Effective practice: Inclusive Practice

Key messages

- Inclusion is about attitudes as well as behaviour and practices.
- The attitudes of young children towards diversity are affected by the behaviour of adults around them and by whether all children and families using the setting are valued and welcomed.
- The principle of individualised learning underpinning the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) extends to all children; early years practitioners have a responsibility to promote the development of all children within the EYFS.
- Working in partnerships with families is particularly important when a child has additional support needs. Joint planning that involves parents and carers and two-way exchange of information about a child is critical to success.
- Careful tracking of development by settings and parents working together supports earlier discussion and response to emerging special educational needs.
- Focused discussion and training is needed to help practitioners and settings consider the nature of discrimination and develop inclusive practice.
- Inclusion is not optional: children have defined entitlements in this area and settings have legal responsibilities.

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Why Inclusive Practice is important

Within the EYFS, inclusion is critical to the aims of:

- delivering improved outcomes for all children;
- closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and others.

*It is ‘non negotiable’ in the sense that it respects and responds to children's entitlements that are defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and a range of legislation in this country.*

Although some people, for example, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) or bilingual support assistants have a particular role to play in this area, **everyone working in early years settings shares a collective responsibility** for:

- helping every child reach their full potential;
- ensuring that all families and children feel valued as members of their early years and wider community.

Effective practice in relation to Inclusive Practice

- All practitioners must promote equality of opportunity and a positive attitude to diversity.
- Practitioners should be aware that all children have different experiences, interests, skills and knowledge which affect their ability to develop and learn.
- Practitioners should plan to meet the needs of both boys and girls, children with special educational needs, children who are more able, children with disabilities, children with complex health needs, children from all social, family, cultural and religious backgrounds, looked-after children, children of all ethnic groups.
including traveller communities, refugees and asylum seekers, and children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

In order to meet children’s diverse needs, and help all children make the best possible progress, practitioners should:

- provide a safe and supportive learning environment, free from harassment, in which the contribution of all children and families is valued and where racial, religious, disability and gender stereotypes and all expressions of discrimination or prejudice are challenged;
- value the fact that families are all different – that children may live with one or both parents, with other relatives or carers, with same sex parents or in an extended family;
- work with parents to identify learning needs and respond quickly to any area of particular difficulty;
- plan opportunities that build on and extend all children’s knowledge, experiences, interests and skills and develop their self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn;
- use a wide range of teaching strategies, based on children’s learning needs;
- provide a wide range of opportunities to motivate, support and develop children and help them to be involved, concentrate and learn effectively;
- plan for each child’s individual care and learning requirements, including the additional or different provision required to meet particular individual needs;
- audit how accessible the setting is for children who use wheelchairs or walking frames or who are learning English as an additional language and take action to include a wider range of children;
- work together with professionals from other agencies, such as local and community health services, to provide the best learning opportunities for individual children.

Challenging and changing attitudes – making everyone welcome

*Inclusive practice requires the adults working with young children to reflect on their own attitudes and practice.* This can be challenging for everyone involved. Effective training must encourage open discussions about both discriminatory and non-discriminatory language and behaviours, so that individuals working in a setting feel safe and supported to raise issues and challenge unequal practices.

*Part of challenging and changing attitudes involves finding out more about different populations of families and children that are known to be at risk of discrimination or exclusion. It is important for practitioners to not only change their practice, but to understand what it is that they might need to change and why people might feel excluded by the way their setting is organised. When they understand this they can begin to think about changing practice, so that every family experiences the setting as inclusive.*

One indicator of good practice is that adults working with young children can describe the systems that are in place in their setting to promote the inclusion of as wide a range of children and families as possible. They can also describe the discussions that have already taken place about these issues, together with any actions that have been taken. Another is that practitioners understand that everyday practices, attitudes, environments, structures and policies all need attention to ensure that they do not disadvantage particular children.

**Children from minority ethnic groups**

There are significant numbers of children from minority ethnic groups in settings across England. They have diverse needs, and may experience discrimination and barriers to learning. Settings adopt an anti-racist approach and should target support to minority ethnic children, particularly those who are underachieving, children for whom English is a new or additional language or who are experiencing mobility or learning difficulties and disabilities.

**Children learning English as an additional language**
Many children in early years settings will have a home language or languages other than English. Practitioners should value this linguistic diversity and provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in their play and learning. They should actively promote bilingualism as a strength and encourage all children to learn some of the languages they hear around them. They should model this themselves – by, for example, greeting children and parents in their home language or asking children how they would say something in their home language.

**Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities**

Providers and practitioners should take specific action to help children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make the best possible progress by:

- providing additional or different strategies and approaches for those children who need help;
- planning, where necessary, to develop understanding through:
  - using materials and resources that children can access through sight, touch, sound and smell;
  - using alternative and augmentative communication, including signs and symbols;
  - using visual and written materials in different formats, including large print and symbol text, using information and communication technology (ICT), other technological aids and taped materials;
- increasing children’s knowledge of the wider world by using word descriptions and other stimuli, including trips beyond the setting, to extend their experiences and imagination;
- planning for full participation in learning and in all physical and practical activity through, for example:
  - providing additional support from adults, when needed;
  - adapting activities or environments, providing alternative activities, and using specialist aids and equipment, where appropriate;
  - helping children who have particular difficulties with behaviour to take part in learning effectively through an effective and consistently applied behaviour management policy.

**Partnership working with parents – tracking development together and sharing information**

One measure of effective inclusive practice is that each parent feels welcome and valued as an expert on their child and that they play a key, on-going role in helping practitioners enable their child to participate and learn.

Close partnership working with families is expected for all babies and children within EYFS, but it is particularly important when children experience difficulty in learning or participating. False assumptions about how much parents and carers can bring to a shared discussion about their child can be very damaging here, as promoting development in young children is a joint enterprise.

Where factors that impact on a child’s ability to learn and develop are just beginning to emerge, partnership working involving all the adults in a child’s life is more important than ever. The earlier a need for additional help is identified, the more likely it is that early intervention can prevent unusual aspects of a child’s development or behaviour developing into a persistent difficulty. Careful observation of children’s development using the Look, listen and note and Development matters material by childminders or settings in discussion with families and regular exchange of information can be a practical way of broaching the subject of whether there is a problem, if parents have not already expressed concern.

**Getting help when help is needed**

Another key measure of effective inclusion is that individual practitioners and settings know when to call in help from outside and who to approach when more specialist expertise and help is needed.

This is sometimes difficult for smaller settings, childminders and adults working in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector unless they already know who to contact or how local services are organised. It is
important that early years providers and settings understand that they are part of a multi-agency network of support for families.

Transitions and admissions

The first contact a family makes with a childminder or setting is a key moment in a young child’s life: it sends important messages about how welcoming, flexible and inclusive your setting is or could be. Focusing on the individual strengths and support needs of the particular child involved is the most straightforward way to avoid unhelpful stereotypes and assumptions.

Useful questions to ask are:

- What is already known about how this child learns and participates?
- What particular support needs does this child have?
- What policies and procedures do we already have in place that can help?
- What would we need to change in order to include this child and support their development?
- Who else is in contact with the family? If other services that are involved have more specialist knowledge than we do, how can we all work together?
- Would this child be safe in this setting?
- Are there any physical barriers to the child participating? If so, are these things that could be changed?

Where there are significant and known factors influencing a child’s development, and the family is already in contact with a range of support agencies, they will have a lot of information to share about the pattern of development, medical treatment or therapy that their child has already experienced. Encouraging families to talk about support that is already in place is a good place to start, as it encourages families to identify the most important priorities from their point of view and concentrates everyone’s minds on thinking constructively about practical arrangements.

Early Support (www.earlsupport.org.uk) is the Government mechanism for achieving better coordinated, family-focused services for young disabled children and their families across England. Where families have been using the Early Support Family Pack, the Family File can help with these early discussions by pinpointing the nature of a child’s additional support needs and current priorities. Early Support has also developed a range of information booklets about particular conditions such as Down syndrome, visual impairment and speech, language and communication difficulties that are available free of charge. These can be useful when settings are including children with particular needs for the first time.

Continuity of support is important at times of transition and it’s always helpful to:

- Invite people who have already been working with a family and child to be part of early discussions about placement (this might be a portage worker, physiotherapist or community-based family link worker who shares the language and culture of the family).
- Ensure a key person is identified early on to greet and maintain particular contact with the family.