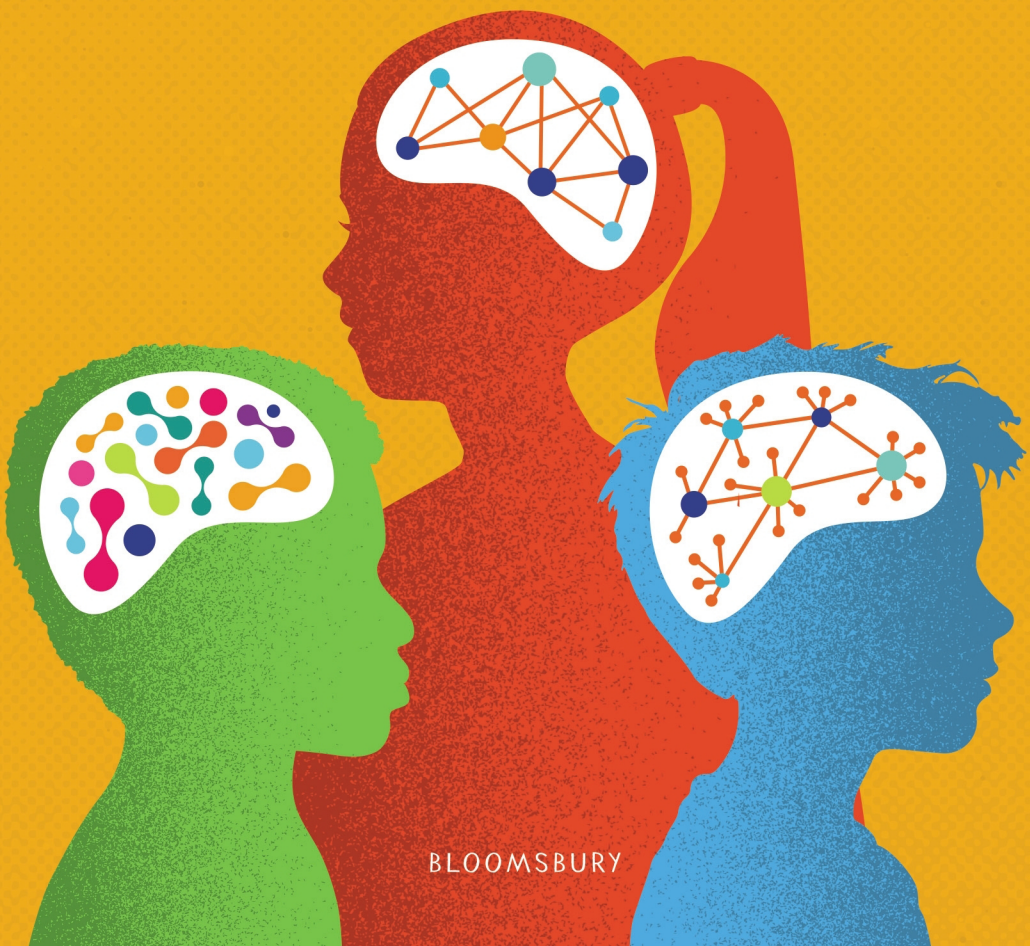
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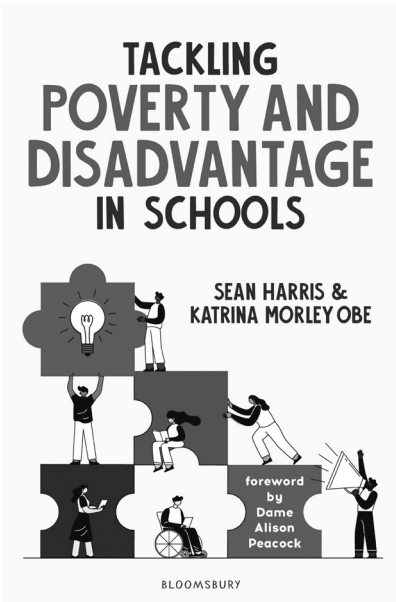
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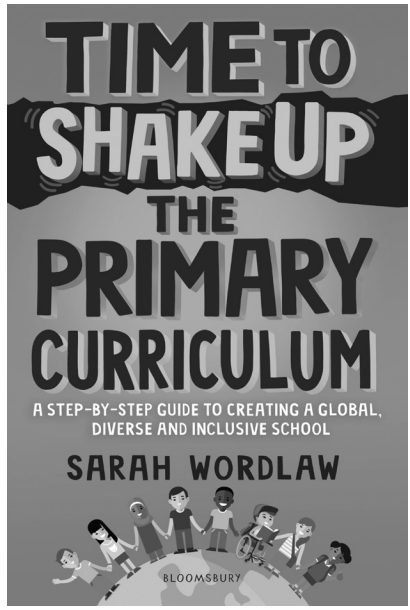


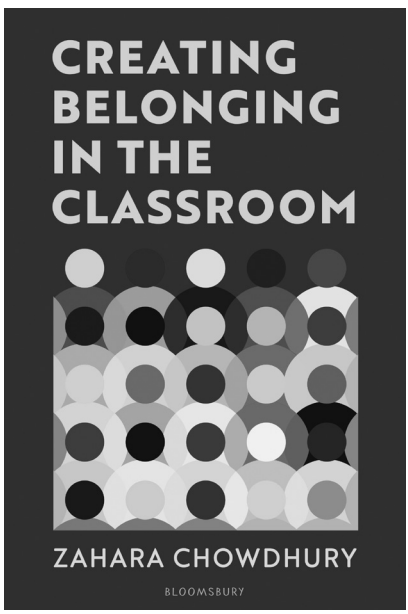
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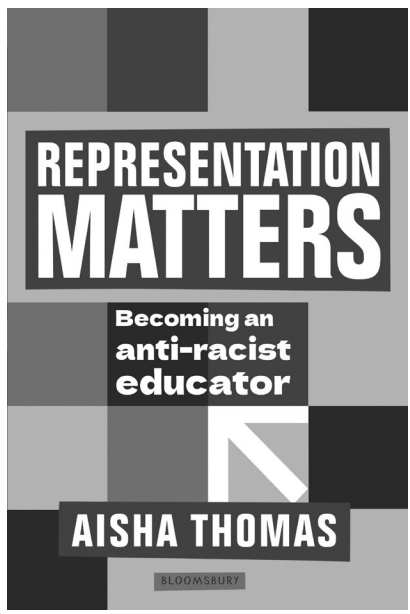
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Creating classrooms where every learner can thrive

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Contents

Acknowledgements 6
Prologue 8
Introduction 10
About this book 19
How to use this book 21

PART 1 FOUNDATIONS 29

1 How brains work differently 31
2 The need to belong 57

PART 2 CORE ELEMENTS OF NEUROINCLUSIVE PRACTICE 81

3 Element 1 – Tuning in 83
4 Element 2 – Settling 105
5 Element 3 – Naming 129
6 Element 4 – Strategising 151
7 Element 5 – Reinforcing 175

PART 3 THE WIDER CONTEXT 191

8 Building bridges 193
9 Bringing it all together 215

Glossary 239
References 243
Index 253

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And finally, to my **dad**, whom we lost two years ago. As a boy at boarding school, he was so othered because of his differences that his only friend was a piece of rope he spoke to when he climbed into a tree. That image stays with me. It reminds me why this work matters; why belonging, above all else, must be the foundation of education.

Thank you, all of you, for helping me to write this book.

Prologue

This book is the culmination of a lifetime spent wondering how education could be different, more human, more hopeful, more genuinely inclusive.

That wondering began early. As a young person, I often felt out of step with what school seemed to value. I was curious, driven and full of ideas, but because I didn't fit the mould, I was made to feel I wasn't good enough. I know what it's like to feel misunderstood in an environment that sees difference as a problem to be fixed. And I know I wasn't alone in that.

I trained as a teacher because I believed schools could be places of possibility. But I soon realised that the very systems I hoped to change from within were still built on outdated ideas about learning, behaviour and human development – ideas that left little room for nuance, compassion or diversity.

So I stepped alongside the system and began working one-to-one with students who had been sidelined by it. That's where everything started to shift. Again and again, I saw bright, capable students who were overwhelmed by the demands of school; not because they lacked intelligence, but because no one had ever taught them how to work with their brains or recognised how disabling the environment could be.

One student, in particular, has stayed with me. She'd been hospitalised for anxiety and suicidal ideation, despite achieving the highest-ever score on Oxford University's Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA). Her psychiatrist recommended a book: *Smart but Scattered Teens* (Dawson et al., 2013). As I read it, everything clicked. It gave me a language for what I'd been witnessing for years: executive function skills. It was a watershed moment.

Fuelled by a blend of impulsivity and goal-directed persistence, I flew to the US and attended training with Dr Peg Dawson, one of the authors of the book. Not one to miss an opportunity, I took her out to lunch and invited her to bring her work to London. That was in 2015. I've never looked back.

Since then, I've devoted myself to understanding how we can teach in ways that align with what we now know about the brain, about development and about the deep need all of us have to feel safe, seen and supported.

I've been lucky to work alongside remarkable educators and thought partners, and to see real shifts in practice – ones that change lives. I've also encountered resistance, scepticism and dismissal. Early on, this stung. But over time, I've come to see something else beneath it: fear.

Many professionals have spent their careers doing what they thought was right. When we ask them to abandon old ideas, it can feel threatening. What looks like defensiveness is often dysregulation, or what we will refer to as a protective state – a nervous system protecting itself. Once I understood that, I stopped taking it personally. I started responding with curiosity and compassion.

This work asks us to rethink long-held beliefs. It invites us to pause before reacting, to lean into discomfort and to prioritise connection over compliance. That's not easy. But it is powerful.

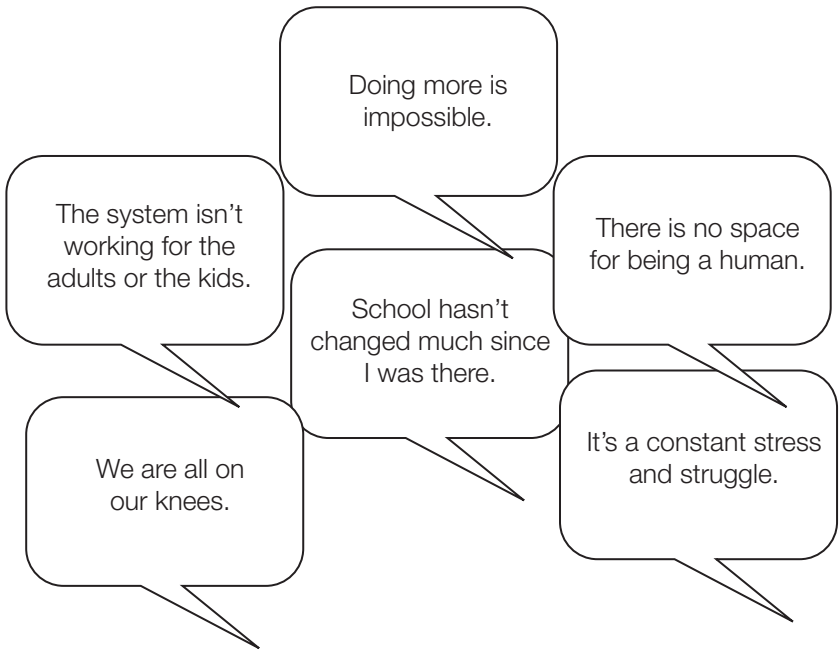
Because when we centre on relationships and humanity, when we teach in ways that expect difference, embrace difficulty and support students to build insight and self-trust, we don't just improve outcomes: we give young people the chance to thrive as *themselves*.

This book is a practical guide for those ready to begin or continue that work. It draws on research, real classrooms and the wisdom of lived experience. It's full of tools. But more than that, it's grounded in a belief I hold tightly: that change is not only possible, but already underway.

Despite everything I've seen, I remain hopeful. That quiet niggle in my heart, the sense that this is worth fighting for, has only grown louder over time. And I know I'm not alone in that.

Thank you for reading this book. I can't wait to see where it takes us – together.

Introduction



We know it's not working but a path forward is not yet clear.

There has to be a better way

Something is shifting.

In classrooms across the world, educators are beginning to see more clearly what they've long felt: children do not all learn the same way. Neurodiversity is no longer a fringe idea: it's entering mainstream conversations about education, parenting and mental health. Students are speaking up about their needs. Families are asking better questions, and schools are trying to respond.

But the systems haven't caught up.

Support is still too often locked behind diagnostic labels: labels that are difficult to access, unequally distributed and often misunderstood. Even

though the law in many countries (including the UK) says support should be provided at the point of need, not the point of diagnosis, practice hasn't caught up with principle. As teacher and researcher Wood (2019) points out, schools are often working within rigid systems that prioritise medicalised labels over meaningful, needs-based support. Old systems are slow to change. Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) departments remain siloed. And policy language doesn't always translate into classroom reality.

Families feel the impact every day.

Many parents and carers of neurodivergent children are desperate not to see history repeat itself. Their own school years may have been marked by exclusion, confusion or shame, and now they're watching their children face the same barriers. They come to meetings already worn down – by waiting lists, gatekeeping, referrals that go nowhere or support that arrives too late. Some feel unheard. Some feel blamed. Some are angry because they've run out of ways to make the system really see them, their child and what they need (Costello et al., 2023).

When communication falters, trust can begin to erode. Meetings that could be collaborative become tense. Everyone retreats into roles: the parent or carer advocating; the teacher defending; the system insisting. Compassion gets squeezed out by protocols and in the process, something important is lost: the chance to work together for the child in front of them.

Caught in the middle of it all are the teachers.

The burden of a system that doesn't meet children's needs falls hardest on those working most closely with them. Teachers are not the ones designing policy, but they are the ones delivering it. They are adapting on the fly, navigating contradictory expectations and trying to meet each student where they are while juggling 30 different needs, a behaviour policy and a curriculum that rarely makes space for complexity. As the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report notes, teachers frequently feel overwhelmed by workload, under-supported in meeting diverse needs and excluded from decisions that shape their day-to-day practice (Mclean and Worth, 2025).

They are reading into the night, attending CPD in their own time, pouring everything they have into their classrooms and still being told it's not

enough. The result? They're burning out. Recent figures paint a stark picture:

- Nearly 40,800 teachers left the profession in 2023–24 in England alone; about 9% of the workforce (Department for Education, DfE, 2025b).
- Early Career Teachers (ECTs) are leaving at alarming rates: around 10% within the first year and over 20% by year two (DfE, 2025b).
- A reported 77% of teachers have work-related mental health symptoms, including insomnia, anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Education Support, 2024).
- Around 82% of teachers say student and parent behaviour is negatively impacting their wellbeing (Education Support, 2024).
- Over one third are considering leaving the profession in the next year (DfE, 2024b).

This isn't about effort. Educators are not lacking in care, skill or motivation. But too often, they're working within systems that make it difficult to teach in the way they long to – with the flexibility, creativity and responsiveness every student deserves. What's needed now is a shift: one that equips educators with the pedagogical tools and professional insights and relationships to meet the child in front of them and to feel confident doing so.



Case study

Miss Harris (Autumn term)

It's just after lunch on a damp Thursday in November. The corridors hum with energy as the students spill back into the building. Miss Harris stands at the door of her classroom, smiling as her Year 9 class drifts in; some dragging their feet, some shoving one another, a few sliding past without even a glance.

'Phones away, please,' she says gently, her voice steady, calm. 'Coats off. Let's get ready to write.'

This is her third year of teaching and her second school. She's learned not to expect the same from every student. She's worked

hard to understand behaviour through a trauma-informed lens. She's read the books, done the CPD and adapted her practice. She believes in the power of education and is determined to help her classes achieve their best.

Miss Harris has 33 students in this class. Three months into the school year, she's getting familiar with the needs of many of them. Amira is autistic and struggles to get started. Liam has dyslexia but loves humour. Jay lives with foster carers. Miss Harris knows that Jay recently had contact with his birth mother, who has a history of substance use challenges. His behaviour since half term has been the talk of the staffroom. Caleb and Eva are under the care of social services and life at home is very hard. Jenny, Kiren and Casey have ADHD. The vast majority of the class engage in learning and are making sufficient progress.

Today, Miss Harris has carefully planned a writing lesson with each of her students in mind. She's chosen a task that offers structure without rigidity, knowing that Amira needs gentle prompts to get going, Liam benefits from humour and open-endedness and Jenny, Kiren and Casey need short, stimulating bursts to maintain focus. For Jay, she's included sentence stems and a low-pressure entry point, hoping it might offer just enough safety for him to engage. It's a plan built from understanding; an attempt to anticipate needs and help all students to access the learning.

On the board is the task: 'Quick Write: Would you rather have the ability to fly or be invisible? Why?' Underneath, three sentence stems:

- I would rather…
- This would help me because…
- A problem with this ability might be…

It's a low-stakes, creative warm-up. Just five minutes designed to re-engage their brains and get pens moving. It's worked before.

Miss Harris gives the instruction as students settle: 'Five minutes. Just jot down your thoughts. There's no right answer. Just get into writing mode.'

She moves around the room with quiet encouragement.

At Amira's table, she pauses. 'I like your thinking face. Want to say it out loud and I'll help you to get started?' Amira shrugs but offers a tiny smile. That's enough for her to pick up her pen and start writing.

At Liam's table, she sees a funny answer: something about being invisible so he can steal sweets. She leans in: 'That's great. All the sweets you could imagine! Can you add what the downside might be?' Liam grins and keeps writing.

It's not perfect, it never is, but they're writing. Most of them, anyway.

Jay is staring at the board, jaw clenched. Miss Harris notices and ducks down by his desk. 'Is everything okay, Jay?' she asks. He shrugs and picks up a pen, enough to get her off his back.

Miss Harris starts to transition the class to the main task: 'Let's build on your ideas now. Choose one of the creative writing prompts on the board and write the opening paragraph of a story. Remember to include sensory details and at least one character.'

Jay mutters, 'This is stupid.'

She approaches again, crouching slightly beside him. 'Can I help you choose one?'

Jay's eyes flick towards her, then away. 'This whole thing's pointless. No one gives a c**p what I think anyway.'

Someone across the room laughs, not unkindly, just nervously.

Miss Harris straightens up slightly. 'Jay, it's OK to be frustrated. You're not in trouble. Let's step outside and chat.'

Jay shakes his head. 'You just want me out of the room.'

His voice is louder now.

'You always do this. You pretend to care. But really, you just want me gone.'

Miss Harris tries to stay calm. The whole class is watching.

'Jay, I do care. I really do. But right now, we're all trying to focus.'

'I'm not going.'

He pushes back his chair loudly. 'You want me gone? Fine.'

He storms out and strides up and down the corridor.

The classroom is silent.

Miss Harris presses the button for the Reflection Room. Jay's been there four times this term. Nothing's changed. It doesn't work,

but she is bound by the behaviour policy to follow protocol. As she waits, she sighs inwardly, already dreading the mandatory online form she'll have to complete later: long and clinical, full of tick boxes and required fields. There's nowhere to record what either of them felt – just what she did and how he responded.

She turns back to the class. 'Let's reset,' she says quietly. 'This room is a place for learning. Back to your writing.'

The air has shifted. The calm is gone.

Amira's tapping again. Liam's distracted. Eva has her head on the table.

Still, she circles the room, gently nudging students forward.

At Riley's table, she notices a drawing in the margin. 'I love the detail here,' she says. 'Can we turn this scene into words?'

He nods. It's not enough to get him started, but with 31 other students in the class she doesn't have the luxury of time to sit with him and help unpack why writing feels so hard.

Partway through the lesson, a member of staff arrives to escort Jay to the Reflection Room. Miss Harris describes what happened and he leaves with a look of resignation in his eyes.

She returns to the class.

She reads a story she has prepared aloud. A few students listen. A couple laugh at the ending, as she'd hoped. She smiles; she put lots of thought into making it relevant and funny. She invites volunteers to share theirs. No one does. She doesn't push, wanting students to feel psychologically safe before speaking in front of their peers. Instead, she invites them to share in pairs.

The final ten minutes are calmer. Several students have a paragraph. She praises their efforts sincerely:

'You set the mood beautifully here.'

'This character feels real.'

'Excellent metaphor!'

As the bell rings, she closes the lesson: 'Thanks for sticking with it today. Writing isn't easy. I appreciate the effort you've made.'

As they leave, one student mutters, 'That was boring.' Most are talking about their plans for after school. Someone quietly drops their work on her desk.

Later, there will be two emails.

One parent complains their child 'feels unsafe in class' because of Jay: 'I send my daughter to school to learn, not to sit in fear.'

Another from Jay's foster carers says he's being 'picked on' by staff. 'He felt humiliated in front of everyone. We've explained how hard he's finding things. He just needs some compassion.'

No one mentions the sentence stems, the encouragement, the hours she spent planning and preparing for the lesson or the way she breathed through her own frustration.

There is also a follow-up request from the behaviour team for a restorative conversation. Miss Harris knows it's scheduled for Friday morning. She's expected to meet with Jay, reflect on what happened and repair the rupture.

She starts mentally preparing what she will say: 'Jay, I know yesterday was hard. I want to understand what was going on for you. You matter to me. I'd like to work out how we can make things better together.'

She walks to the staffroom. Shoulders tight. Throat sore. She'll sit through a meeting. She'll drive home in silence. She'll wonder: Is it me? Am I failing them?

But deep down, behind the exhaustion and doubt, a quiet ember remains: There has to be a better way.



It can all feel so overwhelming.

Note: *Miss Harris had done everything she could. But she didn't have the right scaffolding beneath her: no consistent framework for noticing regulation, no structure for helping students to name what was going on, no space to connect before jumping into strategy. Her story isn't unusual. It's the daily reality of thousands of educators, trying to teach in a system that wasn't designed for difference.*

The good news: there is another way.

The shift to truly adaptive teaching

Miss Harris's story is not an outlier. It's the story of a dedicated teacher trying to do the right thing, without the right tools. And that's where so many educators find themselves: doing their best within systems that weren't designed for difference.

But what if they had been? What if the difference wasn't something to work around, but something to plan for?

That's the promise of truly adaptive teaching. Not an endless cycle of differentiation or a growing list of 'interventions', but a mindset and method that treats variability as part of the plan from the very beginning. A way of teaching that doesn't depend on knowing every possible diagnosis or memorising every profile, but instead gives educators a framework for noticing, responding and adapting, moment by moment, student by student.

Adaptive teaching isn't about perfect personalisation. It's not about crafting 30 versions of every lesson or meeting every need in every moment. It's about knowing where to start. It's about creating learning environments that are flexible enough to accommodate human variation and stable enough to make students feel safe.

At its heart, this is a human process.

It begins with curiosity: about what's happening in a student's body, not just their behaviour. It builds connection: through co-regulation, compassion and a shared language for challenge. And it grows capacity: helping students to understand how their brain works, what helps them to thrive and how to advocate for themselves in school and far beyond it.

When we teach children how to tune into themselves, how to notice protective behaviour and name what's going on inside, and how to ask for what they need and respond supportively to others, we're not just preparing them for exams – we're preparing them for life. These are the skills that underpin healthy relationships, meaningful work and personal wellbeing. A child who learns that their brain is not broken but different, and learns how to work with it, is far more likely to carry confidence and self-compassion into adulthood. They become better equipped to advocate for themselves, to navigate environments that weren't built with them in mind and to contribute meaningfully to the communities they're part of.

And as we build classrooms around this understanding, we begin to reshape society itself.

Education has always been more than curriculum delivery. It's a mirror of our values and a lever for change. When we create inclusive learning environments, we don't just support individual children; we begin to rewrite the norms that govern workplaces, healthcare systems, legal processes and public discourse. The young people in our classrooms today are tomorrow's employers, doctors, policymakers, carers and community members. A generation who grow up feeling seen and supported, who understand the richness of human variation, will carry that mindset with them into every sector. Inclusion begins in school. But its impact can ripple far beyond.

Overheard in the classroom

Hear what students have to say about experiencing this approach:

'Before I didn't notice when my body was getting worried. Now I can tell when my chest feels tight, and I know I need a break.' Year 5 autistic student

'When my teacher sat next to me without hurrying me, I felt calmer.' Year 2 ADHD student

'Most teachers get in my face. Miss Collins just gets it. She gives me a look like she gets it and gives me space.' Year 10 student at risk of exclusion

'Learning about how my brain works has been amazing. I feel so much more aware of what's going on inside and what I can do when my thoughts start to spiral.' Year 12 student with anxiety

'Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one who gets stuck. Hearing others say they do too made me feel better.' Year 4 student with SEMH needs

'I used to think asking for help meant I wasn't clever. Now I know it means I'm learning how I learn.' Year 10 autistic student

About this book

This book is a practical guide for educators who want to do things differently: not by working harder, but by working more humanely. It offers a new foundation for inclusive practice: one that honours student diversity, supports teacher wellbeing and builds classroom cultures rooted in trust, safety and growth.

You won't find prescriptive checklists, step-by-step programmes or pressure to master every diagnosis or difference. What you *will* find is a framework for noticing what matters, responding with compassion and helping each student and each teacher to build the skills to thrive.

The book is structured in three parts:

Part 1: Foundations

These first two chapters explore the big ideas that underpin neuroinclusive teaching and why we need it now more than ever.

- **1: How brains work differently** – introducing the science of executive function, regulation and variability. It explains why traditional models of teaching and behaviour often fall short.
- **2: The need to belong** – exploring the vital role of safety, agency and belonging in learning. Without them, no strategy or curriculum will ever fully land.

Part 2: Core elements of neuroinclusive practice

These five chapters form the heart of the book. Each one introduces a key element of adaptive teaching: a step in the developmental process that helps students to become active participants in their own learning.

- **Element 1 – Tuning in:** building interoceptive awareness for self-regulation and learning.

- **Element 2 – Settling:** meeting protective behaviour with curiosity and co-regulation.
- **Element 3 – Naming:** building executive function literacy through shared language.
- **Element 4 – Strategising:** using mental contrasting to build autonomy and flexible thinking.
- **Element 5 – Reinforcing:** turning strategies into sustainable habits.

Each element builds on the one before. While you can dip in and out, the sequence is designed to follow the natural development of trust, insight and skill-building over time.

Part 3: The wider context

In the final chapters, we zoom out. Neuroinclusive practice doesn't happen in isolation; it's shaped by relationships, systems and culture.

- **8: Building bridges** – strengthening partnerships with parents and carers to support neurodivergent families.
- **9: Bringing it all together** – practical next steps, implementation guidance and ways to keep this work sustainable and real.

This is not a book about being perfect. It's about being *prepared*. Prepared to meet complexity with curiosity. Prepared to see behaviour as communication. Prepared to support diverse learners, not with superhuman effort, but with a shared, sustainable framework that lifts the weight from everyone's shoulders.

How to use this book

Some of the ideas in this book might be new to you. Others may feel familiar, perhaps even affirming practices you've instinctively developed over years of working with students. You don't need to start from scratch. The aim is not to overhaul your teaching, but to offer a new lens that helps you to make sense of what's already working and build from there with clarity and confidence.

To help you make the most of this book, each chapter begins with a 'Choose Your Own Journey' section. This lets you jump to the section that best fits your needs, whether you want to dive into research, reflect on your own practice, try something new tomorrow or learn through case studies.

You'll also find a set of icons used throughout the chapters to guide your reading:

-  Research highlights
-  Developmental insights
-  Why this matters
-  Practical strategies
-  Activities
-  Case studies
-  Further reading and resources
-  Reflection prompts
-  Quick wins
-  Online resources

Online resources can be found at bloomsbury.pub/neuroinclusive-educator.



You can read this book cover to cover or dip into the sections that feel most relevant right now. However you choose to use it, I hope it brings reassurance, inspiration and renewed energy, not just for your students, but for yourself.

A note on language

Language shapes what we notice, how we interpret behaviour and where we place responsibility. The terms used in this book have been chosen carefully, not to be prescriptive, but to support curiosity, dignity, and understanding. Language is always evolving, and readers are encouraged to remain attentive to the words they use, the assumptions those words carry, and the impact they have on the people around them.

Throughout the book, I primarily use identity-first language, such as *autistic person*, rather than person-first constructions. This reflects the preference of many autistic people and neurodivergent communities, for whom neurotype is not an add-on but a fundamental part of identity and lived experience. Where personal preferences differ, those preferences should always be respected.

I also use the terms neurodiversity and neurodivergent with care. Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in human brains and minds, while neurodivergent describes people whose cognitive profiles diverge from dominant social norms. These terms are not diagnoses, nor do they imply deficit. They are explored in more depth in Chapter 1, where the wider framework of human variation and inclusion is introduced.

Finally, you will notice that I use the terms protective state, protective behaviour, and protective response rather than the more commonly used *dysregulation*. This is a deliberate choice. These terms reflect an understanding of behaviour as the nervous system's attempt to maintain safety in the face of stress, overload, or threat, rather than as evidence of something being 'dys-functional'. Throughout the book, protective language is used consistently to support a neuroaffirmative and relational understanding of behaviour.

A note on case studies and quotes

The case studies and quotes in this book are composite examples, drawn from observed lessons, professional supervision and training conversations I have been involved with over the past decade. They do not represent any one child, teacher or school, and identifying details have been deliberately altered to protect confidentiality.

These case studies and quotes are intended to help readers visualise what neuroinclusive practice can look like in real classrooms, bringing theory into lived, relational contexts. They are not models to be followed exactly, nor prescriptions for 'doing it right'. Instead, they offer illustrations that readers can adapt thoughtfully to their own settings, learners and professional judgement.

Addressing common concerns

Before we dive into the foundations of how brains work, it's worth acknowledging some of the doubts and questions you might already be holding. If you're feeling unsure about whether this kind of practice is realistic in your setting or whether it's really your role to take it on, you're not alone. Many educators we work with begin in exactly the same place. So let's take a moment to address some of the most common concerns head on.

1. 'The curriculum is overloaded; how can I fit more in?'

That concern is completely valid; educators today are under immense pressure to cover a packed curriculum. But this isn't about *cramming in more*; it's about embedding strategies that *smooth the learning process* and reduce learning barriers over time. When students develop self-awareness, learn strategies for regulating attention and emotions, and gain clarity around how learning works, educators often spend less time managing behaviour or re-teaching concepts.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, Metacognition, 2025) reports that metacognition and self-regulation strategies, when taught explicitly and embedded into learning, can yield around eight additional months of progress making them one of the most effective and efficient teaching approaches available.

2. ‘My older students will laugh or switch off; isn’t this too soft?’

It’s a common concern, but experience and research tell a different story. Educators often begin with scepticism, only to find that teenagers are far more curious than expected about how their brains work. And why wouldn’t they be? They’re already seeking this information, often from social media. Rather than leaving them to piece it together on TikTok, we have an opportunity to offer them real, reliable insight. When this work is framed around science, autonomy, identity and emotional control, and when they see that these are tools adults are using in the workplace too, students tend to lean in. Far from dismissing it, many become deeply engaged.

As psychologists Hohnen and Gilmour explain in *The Incredible Teenage Brain* (2019), understanding what’s happening in their brains can help teenagers to make sense of their emotions, develop empathy and feel more in control. Rather than switching off, many students become more engaged when these practices are introduced with honesty and clarity.

Try framing it like this:

> *‘Our brains are incredible; there are some really simple hacks we can use to get them working* for *us rather than* against *us.’*

That tone shifts things. It invites curiosity and respect, rather than compliance. And over time, even the sceptics often surprise us, not just engaging, but leading.

3. ‘How do I make this part of our everyday routine?’

Change doesn’t need to be dramatic or disruptive. Many educators begin by introducing small routines at natural transition points: after break, before group work or following a challenge. These consistent ‘in-between’ moments may seem minor, but they matter. As teacher and researcher Ball (2009) explains, classrooms are built on discretionary micro-moments; the seemingly small decisions educators make that collectively shape a student’s experience of school.

Whether it’s a calm redirection, a validating glance or a consistent check-in, these moments create rhythm, predictability and connection.

Over time, they become embedded in the flow of the day. And as Wood (2013) found, teacher interactions, even brief ones, can profoundly influence how students see themselves as learners. Involving students in shaping these routines builds ownership and sustainability. Like all habits, the key is consistency, not perfection.

4. 'I don't feel confident leading emotional work.'

You're not alone; many educators feel the same. Emotional literacy, regulation and mental health support were not consistently part of most educators' own training. In fact, UK research highlights just how patchy provision really is. The Foundation for Education Development (FED) National Education Futures 2025 report found that some Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers offer as little as half a day on topics like trauma, neurodiversity or mental health, if they cover them at all. And the DfE's Independent review of CPD (2024a) found that many schools still lack coherent, high-quality development pathways for inclusive and emotional practice, especially beyond the early career phase.

So if this feels unfamiliar or daunting, it's not a personal shortfall – it reflects a wider systemic gap.

You don't have to be an expert to start. Begin with one practice: a check-in, a grounding script, a quiet pause, and offer it with warmth. Practise with a trusted colleague first if it helps. Use a visual aid or a shared prompt. What matters most is your presence and intention. When students sense that emotional work matters to *you*, they begin to trust it too. You don't need to know everything. Just show up with care, one step at a time.

5. 'What if some students don't respond well?'

That's okay. Neuroinclusive practice isn't one-size-fits-all. It's about providing multiple pathways to the same destination. Not every student will connect with the same strategy, genre or language. That's why offering choice matters. Whether it's movement, art, discussion, journaling or tech, the goal is the same: helping each student to understand themselves better and find tools that work for *them*.

This approach reflects the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which research has shown improves engagement, autonomy and outcomes by building flexibility into how content is presented and how students demonstrate understanding (Manly et al., 2024)

6. 'Will families and colleagues support this?'

New approaches can raise questions, especially when they challenge established routines or priorities. But most families and colleagues want what you want: thriving children; and research shows that when teacher and family support are aligned, students experience lower anxiety and higher self-confidence and motivation (He et al., 2025).

Sharing the thinking behind your approach, and inviting curiosity instead of defensiveness, can go a long way. Some educators find it helpful to send home a short explanation or example. Others run informal workshops, share small wins or create joint reflection sessions with colleagues. Change takes time, but it starts with trust and clear communication.

7. 'Isn't this just one more thing on an already impossible list?'

This concern is valid and widely shared. Educators are being asked to do more and more, often without the systems or time to do it well. Neuroinclusive practice isn't about adding pressure. It's about changing the lens: shifting from control to connection, from firefighting to prevention. As the Teaching Commission (2024) states, inclusion shouldn't be treated as an 'add-on'; it must become part of what teaching *is*. Done well, it can reduce the emotional labour of the job, not increase it.

A first step in the right direction

This work can feel daunting. Changing how we see, teach and support students, especially in a system not built for difference, takes courage. It asks us to unlearn, to question and to lead without a clear map of the path forward.

But the very fact that you've picked up this book, that you're curious, open and willing to look again, means you're already part of the change. You're a pioneer in a profession that is slowly but surely shifting. A change-maker in classrooms, corridors and conversations where inclusion is becoming more than a buzzword – it's becoming real.



The hardest part is always the first step.

You won't always get it right. None of us do. But every small shift you make matters. Every child who feels seen, and every moment of safety you co-create, ripples outward.

Whether you're a classroom teacher, teaching assistant, SENCo, leader or simply someone who wants to build a more inclusive future, I'm so glad you're here.

Let's begin.