

Working Together

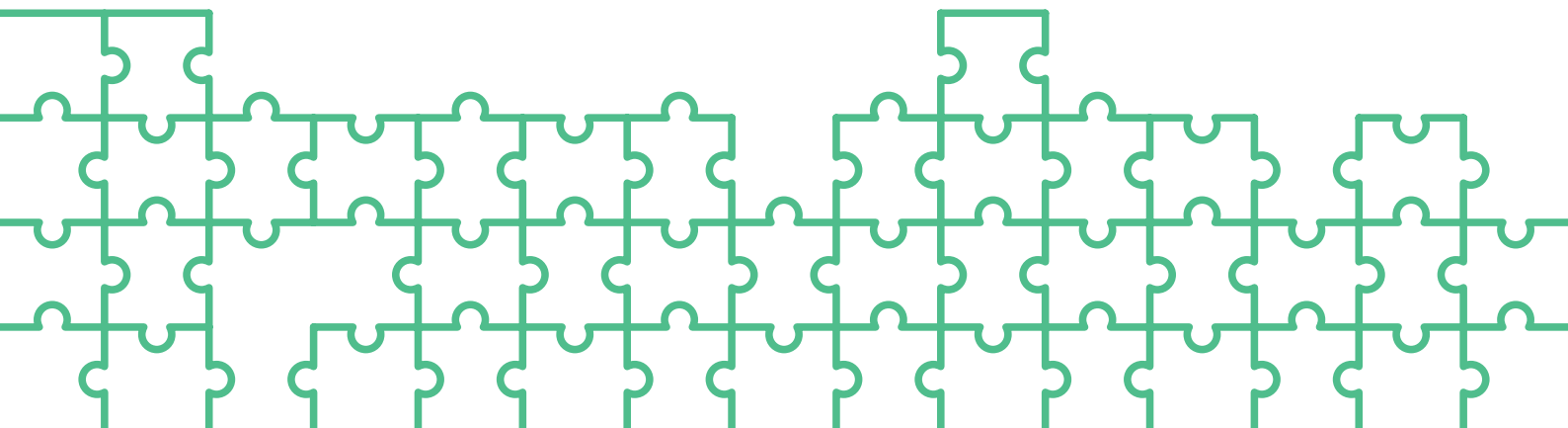
Supporting positive communication between education professionals and parents and carers of children with additional support needs



Module 2

Communicating whole school inclusion approaches to parents

This module will help you explore your whole school approach to inclusion and how this is communicated to parents of children with additional support needs





Background

“It’s difficult to pin it down. I just feel like we are part of the school family – we are welcome and we belong”

Parent

“Equality is one of our school values. Supporting all learners to achieve their potential is at the heart of everything we do, and is communicated to all parents”

Depute Head Teacher

What is a whole school approach to inclusion?’

A whole school approach to inclusion goes beyond additional support needs – it is about respecting and celebrating individual differences and cultures.

A whole school approach is about people working together coherently to make positive change and engaging everyone in the school or early learning and childcare setting community – this includes school senior staff, teachers, pupil support assistants, allied health professionals, children, parents and families.

Parents of children with additional support needs often comment about the “feel” of a school and how this can have a positive impact on how they engage with staff and their child’s learning. Although the ‘feel’ of a setting may seem difficult to pin down, it often relates to the school or education settings’ values and culture. It’s important to remember, people will have different views on what makes a school inclusive.

Throughout our research and consultation work with parents of children with additional support needs, the overwhelming finding was that families want to be included in their school communities.

Exercises



Film: Listen to this parent explain what an inclusive education setting means to her



Duration:
1 min 42 secs

Film: Listen to this Support for Learning Teacher talk about creating a whole school approach to inclusion at her school



Duration:
5 mins 59 secs



Evidence & information

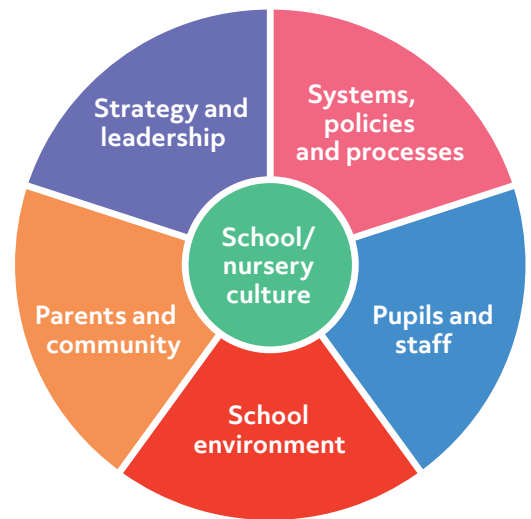
Benefits of a whole school approach for communication and relationships

Taking a whole school approach to inclusion:

- > **Fosters respectful and trusting relationships with parents** – A clear and open commitment to inclusion demonstrates that a setting will do its best to support all learners and helps build stronger relationships with parents.
- > **Increases the chances of early identification of additional support needs** – a holistic approach to inclusion, working with all staff, children and parents can help to raise awareness of additional support needs and identify children who may benefit from additional support at an earlier stage.
- > **Helps pupils and families to manage transitions** – Consistency and reliability can help people to navigate change with more confidence and reduce anxiety for children and parents.
- > **Provides clear and consistent policies and procedures** – this builds a parent's confidence that a request for additional support for their child will be taken seriously and dealt with in a consistent way.
- > **Can increase parental engagement** – Parents will feel more comfortable to engage with staff about their child's learning when settings and schools are open, transparent, communicative, values-based and committed to supporting inclusion.
- > **Acknowledge that things have been difficult and try to refocus communication on the best interests of the child.** Getting support right for the child is a common goal that education staff and parents share.

What creates an inclusive 'feel'?

There are several different factors that influence the feel of an education setting for parents of children with additional support needs. Leadership, policies and processes, the school environment, and people all impact on the culture of a setting. However, effective communication is the key to ensuring an inclusive approach and feel which filters out to all parents.



For example:

- How are processes for supporting children with additional support needs explained to parents?
- How are parents supported to share their views and work in partnership with staff?
- How are pupils' individual successes and achievements celebrated and shared with parents?



Practice reflection

Reflective questions

1. Reflect on the films of the parent and Support for Learning Teacher, discussing the feel of different education settings. How do you communicate your commitment to equality and inclusion to all parents? How do you communicate this to targeted groups or individual parents?
2. How do your school values support inclusivity and positive relationships with parents of children with additional support needs?
3. Consider the list below of some of the different ways your school or setting connects with its community. In your setting or school, do these help to create an inclusive 'feel' and ensure all children, parents and families are made to feel welcome?
 - School/Setting values
 - School/Setting website
 - Parent Handbook
 - Newsletters
 - Social media
 - Displays in school (children's work and noticeboards)
 - Classrooms
 - Physical access to the school
 - Staff visibility
 - Parent Council
 - Parents evenings.
4. How do you identify the needs of the school community and work with parents and families to implement change?
5. What positive action does your school or education setting take to promote inclusion?
6. How does your school or education setting celebrate and communicate successes of children with additional support needs?



Evidence & information

Key conditions to support inclusion

The importance of whole school approaches to support inclusion is backed up by evidence. The Additional Support for Learning Review highlighted key conditions identified by frontline education staff which enable them to effectively fulfil their role in implementing national legislation. These were:

- Values driven leadership
- An open and robust culture of communication, support and challenge – underpinned by trust, respect and positive relationships
- Resource alignment, including time for communication and planning processes
- Ways to support learning and practice development, which incorporate time for coaching, mentoring, reflection and embedding into practice.

Take five minutes to give your setting a score out of 10 for each of the key conditions below (where 10 is the highest score). Think about what is working well and areas for improvement. Make some notes as to why you have assigned these scores and discuss with colleagues to help you think about how you can build on your existing strengths.

Key conditions that enable a whole school approach to inclusion	Score
Values driven leadership <i>Leadership isn't just about senior management. Do staff demonstrate a commitment to inclusion to children, parents and families as leaders within the setting?</i>	/10
An open and robust culture of communication, support and challenge – underpinned by trust, respect and positive relationships <i>A culture of communication, support and challenge includes interactions with colleagues but how you engage with parents and families too</i>	/10
Resource alignment, including time for communication and planning processes with parents <i>Is time set aside for communication and planning with parents at your setting? This is particularly important for families where children have additional support needs who require extra help.</i>	/10
Ways to support learning and practice development, which incorporates time for coaching, mentoring, reflection and embedding into practice <i>Are opportunities available for learning, self-evaluation and practice development? Do you have opportunities to reflect on your interactions with parents of children with additional support needs and develop your approaches?</i>	/10





Ideas

Key steps to developing a whole school approach with families

There are several different factors that influence the feel of a school or education setting. Leadership, policies, processes and people all impact on the culture of a setting however effective communication is the backbone to all these elements, for example:

1. Build an evidence base by reviewing existing evidence and gathering new feedback from parents (as well as children and staff) about current approaches to inclusion to help you understand your starting point and how to progress.
2. Engaging with parents as part of the whole school community will help take them with you on this improvement journey. Regular communication and consultation with all partners about progress will help them feel empowered and part of this important work.
3. Consider the school environment and what experience parents have on a day-to-day basis. Is the education setting a welcoming and inclusive environment for all families?
4. Planning is essential for developing whole school initiatives. What time and resource is allocated to this activity? What do you hope to achieve and by when? Think about ways parents can contribute to and inform planning processes.





Next steps

Reflect on the information in this module and how you will share your learning to promote a whole school approach at your setting or school.

You may ask yourself and your team the following questions:

- What are parents' current views about how your setting or school supports inclusion and additional support for learning?

There are multiple ways to find this information out – parent survey, informal chats with parents, parent focus groups, etc.

- Think about what additional changes could be quickly implemented as short-term improvements to practice? How can parents be more involved in your whole school approach to inclusion?
- What changes need to be implemented in the medium and long-term to create improvements for additional support for learning and develop a comprehensive whole school approach to inclusion? How does this tie into any improvement work that is currently ongoing?



Further reading

How good is our early learning and childcare? and **How good is our school? (4th edition)** identify the features of highly effective practice in relation to a number of relevant areas including wellbeing, equality and inclusion (section 3.1) and support for partnership working across the school community (section 2.7).

The General Teaching Council for Scotland Professional Standards 2021 apply to all registered teachers in Scotland. The standards state that professionals must build positive, rights respecting relationships for learning (item 3.2.3). This includes promoting and developing positive and purposeful relationships with and between learners, colleagues, families and partners, and committing to and demonstrating equity and inclusion through their work.