

November 2025 | The Inclusion Index Edition 2

GLOBAL
EQUALITY
COLLECTIVE

THE INCLUSION INDEX

Tracking the issues most affecting
inclusion and belonging in schools.

thegec.education

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INTRODUCTION FROM OUR FOUNDER

From Policy to Practice: Closing the Gap on Inclusion

Over 26,000 voices — from students and staff across every type of school — tell us inclusion is not a statistic, it's a lived experience. These voices remind us that beneath the traditional measures of attainment and attendance lie urgent realities: children who don't feel safe, staff who don't feel they belong, and families still fighting for EHCPs that deliver the support their children deserve.

Nothing About Us Without Us: This second edition of the GEC Inclusion Index has been triangulated through surveys, interviews and research workshops, ensuring that what you read here is grounded in lived experience as well as robust data. By combining quantitative insights with qualitative voices, the Index offers a sharper picture of the barriers shaping education today.

It also lands at a critical moment. Ofsted's new framework places leadership, culture and inclusion under sharper scrutiny. The Education Select Committee is calling out attendance, workload and retention crises. The Schools White Paper promises a system that values belonging and equity, but students and staff are still telling us the gap between policy and practice is widening.

The Index is built on Kaleidoscopic Data — a framework that humanises school data by combining numbers with narratives. This approach reveals the fracture lines hidden by compliance-driven metrics: who feels seen, who feels safe, and who feels shut out. It is not about ticking boxes. It is about listening differently, leading intentionally, and building trust where it is breaking.

The 10 behavioural areas highlighted here are not just “themes” — they are the daily barriers that shape who thrives and who survives in school. They offer leaders a lens to act not only on what Ofsted measures, but on what students and staff actually live. Backed by the GEC Platform's reporting and support model, this Index becomes more than data: it becomes a driver of systemic, sustainable change.

This is our invitation to school leaders, trusts, and policymakers: to lead with empathy, evidence and equity — and to close the gap between what is promised and what is lived.

THE INCLUSION INDEX



THE INCLUSION INDEX

The most important issues for **students** and **staff**, identified from over 26,000 voices and ranked by leaderboard using Kaleidoscopic Data this Autumn Term.

We've identified the **top 10 key behavioural** areas affecting inclusion and belonging in schools today. By combining quantitative and qualitative insights in **Kaleidoscopic Data**, we surface intersectional, lived experiences that are too often hidden.

The GEC Platform supports schools to use the Index through its ongoing report and support model, enabling leaders to see what's working, what's not, and how to build capacity for intentional, evidence-based change.



INCLUSION
Only 12% of students feel fully included in school life

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STUDENTS

The top 10 key behavioural areas affecting student inclusion and belonging in schools.



Rank	Change	Theme	Insight
2	↑5	Attendance	Over 1 in 5 students link poor attendance to not feeling supported
3	↓2	Belonging	Just 18% of students strongly agree they belong at school
4	↑4	Safety	27% of students do not feel safe in some parts of school
5	↓3	Culture	Only 35% of students feel school culture supports difference
6	↑3	Curriculum	33.2% of students feel invisible in the curriculum
7	↓4	Representation	Nearly 3 in 10 students say they don't see themselves represented
8	↓4	Diversity	1 in 4 students say diversity is celebrated only on 'special days'
9	↓4	Teacher Trust	Almost 1 in 3 students say they can't trust teachers with their concerns
10	-	Wider Curriculum	22% of students feel excluded from clubs and trips

STUDENTS: KALEIDOSCOPIC INSIGHTS

The top 10 key behavioural areas affecting student inclusion and belonging in schools. By combining quantitative and qualitative insights in Kaleidoscopic Data, we surface intersectional, lived experiences that are too often hidden.

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1 INCLUSION “Teachers don’t see me. They only see the label.” (Student, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: SEND learners report far lower inclusion (33% strongly disagree teachers listen, vs 8.7% non-SEND). Non-disclosure students are also at risk (21.2% feel heard). GEC View: Inclusion is front and centre in the new Ofsted scorecards, with “equity” flagged as a core inspection lens. Schools are under pressure to evidence inclusion strategies beyond policy statements.	2 ATTENDANCE “I miss school when I feel like no one notices if I’m there.” (Student, Primary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Students eligible for FSM report attendance barriers at nearly 2x the rate of peers; Global Majority students flag safety/representation as linked to disengagement. GEC View: Attendance is dominating headlines, with persistent absence inquiries in the Education Select Committee. Trust boards are prioritising attendance interventions as a KPI.	3 BELONGING “I come here every day, but it doesn’t feel like my place.” (Student, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Belonging is lowest among Global Majority girls in secondary schools and students identifying as LGBTQ+, with marked regional variation (urban vs coastal). GEC View: Belonging underpins attendance and wellbeing. Despite its prominence in DfE strategy, implementation is inconsistent across trusts.	4 SAFETY “The corridor is where I get called names, not the classroom” (Student, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Muslim students and LGBTQ+ students report disproportionately higher harassment, especially in unstructured spaces (corridors, playgrounds). GEC View: Safety is rising up the Index because safeguarding failures are under the national spotlight. Schools are now expected to evidence whole-school safeguarding cultures, not just compliance policies.	5 CULTURE “The rules are for some of us, not all of us.” (Student, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Global Majority and SEND students report the lowest culture scores. Trust-level variation highlights structural inequities. GEC View: Culture was #2 in the first edition. Its return signals that students still experience double standards and exclusionary climates, even when not labelled “culture” explicitly.
6 CURRICULUM “We never learn about people like me in lessons.” (Student, Global Majority, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Global Majority students are 3x more likely to feel absent from the curriculum; students with SEND report subjects often “don’t fit” their needs. GEC View: Education Select scrutiny and Ofsted’s curriculum reviews demand evidence of representation. Curriculum invisibility continues to undermine engagement.	7 REPRESENTATION “It’s like we don’t exist in the books or displays.” (Student, Primary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Representation gaps are widest in rural and coastal schools; Global Majority and SEND learners report the lowest scores. GEC View: Representation has slipped from its first-edition ranking as schools shift focus to attendance/behaviour. Visibility is deprioritised in inspection frameworks, leaving students feeling unseen.	8 DIVERSITY “We do posters for Black History Month, then it’s forgotten.” (Student, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Students from Global Majority backgrounds consistently perceive tokenism; LGBTQ+ students note Pride visibility is often confined to June. GEC View: National debate highlights “performative inclusion” versus embedded diversity. The DfE’s equity metrics and Select Committee hearings on race equity are exposing the gap between policy talk and classroom practice. Students notice when diversity is surface-level.	9 TEACHER TRUST “If I tell a teacher, it just goes round the staffroom.” (Student, Secondary) Kaleidoscopic Data: Trust scores are lowest among students with invisible disabilities and Global Majority boys in secondary settings, where concerns are often minimised. GEC View: Teacher trust underpins belonging and safety. With workforce pressures, disputes, and rising workload, relational capital between teachers and students is deteriorating.	10 WIDER CURRICULUM “I’d love to join, but it’s not for people like me” (Student, SEND, Primary) Kaleidoscopic Data: SEND learners are over-represented here, with cost and accessibility as barriers. FSM students cite affordability of trips as the main block. GEC View: The Opportunity for All White Paper frames enrichment as a leveller, yet the Index shows exclusion persists. Trusts are under scrutiny for how equitable their enrichment offers are – with governors and Ofsted asking whether clubs and trips genuinely serve all pupils.

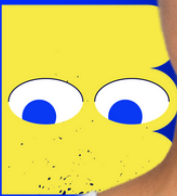
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LEADERSHIP AND VALUES
Only 41% of staff say leaders consistently model inclusion

THE INCLUSION INDEX

STAFF
The top 10 key behavioural areas affecting staff inclusion and belonging in schools.



Rank	Change	Theme	Insight
2	↑5	Flexible Working	Just 38% of staff report access to flexible options
3	↓1	Culture	Fewer than 1 in 3 (31%) feel safe to challenge poor practice without repercussions
4	↓3	Belonging	Only 27% of staff strongly agree they belong in their workplace
5	-	Professional Development	Only 44% say CPD meets their needs, unchanged since 2023
6	↑3	Curriculum	Just 36% of staff say their subject reflects student diversity
7	↓4	Professional Opportunities	Only 32% believe promotion opportunities are fair
8	-	Harassment and Discrimination	18% report experiencing or witnessing harassment or discrimination in the past year
9	↓3	Staff Provisions	Only 35% of staff say wellbeing provisions meet their needs
10	-	Wider Curriculum	Only 26% of staff feel clubs and trips are adequately resourced

STAFF: KALEIDOSCOPIC INSIGHTS

The top 10 key behavioural areas affecting staff inclusion and belonging in schools
By combining quantitative and qualitative insights in Kaleidoscopic Data, we surface intersectional, lived experiences that are too often hidden.

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1

LEADERSHIP AND VALUES

“Leaders talk about inclusion in assemblies, but it’s not lived in our staffroom.” (Teacher, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Global Majority and LGBTQ+ staff report trust scores up to 20 points lower than White peers. FE staff report the weakest trust overall.

GEC View: Leadership values are the backbone of inclusion, but staff voice shows inconsistent follow-through. With Ofsted’s leadership & culture focus & the Education Select Committee spotlighting retention, gaps in leadership credibility are now the single biggest risk to workforce stability and inclusive practice.

6

CURRICULUM

“We’ve started reviewing texts, and it finally reflects our kids.” (Teacher, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: MATs with published DEI curriculum principles show gains; rural primaries lag. SEND staff note curricula often lack accessibility alignment.

GEC View: Select Committee focus on curriculum equity and Ofsted’s “intent, implementation, impact” require evidence of inclusive design. Patchy delivery remains a major barrier.

2

FLEXIBLE WORKING

“It’s the first year I haven’t had to choose between my job and my children.” (Teacher, Primary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Women and carers benefit most; staff in exam-heavy subjects and senior leadership remain excluded. Early-career teachers report openness but little clarity.

GEC View: Without flexibility, schools bleed talent. The DfE’s Flexible Working Guidance and union campaigns highlight intent, but patchy access keeps this a top retention barrier.

7

PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

“Part-time or different, you don’t move up.” (Teacher, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Women with caring responsibilities and staff of colour report the steepest drops. Part-time staff are almost absent from SLT pipelines.

GEC View: Union data on progression inequities and Ofsted governance reviews highlight blocked talent pathways — a barrier to both equity and retention.

3

CULTURE

“There’s no space to challenge toxic behaviours.” (Middle Leader, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Global Majority staff and ECTs report the lowest scores; microaggressions and inequitable discipline policies are common flashpoints.

GEC View: Unsafe cultures are a driver of attrition. Select Committee hearings and union ballots make clear: poor culture is not a soft issue, it’s a hard cost to the system.

8

HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

“Microaggression brushed off as banter wears you down.” (TA, Primary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Staff of colour, disabled colleagues, and LGBTQ+ staff face the highest exposure to discriminatory behaviours, often linked to weak leadership accountability.

GEC View: Year-on-year stagnation shows that policies alone are not shifting workplace culture. Persistent bias and microaggressions continue to erode morale, trust, and retention, especially for underrepresented groups.

4

BELONGING

“I feel like a visitor in my own staffroom.” (Teaching Assistant, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: LGBTQ+ staff and Global Majority colleagues report belonging scores 15 points lower than peers. Non-teaching staff feel the least included.

GEC View: Belonging is a predictor of retention and wellbeing. With unions calling for psychological safety and Ofsted linking culture to safeguarding, low belonging is a red flag.

9

STAFF PROVISIONS

“We’ve got mental health posters, but no actual support.” (Teacher, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: SEND support staff and supply teachers report the weakest access to counselling, workload adjustments, and safe spaces.

GEC View: With attrition and burnout dominating headlines, staff provisions are seen as performative. Unions demand enforceable workload protections, while Ofsted now probes wellbeing under leadership.

5

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“We get training, but it’s rarely about inclusion.” (Support Staff, Primary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Support staff and FE staff report the lowest CPD access. CPD on inclusion is most present in MATs with EDI champions.

GEC View: Despite DfE CPD frameworks and Ofsted’s subject reviews, professional learning is not equitably distributed — a hidden barrier to improvement.

10

WIDER CURRICULUM

“We’re asked to run trips, but funding and time are barriers.” (Teacher, Secondary)

Kaleidoscopic Data: Urban MATs show small gains, but rural and coastal schools decline due to transport/funding.

GEC View: Cost-of-living pressures and administrative burdens mean enrichment is still undervalued — a barrier to inclusion despite policy promises.

EXPERT VIEW



**DR FIONA AUBREY-SMITH - EDD MA(ED) MMUS PGCE
BA(HONS) FRSA FCCT FHEA**

FOUNDER, ONE LIFE LEARNING & EDUFUTURIST OF THE YEAR (2025)
NAMED BY EDUCATION BUSINESS AS ONE OF THE 50 MOST
INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN EDUCATION (2025)

An embedded approach to inclusion goes beyond policies, representation, intentions and actions, and permeates organisational culture, the words that we use, and the thoughts that we have every single day.

That's why the work of the Global Equality Collective is such a powerful changemaker - demonstrating real, practical, and purposeful ways to champion every voice - not just those who already know how to make themselves heard.

The Inclusion Index is not just a report publishing a huge set of survey results, it is an academically robust, forensic dataset, which offers meaningful insights for leaders who seek to close the inclusion gap, and clear signposts about where to prioritise time and energy in order to create the greatest impact on the people who matter most - our students.

Most schools aim for their students to feel a sense of belonging - with traditional ideas focusing on curriculum and special events, pastoral care, and community engagement. But, as The Inclusion Index 2025 shows us, in a contemporary world - with Generation Alpha and Gen Z filling our classrooms - are those good intentions really having the impact that they need to? With 82% of students feeling that they do not belong at school, and a third of students feeling invisible in the curriculum, just how relevant is today's provision for today's young people?

Furthermore, with only 41% of staff believing that leaders consistently model inclusion, and only 27% of staff feeling like they belong in the workplace, these issues are not just limited to students, but are potentially experienced by a majority of those across our sector.

Now is the time for change, and as Ghandi taught us, change begins within. The Inclusion Index 2025 provides us with high quality evidence about where we need to focus our attention, and as the saying goes, when we know better, we ought to do better. So our collective call to action is for us to share a commitment to move beyond listening, to really hearing these messages and doing something about them.

“Together, let's make the world that we all share, a more meaningfully inclusive experience for every single human being within it.”

Dr Fiona Aubrey-Smith



WHAT THE LATEST VERSION OF THE INDEX SHOWS

The Index presents two ranked leaderboards, one for **Students** and the other for **Staff**, highlighting the top 10 barriers affecting inclusion and belonging in schools today.

HOW INCLUSION IS LIVED AND FELT EVERY DAY

Drawing on over 1.8 million data points, triangulated with interviews and research workshops, this Index surfaces the real barriers shaping daily school life. For students, the most urgent issues are Inclusion, Attendance, Belonging, and Safety, while for staff they are Leadership & Values, Flexible Working, and Culture. These findings reveal that inclusion is not abstract — it is lived and felt in classrooms, corridors, and staffrooms every day.

The Index also shows where progress is fragile and where gaps are widening. While some areas (such as curriculum and flexible working) show improvement, the majority of students and staff still report feeling unheard, unseen, or unsupported. The Index gives leaders a lens to move beyond compliance and towards culture — acting not just on what is measured, but on what is experienced.

The **↑** and **↓** arrows show how each inclusion issue ranks against the previous release of the Inclusion Index.

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THE
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INDEX**





REPORT AND SUPPORT

THE INCLUSION INDEX

The Index evidences how inclusion is felt, not just planned – helping leaders demonstrate both compliance and culture.

The Index is more than a diagnostic – it is the starting point for action. The GEC Platform's Report & Support model allows schools and trusts to dig deeper into their own data, benchmark against national findings, and access tailored resources to close gaps in practice.

By translating lived experience into action-focused insights, the Inclusion Index: Edition 2 humanises data, placing feelings, behaviours, and marginalised voices at the heart of school improvement. It provides a clear, evidence-based framework to prioritise inclusion, benchmark progress, and make decisions rooted in real community need.

Aligned with Ofsted's renewed focus on leadership, culture and inclusion, the Index shows where intent translates into lived experience – and where it does not. It shifts inclusion from principle to practice, enabling schools to evidence both compliance and culture.

Through the GEC Platform's ongoing Report & Support model, schools and trusts can turn findings into action: identifying strengths, closing gaps, and building capacity for intentional, evidence-based inclusion. This ensures inclusion is not just measured, but actively improved – closing the gap between policy and practice, inspection and experience.

THE DATA

Created from the voices of over 26,000 students and staff, this Index identifies 10 key behavioural areas.

The 26,000 Voices report is a landmark study, capturing the lived experiences of students, staff, and communities across the educational landscape.

Developed by doctoral researcher and GEC Founder, Dr Nicole Ponsford, and triangulated through surveys, interviews, and research workshops, the report brings together perspectives from over 350 schools and over 26,000 participants. It reveals where inclusion is working, where it is fragile, and where gaps are widening.

Built on the GEC Platform, an EdTech solution designed to amplify diverse voices, the research provides schools and trusts with actionable insights that go beyond compliance. It highlights the 10 behavioural areas that most affect inclusion, belonging, and equity, aligning with Ofsted's focus on leadership, culture and lived experience.

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[Get the report](#)

READY TO TAKE ACTION?

Understand what students and staff really think about inclusion.

The GEC provides the world's first award-winning online framework, survey and resources, designed to give schools and trusts a cultural health check and a clear, evidence-based action plan for improvement.

NEED SUPPORT TURNING INSIGHT INTO ACTION?

The GEC Platform enables you to gather your own data, benchmark against national findings, and access targeted support to drive data-driven, sustainable change.

From capturing hidden voices to closing gaps in leadership, culture and belonging, the GEC helps schools move beyond compliance to build capacity for intentional inclusion and improvement.

Start today at thegec.education

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