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.

Introduction

The EYFS represents a child- and family-centred, egalitarian, anti-discriminatory and inclusive approach to meeting children’s needs and interests that promotes their learning and development. Inclusion is important because it promotes a culture of equality of opportunity and high achievement for all children, by encouraging the development of more flexible attitudes, policies and everyday practices. It also promotes community cohesion and integration through understanding of and respect for others.

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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.

**Extending the scope of individualised learning**

EYFS helps those working with young children to provide challenging expectations and relevant, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for babies and children. This is presented as an on-going cycle of understanding the nature of young children’s development (Development matters), observation and assessment (Look, listen and note), teaching and learning (Effective practice) and Planning and resourcing. The cycle applies to all children.

Where children are developing more slowly, for whatever reason, practitioners need to extend this way of working and to plan for smaller steps in learning and longer periods of consolidation between characteristic milestones. The material provided by Early Support to supplement the areas of Learning and Development on this CD-ROM offers practical help by providing additional information about patterns of development and additional ideas for things to look out for and do to promote learning.

**Effective practice in relation to Inclusive Practice**

- All practitioners must promote equality of opportunity and a positive attitude to diversity, whether or not there is a diverse population locally, and even if the school or setting caters for a particular religious community. Independent faith schools and settings must consider how to encourage children to acquire respect for their own and other cultures in a way that promotes understanding and community cohesion, in accordance with the Education Regulations for Independent Schools.

- Practitioners should be aware that all children have different experiences, interests, skills and knowledge which affect their ability to develop and learn.

- Providers have obligations under legislation, including the amended Race Relations Act and the Disability Discrimination Act, and should ensure that practitioners are aware of the implications of these obligations. Race Relations legislation makes it a duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination [and to], promote equality and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. Disability Discrimination legislation expresses a duty not to treat disabled children ‘less favourably’ than others and to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to include them. The SEN Code of Practice expresses inclusion as an expectation that practitioners and settings will extend the concept of ‘individualised learning’ and provide any additional help needed to include and support individual children with special educational needs, using a graduated approach at Early Years Action or Early Years Action Plus (DfES 2001).

- 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 then 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 taken1. 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.

1 This and some other indicators of good practice quoted here are adapted from the All of Us - Inclusion Checklist for settings
Settings should:

- Have a Race Equality Action plan.
- Have a named member of staff responsible for race equality.
- Have a commitment to challenging and eradicating racism.
- Provide a welcoming atmosphere with approachable staff.
- Welcome all families equally.
- Have accurate information about all the children in the setting, such as regarding ethnicity, religion and naming systems.
- Take care to spell and pronounce names correctly.
- Recognise the need for training in race equality whatever the ethnic make up of the setting and surrounding area.
- Share their commitment to race equality with parents and openly deal with racist remarks or other discriminatory behaviour making it clear that such behaviour is unacceptable.
- Ensure all staff have access to equalities training.
- Handle questions about race and ethnicity honestly, sensitively and openly.
- Treat everyone with equal concern.
- Ensure all staff have a basic understanding and knowledge of faiths and cultures to ensure everyone is catered for, including those of no faith.
- Check that resources reflect cultural and ethnic diversity and do not promote negative stereotypes, for example, ensure dolls and puppets have accurate and realistic skin tones, facial features and hair textures.

(Guidelines taken from Portsmouth EMA Service’s Early Years Race Equality checklist – www.bliss.portsmouth.sch.uk)

**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.

Young children will be at many stages of learning English as an additional language:

- some children are bilingual from birth, because their families have talked to them in more than one language;
- some children will be acquiring English as an additional language. As with their first language, this needs to be learned in context, through practical, meaningful experiences and interaction with others. These children may spend a long time listening before they speak English, and will often be
able to understand much of what they hear, particularly where communication through gesture, sign, facial expression and using visual support is encouraged.

Learning opportunities should be planned to help children to develop their English, and support should be provided to help them to take part in other activities by, for example:

- building on children’s experiences of language at home and in the wider community by providing a range of opportunities to use their home language(s), so that their developing use of English and other languages support one another;
- providing a range of opportunities for children to engage in speaking and listening activities in English with peers and adults;
- ensuring that all children have opportunities to recognise and show respect for each child’s home language;
- providing bilingual support, in particular to extend vocabulary and support children’s developing understanding;
- using bilingual support to ensure accurate assessment of children’s understanding and knowledge;
- as far as possible ensuring that bilingual support staff have an understanding of child development and are preferably early years practitioners;
- providing a variety of writing in the children’s home languages as well as in English, including books, notices and labels;
- providing opportunities for children to hear their home languages as well as English, for example, through use of audio and video materials.

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

Practitioners have obligations under legislation including Part 4 of the Education Act 1996 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. They also have obligations including a requirement to have regard to the SEN Code of Practice. Proprietors of Independent Schools have obligations under Part 8 of the Education Act 2003, amended 2005, and Statutory Instruction 1910, as it applies to pupils with special educational needs.

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 that also includes:

- ethnic minority achievement services;
- specialist teachers for children who are learning English as an additional language;
- traveller education service;
- speech and language therapists;
- occupational therapists;
- physiotherapists;
- paediatricians;
- social workers;
- nurses;
- health visitors;
- midwives;
- educational psychologists;
- child and adolescent mental health services;
- specialist teachers working with children with visual or hearing impairments;
- portage services;
- dieticians;
- parent partnership services.

The Parent Partnership Scheme provided by your local authority is another useful source of information about how local multi-agency additional support services are organised in your area. Ask at your local library or ring the Contact a Family Helpline on tel: 0808 808 3555 (Textphone: 0808 808 3556). They can tell you how to contact your local Parent Partnership Scheme or other organisations with useful information to share. You could also ask at a Children’s Centre in your area where a range of support services are normally represented. These can all advise on what to do next, if you do not already know.

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.

References


Further resources
