SAINT JOHN SOUTHWORTH
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

Inclusion Strategy
2026–2027

Strategy information	Detail
Strategy period	September 2026 – August 2027
Review cycle	Annual, with termly implementation monitoring
Next formal review	Summer Term 2027
Trust Board oversight	To be confirmed
Trust Inclusion Lead	To be confirmed

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1. Executive Summary

At Saint John Southworth Catholic Academy Trust (SJSCAT), inclusion is rooted in our Catholic mission and in our belief in the dignity, uniqueness and God-given potential of every child and young person. We understand inclusion not as a separate strand of school improvement, nor as the responsibility of a single professional or department, but as a defining feature of excellent education. High expectations and inclusion are therefore inseparable. Every pupil should be known, valued and able to participate fully in the life of their school, with the teaching, relationships, support and opportunities required to flourish academically, socially, spiritually and personally.

Our schools serve different communities and pupils will encounter different barriers at different points in their education. Some barriers arise from special educational needs or disabilities; others may relate to communication, prior learning, disadvantage, attendance, emotional wellbeing, physical or sensory access, family circumstances or a combination of factors. The Trust's responsibility is to understand these patterns of need and to create schools that anticipate and remove barriers wherever possible rather than waiting for difficulties to become entrenched or for a formal diagnosis to be secured.

The Trust's approach is organised through seven interconnected pillars: Purpose, Prevention, Pedagogy, Participation, Presence, Partnership and Provision. These pillars translate the Department for Education's seven principles of inclusion into a distinctive and memorable SJSCAT framework. They provide a common language for leaders, governors, teachers, support staff, pupils and families, while allowing each academy to respond to the needs of its own community.

This strategy establishes the overarching Trust vision, framework and strategy. Each academy will publish its own Inclusive Mainstream Funding (IMF) table, informed by an analysis of its cohort, the barriers experienced by pupils, the provision already in place and the activities and resources required to strengthen inclusion. The Trust strategy therefore creates consistency of ambition and accountability without assuming that every school requires identical provision.

2. Purpose and National Context

The Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) forms part of the government's programme to support a more inclusive mainstream education system. The Department for Education describes the fund as an additional resource to help schools strengthen their inclusive offer and remove commonly occurring barriers to learning and participation. It is intended to support inclusive universal provision and the early delivery of evidence-based targeted support, including for pupils with SEND. Importantly, the funding is allocated at a setting level rather than as a personal budget attached to individual pupils.

The national direction is significant for SJSCAT because it reinforces a move towards earlier, more flexible and more preventative support. Schools are expected to consider the needs of their whole cohort, including needs that are predictable or commonly occurring, and to identify the approaches most likely to improve access and participation. This means that inclusive practice cannot depend solely upon formal identification, diagnosis or statutory assessment.

For 2026–27, every individual school must publish an Inclusion Strategy Statement by 31 December 2026. The statement must identify activities intended to ease learning and participation barriers and include their budgeted costs. Multi-academy trusts may pool IMF resources where appropriate financial governance is in place, but a separate strategy statement remains necessary for each academy. The Trust will therefore use this document as the common strategic framework within which school-level statements are developed.

The DfE's conditions of grant also make clear that IMF must be used alongside core funding, including the notional SEN budget. It cannot be used for general running costs, capital works, unrelated staff activity or activity that does not align with at least one of the seven national principles. SJSCAT will maintain clear records of income, expenditure and evidence of use, and will ensure that resource decisions can be traced from identified need through to intended pupil impact.

3. Our Catholic Vision for Inclusion

Our approach to inclusion begins with the dignity of the human person. Catholic education calls us to recognise each child as unique, valued and capable of growth. This requires more than access to a school place; it requires genuine belonging, meaningful participation and an unwavering commitment to helping each pupil develop their gifts.

Within SJSCAT, equity does not mean that every pupil receives the same response. It means that barriers are understood and that resources, teaching and support are deployed so that pupils can participate and achieve. We therefore seek to combine high expectations with compassion, challenge with support, and individual responsiveness with a strong common entitlement.

Our ambition is that every SJSCAT school becomes increasingly inclusive by design. This means anticipating difference when curricula, classrooms, routines, enrichment, communication and environments are planned, rather than making inclusion dependent upon retrospective adjustments. Where additional support is required, it should build upon a strong universal offer and promote participation and independence rather than unnecessary separation.

4. Principles Underpinning the Strategy

The Department for Education identifies seven principles of inclusion. SJSCAT adopts all seven as the national framework underpinning this strategy: ambitious leadership and governance; evidence-based support prioritising early intervention; high-quality adaptive teaching and curriculum design; enriching provision beyond the classroom; safe and respectful cultures that foster belonging and attendance; strong partnerships with families and wider services; and inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility.

The Trust does not expect every academy to divide activity or IMF expenditure equally across all seven principles. Priorities should arise from evidence about the school's cohort and the barriers that matter most. A smaller number of well-chosen and well-implemented approaches is likely to be more effective than a large collection of disconnected initiatives.

5. The SJSCAT Seven Pillars of Inclusion

To make the national principles meaningful in day-to-day Trust practice, SJSCAT has translated them into seven pillars. Each pillar has a direct relationship with the DfE framework but uses language that can become part of our shared culture.

SJSCAT Pillar	Strategic meaning	DfE alignment
PURPOSE	Inclusion is deliberately led, governed, resourced and evaluated.	Ambitious leadership and governance
PREVENTION	Needs and barriers are identified early and support is timely and evidence-informed.	Early intervention and evidence-based support
PEDAGOGY	High-quality adaptive teaching and an ambitious accessible curriculum form the universal foundation.	High-quality adaptive teaching and curriculum
PARTICIPATION	All pupils have access to enrichment, wider opportunities, leadership and preparation for life.	Enriching provision beyond the classroom
PRESENCE	Pupils are safe, attend, belong and participate meaningfully in learning.	Safe, respectful culture, belonging and attendance
PARTNERSHIP	Pupils, families, Trust colleagues and external professionals work together.	Partnerships with families and wider services
PROVISION	Physical, sensory, communication, digital and curriculum barriers are anticipated and progressively removed.	Inclusive environments and accessibility

These pillars should be visible within school strategies, improvement planning, professional development, governance reporting and evaluation. They are not separate programmes. Rather, they are lenses through which the Trust tests whether its systems and everyday practices are genuinely inclusive.

6. Understanding Need Across the Trust

Effective inclusion begins with an accurate understanding of need. The Trust will therefore develop a coherent picture of commonly occurring and emerging needs across its academies which will be shared with the Trust board at the half termly standards committee. School leaders will use attainment and progress information, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding and pastoral evidence, SEND profiles, intervention outcomes, pupil and parent voice, case sampling, transition information and professional advice to understand where barriers are occurring.

The Trust will use a school-by-school inclusion heatmap to identify patterns that may benefit from collective action. This is intended to support strategic decision-making rather than rank schools. It will help identify where expertise can be shared, where professional development should be commissioned jointly, and where a Trust-wide response may be more effective than ten separate responses.

Area of need	Illustrative barriers that may require attention
Communication and interaction	Receptive and expressive language, vocabulary, speech and language needs, social communication and interaction.
Cognition and learning	Literacy, numeracy, working memory, processing, executive functioning and gaps in prior learning.
Social, emotional and mental health	Anxiety, regulation, relationships, adversity, behaviour as communication and emotionally based non-attendance.
Sensory, physical and medical	Sensory processing, mobility, hearing, vision, medical access and specialist equipment.
Attendance and belonging	Persistent or severe absence, disengagement, transition difficulties, suspensions and reduced participation.

Disadvantage and vulnerability	The interaction of SEND with disadvantage, care experience, mobility, safeguarding factors and other vulnerabilities.

7. Our Graduated Inclusive Offer

SJSCAT will describe provision through a graduated model of universal, targeted and specialist support. This model is not intended to create rigid thresholds. Its purpose is to ensure that additional provision is built upon strong everyday teaching and that pupils remain connected to the curriculum and their peers wherever possible.

Individual Support Plans (ISPs) will translate the Inclusion Strategy into personalised support, setting out each pupil's needs, agreed outcomes, reasonable adjustments and universal, targeted or specialist provision. Developed with pupils, parents and staff, ISPs will be reviewed through the Assess–Plan–Do–Review cycle to evaluate progress and adapt support, in line with the Trust's Seven Pillars of Inclusion.

Universal provision

Universal provision is the entitlement that every pupil should ordinarily experience. It includes high-quality adaptive teaching, explicit instruction, modelling, careful vocabulary development, accessible resources, predictable routines, reasonable adjustments, positive relational practice, inclusive behaviour and attendance systems, accessible enrichment, effective transition and purposeful communication with families. Universal provision should be sufficiently responsive to meet a wide range of commonly occurring needs without requiring a separate programme for every pupil.

Targeted provision

Where universal provision does not sufficiently reduce a barrier, pupils may require additional targeted support. This might include evidence-informed literacy or numeracy intervention, language and communication support, pre-teaching, precision teaching, emotional literacy or regulation work, attendance mentoring, social communication support or structured transition programmes. Targeted provision should be time-limited, linked to clear intended outcomes and routinely reviewed for effectiveness.

Specialist provision

A smaller number of pupils will require highly individualised provision involving specialist expertise. This may include provision specified within an Education, Health and Care Plan, specialist teacher advice, educational psychology, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, specialist communication systems or equipment, multi-agency planning and personalised curriculum pathways. Specialist provision should complement rather than displace the pupil's entitlement to universal teaching.

8. The SJSCAT Seven Pillars of Inclusion

8.1 Purpose - Leadership, Governance and Collective Responsibility

Purpose is the first pillar because sustainable inclusion requires deliberate leadership. The Trust Board, executive leaders, headteachers, SENCos, senior leaders, teachers and support staff all have distinct but connected responsibilities. Inclusion should be visible in strategic planning, curriculum discussions, staffing decisions, professional development, budget setting and evaluation.

Headteachers remain accountable for the quality of inclusive provision within their academies. SENCos and inclusion leaders provide specialist leadership and coordination, but they do not hold sole responsibility for pupils with additional needs. Teachers remain responsible for the progress and participation of all pupils they teach, and leaders must ensure that staff have the knowledge, time, resources and support required to meet that responsibility.

Governors and trustees will scrutinise both the planned use of inclusion funding and the outcomes achieved. Their role is not simply to confirm that money has been spent, but to test the rationale: what barrier was identified, why a particular approach was selected, whether implementation is secure, and what evidence demonstrates that pupils are experiencing improved access, participation or outcomes and what the impact of the funding has been.

8.2 Prevention - Early Identification and Prevention

Prevention means responding to emerging difficulty before it becomes entrenched. Across SJSCAT, early identification will draw on professional observation, assessment, attendance patterns, pupil voice, parent concerns, transition information and evidence from teaching. Staff will be encouraged to ask what barrier a pupil is experiencing and what can be changed within the learning environment, rather than beginning with the question of whether a pupil meets a particular label or threshold.

The Trust will strengthen the graduated approach and promote consistent systems for identifying need, planning support, implementing provision and reviewing impact. Transition points will receive particular attention because information loss or delayed adjustments can create avoidable barriers. Where external professional input is required, schools will seek advice into practical classroom strategies and measurable outcomes.

8.3 Pedagogy - Inclusive Pedagogy and Curriculum

Pedagogy is central to the strategy because the classroom is where most pupils spend most of their school day. Inclusive practice therefore depends upon consistently strong teaching. SJSCAT will promote adaptive teaching that maintains ambition while responding intelligently to difference. Adaptation should support pupils to engage with the same rich curriculum wherever appropriate rather than automatically narrowing content or lowering expectations.

Trust professional development, via the Southworth Training Hub, will support teachers to use explicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding, checking for understanding, flexible grouping, metacognitive approaches, language-rich teaching, assistive technology and effective deployment of support staff. Leaders will evaluate whether these approaches are visible in everyday practice through learning walks, case sampling, pupil voice and work scrutiny.

Curriculum leaders will consider accessibility at the point of curriculum design. This includes identifying unnecessary language, sensory, physical or organisational barriers; ensuring resources are accessible; and planning how pupils with additional needs can participate in practical work, trips, performances, worship, sport and other subject-specific experiences.

8.4 Participation - Community and Wider Opportunity

Participation recognises that inclusion extends beyond academic lessons. Pupils should be able to take part in the wider life of their school, including clubs, educational visits, residential experiences, sport, music, worship,

pupil leadership and cultural opportunities. Schools will monitor participation patterns so that pupils with SEND or other vulnerabilities are not unintentionally excluded from experiences that contribute to confidence, relationships and personal development.

Where barriers are identified, leaders will consider reasonable adjustments, additional preparation, staffing, communication with families and alternative ways of enabling participation. The goal is not simply attendance at an activity but meaningful involvement and increasing independence.

8.5 Presence - Belonging, Attendance and Behaviour

Presence describes more than being physically on the school roll. Pupils need to feel safe, understood and part of their community if they are to participate successfully in learning. The Trust will therefore consider attendance, behaviour, relationships, emotional wellbeing and inclusion as interconnected rather than separate agendas.

When attendance deteriorates or behaviour becomes a concern, schools will explore whether unmet or emerging needs are contributing. Relational practice, predictable routines, trusted adults, appropriate adjustments, regulation support, transition planning and close partnership with families may all form part of the response. Where pupils experience emotionally based non-attendance or persistent absence, support will be individualised while retaining high expectations for participation and education.

8.6 Partnership - Pupils, Families and Services

Partnership is essential because effective inclusion cannot be delivered by schools in isolation. Parents and carers hold valuable knowledge about their children and should be involved in identifying strengths, understanding barriers, reviewing provision and evaluating impact. Communication should be accessible, timely and focused on joint problem-solving.

Pupil voice is equally important. Pupils should have age-appropriate opportunities to describe what helps them learn, what makes participation difficult and how support affects their independence and sense of belonging. Their experience should inform both individual provision and wider school improvement.

The Trust will also strengthen collaboration between SENCos, leaders and specialist professionals. Where several academies experience similar needs, shared training, joint commissioning, peer review and resource sharing will be considered. The purpose of collaboration is to increase capacity within schools and create a more coherent experience for pupils and families.

8.7 Provision - Accessible and Inclusive

Provision encompasses the physical, sensory, communication, digital and organisational environment. Accessibility should be considered proactively rather than only when an individual difficulty arises. Each academy's Accessibility Plan will therefore complement its Inclusion Strategy, with leaders considering how classrooms, communal spaces, signage, information, technology, resources and routines enable or restrict participation.

Schools will consider sensory load, acoustics, visual stimulation, seating, mobility, communication, accessible information, assistive technology, regulation spaces and specialist equipment where appropriate. Not every

improvement requires substantial expenditure; many barriers can be reduced through thoughtful organisation, consistent routines and better use of existing resources.

9. Inclusive Mainstream Fund and Resource Deployment

The Inclusive Mainstream Fund will be treated as a strategic enabler rather than as a separate SEND intervention budget. Resource decisions will begin with evidence about need and barriers, not with a list of items or programmes that schools wish to purchase. Each academy will consider its existing universal, targeted and specialist offer and identify where additional investment would strengthen inclusion most effectively.

The Trust's resource deployment process will follow a clear line of reasoning: need, barrier, current provision, gap, evidence, resource and intended outcome. This provides an audit trail showing why a particular investment was selected and how it is expected to improve pupils' experience. The approach also helps schools distinguish between provision that should already be sustained through core or notional SEN funding and genuinely additional activity that can appropriately be supported through IMF.

Every proposed IMF-funded activity must align with at least one of the seven DfE principles and therefore with one or more of the SJSCAT Seven Pillars. Schools are not expected to allocate funding evenly across all seven. They should prioritise the areas where evidence suggests additional resource can make the greatest difference and where the school has sufficient implementation capacity to deliver the approach well.

Before approving expenditure, leaders will consider the evidence strength, the fit with the school's cohort, implementation requirements, scale, sustainability and intended pupil outcome. The Trust will discourage isolated purchases that are not embedded within a wider implementation plan. Where training, resources or technology are funded, schools should be clear about how staff practice will change and how this will translate into improved access, participation, independence or achievement.

IMF will be used alongside core funding and the notional SEN budget and may complement other grants where their conditions permit. It will not be used for running costs, capital works, unrelated staff activity, or outside the seven principles. Schools will maintain clear records of IMF income and expenditure, including evidence of use. Unspent funding may be carried forward in accordance with the current conditions of grant and must be accounted for in the strategy for the year in which it is spent.

Where several SJSCAT academies identify the same barrier, the Trust may consider pooled resource deployment to provide training to address the barrier. This could include joint professional development, shared specialist expertise, common implementation tools or collaborative commissioning. Any decision to pool funding will be supported by appropriate financial governance, will meet the needs of participating academies and will not be used to subsidise central administrative services. Each academy will continue to publish its own strategy statement and show how its allocation contributes to the activity.

The following planning table will translate strategy into resource decisions. Schools will complete it through the Trust workshop and update it as implementation is reviewed.

Barrier / priority	Pillar	Planned activity	Funding source	Budgeted cost	Intended pupil outcome	Lead / review

To be completed by academy						

10. Trust Strategic Priorities 2026–2027

The final Trust priorities will be confirmed after school-level analysis and the Inclusion Strategy workshop. This is important because priorities should be grounded in evidence from the current cohort rather than predetermined centrally. Nevertheless, the Trust has identified a strategic direction under each pillar that will guide the first year of implementation.

Pillar	Trust strategic direction	Intended system impact
Purpose	Establish consistent leadership, governance and evaluation of inclusion.	Inclusion is visible in school improvement, resource decisions and governance.
Prevention	Strengthen early identification and the graduated response.	Pupils receive timely support before barriers escalate.
Pedagogy	Develop consistently strong adaptive teaching and accessible curriculum practice.	More pupils access ambitious learning with increasing independence.
Participation	Improve equitable access to enrichment and wider school life.	Pupils with additional needs participate fully in opportunity and leadership.
Presence	Integrate inclusion, attendance, behaviour and belonging.	Improved attendance, engagement, relationships and sense of belonging.
Partnership	Strengthen pupil, family, Trust and multi-agency collaboration.	Support is better coordinated and families have greater confidence.
Provision	Improve accessibility and use shared expertise strategically.	Environmental and organisational barriers are progressively reduced.

11. Implementation and Workforce Development

A strategy only improves outcomes when it is implemented well. SJSCAT will therefore pay particular attention to the conditions that enable staff to translate priorities into everyday practice. New initiatives will have clear leadership, realistic timescales, appropriate professional development and agreed monitoring arrangements.

Trust-wide professional development, via the Southworth Training Hub, will be informed by the needs analysis rather than delivered as a generic programme. Where a common barrier is identified across several schools, the Trust may commission shared training or develop communities of practice. SENCos and senior leaders will have opportunities to share effective provision, examine case studies and evaluate implementation together.

Support staff deployment will also be considered within implementation. The aim is to ensure that additional adult support promotes access to high-quality teaching, participation and independence rather than creating unnecessary dependency or separation. Leaders will review not simply the quantity of support but its quality and impact.

12. Monitoring, Evaluation and Measures of Success

Monitoring will focus on whether agreed approaches are being implemented as intended and whether they are reducing the identified barriers. The Trust will avoid judging success solely by counting activities, training sessions, or interventions. Implementation and pupil outcome evidence will be considered together.

Depending on the priority, evidence may include attainment and progress, attendance and persistent absence, suspensions and behaviour, curriculum participation, intervention outcomes, learning walks, work scrutiny, pupil case sampling, pupil and parent voice, staff confidence, enrichment participation, accessibility reviews and feedback from external professionals.

Measures will be proportionate and matched to the barrier. For example, an adaptive teaching priority may require evidence of changes in classroom practice alongside pupil participation and progress; an attendance and belonging priority may use attendance patterns, pupil voice and successful reintegration; a language priority may combine assessment information with evidence that pupils transfer strategies into classroom learning.

Outcome domain	What success may look like
Achievement	Improved attainment and progress and stronger access to ambitious curriculum learning.
Attendance	Improved attendance and reductions in persistent or severe absence among pupils experiencing additional barriers.
Participation	Greater involvement in lessons, enrichment, visits, leadership and wider school life.
Belonging	Pupils report feeling safe, understood, valued and part of their school community.
Behaviour	Reduced exclusionary responses where unmet need contributes to behaviour and stronger engagement with learning.
Independence	Pupils increasingly use strategies, adaptations and resources without unnecessary adult dependence.
Family confidence	Parents and carers report greater confidence in the school's understanding and response.
Workforce practice	Staff demonstrate increased knowledge, confidence and consistency in inclusive practice.

13. Governance and Accountability

The Trust Board retains strategic oversight of inclusion across SJSCAT. Trustees will receive sufficient information to understand common barriers, differences between academies, progress against the Seven Pillars, the use of inclusion funding and the impact of agreed priorities. Oversight should enable both assurance and challenge.

Local Governing Bodies will scrutinise their academy's Inclusion Strategy Statement, including the rationale for priorities, planned use of IMF and evidence of impact. Governors should be able to follow the line from identified barrier to resource decision and intended outcome. This provides a stronger form of accountability than simply reviewing expenditure.

The central Trust team will use school information to identify cross-Trust patterns and opportunities for support. Where monitoring indicates weak implementation or limited impact, the response may include professional challenge, additional expertise, peer support or revision of the planned approach.

14. Annual Review and Continuous Improvement

The strategy will operate as a continuous improvement cycle. Schools will understand need, identify barriers, review evidence, prioritise activity, implement, monitor, evaluate and adapt. This cycle should be visible within school improvement processes rather than confined to an annual compliance exercise.

At the end of the academic year, each academy will evaluate the activities undertaken, expenditure incurred, implementation strengths and difficulties, outcomes achieved and implications for the following year. The Trust will draw these evaluations together to identify approaches that should be sustained or scaled, activity that requires refinement, emerging needs and opportunities for collective investment.

Where an approach has not produced the intended impact, leaders will consider why. The issue may be the quality of the evidence, the match between intervention and barrier, weak implementation, insufficient time, contextual change or an inaccurate initial diagnosis of the problem. Evaluation should therefore support learning and improvement rather than simply justifying previous decisions.

21. Conclusion and Trust Commitment

SJSCAT's ambition is not simply to increase the quantity of additional provision available to pupils. It is to create schools that are increasingly inclusive by design: schools in which difference is anticipated, barriers are identified early, teaching is responsive, pupils belong and resources are deployed intelligently.

Through Purpose, we will lead inclusion. Through Prevention, we will respond earlier. Through Pedagogy, we will make ambitious learning accessible. Through Participation, we will open opportunity. Through Presence, we will create belonging. Through Partnership, we will work together. Through Provision, we will progressively remove barriers.

Appendix A: Academy Inclusion Strategy Statement Framework

Each academy will use the Trust strategy as its common framework but publish a statement rooted in its own cohort and evidence. The academy statement should identify its context, commonly occurring and emerging needs, barriers to learning and participation, strategic priorities, activities, budgeted costs, intended outcomes and review arrangements.

Academy information	Detail
Academy	
Headteacher	
SENCo / Inclusion Lead	
Strategy period	2026–2027
Date published	
Review date	
IMF allocation	£
Notional SEN budget	£

Contextual Information

School size and age range, local community and Catholic ethos, pupil numbers, IDSR data on FSM6 and disadvantage, EAL, SEN Support and EHCPs, main areas of SEND need, prior attainment and achievement, attendance and persistent absence, suspensions and exclusions, pupil mobility, significant trends and national comparisons, current barriers to learning and participation, existing provision and staff expertise, pupil and parent views, key inclusion priorities linked to the Trust's Seven Pillars

Barrier identified	Evidence / pupils affected	SJSCAT Pillar	Priority

Appendix B: Resource Deployment Planning TableAppendix B: Resource Deployment Planning Table

This table is designed to be completed during the SJSCAT Inclusion Strategy workshop. It creates the evidence trail required to demonstrate that investment follows identified need rather than preceding it.

Need / barrier	Current provision	Remaining gap	Evidence-informed activity	Pillar	Funding source	Cost	Intended outcome	Monitoring / review

Reference Framework

This strategy has been developed with reference to Department for Education guidance on the Inclusive Mainstream Fund, the 2026–27 conditions of grant and the DfE inclusion strategy support materials. The Trust will review the document if national requirements are amended during the strategy period.

Department for Education, Inclusive mainstream fund: support for school leaders, published 25 June 2026 and updated 7 August 2026.

Department for Education, Inclusive mainstream fund for schools: conditions of grant 2026 to 2027, updated 1 July 2026.

Department for Education, Inclusive mainstream fund for schools: methodology 2026 to 2027, updated 1 July 2026.