

**nasen**

Helping Everyone Achieve

**SPOTLIGHT**

# THE SENCO SURVIVAL GUIDE

The Nuts and Bolts of Everything You Need to Know

THIRD EDITION



## 4 Inclusion

### Access, challenges, barriers

Part 1 has explored learners with SEND, in terms of who they are and how best to identify needs through the Code of Practice and/or the Equality Act. Part 2 explores provision, starting with inclusion as the foundation for success.

This chapter:

- introduces four key factors that underpin successful inclusion for all.
- analyses distinctions between integration and present-day inclusion.
- considers what 'inclusion' looks like as policy and practice.
- further considers personalisation as an essential element of inclusion.

#### What is inclusion?

Education has moved far from original attempts to place children with SEND in mainstream, based on the naive assumption that merely being there would enable success. Experience has proved otherwise. Where are schools now on this journey towards the kind of inclusion that benefits every child in mainstream – given the still-lingering attainment gap between SEND and non-SEND?

Inclusion is about rights. How far is the right to be educated in mainstream matched by the equal right to be educated in a school that best meets needs? Mainstream is not *always* compatible. Special schools will always be needed for pupils with the most severe SEND.

One positive outcome of inclusion is that almost all children with MLD are now educated in mainstream, but has mainstream culture and curriculum enabled all these children to achieve their potential? The attainment gap suggests not.

SENCOs are at the forefront of this achievement dilemma. They lead the journey and take much of the responsibility. Having been a SENCO, I understand the complexities and responsibilities. With regard to their school's inclusion, SENCOs might consider:

- how far are we along the inclusion journey?
- what implications are there for policies/practices?
- what are the characteristics of inclusion? Does our school match up?
- what does inclusion look like in our classrooms?
- what should inclusion look like for learners and parents – does our school represent a satisfying picture?

Inclusion, as a social construct, could involve four Ps:

- Place – special or mainstream.
- Policy – from Government, down to LAs and schools.
- Practice – as inclusive teaching and learning.
- Personalisation – all pupils benefiting from their experiences and opportunities.

## Inclusion as a sense of place

Table 4.1 identifies differences between integration and inclusion, illustrating why place alone could never enable pupils with SEND to succeed in mainstream.

Table 4.1 From integration to inclusion

INTEGRATION	INCLUSION
Pupils expected to fit in with the existing culture and curriculum of mainstream	Culture and curriculum adapted to meet all needs
Pupils with SEND were the responsibility of specialists	All teachers, of every age group or subject, are teachers of SEND
Withdrawal from classroom participation was a common feature of curriculum delivery	High quality classroom teaching for all is the ultimate aim
Areas of a child's life that impacted negatively on achievement were not the responsibility of educationalists	Well-being is at the forefront of learning, with education, health and social care professionals working together
Parents were neither expected, nor supported, to influence educational outcomes for their children	Parent partnership is recognised as the essential key to achievement for learners with SEND
Pupils were not involved, or expected to take responsibility for their own learning	Pupils are at the centre of learning, influencing the style and content of teaching. Self-responsibility is a major goal for SEND learners
Labels, low expectations and stereotypical judgements stifled achievement and aspiration for learners with SEND	Enlightenment – high aspirations and expectations guide individual success
Less emphasis on individuality – SEN often regarded as a homogenous group	Personalisation and individuality recognised as key factors in the high achievement of SEND learners

During the 1980s, my role was to support the changed intake of pupils with SEN into mainstream schools; one, an ex-grammar. Many staff were overwhelmed by what they regarded as children who should not be there – and not knowing how to teach pupils below 'grammar school' standard. So, changing *culture* had to happen first before changes in policy and curricular practice could be attempted; a reminder that *place* represents a sense of belonging for all learners.

## Inclusion as whole-school policy

For inclusion to mean 'success for all', every member of staff, including non-teaching, must subscribe. The spirit of inclusion that leads to culture change filters down from management, as policy and practice inform and reflect each other. Key indicators:

- A mission statement that expresses unconditional acceptance of all learners whose needs can realistically be met in mainstream.
- Policies that embody the mission statement.
- Local mainstream and special schools working together: outreach support and dual placement or training for mainstream staff.
- Every aspect of the curriculum promotes participation and achievement for all.
- All staff on the same wavelength regarding inclusion and striving to achieve it.
- Diversity and difference embraced as a school's strength.
- Use of combined budgets reflecting inclusive principles.

Ofsted (2009b) identified key features of 12 'outstanding' secondary schools, noting that even in challenging circumstances, these schools were highly inclusive. For every student, the school had high regard for:

- educational progress – seeking the best outcomes.
- personal development – the importance of independence and self-responsibility.
- well-being – recognising that positive emotions underpin effective learning.

Other common features contributed to success:

- Proving constantly that disadvantage need not limit achievement.
- Putting students first.
- Strong values and high expectations.
- Fulfilment of individual potential through outstanding teaching, rich opportunities and well-targeted support.
- Carefully implemented strategies for removing barriers.
- A high degree of internal consistency.
- Striving towards further improvement.
- Outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

What is well-distributed leadership? Is this management that permeates all levels of policy and practice? Is it effective delegation that stretches into classrooms? Do leaders 'walk the job' and use observations to improve policy? SENCOs, being part of the management team, are in a good position to 'walk their job' for SEND learners.

Whole-school inclusion challenges staff to identify vulnerable groups, some of whom may have SEND, for example, pupils who:

- have English as their second language.
- have learning difficulties that require SEN provision.
- have disabilities that require reasonable adjustments.
- need help to develop social and emotional skills.
- are looked after by the LA.
- are from travelling communities.
- are financially disadvantaged.
- are young carers.
- are particularly gifted and talented.

The schools rated 'outstanding' paid much attention to well-being, inviting questions: How can sociological factors be compensated for? And how can schools eliminate disadvantage as a justifiable reason for poor attainment?

Ofsted (2014) reported that in 13 LAs, learners had a less than 50% chance of attending a 'good' or 'outstanding' secondary school. What might be deduced? Is the proportion of 'good' or 'outstanding' secondaries in these authorities less than 50%? Which of the above factors are missing?

To be 'outstanding', practice must reflect the highest expectations of staff and the highest aspirations of all learners, including the most able, disabled, and those with SEN. Schools must be consistent, with all staff marching towards agreed inclusion goals.

'Achievement for All' (AfA 2009) was based around whole-school inclusion. The original project involved ten LAs, pupils in Years 1,5,7,10, including those with SEND. Supported by Lamb (DCSF 2009b) the project involved conversations with parents/carers to share achievement aspirations, and challenged schools to:

- build structured, aspirational parental conversations into staff roles.
- make these conversations compatible with reviews.

AfA invited schools to consider the following issues for whole-school inclusion:

VISION:

- To what extent is there a shared vision of high expectations/aspirations for all – spread amongst all staff?
- How do pupils and parents support this vision?

COMMITMENT:

- How extensive is whole-school commitment towards this challenge?
- How relentlessly is progress for pupils with SEND assessed/monitored?
- How well is the culture of inclusion embedded?

## COLLABORATION:

- How do external specialists affect SEND outcomes? Evidence?
- How do parents collaborate in their child's learning and school policy?
- How do SEND pupils engage in policy-making that affects them?

## COMMUNICATION:

- How effectively do staff share ideas and expertise?
- What safeguarding systems are in place for vulnerable children?
- What opportunities are there for aspirational conversations with parents and pupils?
- How are SEND (and other) pupils involved in decision-making?

AfA as a charity no longer operates, but the above questions continue to apply as schools search for the success that stems from – aspiration, access and achievement.

So, is 'aspiration' the essential starting point from which policy and practice follow? SENCOs play a huge part in helping to place vulnerable pupils on an equal footing. The job has expanded beyond previous recognition and involves collaboration with managers of other vulnerable groups. The inclusion policy must clarify which staff work together to reflect it in practice.

## Inclusion in practice

'Leading on Inclusion' (DfES 2005a) identified three criteria as touchstones for debate: *presence*, *participation* and *achievement*. Table 4.2, adapted from small-step assessment, considers how these might be identified in mainstream classrooms.

Table 4.2 Recognising presence, participation and achievement

**PRESENCE:** Pupils are present but may only encounter things. They may show awareness of what is happening but respond only in a basic manner. There is no significant learning from the experience and no change for the pupil as a result of being in the lesson.

**PARTICIPATION:** Pupils are not only present, but use skills of listening, speaking and working in groups. They engage and may feel involved by striving to join in, even if learning is minimal. Some small change has taken place, but with little usable understanding of the ideas and concepts.

**GAINING SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT:** Pupils understand what the lesson is about and are fully included. They gain skills and knowledge to transfer into other areas of learning – social skills, literacy and numeracy. Achievement from the content of the lesson is clearly demonstrated. Change has taken place.

These criteria reflect use of the 'engagement model' (expanded in Chapter 7) now used to assess achievement of pupils with significant learning difficulties. Pupils can be present in classrooms without any learning outcome – but if no bridge connects participation with achievement, what is the point? These criteria suggest there should be recognisable *change* from classroom experience. Consider:

1. a Year 8 student with SLD is supported in Maths by a TA who tries to interpret the teacher's explanation of algebraic equations – without success. The challenge is too high. This pupil does not interact with peers. His 'group' consists of himself and the TA. No change – no learning.
2. a child with visual impairment needs materials in enlarged font, but in some lessons, this is not provided, so the child cannot participate.
3. a pupil with autism sits outside the classroom. Occasionally, a TA checks that he is copying spellings correctly – with no focus on learning, and no participation.
4. objectives in science are to observe/report chemical changes. Some pupils with SEND observe the changes but cannot report them in writing, so they draw them, or describe to a TA. There is some recognisable change from this lesson.
5. as part of a WW2 topic, groups debate whether or not life in Nazi Germany was better or worse than before Hitler. Despite valiant efforts by the TA, one pupil does not understand the language, cannot join in – and recalls nothing. No change! No learning! Much frustration!

Schools need to question whether inclusion means pupils should be in class lessons 100%, even if challenges are unreachable. Not all lessons can be made accessible. If presence, participation and achievement are sound criteria by which to judge effective inclusion – what needs to happen? If occasionally, lessons are seen as a waste of time for certain pupils, is participation in something else a better option? All pupils need opportunities to demonstrate what they CAN do – rather than what they cannot. Does presence alone also encourage pupils to accept misunderstandings as normal, rather than being encouraged to recognise and deal with confusions – limiting independence?

Inclusion at class level is a major challenge: multi-tasking at its extreme. Chapter 5 explores further the flexible relationship between inclusion and HQT.

## Inclusion as personal experience

Chapter 2 briefly explored personalisation as individual quirks of character. For many pupils, is personalisation icing on the cake – the sweetener? Personalisation invites teachers to get to know a minority of pupil's needs in more insightful ways. For the 'disadvantaged', including pupils with SEND, might personalisation also reflect 'wrap-around care'?

Personalisation may also represent the *value* of lesson experiences, for example:

- the feel-good factor.
- a swell of pride as a child runs out after a good lesson.
- a brief chat has helped to lift a child's mood – avoiding confrontation.
- a pupil has received a special reward for good work.

Strategies for SEND support are often highly personalised. Social stories for pupils with autism may have a common structure, yet each story is individual.

Personalisation involves a two-way channel of communication. No longer do teachers teach – and pupils learn – in one direction. Learners teach educators about themselves to further inform teaching strategies that support their learning. This two-way personalisation cycle holds the key to narrowing that elusive achievement gap.

Is inclusion basically a choice between mainstream and special schooling? Webster *et al* (2021) queried whether pupils with SEND do better or worse if included in a mainstream school, and whether non-SEND pupils do better or worse when peers with SEND are included. Studies suggest that mainstream inclusion has many positives:

- Social outcomes and peer acceptance.
- Fewer behavioural issues.
- More community participation.
- Greater independence.
- Some academic gains – greater in primary than secondary.

Are some of these gains, especially social, due to pupils with SEND being with non-SEND peers, learning from positive modelling and interaction? Could they emanate from greater peer acceptance and social engagement? The research also suggests that inclusion benefits pupils with SEND through participation in school and community groups and promotes independence.

A report on how education has changed since Warnock (Lindsay *et al* 2020), documents changes 40 years on, that remain relevant and indicate the future for pupils with SEND. The report stresses that some of Warnock's principles are not yet embedded, namely:

- parents as genuine partners in education.
- multi-disciplinary assessment.
- diagnosis/terminology (from ESN to learning difficulties) that has still not brought about the accuracy needed for precise intervention.
- early intervention.
- individual needs versus SEND labelling.

Why is it taking so long for the changes to take effect, and result in more positive outcomes for learners with SEND? What are we still failing to see, understand and get to grips with? Do these research findings point to outdated beliefs and expectations? Or has more positive philosophy still not filtered down through policy into practice? Does it demonstrate lack of skills and experience amongst mainstream teachers? If so, is HQT now the focus area for research?

## Summary

This chapter has explored factors that facilitate successful inclusion – place, policy, practice and personalisation – as starting points for debate. How do ‘presence, participation and achievement’ fit with ‘learning objectives, styles and access’? Are these concepts helpful for schools searching for that elusive judgement of ‘outstanding’? The answers are contextual. What works for one school may not work as well for another.

Inclusion is not about creating templates. Teaching must never be unrealistically simplified as a ‘painting by numbers’ approach, leaving little scope for that inspirational uniqueness each teacher brings to the collective endeavour. Hopefully these ideas will inspire the kind of debate that will take schools closer to their inclusion quest.

Inclusion has come a long way with place and policy – but has further to go with practice and personalisation.