

Preparing to Include Special Children in Mainstream Schools: A Practical Guide

Reviewed by SUE METCALFE, Special Needs Resource Teacher at St. Michael's N.S., Trim, Co. Meath.

This book aims to be an aid to those who work in special or mainstream schools and who are seeking to develop inclusion for all pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties. Liz Flavell writes the book based upon the experiences of one special school in the U.K. working closely with three mainstream schools (two primary and one high school). She tries to show that by sharing and valuing good practice between schools it is possible to include the pupils with the most profound and severe learning difficulties, while providing all pupils with a high quality education.

Not only does she demonstrate how mainstream and special schools can work together in preparing the child with special needs to succeed in the mainstream environment, but she also shows how to prepare existing mainstream pupils and members of staff involved in or affected by the inclusion process.

Liz Flavell recognises that there are many issues and difficulties attached to pupils with such levels of complex learning difficulties sharing their education with mainstream peers. Comments both positive and negative, collected from parents, teachers and pupils of both the special and mainstream schools are reproduced making interesting reading for others who may want to embark on developing inclusive ties between schools in different sectors. She shows that careful planning between all involved is essential and needs to be done before the inclusion programme is started. She makes suggestions for ways in which special and mainstream schools can work together to enhance the whole curriculum. She provides photo-copiable forms for evaluating pupils' academic and social progress, sample lesson plans, resource ideas and plans for daily record keeping for use across the curriculum subjects.

Schools need to look at how to accommodate the needs of individual pupils and not at whether pupils can fit the system. This of course throws up problems of finances, resources, training, time and planning. Many schools are familiar with integration where pupils with special needs work alongside mainstream pupils, fitting into existing arrangements but Flavell suggests that an inclusive school is one which attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curriculum organisation and provision. She feels that pupils have a right to be educated together and to be provided with a broad and balanced good education.

Inclusion means to add to the educational experiences of the pupils and not to compromise them. Flavell is realistic in acknowledging that some children may require

special school placement only and/or integration and inclusion in mainstream classes. Different types of placement may all play a role. She has shown through many case studies how inclusion can be achieved for certain pupils in certain curricular areas.

Any teacher in a mainstream or special school who is concerned about making inclusion really work for their pupils will find this book an invaluable companion. It is well laid out and easy to read. I learned something new each time I read it. It has certainly made me consider the teaching methods used with our pupils with special educational needs. It has left me feeling excited and challenged.

PREPARING TO INCLUDE SPECIAL CHILDREN IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE by Liz Flavell, is published by David Fulton Publishers, London, 2001, and costs Stg£14.00.