

Inclusive practice

Inclusive practice is central to providing good quality child-centred settings. When it comes to inclusive practice, a manager's role is to make sure that they and their team create an environment where everybody feels welcome, valued and respected. As we've already discussed in earlier chapters, the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the provision belongs to the manager. Much of the manager's responsibilities with regard to inclusive practice will focus on monitoring behaviour, attitudes and procedures, plus supporting adults and children in understanding the importance of being inclusive and how this can be achieved. Managing inclusive practice also therefore requires managers to provide a role model and reflect on their own practice, so that everybody can see that inclusive practice is a fundamental part of the vision for the setting, rather than 'just another policy'.

Essential skills for inclusive practice

- Keeping up-to-date
- Creating a climate of openness and acceptance
- Raising awareness
- Giving feedback (see Chapter 5)
- Reflective Practice (see Chapter 3)
- Confidence (see Chapter 1).

Keeping up-to-date

Inclusion is just like any other part of our practice, in that it is constantly changing and moving on, so there will never be a 'perfect' inclusive setting. Managers need to create regular time to plan and reflect on up-to-date good inclusive practice so that they can 'take the team with them' to keep

inclusive practice relevant for the children they are currently working with (see Chapter 6).

Managers are of course responsible for the policies and procedures of the setting and this includes keeping them up-to-date and relevant to current practice. A full understanding of inclusive practice will require a manager to know what 'equality' means both legally and in terms of best practice. Any inclusion policy needs to say more than, 'we will not discriminate against a person because of their race, culture, disability, etc'. It will need to specify **how** the setting will not discriminate and **how** you are developing practices that are inclusive.

Reviewing policies and procedures and making sure that they are understood and being put into practice is an important way of keeping up-to-date. Team meetings or specially arranged discussions on the inclusion policy will allow views to be heard and questioned, and enable everybody to deepen their understanding of what inclusion means in the setting. Discussing policies helps the team focus on what your setting believes and what is captured in your vision, and how this translates into practice.

Managers also need to keep up-to-date with current thinking on language and terminology, as this also changes all the time. Reading professional journals, researching on the internet and attending meetings and training courses can all help with this, and there are several suggestions for organisations and websites that can help with this in the back of this book.

Creating a climate of openness and acceptance

It is not possible to know and understand everything about all the different backgrounds of the children and young people of the British Isles or indeed even just those currently using your setting, so **ask**. It is better to encourage an atmosphere where people **enquire and do not assume**, where people are learning from each other and trying to understand, than develop prejudices on grounds of ignorance or develop avoidance reactions. By encouraging children and team members to be open-minded, you will be able to create a climate of openness and tolerance.

Managers need to balance the rights of the child with respect for parents' wishes, and this sometimes means being honest with parents about the aims and policies of the setting. The role of a manager will include being open and frank with parents and children if what is being asked is not possible and would go against policies of the service. For example, if a parent asks that their child does not eat certain foods for religious or health reasons, complying with this request is usually straightforward. On the other hand, if a parent asks that their daughter, aged 11, no longer be allowed to play on adventure

playground equipment because it is not 'ladylike', that would be a request to question because it is discriminating against her on grounds of gender.

First person – supporting good practice

Two of my team had come to have a 'quiet word' as they were concerned about something that kept happening at home time. One little boy was being picked up by his dad who was smacking him pretty much every day because the little boy wasn't quick enough getting his coat on. Although obviously upset by this, the members of staff said they didn't feel that they could intervene because the family were travellers and this way of dealing with children was 'their culture'. I had to remind them that it was our policy that there was no physical punishment on the playbus, regardless of the beliefs or backgrounds of the parents, and offered to talk to the dad at the next session.

Playbus Leader

Raising awareness

It is important to raise awareness of the need for inclusive practice as not everybody has had experience of working with children from a wide range of different backgrounds and abilities. Some members of staff may be less aware than others of how some of their beliefs and practices could stem from incorrect beliefs and assumptions (prejudices) about certain individuals or groups of people, and so it is important that managers make sure they are promoting awareness of inclusive practice to combat stereotypical thinking in the setting.

Ways of raising awareness include:

- Having inclusion policies displayed for staff and parents to read.
- Reviewing the activities and resources offered to children (see Chapter 10 for more ideas on this). Think about whether certain activities encourage stereotyping, sexism or other barriers for some children and explore this with the team. This could be done verbally in team meetings or through a questionnaire.
- Designing or buying in board games on inclusion issues to encourage discussions and learning appropriate to children's age of development.
- Choosing play materials, books etc which reflect the diversity of our

society and encourage non-stereotypical thinking (for example, story books which include men as primary carers).

- Selecting non-stereotypical images for websites, newsletters, etc (for example, does your publicity always include pictures of boys playing football and girls making things?).
- Ensuring that comments and practices which may reflect stereotypical thinking are dealt with in a positive manner and encourage all team members to do the same.

First person – developing awareness

My team really surprised me at our last team meeting as a couple of them asked why we were going through the inclusion policy because we were all white and all women. They also pointed out that we all had qualifications where we would have already 'done' inclusion. At least it opened up the subject for discussion, which was really useful as it brought up a couple of issues that clearly needed sorting out that I hadn't known about. It made me realise that we need to review our inclusive practice just like we would review the rest of our practice, as I can't take it for granted that my team all think and behave the same just because we work with children.

Nursery Manager

Giving feedback

It is vital that all team members are aware of their role with regard to challenging discrimination and are given support in doing this. Give your team the opportunity to discuss a diverse range of methods for dealing with stereotypical thinking and discrimination that arises in the setting. This will not only help support them but also explore what attitudes prevail at the setting.

Managers need to develop the confidence to deal with any adult who makes a remark which goes against the inclusive nature of the setting. Holding an open discussion at a team meeting about adults' use of language can highlight the issue but is not always enough. There may also be a need to discuss non-inclusive practice on a one-to-one basis. Chapter 5 gives suggestions on how to deliver objective criticism which are useful for dealing with discriminatory behaviour or language, although the severity of the remark or behaviour would of course determine what action the manager would need to take.

Case study

Tomás, manager of the after-school club, is sharing a table at snack time with Joseph, who is from East Africa and has not been in England very long. He notices that Joseph eats with his hands and not the knife and fork. One of the boys sitting at the table laughs at him and calls him a baby for not being able to use the cutlery. Tomás intervenes by asking the boy to stop laughing and explaining that people have different ways of eating. He then asks the boy who laughed what food he eats with his fingers, opening up the discussion to involve other things and asks Joseph what he has found different about living in England.

Tomás challenged the behaviour of the boy who mocked Joseph in a gentle way that involved all of them learning and understanding a little more about cultural differences and practices.

Some 'dos' and 'don'ts' when responding to inappropriate remarks

Do

- read up on policies and good practice;
- attend training or discussion groups on inclusive practice;
- look for ways to support the team in developing good inclusive practice;
- bring up issues of dealing with discrimination in team meetings;
- have an open mind but be prepared to say 'that is not acceptable in our setting';
- look at your own personal language and attitudes;
- review and monitor inclusion policies and make changes if necessary.

Don't

- ignore any discriminatory remark even if it was 'meant' as a joke, as it implies that it is 'OK' here to say things like that;
- shout or get angry;
- threaten exclusion or sacking if the policies of the setting do not include this;
- fail to monitor and review because of lack of time or resources;

- give someone a book and tell them to read it, instead of talking to them directly;
- only deal with the issue in private behind closed doors – this gives mixed messages to other team members.

Case study

Bella is one of the volunteers at a local playgroup. A mother brings her three-year-old child who has cerebral palsy. Bella says to the mother, 'I am afraid we have very little equipment for crippled children here.' Nur, the manager, hears this and comes over to the mother and Bella, saying to Bella, 'The child isn't a cripple, Bella; she has a physical impairment, that's all. We can adapt lots of equipment if we think about it.' Nur talks to Bella after the playgroup has finished. She explains to her that words and phrases can really cause offence, even if unintentionally. Nur asks Bella to reflect on her use of the word 'cripple' and points out why it is out of date and inappropriate. Bella is defensive and remarks that she has always used that word and grew up with it. Nur reminds her that the playgroup wishes to remain inclusive to all children and how important a resource it has been for local parents, and for that family in particular. Bella agrees to watch her language, and Nur mentions a few training courses that might help Bella to become more aware of up-to-date language.

Putting it into practice

- Be aware of your own language and behaviour to watch out for hidden prejudices.
- Discuss areas of potential discrimination in the setting at team meetings to improve skills and knowledge.
- Have clearly written policies on inclusion showing how the setting will both prevent and deal with discrimination.
- Have a mixture of equipment and books that all children, whatever their abilities, can access.
- Look into training some of the team in specific skills, e.g. learning sign language.
- Never leave discriminatory language or actions unchallenged.
- When dealing with discrimination, remain calm but firm.
- Get advice and support from others to develop your setting's inclusive practice.

Reflective questions

- Do I see inclusive practice as an essential part of our setting, or just another external requirement?
- Do I provide a role model for others in terms of my own inclusive practice?
- How comfortable do I feel about challenging discrimination (whether intentional or unintentional)?
- Do I have certain areas where I am more (or less) confident or knowledgeable in terms of inclusive practice?
- Can I distinguish between valuing differences and practices which are in line with the overall vision of the setting?