



**Case Study:**

# **Ormiston Academies Trust**



# How Ormiston developed specialist internal provisions (SIPs) to support pupils with complex needs

*A key principle of SEND practice this case study exemplifies:*

Provision being flexible as pupils' needs change and evolve, avoiding pupils becoming 'stuck' in separate settings.

## *At a glance*

- Ormiston Academies Trust (Ormiston) has worked with a group of school leaders to co-create specialist internal provisions (SIPs) across six of their primary schools.
- These provisions cater to pupils who require targeted, additional support within mainstream settings, including pre-verbal pupils and those with complex needs.
- Leaders have designed these provisions to complement high quality teaching, and to be flexible to pupils' needs as they change over time.
- The schools have seen positive early results since implementing the provisions, with data showing improved behaviour, attendance, and pupil engagement.





## Background information

Ormiston Academies Trust is one of the largest multi-academy trusts in England. The trust educates over 35,000 pupils across five regions, in over 40 schools – currently 32 secondary schools, six primary schools, three alternative provision schools and three special schools.

The six academies that have been part of setting up specialist internal provisions are: Cliff Park, Edward Worlledge, Herman, Meadows, Packmoor, and South Parade.



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# What challenges were you trying to address?

**By establishing Specialist Internal Provisions (SIPs), Ormiston aimed to create dedicated spaces within their mainstream schools where pupils with more complex needs could receive tailored support.**

These in-school provisions aim to enable staff to respond more flexibly and effectively to individual needs – such as those related to social, emotional and mental health, cognition and learning, or communication – while maintaining strong links to wider services beyond school. The goal is to improve outcomes by providing the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Ormiston's focus is on complementing, not replacing, high quality teaching in mainstream classrooms. SIPs are not seen as

a final destination for pupils, but a stepping stone, so pupils can return to and thrive in the mainstream environment when the time is right. Their goal is always to avoid pupils becoming 'stuck' in separate settings, and to support them in building the skills and confidence they need to succeed alongside their peers.

Leaders set out to develop provision that was carefully planned, inclusive, and based on what pupils need to succeed not just in school, but in life. They recognised a risk of responding in piecemeal or short-term ways, which could create ad-hoc provision spaces that lacked purpose and structure. If not planned and implemented carefully, spaces would unintentionally risk excluding the pupils they were meant to support.







## What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

### *How the project started:*

Ormiston brought together staff from across their schools to co-create an aligned approach to design and implementation through a series of central documents that would underpin the design and delivery of their SIPs:

- A shared vision to ensure all Principals understood the purpose and goals of their schools' SIPs. The central aim was to deliver high quality, tailored support that enables pupils to remain in a mainstream setting.
- A foundational framework informed by research and expert guidance from Ambition Institute, Whole School SEND, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), and NASEN. Drawing inspiration from the EEF's School's Guide to Implementation, the trust created a set of principles, tools, and practices to guide their work.

## What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

### *The approach:*

Each SIP is designed around the specific needs of pupils in that setting. Across the six primary schools, SIPs focus on areas such as communication and interaction, cognition and learning, and social-emotional development. A one-page overview outlines the core aims of the SIP across all academies. Individual academies have then developed a detailed, context-specific overview which outlines key objectives, entry and exit criteria, staffing and training requirements, and methods for gathering and responding to parental feedback.

Pupils learning within SIPs follow personalised pathways tailored to their individual needs, strengths, and circumstances. The level of structure and formality within these pathways can vary significantly. For

some pupils, this may involve a highly structured, timetabled approach with clearly defined routines and targeted interventions. For others, a more flexible and responsive model may be appropriate, allowing for adjustments based on emotional readiness, learning pace, or emerging needs.

This keeps the provision pupil-centred, offering the right balance of support, challenge, and flexibility to enable meaningful progress and successful reintegration into wider school life where appropriate.

Alongside this, Ormiston adopts an 'assess, plan, do, review' approach to ensure provision is effectively tailored to individual pupils' needs. Robust assessment processes are embedded to closely track progress and inform responsive, data-driven planning throughout the cycle.



# What does it look like in practice?

## 1. In practice in different academies

Across the trust, the focus and delivery model of SIPs vary. These reflect the needs of each unique school community.

- **Cliff Park** offers full-time SIP places for pupils in reception and year 1. For older pupils, access to provision is tailored, determined by individual needs rather than a set timetable, allowing the school to be agile and responsive.
- **Edward Worlledge:** Pupils in years 1 and 2 who need support with communication can access the provision full-time, giving them a consistent and supportive environment to build key skills. For pupils in key stage 2, mornings are dedicated to focused support around cognition and learning, with the aim of equipping them to transition more confidently into the wider classroom later in the day.
- **Herman** has focused its SIP on early communication and interaction needs. Reception and year 1 pupils attend the provision each morning, allowing staff to deliver focused support during a calm and consistent part of the day.
- **Meadows** also focuses its SIP on early communication and interaction needs, following a similar model to Herman. Morning support is extended to include reception through to year 2.
- **Packmoor:** Staff work together to identify and respond to individual pupils' needs and adapt the support as required. The SIP operates as a flexible, wraparound model that responds to changing pupils' needs.
- **South Parade:** Pupils from reception to year 2 with communication needs attend full-time, while key stage 2 learners with cognition and learning challenges access the provision in the mornings.







## What does it look like in practice? (continued)

### 2. Training and professional development

Ormiston sought guidance from a range of expert organisations to ensure staff were well equipped to meet the diverse needs of their pupils. Some support was highly individualised, such as training in augmented communication for a non-verbal pupil. Other sessions were designed for the whole cohort, focusing on areas like attention, engagement, and sensory regulation.

Professional development is seen as essential not just for those in SIP, but for all staff across the trust. Leaders recognised that meeting the needs of a diverse pupil population was not the responsibility of a few specialists, but rather a collective effort. Drawing on the evidence base helped staff explore how key principles such as environment design, visual structure, and routine could unlock rapid progress for pupils with high needs.

Half-termly visits from the trust's

lead practitioner offers opportunities for observation, coaching, quality assurance, and collaborative problem-solving. These visits enable staff to reflect on practice, explore solutions, and refine their approaches with expert input. The lead practitioner also holds scheduled phone calls and meetings to provide guidance and problem solving with colleagues on emerging challenges.

Ormiston holds regular meetings with leaders to revisit the vision and goals, and reflect on progress. The National Director of Primaries ensures development of the SIPs is a priority on every academy development plan, and the impact on the whole academy is monitored and evaluated termly. Classrooms outside of the SIPs are also structured and resourced to support pupils who attend the SIP, ensuring consistency and smooth transitions between settings.



## What does it look like in practice? (continued)

### 3. Funding and cost

To ensure that every SIP had the leadership and expertise it needed, funding from pupils' Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) was deployed alongside funding from the school budget. This allowed each provision to have a dedicated teacher lead, supported by additional staff as required. Staffing levels were tailored to the specific needs of each setting, considering not just the number of pupils, but also any additional support needs.

Building effective provisions also meant securing the right physical resources. In the early days, many SIPs pieced together their learning spaces using borrowed materials from elsewhere in the school. But as the provisions became more embedded, academies allocated specific budgets for sensory areas, calming zones, and adapted learning tools to create purposeful, safe and supportive spaces.

Even with careful planning, the financial reality remained a challenge. Ormiston have sought additional funding from local authorities to support inclusive education. In Peterborough, for example, a new higher funding band was introduced specifically for children that have been agreed specialist school/provision but have been placed in a mainstream academy.

### 4. Ongoing reflection and evaluation

Ormiston has selected a review framework to evaluate SIPs formally across the trust. This tool supports schools in reviewing provision across a range of key areas, including leadership and management, curriculum, environment, assessment, and wider partnership working.

Ormiston also introduced termly pupil progress reviews. These are designed to be led by academy leaders, in partnership with teachers, teaching assistants, and where appropriate parents and pupils themselves. The meetings focus on academic and development progress of pupils in SIPs, and consider options for gradual reintegration into mainstream settings. .



# What has been the impact?

**Early data demonstrates how pupils accessing the SIPs show improvements in behaviour, attendance and engagement.**

Teacher observations have also identified better emotional regulation and stronger peer relationships. Three schools within the trust received positive feedback about the SIPs from Ofsted, with one report noting, “The Specialist Internal Provision has been set up with careful consideration about pupils’ individual needs and works well.”

An application is underway to fund a research project to evaluate this work, led by a practitioner completing a doctorate within one of the SIPs. This project aims to evaluate impact and insights that can be shared across the trust and beyond.







## Next steps

Ormiston intends to expand and embed the success of SIPs across all their primary schools, for the long term. Therefore, they are asking themselves a series of questions to ensure that the impact is sustainable:

- **Is a SIP always the right solution?** Leaders remain committed to ensuring SIP is not a default response. High quality, adaptive teaching must always be considered as the first and best intervention.
- **How do we ensure sustainability?** With variation in EHCP funding and local authority arrangements, Ormiston is exploring how to balance financial planning with provision design, while ensuring that children continue to get the support they need.
- **What are the long-term pathways for pupils?** Ormiston recognises that inclusion does not end with the primary phase. It requires careful thought about next steps, whether that is transitioning to secondary school, mainstream reintegration, or moving into specialist settings.
- **How can we strengthen transition to secondary?** Operationally, the trust is deepening links with secondary academies, some of which are developing their own SIP models. This joined-up thinking ensures continuity of support and shared understanding as pupils move through the education system.



# The key factors that make it work

Leaders have identified the following key behaviours and content which have made this approach effective in their setting:

- **Establish a clear, inclusive vision:** ensure all staff understand how SIPs can meet the needs of pupils.
- **Develop joint planning:** to enhance all teachers' understanding of how to meet a wider range of needs.
- **Draw from best practices in early years:** gain insights from both the provision and environment in early years to support the planning and preparing of a SIP.
- **Celebrate small but meaningful steps:** empower leaders to recognise the importance of celebrating meaningful steps of progress and integrating this into whole academy reporting.
- **Hold regular meetings to maintain momentum:** ensure the vision remains aligned, build connections, develop practice and identify training needs of staff.
- **Use formal review frameworks** as a formal starting point for evaluating provision.



# Advice for school leaders

Leaders have reflected on lessons learnt along the way, to support others looking to implement similar practices in their settings.

## ***1. Understand pupils' needs and their nuance***

While SIPs are designed to meet the needs of a small number of pupils, those needs can be incredibly diverse. Provision must be rooted in and responsive to individual pupil development, not a fixed plan that risks becoming not fit for purpose.

## ***2. Know when not to set up a SIP***

One of the biggest strategic decisions is recognising when SIP isn't the right approach. High quality, adaptive teaching and targeted interventions often remain the most inclusive and effective response. SIP should not become a default solution, or a way of managing behaviour or masking unmet teaching needs. Leaders must constantly ask: 'Is this the best environment for this pupil? Could we support them successfully in the classroom with the right adjustments?'

## ***3. Plan funding and sustainability with foresight***

Resourcing SIP requires both strategic and operational thinking. Strategically, leaders need to explore how to sustain funding models especially if the school or trust retains financial responsibility. What happens if local authorities become involved and offer centralised funding or designation as a resource base? Will that limit autonomy or shift the focus away from your local priorities? Operationally, staff must have access to training, research, and high quality resources that are meaningful and appropriate for the diverse needs within the provision. Investment in professional development and collaborative networks is essential.

## ***4. Build shared understanding, inside and outside the school***

SIP supports pupils by shaping the professional thinking across schools. It's important to build local and national understanding of how these provisions sit within broader SEND strategy. Engaging in partnerships with research organisations can elevate the work and embed a stronger evidence base.



## Advice for school leaders (continued)

### *5. Think beyond the here and now*

One of the most important roles of a SIP is to give pupils (and their families) the space and time to figure out what comes next. For some, that might be a return to full-time mainstream learning; for others, a move to a specialist setting. Leaders need to think proactively about how to support transitions, academically, emotionally, and socially. There are also exciting opportunities to connect with secondary schools, particularly if they're beginning to explore their own inclusive provisions.

### *6. Anticipate policy shifts and inspection priorities*

While there is increasing clarity from Ofsted around SEND, the inspection framework has yet to consistently address the role of SIPs (outside of formally designated Resource Bases). Leaders should stay alert to policy developments and consider how to articulate the purpose and impact of their SIPs in relation to broader school improvement and pupil outcomes.





## Further reading and resources

Leaders have shared some examples of resources they consulted throughout this process, which they would recommend other school and trust leaders to consider in their own contexts.

- See [MAT/AP Offer Progression Framework Delegate Pack](#) to learn more about an Autism progression framework.
- See [A School's Guide to Implementation | EEF](#) for guidance on implementing change in your school or trust.
- See [The PiXL Club - PiXL Primary](#) to discover a network offering school improvement strategies, resources, and data-driven interventions for pupils with SEND in primary schools.



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