

RISE Together: Strengthening Inclusive Education Systems Through Cross-Sector Collaboration in Ireland

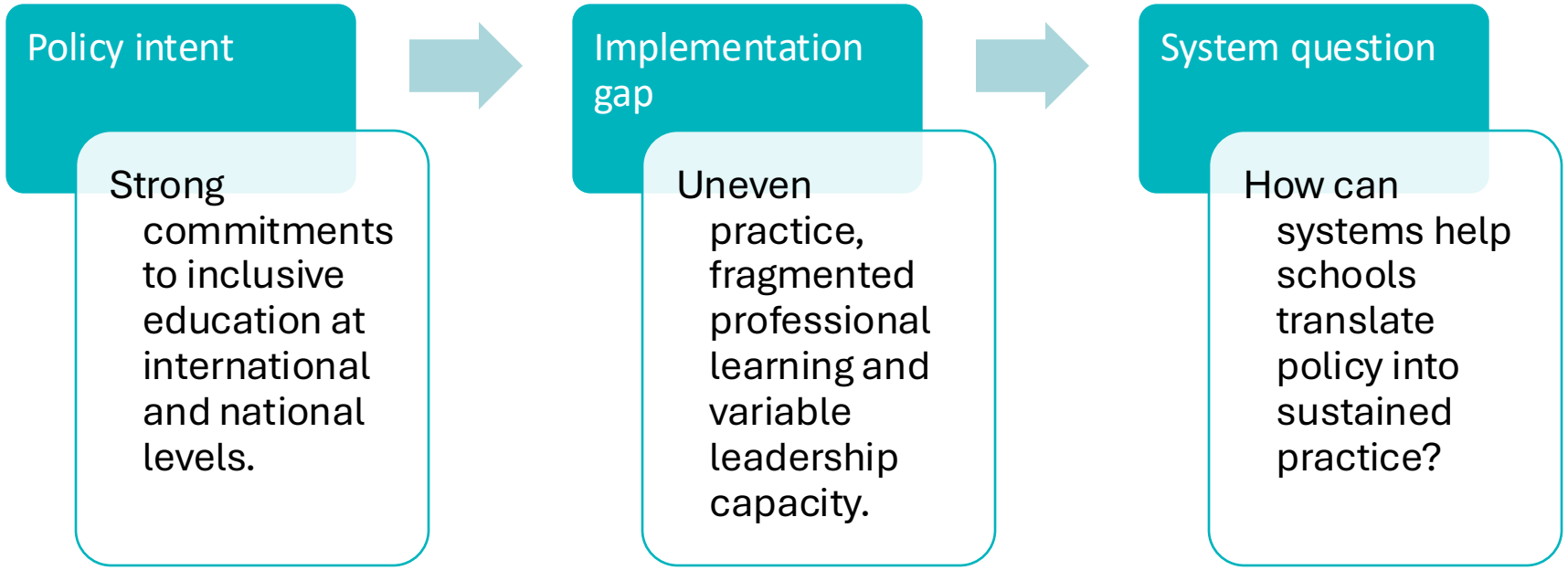
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The problem is not motivation; it's fragmentation

Inclusive education policy often struggles at the point of enactment.



RISE explores how relational, evidence-informed system support can bridge policy, research and practice.

Ainscow & Chapman 2025; EASNIE 2026; Florian 2019; Fullan & Stiegelbauer 1991; NCSE 2024

What is RISE?

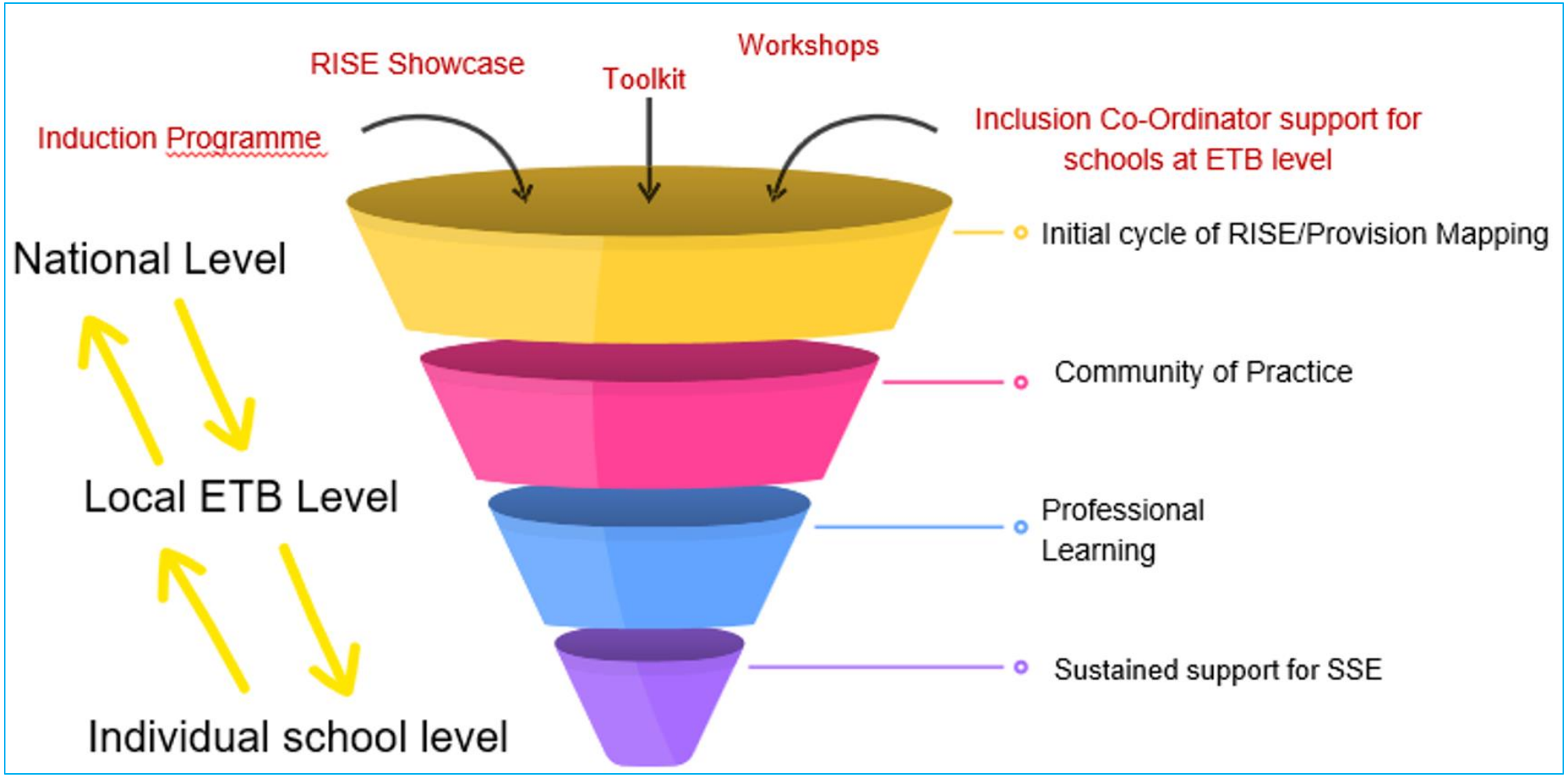
- A close-to-practice **process** underpinned by research, policy and theory.
- A **system** that builds national, regional and local leadership capacity for inclusive school improvement.
- An **accountability tool** to deploy resources and evaluate their impact.
- A **transformative** professional learning programme.

Emphasises contextual, data-informed teacher & leader professional learning and development.



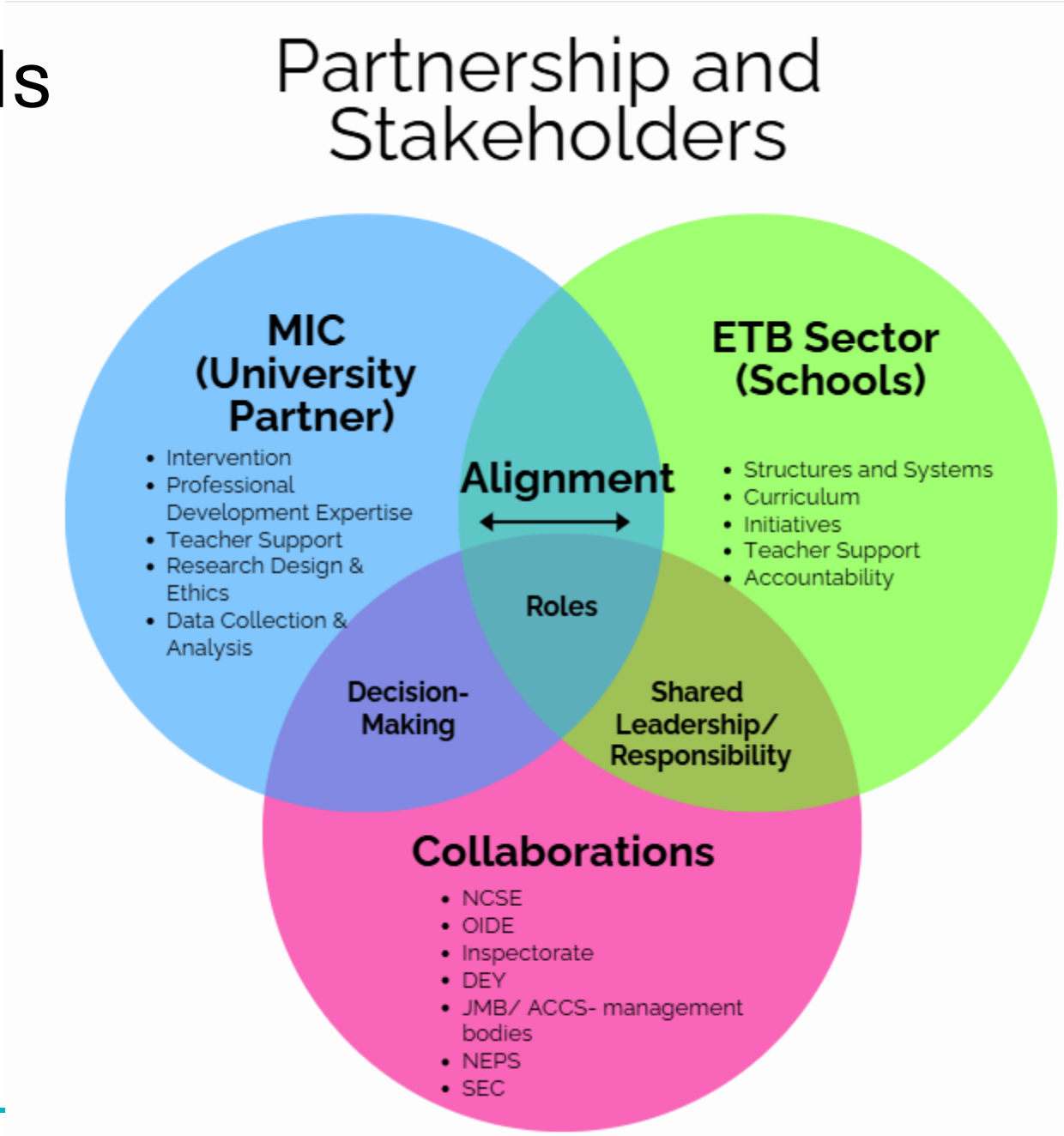
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RISE- A Capacity Building Framework



Mesosystem building needs more than schools.

- Partnership moves beyond consultation to shared system leadership.
- Participating Schools: 230 ETB Post Primary Schools across 16 ETBs;
- Cross-sector pilot with management bodies and support from National Council for Special Education



Mixed-methods evaluation

Design-Based Implementation Research (Penuel et. Al 2011), guided by **systems theory & leadership** (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Ainscow & Chapman 2025; Azorin & Fullan 2022) and **leadership as practice/ shared** (Spillane 2012; Wenger 1998)

*System Leaders	Senior School Leaders	School Inclusion Leads
Balcony view	School improvement view	Implementation view

Surveys

(n=25)

+

Interviews

System Leaders (n=7)

Senior School Leaders (n=4)

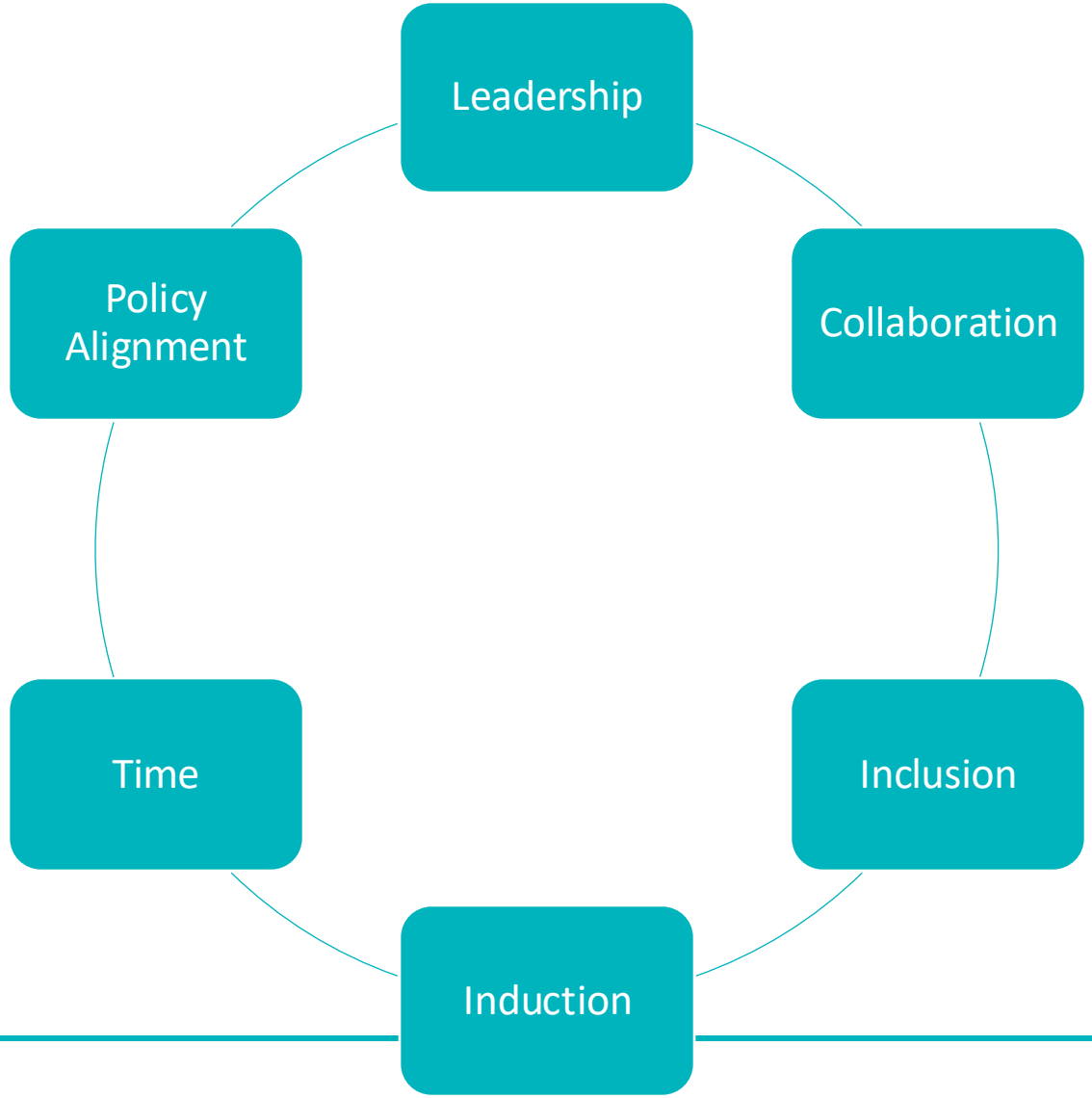
School Inclusion Leads (Middle Leaders) (n=6)

Aim: understand experience, enablers, barriers and conditions for sustaining RISE across ETBs & cross-sectorally.

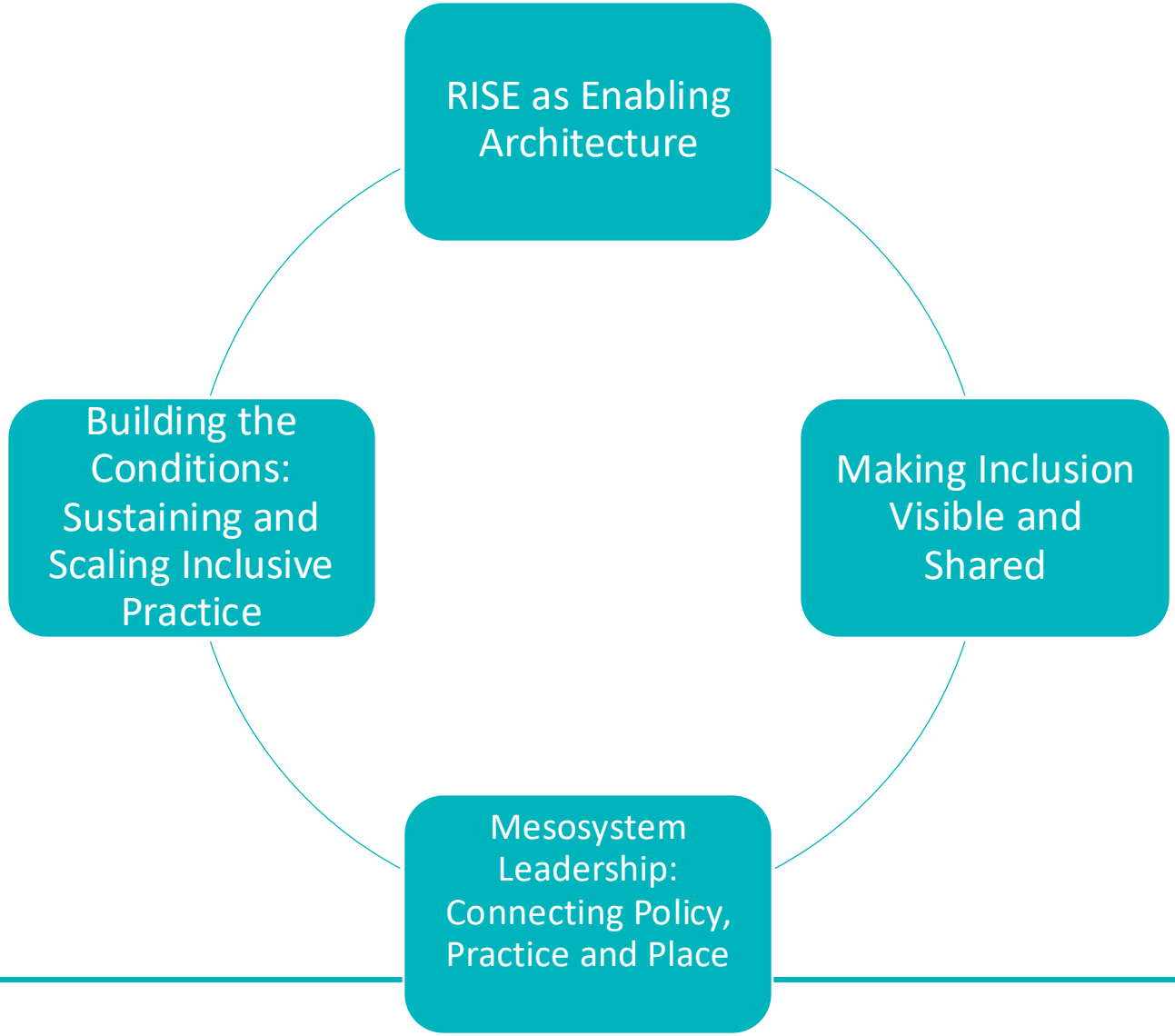
**System Leaders: ETB Inclusion Coordinators; ETB Directors of Schools; Other Management Body Representatives*

Survey Findings-What Participants Reported

Survey findings: strong perceived value



Interview Findings- Initial Themes



Theme1-RISE as Enabling Architecture

RISE is not “another initiative”; it is a way to make initiatives coherent.

- *“This strategy offers a **unifying methodology** for schools to be strategic and smart in the way they implement the various initiatives that are coming their way.” (Denise, RDO_SL*)*
- *“It informed a lot of the conversations as well even with the inspector team…That went well that WSE [**Whole School Evaluation**]; we were very happy with it.”* (Margie, IL3)
- *“The **community of practice** events were brilliant…I never really saw it as ‘other’ areas to be honest, because we're all doing the same job at the end of the day.”* (Martina, IL*)
- “It’s integral to how a school functions.”(Sean, DoS_SL)



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Theme 2-Making Inclusion Visible and Shared

Visibility creates shared responsibility.

- *"The most positive thing about it, was the positive **affirmation** it gave the school staff about how much supports are actually in the school."(*Margie, IL3)
- *"It allowed the students **to flourish**, but it also allowed the adults to flourish."(*Denise, RDO_SL*)
- "With the provision mapping there was such an insight into what **students** were crying out for." (Aaron, IL1)
- *"Up to this, our engagement with **parents** was very slow… this had really opened the doors for that."* (Nathan, IL2)
- *"The most important learning was that inclusive practices, the **whole school responsibility**. Being involved in the RISE process has kind of helped that to happen." (Siobhan, IL4*)*



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Theme 3: Mesosystem Leadership: Connecting Policy, Practice and Place

RISE requires leadership but it also creates leadership.

- *"As the work progressed, that's where my **confidence grew**."* (Nathan, IL2)
- *"The natural **leaders** in the school, they're not necessarily in the SEN space and harnessing their skills for the benefit of the school has been the biggest learning."* (Elaine, IC5_SL)
- *"It's a kind of a steppingstone for them sometimes… dipping their toe into leadership."* (Jennifer, IC1_SL)
- *"We don't often get the experience of talking to all the different stakeholders in school."* (Martina, IL5*)
- *"It [CoP] became about the students, not the sector from which people were operating."* (Denise, RDO_SL*)



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Theme 4: Building the Conditions: Sustaining and Scaling Inclusive Practice

Cross-sector scaling requires architecture, not only goodwill.

- *"There's only so much you can do in the one day a week."* (Johnny, IC2_SL)
- *"I'd love to see a **ring-fenced time** …You can't just assume that the reflection and the work and the progress going forward is going to happen."* (Geraldine, IC4_SL)
- *"It has been very supportive… **acknowledging people where they're at** and how to move them forward, rather than just throwing templates at them."* (Sean, DoS_SL)
- *"For those schools in the cross sector, they've done their **initial cycle** but who will push those schools on to keep going with that process?"* (Elaine, IC5_SL)



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Implications for Inclusive Education

Four take-home messages from the RISE pilot.

- **RISE works as policy enactment infrastructure:**
  It helps schools translate inclusive policy into local practice.
- **Evidence creates ownership**
  School-owned data makes inclusion visible and actionable.
- **Leadership must be distributed and authorised**
  Middle leaders need time, legitimacy and senior backing.
- **Scaling requires relational architecture**
  Trusted support, CoPs, NCSE collaboration and regional structures are essential.



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Thank You!

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