

A Guide for Policy Makers:

Improving learning for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties



Table of Contents

Foreword	4
Clear national policy	6
Multi-tier framework	8
Assessment process	10
Graduated provision	12
Interagency team	15
Action	16
PwC support	17



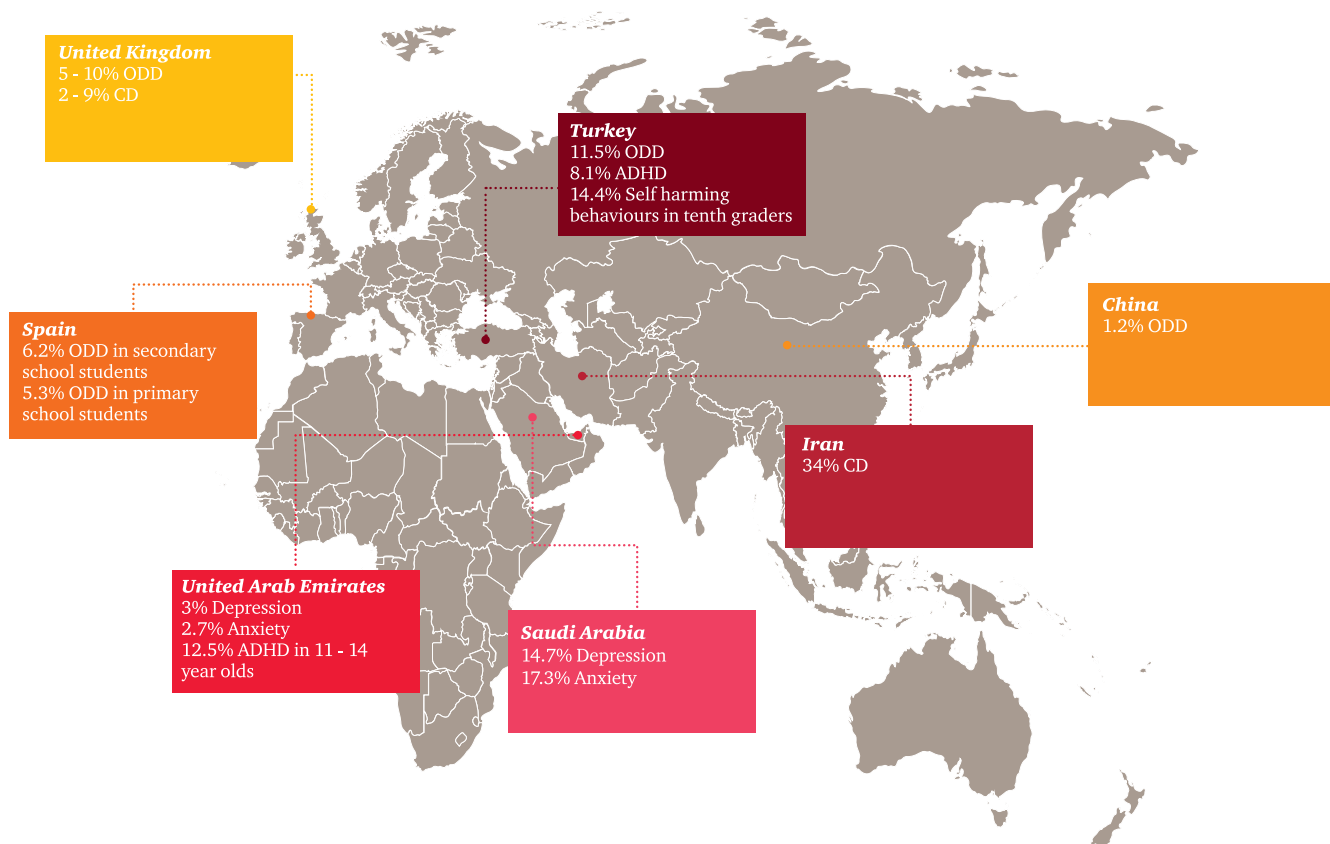
Foreword

How can we improve learning for children with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties (SEBD)?

Globally, one of the challenges facing policy makers is providing education to students who cannot access mainstream provision, or to those who need additional support to do so.

This is particularly true for children with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties (SEBD) who may need specialised environments to address their needs or who can exhibit disruptive behaviour that can result in exclusion from mainstream education environments.

For children and adolescents up to age 18, mental health disorders are estimated to be at a worldwide prevalence of 13.4%, of which a significant proportion will fall in the category of SEBD. The prevalence of such difficulties presents a global challenge to the progression and wellbeing of children.



*Global variance in prevalence of these disorders can be a result of the different tools used to identify them from one region to another.

CD: Conduct Disorder

ODD: Oppositional Defiant Disorder

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

SEBD

SEBD - social, emotional or behavioural difficulties - is an established term used to describe children who are troubled or troubling. These difficulties can be externalised or internalised, with externalised behaviours more prevalently identified in boys and internalised behaviours more prevalently identified amongst girls.

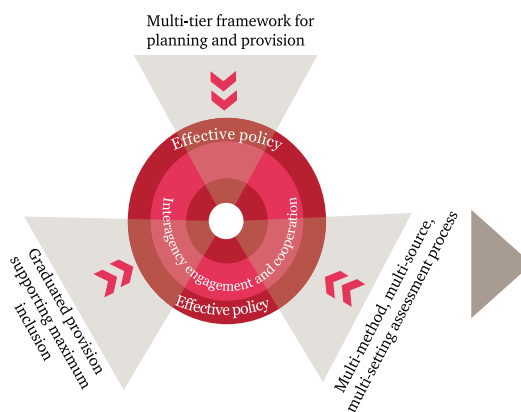


There is a developing evidence base around what works for this group of students. In this report we draw on this to recommend the key elements of a whole system approach for effective provision for students with SEBD, with a focus on students aged 11-18 years. We identify these key elements as:

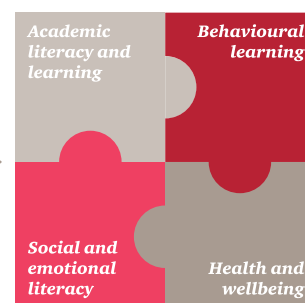
- A clear national policy framework
- Multi-tier framework underpinning planning and provision
- Multi-method, multi-source, multi-setting assessment process with evidenced assessment tools
- Graduated provision with a preference for maximum inclusion
- Interagency engagement and cooperation

The primary objective of any strategy should be to improve student outcomes through removing barriers to learning and improving students' social, emotional and behavioural learning and wellbeing.

Evidence based strategy ...



... enhancing student outcomes in four areas



Improving these student outcomes has been shown to enhance national outcomes as follows:



1. Implement a clear national policy framework

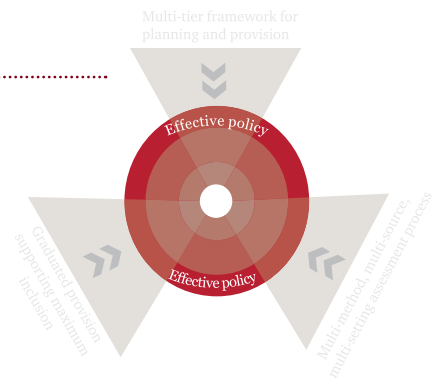
The starting point for any effective strategy is a clear policy framework that cascades national policies down to the school level, ensuring that they are translated into practical and standardised approaches for improving learning.

Any policy is only as good as its implementation and compliance arrangements, which are essential both to support implementation and to inform policy reviews and updates.

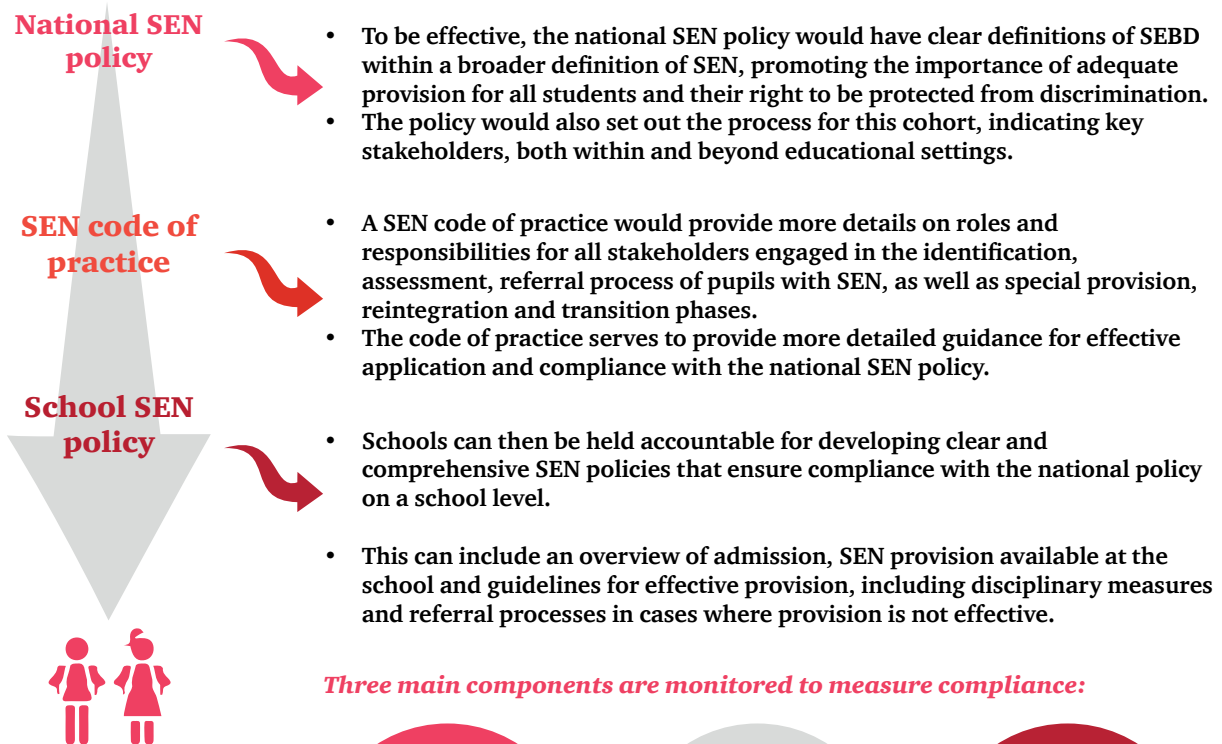
Compliance should be monitored using systems to measure:

1. Student progress
2. Impact of provision
3. Extent to which intervention has been implemented as directed and applied by qualified professionals according to the required protocols (fidelity of delivery)





Policy model for special educational needs (SEN)



2. Adopt a graduated, multi-tier framework to underpin planning and provision

Although some prevalence data is available on SEBD, it varies substantially based on the method of identification in different studies and different countries.

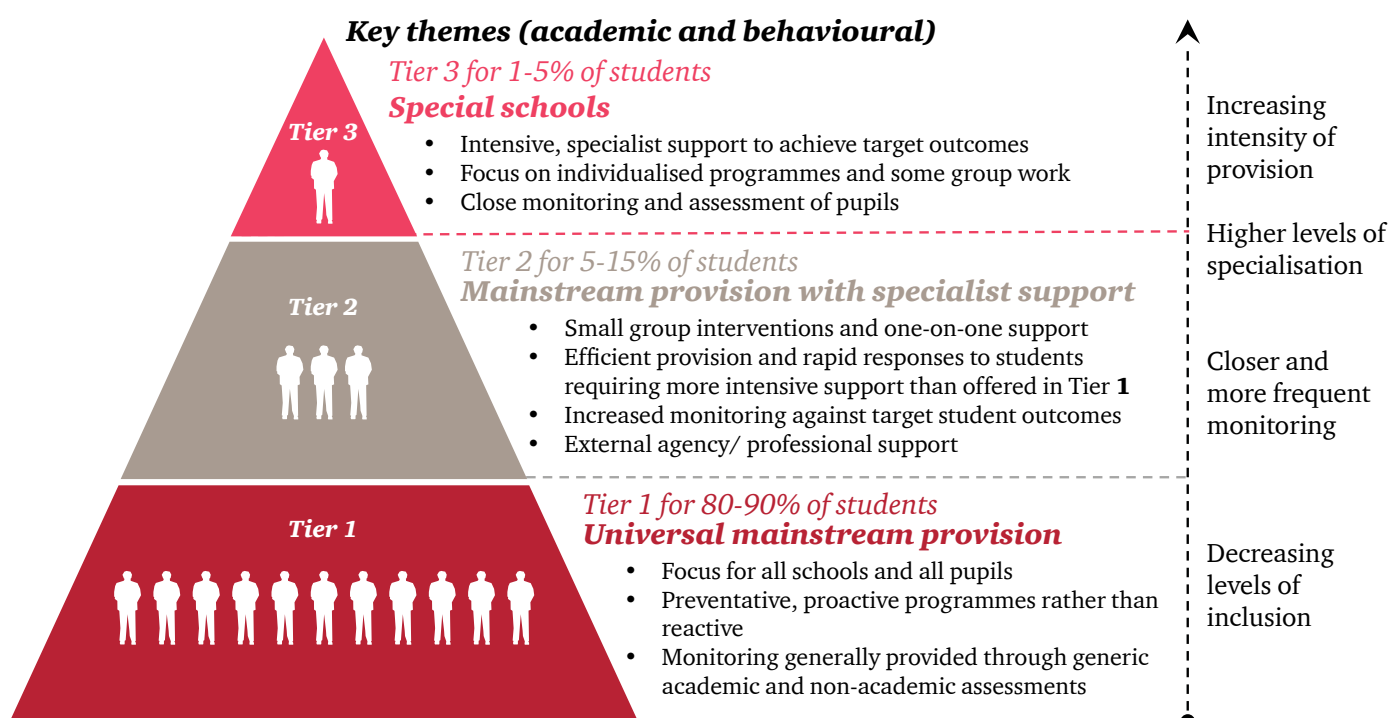
The model outlined below is based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, used globally to categorise assessment and provision into three tiers, with varying levels of intensity of provision.

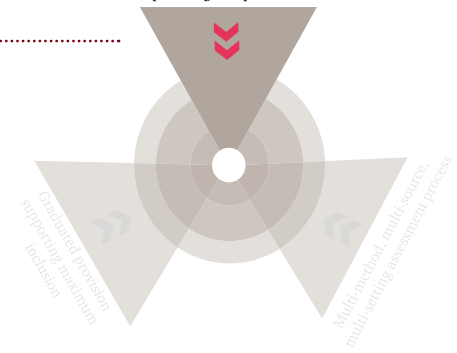
The model accounts for students who can be supported with universal provision to perhaps just 5% of a school population who will require very individualised support to effectively remove more severe barriers to learning.

The multi-tier framework can be contextualised to any country based on the maturity of provision in that country. The three tiers can be used for planning purposes, identification, assessment and referral processes, as well as provision in mainstream and specialist settings.



Multi-tier framework for planning and provision



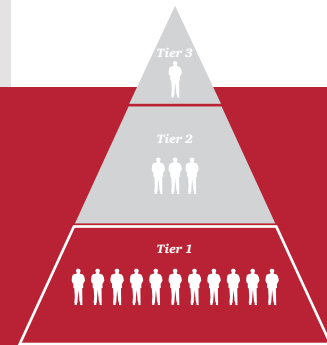


A closer look: developing a multi-tier continuum for special education and support in Japan

Japan has increasingly focused on improving special education and support and on eliminating stigma around SEBD. An important step that Japan has taken to build a solid foundation for special education and support is mapping provision to multiple tiers.

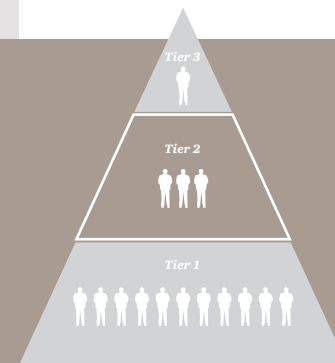
Tier 1 – Universal mainstream provision

- Japan has been focused on building capability in mainstream classes to ensure a sufficient level of support for students with learning difficulties, such as ADHD, as well as other difficulties in mainstream environments.
- Each municipality receives financial means to allocate special needs education assistants to public schools to provide support for students with difficulties, enabling support in inclusive environments.



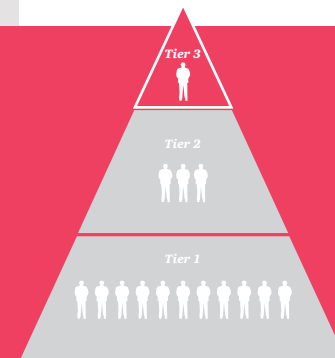
Tier 2 – Mainstream provision with specialist support

- It is mandatory that students receiving specialised support have individual teaching plans tailored to their difficulties, developed in coordination with the child's parents.
- “Tsukyu” classes, small group lessons addressing SEN, are set up in mainstream schools to allow students with learning difficulties to receive specialised, tailored support while in inclusive, mainstream environments.
- Children in special classes join their peers in mainstream classes for the rest of the day, and mainstream students are encouraged to interact with students with SEN as much as possible.



Tier 3 – Special schools

- Even children with severe disabilities are eligible for schooling, with only 0.001% of children allowed postponement or exception from schooling due to disabilities.
- Special schools offer transition programmes that support students with difficulties in entering the workforce – only 28% of students with special needs got employed in 2014, so this is becoming increasingly prioritised, with interagency collaboration at the core of the country's improvement plans.
- “Koryu” activities are notable, where students in special schools reintegrate with students from mainstream schools for joint activities and learning. This is mandated across the country to ensure maximum inclusion.

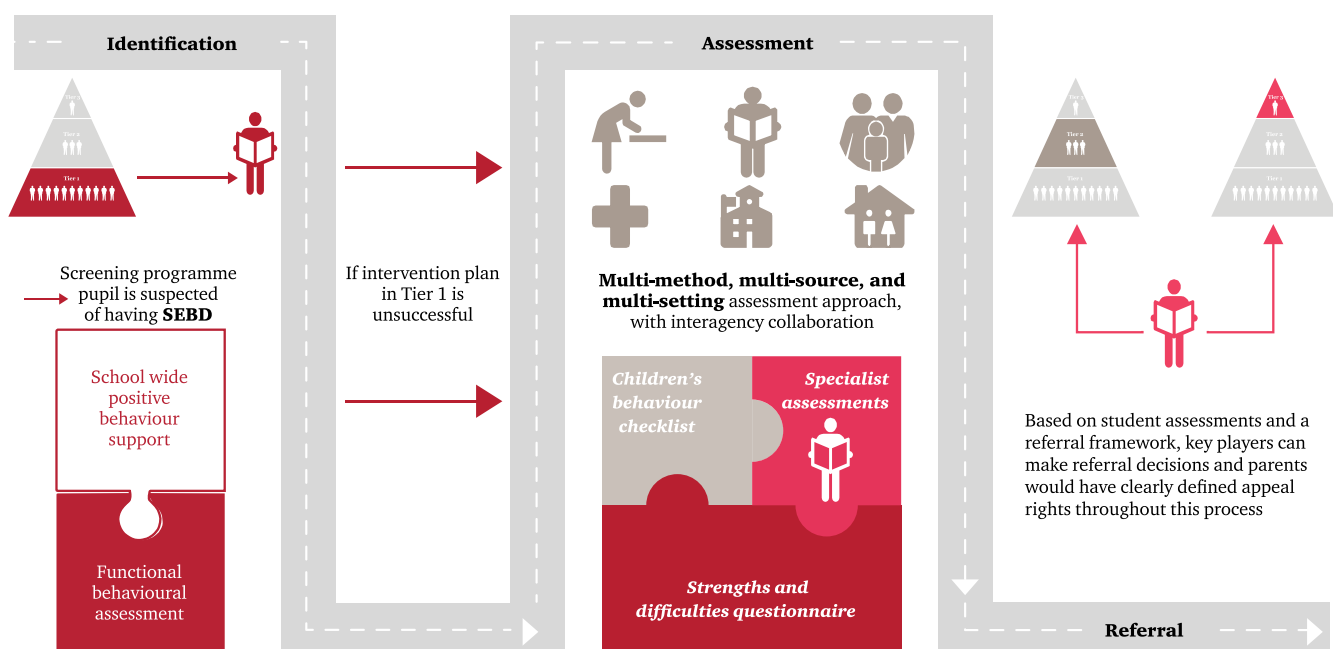


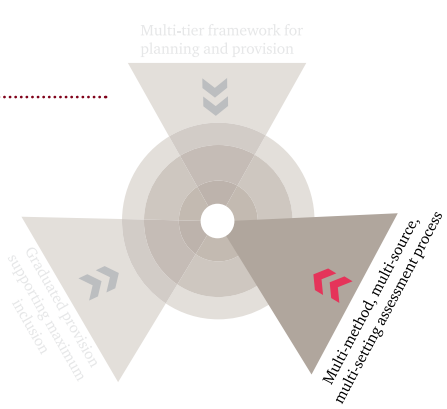
3. Identify through multi-method, multi-source, multi-setting assessment

The baseline to appropriate provision starts with the clear identification of 'need'.

An effective identification and assessment process should involve data collection from multiple sources, using multiple methods and observing pupils' behaviours in different settings to capture a comprehensive profile of each student, effectively informing referral and placement decisions.

This form of assessment – known as multi-method, multi-source and multi-setting assessment – is more likely to provide a well-rounded view of need; also shedding light on how and where this need might be met. Throughout the journey, it is important to provide mechanisms to allow the pupil voice to inform decisions.





Central to this process are evidenced screening and assessment tools. There are now a number of established tools that have good evidence of effectiveness.

Many of these tools can be contextualised to the region where they are applied to maximise their effectiveness, and many are available in multiple languages, including Arabic, for international use.



A closer look: evidence-based screening tools

School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS)

Founded upon a positive approach to whole school wellbeing, SWPBS is a framework used by education professionals and schools to provide targeted measures for improving education and behaviour outcomes.

The core objectives of the SWPBS framework include the prevention and management of behavioural problems, the creation of a better school environment for students and the school community and the development of skills for better teaching and learning.

Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA)

FBA is recommended for use as part of a wider SWPBS programme. It is used to identify causes and functions of challenging behaviours through:

- Direct observation - A child is observed in their natural environment. When challenging behaviour occurs, an observer records what happens just before and after to identify hypotheses for the cause
- Informant methods - Involves interviews and questionnaires that can be completed by the child, parents and teachers to develop a hypothesis for the function of the behaviour
- Functional analysis – Practitioners deliberately manipulate what happens before and after a behaviour occurs, testing hypotheses for the cause of the behaviour and factors affecting it.
- Singapore is an example of a country that places a strong emphasis on direct observation methods, with extensive guidelines provided to schools for effective application.

A closer look: evidence-based assessment tools

Children's Behaviour Checklist (CBCL)

The CBCL is a checklist parents can complete to detect SEBD in children and adolescents. Part of the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA), CBCL is one of the most widely used measures for evaluating such difficulties, available in around 90 languages.

The CBCL/6-18 is used with children aged 6 to 18 years of age and scores behaviours on a three-point Likert scale (0=absent, 1= occurs sometimes, 2=occurs often). Time frame for responses is the past 6 months.

To ensure multi-source assessment, ASEBA has two other assessment components - the Teacher's Report Form (TRF) is to be completed by teachers and the Youth Self-Report (YSR) by the child or adolescent.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for 4-16 year olds, available in over 80 languages. The SDQ includes questions for children, parents and staff, to collect data on the child's behaviour in multiple settings to consider a broad student profile.

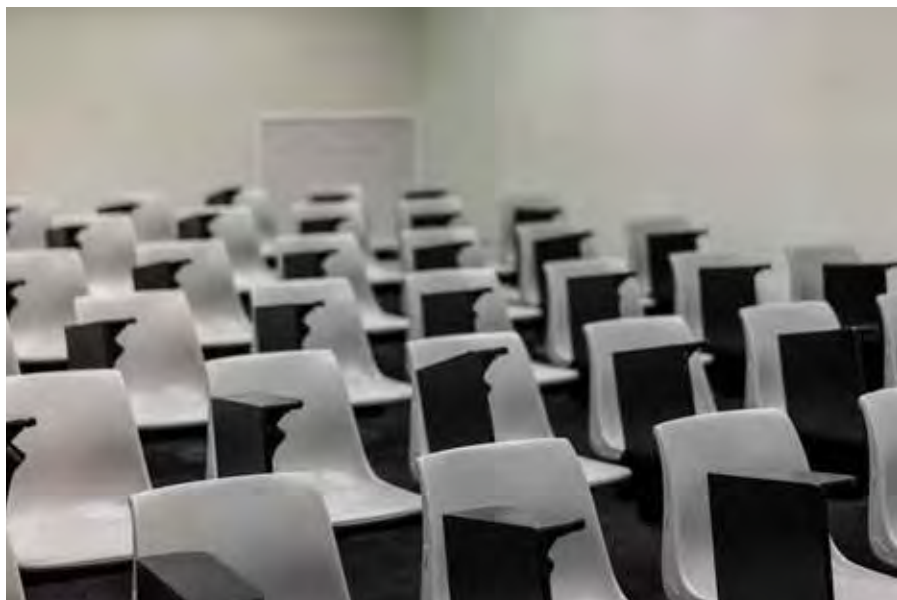


4. Identify the most appropriate inclusive environment through referrals

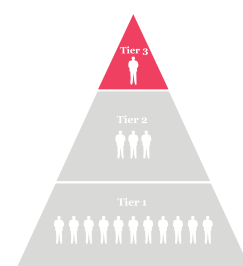
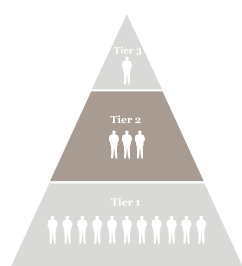
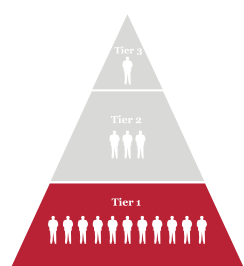
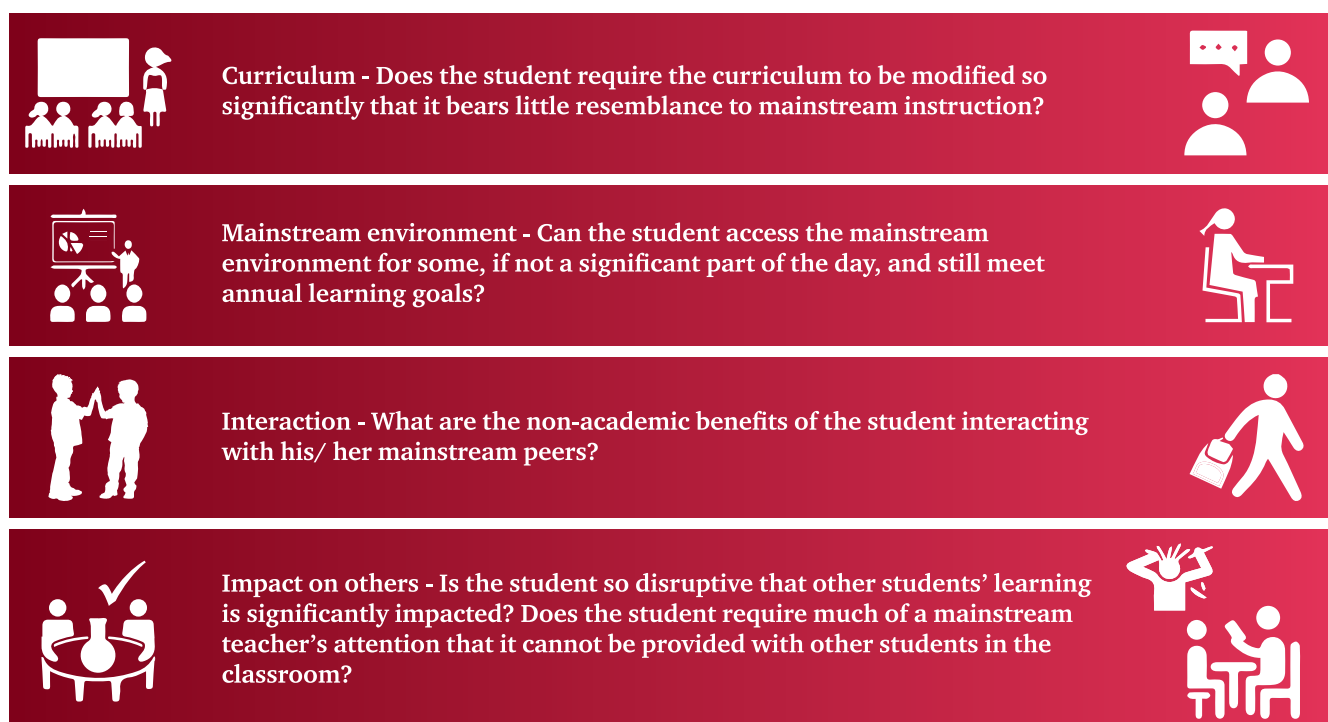
Referral decisions should have a strong emphasis on maximum inclusion, with some students, inevitably, requiring specialised education in less inclusive environments to address the severity and type of SEBD. Different factors can be considered to address the trade-off between:

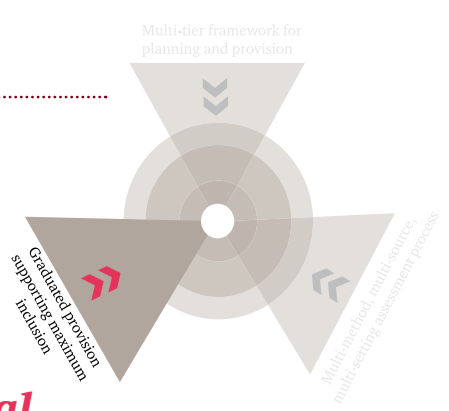
1. Providing specialised education to address students' individualised needs
2. Addressing learning difficulties in inclusive environments to facilitate interaction with mainstream students

Any framework developed to inform referral decisions should also consider the impact of these decisions on the well-being of other mainstream students who do not face similar SEBD.



Student referral framework – factors informing referral decisions





Effective provision is underpinned by eight essential evidence-based features

Across tiers of provision, there is significant overlap between strategies to address SEBD. In both mainstream and specialist settings, there are eight essential, evidence-based features that underpin effective provision for students facing such difficulties.

Essential Features of Effective Provision



Qualified and committed professionals

Training teachers and recruiting qualified professionals who are committed to enhancing student progress and outcomes



Practical and functional environmental supports

Providing practical and functional environmental support that make students feel nurtured and safe



Ongoing evaluation

Ongoing evaluation of intervention against student outcomes to measure the impact of intervention and the progress of the student



Robust academic support systems

Robust academic support systems to support students in achieving ambitious academic standards that their mainstream peers are held to



Strong family involvement

Strong family involvement is key and can be boosted with programmes like the Triple P Programme, which ensures positive parental involvement throughout the student journey to influence student outcomes



Effective behaviour management plans

Developing tailored behaviour intervention plans, reviewed annually, for each student identified with a difficulty regardless of provision setting, to measure progress against plan



Effective social interaction

Utilising relevant and effective social skills and social interaction programmes



Community support mechanisms

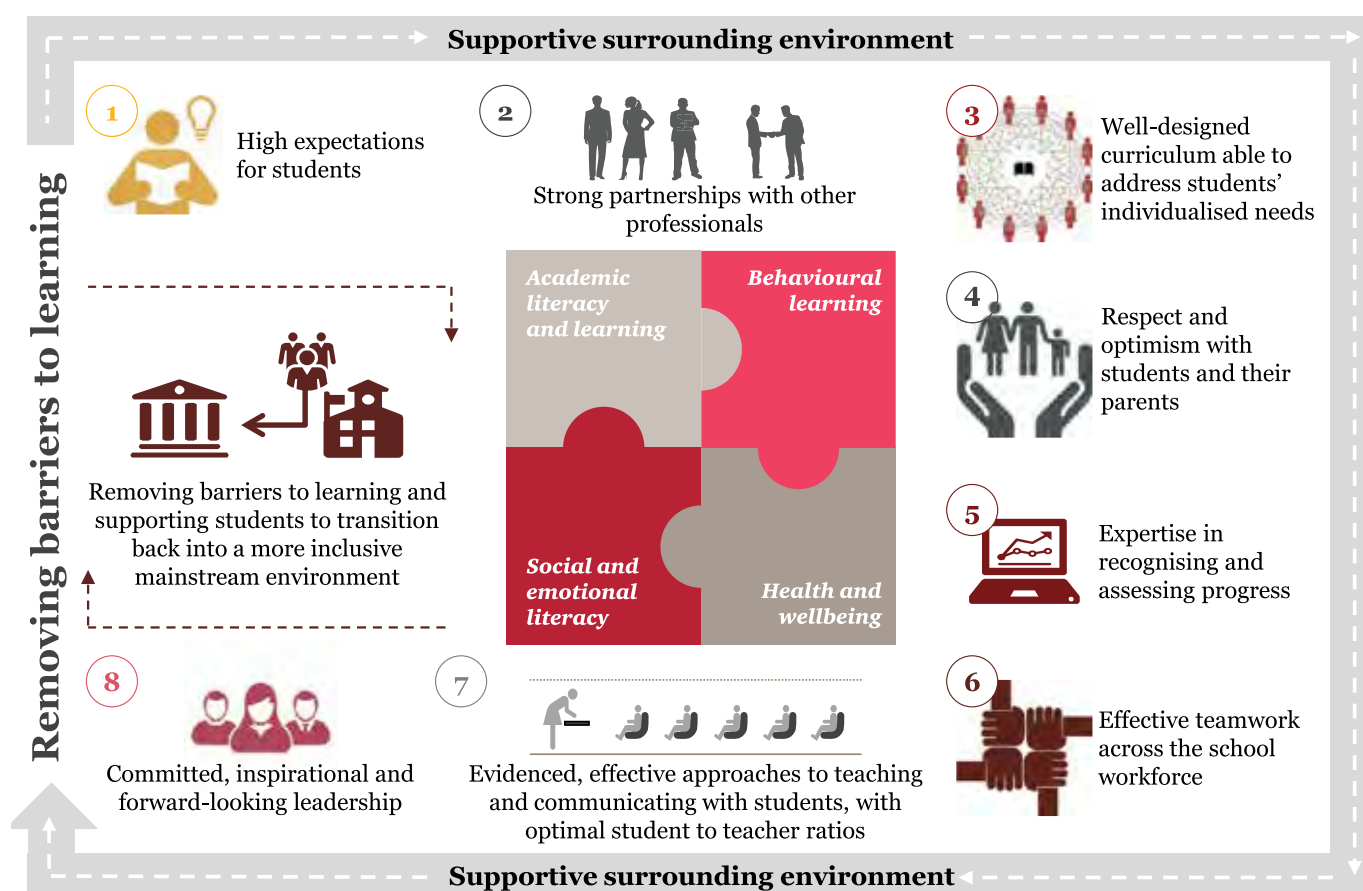
Encouraging community support through developing coordinated community support mechanisms centred around the student

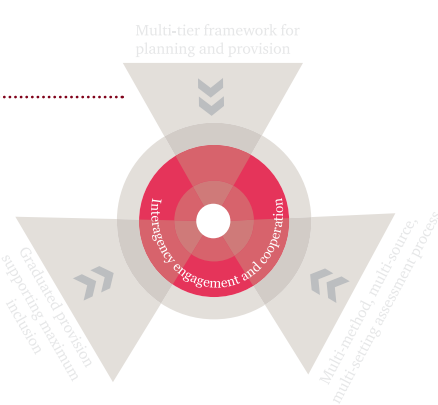
We recognise that some students will require specialist provision

A small percentage of students have difficulties so severe that they cannot be addressed effectively in mainstream environments. The individualised, specialised support that they need would typically be offered in special schools that can more effectively remove barriers that impede their learning.

There are 8 essential features that have been shown to underpin effective provision in special schools, supporting students in achieving their target outcomes, as summarised below.

It is crucial to support students with SEBD in their transition from one tier of provision to another and in their reintegration back to mainstream settings after being in specialist environments.





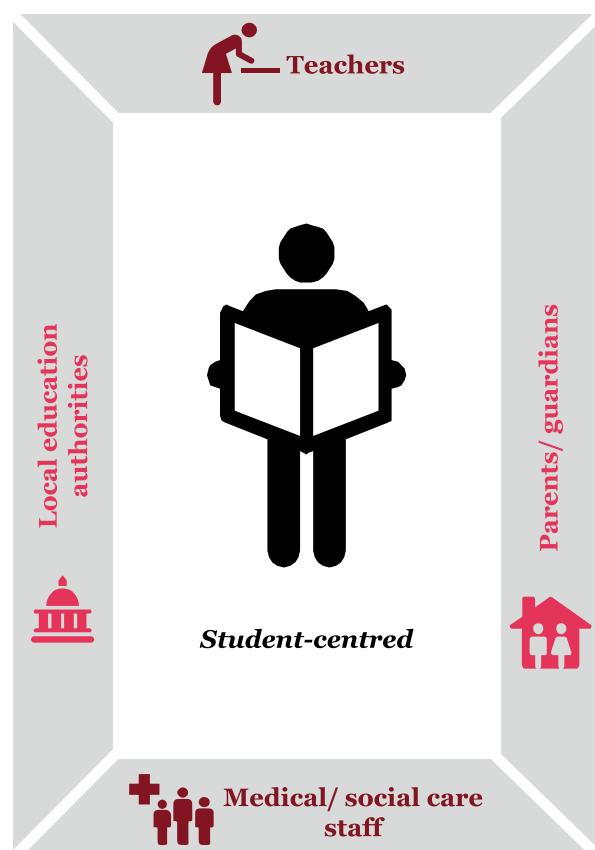
5. Adopt an interagency team centred around the student

Adopting an interagency model with key multidisciplinary stakeholders focused on the student is crucial throughout the assessment process, during provision and in transition phases, such as reintegration into mainstream education.

Common key stakeholders have been identified across several countries as essential to the student journey as they are each specialised in an area that is relevant to inform decisions around children's development and learning.



Key stakeholders in the student journey



Interagency collaboration: Finland

1) Student welfare group (SWG)

In Finnish schools, the SWG is an interagency team that typically consists of the school principal, psychologist, nurse, special educational teacher, the classroom teacher, a social worker, the school doctor and a student advisor.

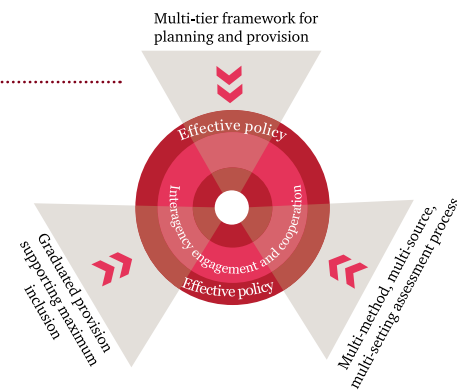
The team is responsible for ensuring that schools have effective learning environments for students with SEN, including those with SEBD .

The team also ensures students' wellbeing and is responsible for assessing students and developing tailored intervention to address their individualised needs, including preparing an individualised education plan (HOJK in Finnish) and monitoring progress against this plan at least once a year.

2) Nation-wide interagency network

Finland has a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention, and it utilises its nation-wide network of university researchers, public agencies, education providers and developers of early screening and identification tools to support special education in the country . This is done through providing evidenced tools for early screening and prevention and through providing teaching materials and strategies to support students with difficulties and schools nationally.

6. Implement an action plan to address this issue



This document has been developed by the Middle East practice but presents evidence and recommendations applicable for a global audience.

With a significant percentage of the student population facing SEBD that impede their learning, it is important for governments to prioritise actions that address these difficulties and support students in realising their full potential.



Actions that can be initiated in the short term but will take longer to be accomplished

Actions that can be accomplished in the short term

Developing a clear policy framework with clear definitions relating to SEBD and deploying monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with the national policy

Developing an effective assessment process and drawing on evidenced tools and programmes, contextualising and applying them in mainstream and special schools

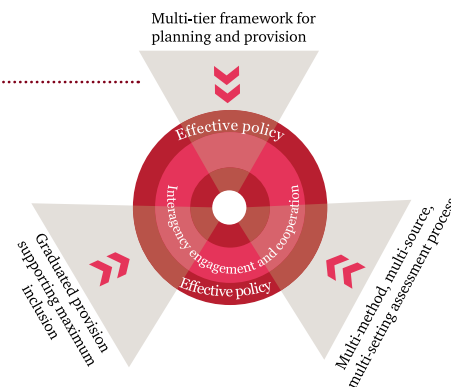
Developing interagency collaboration, engaging stakeholders from varied disciplines and building capability across stakeholders to make informed decisions centred around the student

Building capability across tiers to provide effective provision:

- Training teachers
- Developing a culture of support and acceptance of children with difficulties, eliminating discrimination and stigma
- Establishing programmes and special schools especially in countries where they are limited, such as in countries with stigma around SEN, with specific competencies addressing different needs
- Engaging and supporting parents, equipping them with tools to support their children

Gathering data on the contextual impact of provision to provide effective, contextual solutions based on the primary data collected

PwC can support in improving learning for students with special educational needs



We have extensive consultancy experience working with governments and educational providers in the Middle East and globally, advising on policy design and application.

We have specialised experience in education and are able to draw on our extensive global network of subject matter experts who have deep operational and policy-making experience in the field of special education. This network includes leading institutions around the world, such as the UCL Institute of Education, which allows us to use academic rigour to identify the most effective practices and evidenced solutions to improve learning.

We also have a growing network of experts within the Middle East who have a detailed understanding of the challenges of promoting inclusion of special education within developing regions.

This combination of in-house capabilities, coupled with our network of regional and international experts, uniquely positions us to provide impactful, evidenced solutions designed to improve provision for students with SEN.

Authors of this report



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