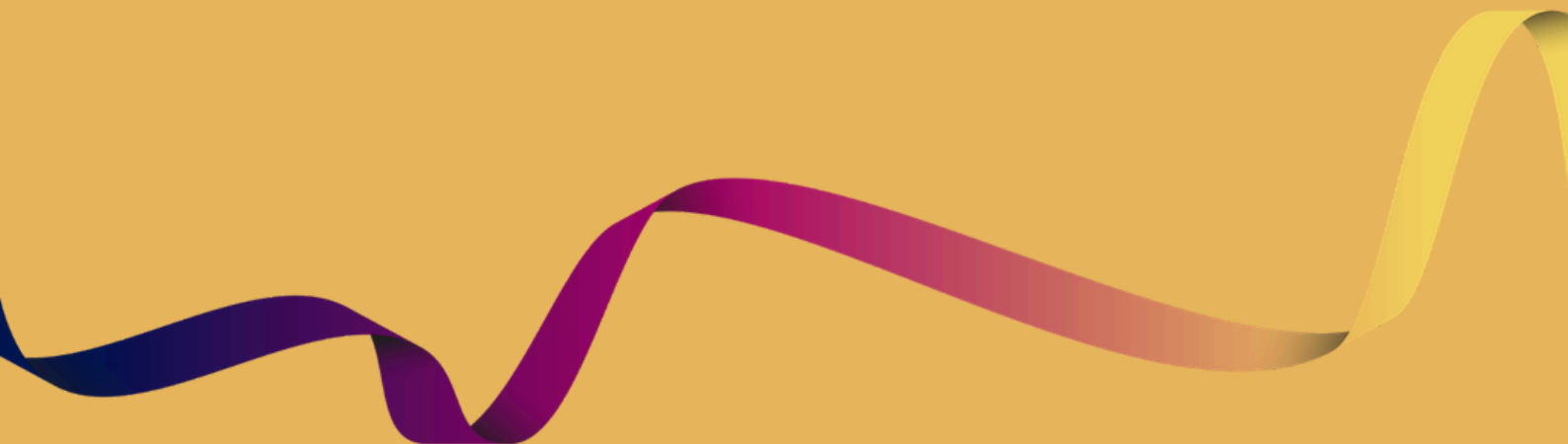
Centre for Teaching Excellence
Ionad Sàr-mhathais ann an Teagasg

Support for Diverse Classrooms

Research Brief

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Pedagogy to Support Attainment in Diverse Classrooms



Overview of Themes

The **Support for Diverse Classrooms Hub** will utilise digital spaces to maximise national reach and impact. The themes identified as in scope for the Support for Diverse Classrooms hub are overlapping and interdependent. These are:

- Nurturing relationships and promoting positive behaviour;
- Promoting inclusive pedagogies;
- Thriving through diversity;
- Developing counselling skills to support relationships and attainment, and supporting mental health and wellbeing for learners and educators.



Figure 1: The key interdependent themes that are within scope

The scope of each theme is outlined below:

- **Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour**
 - Nurturing relationships and promoting positive behaviour is premised on building rapport and understanding context. To support educators in enhancing their practice, we will share good examples from practice, making them visible and usable, to show what this *looks* and *sounds* like across contexts in Scotland. Over time, initial 'marginal gains' aim to support cumulative growth within virtuous cycles of improvement. This can help strengthen relationships within learning environments,

support behaviour regulation, and improve the overall climate for learning.

- **Promoting Inclusive Pedagogies**

- Inclusive pedagogies equip educators with high-impact, socially just practices that ensure every learner has their needs met, helping them to thrive. We will provide educators with evidence informed approaches and access to professional networks that help develop and share good examples of practice.

- **Thriving through Diversity**

- Scotland, as a nation, is dynamic and diverse; as educators, we embrace our ethical, moral, and legislative commitment to embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in practice. By developing networks of inclusive pedagogical practice and creating nurturing learning environments, we will support educators' development so that all learners can thrive. This moves inclusive practice beyond "integration" and transforms classrooms into places where diversity is not merely accommodated but actively drives success.

- **Developing Counselling Skills to Support Relationships**

- Counselling means to engage in dialogue for the benefit of others. Developing counselling skills to support relationships is more than 'learning to listen better'; it involves cultivating skills grounded in 'ways of doing' and 'ways of being'. We will help educators and practitioners explore how to create a supportive environment for learners and colleagues, enabling them to understand and express themselves as they navigate challenges, build emotional bonds, and develop and grow.

- **Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing for Learners and Educators**

- In an increasingly challenging environment, educators are called upon to sustain the mental health and wellbeing of students, and alongside this are requirements to respond appropriately to mental health challenges, which exist and emerge within educational contexts. Building on strong evidence that wellbeing and positive outcomes result from respectful, inclusive structures, positive relationships, and reciprocity, we will support educators in creating and sustaining communities of learners.

Definitions

Positive Relationships and Behaviour

The foundation of education is relationships, premised on a sense of belonging, underpinned by children's rights and wellbeing. Belonging is fostered through respectful, trusted and supportive relationships, where children and young people have a sense of being seen, heard and valued, and where positive behaviour is supported by responses that are fair, proportionate and needs-based. This is strengthened by safe, consistent environments that are nurturing, relational, and restorative.

Additional Support Needs

Supporting equitable education requires recognition that learning is not one-size-fits-all. Meeting children and young people's needs ensures that any barriers, whether temporary or long-term, are addressed with responsiveness and care to help them thrive. Identifying different support needs, developing a range of strategies, and providing appropriate resources are all essential to ensuring all learners can access education.

Inclusion

Inclusion means giving every child and young person the opportunity to thrive. It is the proactive practice of ensuring that every individual feels they belong, but more importantly, they matter. Inclusion recognises and celebrates diversity and values the contribution of every individual. Inclusive practice, which supports an individual group/s of learners, benefits all learners.

Diversity

Embracing diversity means actively recognising, respecting and valuing differences in all forms. This requires embedding a social justice approach to ensure that learners' differences do not create or perpetuate disadvantage.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity encompasses the continuum of variability in human brains, which should be recognised so that children and young people are included and celebrated for their unique ways of learning and thinking, such as heightened pattern recognition or creative problem solving, and learning.

Mental Health

Mental health is the emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of a person: it is influenced by physiological, relational, and environmental events, as part of daily life. The World Health Organisation defines mental health as "a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." World Health Organisation (2025)

Counselling Skills

Counselling skills are communication techniques that promote a person's emotional health and well-being. They can be used by practitioners whose primary role is not counselling, but who embed these skills in their everyday professional role.

Good examples of practice

Rather than promoting the notion of 'best practice', which suggests a context-free, singular and universal view of practice, and that positions educators as implementers of 'what works', we use the notion of 'good examples of practice' (Kelchtermans, 2015, 2021). This recognises the importance of context and multiplicity and treats educators as active professionals who critically reflect on practice to support their own and the growth of others.

Next Steps

Relevant legislation, policies and commitments in Scottish Education

There is already a range of legislation and policy associated with the key areas of focus for the Support for Diverse Classrooms Hub. Please see below some items which may be of interest.

Legislation

- [Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000](#)
- [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#)
- [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#)

Policy

- [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\)](#)
- [Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture: relationships, learning and behaviour](#)
- [Additional support for learning: statutory guidance 2017](#)
- [Presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting: guidance](#)
- [Schools - improving relationships and behaviour: progress report 2025](#)

Commitment

- [The Promise Scotland](#)
- [The National Framework for Inclusion](#)

Research into Practice

Relationships

When considering relationships and behaviour in schools, it is helpful to peruse the policy context. [The Improving Relationships and Behaviour in Schools: Ensuring Safe and Consistent Environments for all: Joint Action Plan 2024 – 2027](#), may help you to think about relationship and behaviour, and you may want to find out more about your local authority and learning context action plan.

Inclusive Practice

Review the [infographic](#) created from the key messages from [Florian \(2012\)](#) and [Finkelstein, S., Sharma, U., & Furlonger, B. \(2021\)](#), using LM Notebook.

Diversity

In their paper, [Teacher Education and Teaching for Diversity: A Call to Action](#), Ryan et al.

(2022, p. 202) discuss three ways of knowing about diversity:

- **teaching about diversity**, where educators need access to facts about forms of diversity and their consequences.
- **teaching to diversity**, what educators need to know about diverse learners, and how they need to respond.
- **teaching for diversity**, the origins of equity, the operation of power, the ways in which differences are consistently made to matter and what education can do to address this.

This framing of diversity may be a helpful way to consider your own practice and the practice in your context or learning environment.

Counselling Skills

In their article [Stoll, M. & McLeod, J. \(2020\)](#) explore the experiences of educators working with children and young people with mental health difficulties. They report that participants found the use of a counselling skills framework useful and helpful. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy has defined the competencies for counselling skills. They include **professional context, empathy, skills and techniques, working alliance and personal qualities**. The [framework](#), offers a benchmark for educators who may find counselling skills helpful in their role.

Health and Wellbeing

The Curriculum for Excellence defines outcomes expected from educational environments for children and young people, which include aspects of curriculum design rather than school culture; see [Health and wellbeing: Experiences and outcomes](#).

For those in leadership roles, the [Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) (2021) supports you to consider the wider context for support for mental health and wellbeing.

Reflexive Questions

- ★ Looking at the definitions above, do these resonate with your understanding? What would you change? What would you add?
- ★ How can we recognise the rights, interests and needs of all, including the most disadvantaged?
- ★ How can positive relationships be best modelled?
- ★ How can we engage key constituents, including educators and community, in school policy development in relation to inclusion?
- ★ How can we forge new research and practice partnerships to promote meaningful inclusion?
- ★ How can we be both inclusive and provide individual support?
- ★ How can we celebrate attainment whilst at the same time valuing individual achievements?
- ★ Do you currently use counselling skills within your practice? If so, what has been helpful or unhelpful?
- ★ Thinking ahead, which additional counselling skills do you hope to engage with as you continue to develop as a educator?
- ★ What self-care practices help you restore your energy and maintain healthy boundaries with learners?
- ★ Do you conceptualise mental health as an individual or a community characteristic within school environments?

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