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Inclusion: Moving Beyond the Margins

This is a joint paper based on a collaborative project undertaken by the University of Strathclyde on behalf of one West of Scotland Education Authority. The project took place over a two-year period and a Staff Development Package was produced at the end of the research process.

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BACKGROUND

The education authority which commissioned the work is a forward-looking authority which is quick to respond to the Scottish Executive Education Department's (SEED) recommendations and policy documents. The authority has a clearly articulated policy on inclusion.

At national level the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 has firmly established the principle of inclusion with its clause on the "presumption of mainstream education" (Section 16). This has determined that inclusion for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is legally possible and an entitlement.

Having a policy at national and local level is not always a guarantee that schools automatically share the same vision. Inclusion is an aim which will present challenge to schools. The authority at the centre of this study is aware of this challenge and has commissioned the project because of a genuine desire to understand the difficulty inherent in striving for inclusion in order that in phase three of the project staff development materials would be available to enable schools to progress their journey towards inclusion.

Some schools in Scotland have struggled to come to terms with integration against a background of a history of exclusion. In the West of Scotland which has been well served with high levels of special school provision this history has become firmly embedded and has been the tradition which many teachers regard as best for many children with SEN, therefore exclusionist attitudes are not necessarily a thing of the past. This struggle against the past is acknowledged by Florian (1998).

The process of integrating children with SEN has evolved in Scotland since the legislation of the 80s which followed Warnock's recommendations on the subject (DES 1978) but there has not been universal acceptance of the practice in some schools. Inclusion significantly changes the educational playing field because it is an entitlement supported by legislation.

The inclusion of children with SEN is at the heart of social inclusion but the latter is a much larger goal. Understandings of the terms inclusion, inclusive education and inclusive schools vary. Some educationalists view inclusion as another name for integration and solely to do with children who have a Record of Needs (RON) and/or an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) while others share a wider understanding of inclusion which encompasses equal opportunities for all regardless of race, colour, creed, learning difficulty or disability.

Ainscow (1995) and Frederickson and Cline (2002) consider that an integrationist interpretation of inclusion will limit the response that schools make for individual pupils with SEN. Their view is that an integrationist perspective assumes that individuals must fit in with what schools already provide. In contrast an inclusionist perspective accepts that a process of change must be actioned in order to effectively meet the needs of pupils. This view is also shared by Corbett and Slee (2000). Schools are likely to be at varying points on the journey towards inclusion with some perhaps holding integrationist views and others perhaps sharing more inclusionist views.

The Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (1996) identifies the principles of the philosophy of education that is inclusion and Florian (1998) agrees that this philosophy is anti-exclusionist. To share this philosophy teachers and managers in schools must be prepared to set aside traditional exclusionist views. This implies that change within the culture that is the school is inevitable if inclusion is to become a reality.

Lewis (2000) stated that “The ideal of Inclusive Education should be used as a Trojan horse to breach the walls of the current system and to expose its weaknesses. If we can build a system that is truly inclusive of all, we will have helped everyone” (p. 200). This sentiment is born of the view that the present system is not the best environment for the most vulnerable. Experience dictates that many may share this view. However, if it is possible to identify schools where the vulnerable thrive then perhaps it may be possible to analyse such good practice to help schools which have not yet become truly inclusive.

AIMS

The project in phase one aimed to:

- ⑩ identify the range of pupil needs across the Early Years pupil population;
- ⑩ highlight the requirements of teachers and other staff in providing for pupil needs;
- ⑩ explore the understandings of inclusion shared by staff;
- ⑩ establish indicators of good inclusive practice;
- ⑩ identify establishments where such practice is firmly embedded.

In phase two the project aimed to:

- ⑩ confirm the findings of phase one
- ⑩ identify strategies which were deployed to support inclusive practice
- ⑩ provide support for staff to enable them to respond appropriately to pupil needs.

PHASE ONE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

All mainstream early years establishments were involved in the study. These included nursery schools as well as primary schools. The study was therefore a case study of inclusion within mainstream early years provision in one authority. A survey approach was utilised at the outset to enable a broad picture of inclusive practice to be drawn.

This design was chosen to provide breadth and depth within the study which would create a description of provision and practice across the authority as a result of an exploration of individual views, understandings and perceptions.

The survey was designed to explore and capture

- ⑩ current understandings and practices;
- ⑩ attitudes and beliefs held by staff;
- ⑩ the complexities of contexts.

In addition, it was intended to enable participants to have a voice and to provide the opportunity to further explore the issues that emerged. Management responses could be compared and contrasted with those of teaching staff and a third set of responses from non teaching staff would add yet another dimension. A questionnaire for headteachers and a questionnaire for teachers and other staff were created as a result of wide reading around the subject of inclusion.

All primary and nursery schools in the authority received the questionnaire. The blanket survey was expected to have a high response rate as the Adviser in SEN for the authority signed a covering letter which was sent with the questionnaires.

Following the analysis of the questionnaires which contained both quantitative and qualitative data, a sample of schools was identified for follow-up visits when staff, pupils and parents were interviewed in phase two.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The survey targeted all staff both teaching and support staff in all early years establishments in the authority. The survey yielded a 75% return which, as expected, was high.

The quantitative results were analysed to enable the examination of the responses from head teachers, teaching staff and non teaching staff across establishments and also within individual schools and nurseries.

RANGE OF NEEDS

The range of pupils' special educational needs varied from establishment to establishment as could be expected but across the authority a wide range of needs exists across the early years pupil population. This includes a number of syndromes including anaphylactic shock, developmental difficulties such as dyspraxia and communication difficulties, chronic medical conditions like juvenile arthritis, physical impairment including cerebral palsy, sensory impairment and severe and complex learning difficulties. In the case of children with severe and complex learning difficulties these are, at present, confined to nursery provision as separate primary and secondary provision for severe and complex learning difficulties continues to be offered by the authority. The incidence of some disorders and syndromes is relatively low but all establishments reported a rise in the group of children who are on the Autistic spectrum and children who present with challenging behaviour. This would appear to mirror the trend nationwide.

Of those pupils who had a Record of Needs the highest percentage of these pupils had a physical impairment. Next highest in terms of incidence were pupils with communication difficulties.

RECORD OF NEEDS

Not all pupils who had recordable special educational needs had a Record of Needs (RON). Only six headteachers in the survey reported that all of such pupils had a RON.

In Scotland education authorities have the power to open a RON for a child from the age of two when the SEN are considered to be pronounced specific or complex (Education [Scotland] Act, 1980) but it is more common for the RON process to be initiated prior to children being placed in school. As a result, because the process is somewhat protracted, the child may be older before the process is completed. Also, in mainstream provision in Scotland, children with SEN who have a RON are expected to have an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) as outlined in SOEID (1998). Other children with SEN who do not have a RON are also expected by SEED to have an IEP. However pending legislation will determine that the RON will not continue in Scotland but will be replaced for some learners by a Co-ordinated Support Plan. The IEP will however remain (SEED, 2002). This pending change may therefore be influencing what is happening at the present time and explain why several children with SEN in the establishments in the study do not currently have a RON.

An interesting fact which emerged from the study was that in the case of eight establishments pupils with a RON had no IEPs. This would appear to run counter to the guidance offered by SOEID (1998). This is worrying given that the RON will cease to exist past the pending legislation which may determine that this criterion for having an IEP will no longer be the benchmark and establishments that are currently not following the guidance may continue current practice to the detriment of the children concerned. Even more worrying is the fact that children with SEN which do not currently merit the opening of a RON because they are considered to be less pronounced, specific or complex should also have an IEP. If some children who

currently have a RON do not presently have an IEP, is it reasonable to expect that in the future children who do not have a RON will have the latter document? In five establishments in the study no early years child had an IEP. This suggests that in these five establishments there are no children with SEN which seems unlikely or possibly that management in these establishments have not prioritised IEP planning to date.

INCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING AND VISION

Understandings of inclusion varied greatly both across and within establishments. It was apparent from the responses that the majority of staff held an integrationist understanding of inclusion as discussed by Ainscow (1995) and Frederickson & Cline (2002). It could be expected that where such views were mentioned, no revolutionary changes as discussed by Dyson (1997) had taken place to accommodate children.

In some cases staff were still struggling with the philosophy of SEN. A minority of staff had an understanding of inclusion which was much wider, embracing equal opportunities for all. It was also apparent where an inclusionist perspective was in evidence that in these establishments, strategies to progress better inclusion were being deployed. These included promoting positive behaviour, genuine partnership with parents, teamwork and collaboration.

ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

Some staff including headteachers, teachers and support staff expressed negative views about inclusion. Indeed one SEN auxiliary^{1*} appointed to support children with SEN was very exclusionist in her views and considered that children with no SEN were disadvantaged by having children with SEN in the class. It was also apparent from the qualitative responses that where negative attitudes prevailed there existed expectations that inclusion could not work. Missing from the equation in many cases was the understanding that inclusion is an entitlement rather than an option.

COLLABORATION

In most cases where children had recorded SEN several personnel both internal and external to the school were involved. SOEID (1998) guidelines encourage joint planning on the part of all involved with individual children, including the planning which relates to an IEP. There is acknowledgement within these guidelines that parents and pupils should also be involved as partners in the planning process. Twenty two establishments had a team approach to IEP planning which involved only in-house staff who worked with a pupil, twelve establishments had teams of both internal and external staff who jointly planned the IEP. Only three establishments in the study included parents in the process and only one establishment involved the child when planning the IEP. In four instances the IEP was planned and written by one person who was either the Headteacher or the Learning Support Co-ordinator.

^{1*} Special Needs Assistant (SNA)

The issue of time in respect of planning was highlighted by many staff who found it difficult to liaise with outside agency personnel who worked with individual pupils. Flexible cover arrangements were in place in several establishments to allow staff to discuss and to plan. In the majority of instances such cover was provided by the senior management team (Principal and Deputy Principal). Some establishments bought in cover. Five headteachers intimated that it was not possible for staff to meet with outside agency personnel and two indicated that it was not always possible for such liaison to take place. It was also highlighted that outside agency personnel were in short supply and had limited time and that some headteachers could not themselves provide cover because they were class-committed.

SUPPORT

The majority of staff perceived that they were largely supported in their endeavours to meet the needs of children and valued additional staffing in the form of classroom assistants and SEN auxiliaries. Also valued were links with other agencies like psychological services, visiting specialist teachers and visiting health service personnel including occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

100% of headteachers who responded indicated that staff were encouraged to work in partnership with parents. A comprehensive list of strategies to ensure that this happened was also elicited from the study. Such strategies ranged from formal to informal situations when such partnership took place. In addition some schools indicated that this worked well when the following conditions were met:

- **good relationships with parents**
- **good communication (face to face)**
- **good communication (written/two way)**
- **good communication (writing to home/one way)**

Certainly keeping parents informed and inviting dialogue with parents will encourage partnership. Where schools have a welcoming ethos such partnership is likely to flourish. This issue is discussed by Wearmouth (2001) and identified by her as an issue related to inclusive educational practices.

POLICY

The authority in question has a policy on inclusion and requires all schools to operate in accordance with this policy and to produce school policies in line with this philosophy. A number of schools had staff who did not know that the authority promotes inclusion. In the main these were support staff but this implies that there are communication and training issues for support staff if this is the case. 20% of school staff thought that their school did not have a policy that supports inclusion and 20% did not know if such a policy existed. 44% of headteachers said that they do not have such a policy at the present time.

Having a clearly articulated policy is essential to ensuring that change takes place. Policy making is not however simply the task of writing the document. It is about going through a process with staff engaging in dialogue as part of that process. If the policy is purely a writing exercise then there are no guarantees that all staff will interpret policy in the same way. This is discussed by Bowe, Ball & Gold (1992) who believe that individuals' histories, experiences, values and personal agendas will determine that some aspects of policy will be rejected, misunderstood and even ignored. The lesson here is clearly one of ownership. If the discussion and agreement are part of the process of policy making then the policy is more likely to be understood, accepted and implemented by all.

ACCESS: ACCOMMODATION

The survey revealed that some school buildings were to an extent inaccessible to pupils with disabilities. The problem aspect related to buildings which were on more than one level and had no lift, internal and external steps, access to the gymnasium by stairs only and wheelchair access to the gymnasium being outside the building. These problems related exclusively to pupils with a physical impairment but not in every case wheelchair bound. Inclusion is also about equality of opportunity. Where access is impeded or made impossible then pupils within such buildings are clearly disadvantaged and excluded from some activities. As of 1st April 2003, education authorities must ensure that such access is possible as a result of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) Scotland Act 2002.

ACCESS: CURRICULUM

Staff were asked to consider whether there were areas of the curriculum which were inaccessible to some pupils. Responses confirmed that in some cases pupils with SEN could not access the full curriculum because of the nature of their difficulties or disabilities as in the case of Physical Education because of physical disability, French because of profound hearing impairment and in another case because of intellectual difficulties and free play for children who are autistic and cannot cope with too much noise and too much activity.

One interesting response from a support staff member clearly highlighted that she did not understand the term "curriculum". It is essential that support staff should understand basic terminology used within schools and classrooms. Training for support staff is every bit as important as staff development for teachers.

ACCESS: AFTER HOUR ACTIVITIES

89% of schools that replied to the survey indicated that after hours activities were offered in their school. 48% indicated that all pupils with SEN could access all such activities, 35% said that some pupils with SEN could participate and 6% revealed that no pupils with SEN could access these activities. If inclusion aims to enable all pupils to participate fully in the life of the school then these figures suggest that in after hours activities some pupils with SEN are being excluded.

Reasons for such exclusion related to transport difficulties, restricted numbers, physical activities which were not appropriate for some pupils with a physical impairment and the risk factor when pupils require one to one supervision. Of concern here is the 6% of schools where all pupils with SEN are excluded from after hours activities. Perhaps more consideration of how to enable such access could be recommended. In one school transport times had been rearranged to ensure that pupils with SEN could be included.

FACTORS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION

The headteacher and staff questionnaires asked for the illumination of factors considered as being essential to aiming for successful inclusion. Collectively a number of important factors emerged. These factors have a strong correlation with factors which others' research has already highlighted. Additional staffing, training and resources were highlighted by the majority of headteachers whereas other headteachers identified factors which were perhaps less predictable. The "willingness of staff to give a bit extra" was a very interesting one and no less important because fewer headteachers had mentioned it. The factors were as follows:

- **Staff Development/Training/Guidelines for Staff**
- **Appropriate Resources/Equipment & Management**
- **Appropriate Additional Trained Staff & Better Pupil/Teacher Ratio**
- **Multi-disciplinary Reviews/Planning Meetings**
- **Appropriate Accommodation/Adaptation to Buildings**
- **Good Collaboration with Other Professionals and Partnership with Parents**
- **Positive Attitudes/Ethos Relationships**
- **Appropriate Curriculum/Common Approach by all staff**
- **Best Interests of Child and Other Children have been considered**
- **Willingness of Staff to Give a Bit Extra**
- **Early Identification and Assessment**
- **Record Keeping & Planning including Pre-Placement**
- **Fostering Positive Pupil Attitudes through Personal and Social Development**

These factors were matched to the views of Stainback & Stainback (1990), The Council for Exceptional Children (1994), Ainscow (1995, 1999 & 2000), Giangreco (1996), The Centre for Inclusive Education (1996), Westwood (1997), Thomas, Walker & Webb (1998), Florian (1998), Lewis (2000), Corbett & Slee (2000), and Frederickson & Cline (2002), in order to create a checklist of factors which would become the cornerstone of phase two of the project.

PHASE TWO

On the basis of the responses and from the twenty one schools that appeared to hold an interpretation of inclusion which involved a willingness on the part of the school to change as explained in the section on “Attitudes and Expectations”, a sample of eight schools and two nurseries were selected for follow-up visits and interviews. A checklist of factors at authority and whole-school levels and a checklist of strategies and systems at school and classroom levels were created and were used in the interviews with headteachers to focus discussion and to enable endorsement of the validity of these factors. These systems and strategies were grouped under the headings of Ethos/Attitudes, Organisation/Management, Communication, Teamwork/Collaboration, Support and Training.

Headteachers were asked to agree or disagree with the identified factors and to grade their importance on a scale of 1-4 with 4 being the highest rating. The systems and strategies also had to be endorsed and graded and headteachers were asked to indicate whether or not this was already an aspect of practice. Finally headteachers were asked to indicate which grouping of systems and strategies was in their view, the most important. At this stage headteachers were also asked to indicate their willingness for further visits to the establishment to take place in order to video and to observe practice.

Checklist Findings: Authority: School Level

All identified factors under this heading were endorsed and received a considered grade 3 or 4 (important or very important). No additional factors were suggested by the headteachers.

School: Classroom Level

Similarly all systems and strategies at these levels were agreed as being important and gradings of 3 or 4 were also levied against them. Exceptions related to the nursery schools which did not consider that having a pupil council, a whole school house system, a learning support co-ordinator or a behaviour support teacher, were applicable to their context, which is understandable. No additional factors were suggested by the headteachers.

Six of the ten establishment headteachers chose Ethos/Attitudes as the most important, two considered that Organisation/Management was most important, one highlighted Teamwork/Collaboration and one said that it was a combination of all six groupings.

Six schools and two nurseries were identified for the final sample of videoing and observation. The interviews with headteachers were instrumental in creating a picture of practice in each establishment which confirmed to the researchers that they were striving to be as inclusive as they could be because the key factors named in the account of “Phase Two” were embedded within what they were already doing.

Observation

Further confirmation of inclusive endeavours was provided in additional visits set up for the purpose of planning the video and in the process it was possible to observe

aspects of practice relating to systems and strategies without these being set up in advance. The researchers simply asked the headteachers if they could look round the school and visit classrooms to gather ideas for possible video footage. It was then possible to plan the video shoots to capture the essence of such practice.

Video & Package

Headteachers, teachers, support teachers, pupils, parents, classroom assistants, visiting specialists were interviewed. Review meetings, planning meetings, staff development sessions, teaching and learning sessions, playground activity, lunchtime activity, supported activities were all captured on video with the express purpose of providing the core of staff development materials which have now been produced to complete the final phase of the project. These materials have been made available to all primary and nursery schools in this authority to enable other schools that are at an earlier stage in the evolution of inclusiveness to audit their progress and practice in order to move closer to their destination on the inclusion map. Their journey is supported and directed by the activities which have been incorporated within the package of materials which has been named *Beyond The Margins to Inclusive Education: Staff Development Materials for Primary Schools and Nurseries*.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this comprehensive study, a picture emerged of schools and nurseries which were at varying stages of their evolution towards becoming inclusive contexts. On the one hand there were establishments in which staff and sometimes management expressed negative views of inclusion but at the other end of the spectrum a number of schools had moved considerably in the process and had developed very positive attitudes towards inclusion. In such schools staff had embraced the philosophy and the ideal of inclusion and were striving to ensure that learning for children with SEN was effective.

A process of planned, active, often dynamic change had been initiated in these establishments and one of the hallmarks of each school as observed by the researchers was the team approach adopted by staff who shared and discussed problems. These schools had a very welcoming ethos within which there was mutual respect, staff for pupils and vice-versa. A strong personal and social education curriculum was in place and behaviour and discipline problems appeared less prevalent. A flat hierarchy seemed to be in existence. Headteachers were not aloof or distant from staff and staff were encouraged to play an active part in policy development. In these schools and nurseries staff had truly moved beyond the margins to inclusive education.

In striving for successful inclusion to ensure effective learning there are responsibilities for a number of players. The project findings suggest the following:

School staff's responsibilities are to:

- accept the need for change
- be willing to work through the process of change

recognise that inclusion is about much more than the sum of extra staffing and resources
be a team player
work in partnership with parents
listen to the children who are at the centre of the inclusion process

School manager's responsibilities are to:

- make staff stakeholders in and owners of the process
- ensure that guidance and support are in place
- provide reassurance and encouragement and acknowledge that it will not always be an easy journey
- lead by example as part of the team

Education authority's responsibilities are to:

- provide guidance on matters relating to policy and practice and ensure that this is understood by all
- provide training and staff development for teaching and support staff
- provide the support of both staffing and material resources
- Assess and make adaptation to buildings and grounds to ensure access

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