Achievement for All:

Characteristics of effective inclusive leadership -
a discussion document

department for
children, schools and families

The National Strategies

National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Contents

Purpose

We want every young person to achieve their potential and enjoy their time in education. Parents' support for their child's learning is an essential foundation for achievement. Parents told us they want to be more involved in their children's education, and schools see the benefits of greater engagement with parents.
(DCSF 2009a)

Our challenge...is to create a world-leading school system. One which develops every child and young person's potential and talents. And, fundamentally, one which progressively breaks the link between deprivation, disadvantage, disability and low educational attainment ... and one that believes that every child has potential and can succeed and never gives up on any child.
(DCSF 2009b)

The main aims of the Achievement for All project are to:

– improve achievement and progress for all children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND);

– improve parental engagement in their child's education; and

– improve wider outcomes.

More details on the key strands and outcomes of the Achievement for All project can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

Critical to the success of Achievement for All is a whole-school belief system, buy-in and support from the whole staff. This is not just another task for the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or inclusion manager! Successful realisation of the key aims of Achievement for All will need the wholehearted support of the headteacher. School leaders – at various levels of leadership and not just headship – will provide the vision, strategic planning, motivation, support, resources, structures and environment for learning that enable staff in schools and other children's services to work with parents and carers to make the very best possible provision for all children and young people.

From a variety of evidence there are strong claims that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as a school-based influence on pupil learning (Leithwood et al 2006a). It is therefore essential, when embarking on a project that seeks to improve the provision and outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in our schools, that we examine the characteristics of effective school leadership and how these apply to inclusive leadership.

Complementing and building on Achievement for All: Guidance for Schools (DCSF 2009c), this document specifically seeks to raise awareness and develop understanding of the characteristics of effective school leadership, and to provide opportunities for reflection and prompts for discussion. It does so through focusing on how some of these key elements may apply to the main aims of the Achievement for All project. We aim to achieve this through:

– raising awareness of the characteristics of effective leadership in terms of leadership qualities and management processes;

– considering the implications of these characteristics for the leadership of inclusion;

– prompting reflection on the leadership values, beliefs and behaviours evident in schools;

– providing some illustrations and reflective questions for leadership and management to action.

This document is not a definitive statement on effective inclusive leadership, but more a set of prompts for reflection, discussion and exploration in schools, which in turn may feed back into the development of leaders and leadership in children's services.

School leaders have a key role in promoting and implementing the Achievement for All project in primary, secondary and special schools. Headteachers and senior leaders need to take collective responsibility for the leadership of inclusion across their schools. It is their role to engage others to support the vision and to get all stakeholders excited about the opportunities that Achievement for All can provide for all the children and young people and families within their schools.

What we know about effective school leadership

Research for the National College in 2007 identified a core set of leadership practices that form the 'basics' of successful leadership (NCSL 2007):

– **Building vision and setting directions:** successful leaders identify and articulate a vision, promote shared understanding and ownership of this vision in the school community, encourage high expectations and aspirations and monitor organisational performance and progress towards goals.

– **Understanding and developing people:** successful leaders offer intellectual stimulation, provide individual support to staff and an appropriate model – they lead by example. They build on the knowledge, skills and qualities that teachers and other staff have and need in order to achieve the school's key aims and goals. They develop, mentor, recognise and reward behaviours that lead to the achievement of these goals.

– **Redesigning the organisation:** successful leaders build collaborative cultures and processes, manage the environment and work conditions, create and sustain productive relations with parents and the community and connect the school to the wider environment.

– **Managing the teaching and learning programme:** successful leaders create productive working conditions for staff and students alike, they foster organisational stability, ensure effective learning-centred leadership, allocate teachers and support staff to deliver the curriculum and monitor school activity and performance.

Recently published research from the NCSL explores how school leaders create a learning community to improve learning for all (NCSL 2009). Getting the best or most out of people was related to the philosophy, leadership approach and personal skills of the headteacher, including:

– **Motivating:** successful leaders encourage, trust and value colleagues to do well.

– **Modelling:** successful leaders lead by example, especially in teaching.

– **Providing an opportunity to undertake greater responsibility** and undergo development programmes from the second year of teaching.

– **Promoting professional development:** focused on teaching, learning and leadership, and keeping abreast of change; coaching is much in evidence.

– **Encouraging initiative:** allowing people – children and young people, and staff – to experiment, confident they will be supported.

– **Showing interest:** being generous with praise, encouragement and help in moving forward.

– **Knowing the names** of a very high proportion of learners; valuing and respecting them.

– **Being community-minded:** successful leaders involve, consult and engage with the local community.

– **Building teams:** successful leaders build teams and empower them.

These 'basics' of effective leadership clearly provide a sound foundation for taking forward the Achievement for All project. They apply just as much to leadership for inclusion as for other aspects of school life. In the next section we seek to explore some particular features of leadership that underpin the above key characteristics.

What we know about the leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities

In 2006, Ofsted reported that:

Pupils with even the most severe and complex needs were able to make outstanding progress in all types of settings. High quality specialist teachers and a commitment by leaders to create opportunities to include all pupils were the keys to success. (Ofsted 2006)

The report also identified that schools where children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made outstanding progress had the following key features:

– **Ethos** – high expectations, inclusive, good relationships.

– **Specialist staff** – high level of skilled support, academically and socially.

– **Focused professional development for all staff** – regular and based on needs.

In a study of inclusive education in three countries – the USA, UK and Portugal – features of effective practice included an uncompromising commitment to inclusive education with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, collaboration, problem solving and conflict resolution skills, an understanding and appreciation of the expertise of others and supportive relationships (Kugelmass 2003).

Beany (2006) identified vision and commitment as key to effective inclusion with skills such as confidence building and negotiating. Innovative approaches, partnerships, flexibility and collaboration were also found to be important. Strategies for inclusion included practical support, provision of resources, discussion, whole-class interventions and training.

From what we know about effective leadership in general, and from the above research in particular, we have identified four key elements relating to the effective leadership and management of SEND for further reflection and discussion: **shared vision, commitment, collaboration** and **communication.**

Elements of effective leadership for Achievement for All

The following sections encourage school leaders to consider key elements of effective inclusive leadership and to reflect on the qualities and processes that may support these. This does not seek to provide a definitive framework for inclusive leadership but is more a set of prompts for reflection and discussion. School leaders may want to use this with their leadership teams or whole staff to raise awareness of issues, encourage self-reflection and identify areas for individual and collective development as part of the Achievement for All gap analysis.

When considering these elements a common focal point should be: what does this mean in terms of leading learning and teaching? How do these elements impact on teaching styles and strategies, and learning experiences for children and young people with SEND? How do they support inclusive teaching and learning?

Four key elements of effective inclusive leadership are:

– **A shared vision**

– **Commitment**

– **Collaboration**

– **Communication**

A shared vision

The successful and effective implementation of the aims of Achievement for All needs leaders to be driven by a set of core values and beliefs around the entitlements and expectations for all children and young people, especially those identified with SEND. They model these values in their interactions with children and young people, staff, parents and other professionals engaged in the education and care of these pupils. The vision is apparent both in informal and formal communications – staff meetings, conversations in corridors, meetings with parents and other agencies. In particular:

– At the heart of the successful leadership of inclusion lies a core set of values and beliefs about children and young people and their entitlement and aspirations. Successful leaders reflect on what their core values are; how they articulate and demonstrate these – how they live the values; how they share expectations, raise aspirations and encourage dialogue; and how they monitor and evaluate the achievement of key aims – essentially how their vision comes to life.

– A shared vision gives staff confidence to be flexible and innovative in reviewing, evaluating and developing effective provision for children and young people with SEND. Leaders nurture staff and children and young people to provide the right conditions for teaching and learning. Their passion is evident.

– Leadership at all levels within the school promotes a clear and consistent vision and expectations for engaging with parents and carers of children and young people identified with SEND.

– A shared vision and expectations ensure that provision for and outcomes achieved by children and young people with SEND are monitored; that there is rigorous analysis of data across a range of aspects including attainment, attendance and behaviour.

– The effective school leader is motivated by a fundamental moral purpose towards inclusion as a core value, and with this a non-negotiable commitment to enabling achievement for ALL children within school, believing that ALL children have a right to achieve their potential, while also understanding that achievement is far wider than simply a numerical level.

– Knowledge of the community that the school serves underpins a successful leader's vision for the school. An awareness of context and issues within a school community is important to enable empathy, and to understand and prioritise effective strategies to deploy when introducing Achievement for All.

– A clarity of vision will help to encourage the development of the creative and innovative practices that Achievement for All seeks to develop. It encourages risk taking and challenge within an environment of excitement, enthusiasm and engagement. It ensures that learning is fun.

– The vision of successful school leaders is based on an understanding and self-awareness of their own personal leadership styles and how these may apply to embedding the key principles and strands of Achievement for All throughout their school.

Finally, it is vital that school leaders share and promote their vision for Achievement for All, enabling all stakeholders in school to own and shape its direction. To be successful it will need a whole-school commitment based on collective responsibility and shared accountability.

To what extent is there a shared vision and high expectations for the outcomes for all pupils in your school? How do you know?

In what ways will the core values in your school underpin the work in each of the three strands of Achievement for All?

How do children/young people, parents, staff and governors understand and influence those values?

How do they see those values enacted in the behaviour of leaders and staff in your school?

What is your vision for the engagement with the school community?

In what ways will your knowledge of your particular school community influence the work in the three strands?

How do you ensure that all in your school view each child/family without prejudice and understand individual circumstances?

How do you value 'pupil voice'? In what ways do children/young people with SEND actively engage in supporting and designing their own learning?

To what extent is there a shared vision for the engagement of parents and carers in supporting the learning and development of their children? How do you know?

What does 'SEND' and 'inclusion' mean in your school? Does your school have a common understanding of what makes for effective and inclusive teaching and learning?

Elements of effective leadership for Achievement for All

Commitment

Successful leaders reflect their values and beliefs in their commitment to children and young people. They are relentless in securing the most appropriate provision. They commit high-quality resources and engage specialist staff where appropriate. They have a strategic view of what is needed to skill up their workforce to improve inclusion, are committed to the constant development of staff training and successfully deploy appropriate staff to meet the needs of the individual – all crucial elements towards the successful introduction and impact of Achievement for All in school (eg facilitating training for key teachers to hold structured conversations with parents – Strand 2).

In particular:

– Effective leaders are committed to developing staff confidence and skills, and providing resources that enable ownership of the vision for Achievement for All. They especially provide opportunities for children and young people to influence the vision and engage with assessing and planning their own learning – pupil voice is crucial to effective empowerment. This includes: removing as many barriers as possible, providing opportunities for staff to lead and develop, planning specific interventions for each individual case and assessing impact.

– There is commitment to a sense of ownership for inclusion across the school community to ensure progress of children and young people identified with SEND. It is not about delegating responsibility and accountability to the SENCo or inclusion manager, but about enabling these roles to support the concept of collective responsibility. Clear roles and responsibilities will encourage staff to take responsibility and become accountable for all tasks needed to successfully introduce and embed Achievement for All.

– Through sustained commitment, based on moral purpose, and consistent messages, leaders create an ethos and culture of inclusion. It is reflected in the school improvement plan, and progress is monitored and challenged by the leadership team and reported to governors and the community regularly.

- Successful schools have robust systems of tracking, reviewing and recognising outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation of inclusion is planned into the school improvement plan or self-evaluation form (SEF). Leaders use this information to make judgements and to inform future plans.

- Commitment is reflected in a shared understanding and awareness of what good progress is, what has been achieved and the extent to which it meets the high aspirations for these children and young people. It should be recognised, for example, that for some children and young people achievement may be national expectation 'two-level progress' between Key Stages and, for others, progress within a P scale may be a major achievement.

- The commitment of successful leaders is also seen in the way they equip children for an ever-changing technological world, give experience of life skills and understanding of enterprise opportunities and inspire the children to constantly question and set personal targets.

- Leadership at all levels within the school demonstrates a clear commitment to engaging actively and positively with parents and carers of children and young people identified with SEND.

All this requires tenacity and resilience – an absolute determination to secure the best provision for vulnerable children and young people with particular needs.

What evidence of a commitment to the aims of Achievement for All is apparent in your school?

Are expectations of progress high enough across the school? How do you know? Has progression guidance been disseminated to all staff?

What strategies are in place to track children's progress? Is progress good enough? What evidence do you have to support this?

Is there a collective responsibility for the progress of SEND children and young people in your school? How do you know?

In what ways are children with SEND involved in their own learning, target setting and person-centred reviews in your school?

How is the commitment to engaging parents evident in your school?

How do you ensure all staff have the appropriate skills to embed a culture of inclusion in your school?

How high a profile does inclusion have in your school improvement plan?

In what ways are resources appropriately planned to meet the needs of ALL children in school?

Elements of effective leadership for Achievement for All

Collaboration

Successful provision and outcomes for children and young people with SEND will be founded on a culture of collaboration, and management systems and processes which support this. Achievement for All will benefit from leaders across schools working together with a sense of collective responsibility for these children and young people. It also means that leaders are outward facing – they look beyond their own school, they show an appreciation and understanding that all schools are different and that all have particular strengths and good practice which can be shared. Effective leaders model shared working practices between schools and phases of education.

– Successful collaboration is based on the creation of an environment of engagement for all stakeholders and outside agencies within and beyond the school. It may involve other schools – groups, clusters and partnerships – which are prepared to be outward facing and to transfer information and practice.

– Collaboration with parents is particularly important to achieve successful outcomes for Achievement for All.

– Successful collaboration in support of pupils with SEND is evident when there is effective interaction and communication between staff in different classes, departments and schools to ensure that knowledge about pupils and what they have achieved and what helps them learn is shared effectively.

– Schools that collaborate well may, for example, share systems and processes to enable effective assessment for learning to happen. They recognise the importance of assessment for learning as a vital component of successful approaches to personalised learning. They model and monitor these and take advantage of opportunities to engage in professional dialogue. They ensure that they:

● evaluate the current assessment strategies used within and between schools and whether these enable effective assessment for learning;

● ensure all teachers are aware, plan and use various teaching styles appropriate to individual learning styles;

● monitor the extent to which the curriculum meets the needs of the individual (taking context and ability into account).

What evidence is there of effective collaborative leadership within and beyond your school?

How proactive is your school at developing effective cross-agency partnerships for children and young people identified with SEND? What is the impact of this?

To what extent do you know that your pupils with SEND make an effective transition between classes and between phases and schools?

How do you enable parents to collaborate in their children's learning?

How do you provide parents with up-to-date information about their child's current level of progress and wider achievements in school?

How do you collaborate outside of your school context? Is this external collaboration effective? How do you know?

Elements of effective leadership for Achievement for All

Communication

The successful leadership of SEND relies on effective communications at a range of levels – with children and young people, with parents and carers and with staff in and between schools and children's services and other agencies. Leaders need to be engaging, particularly nurturing relationships with children and young people and their parents/carers. Successful implementation of Achievement for All will rely on leaders being good listeners and demonstrating professional humility.

- Skilled leaders model positive engagement with parents/children and outside agencies, facilitate training for key teachers to receive specific guidance and support for structured conversation with parents and set up conflict resolution/problem-solving strategies throughout the school.

- They communicate their vision for inclusion well – formally and informally – and through the way in which they behave and interact with all those involved.

- Effective communication is evident in the clarity of expectations, and roles and responsibilities, particularly the collective responsibility for the provision and achievement of children and young people identified with SEND.

- Successful communicators ensure that staff, parents and children and young people share high expectations and plan for maximum progress as early as possible and throughout their school life.

- Successful communication means listening actively to and valuing what parents and carers know and understand about their children's needs and preferred ways of learning.

- Communications are based around clear structures and systems, with agreed protocols for meetings including what information can be shared and how.

- Communications are fit for purpose – they take account of the context of schools and the preferences of parents.

– Leaders work together within and across schools to make transition a positive experience, planning any transition as early as possible for maximum continuity and progression. Effective communications lie at the heart of successful transition.
This might involve:

- all phases working together to ensure smooth transition – sharing knowledge and approaches for individuals, for example cross-phase support workers, e-buddies and involvement of cross-phase staff in reviews;

- opportunities for discussing and sharing pedagogy relating to SEND between year groups and phases – adapting the teaching to the learning required;

- opportunities to share effective practices relating to assessment, target setting and tracking progress, parental engagement and achieving wider outcomes.

– Through their communications and their own teaching, leaders across the school demonstrate that learning should be fun – an enjoyable and rewarding experience for ALL pupils.

How do you know there is effective communication between leaders (and between leaders and other staff) in your school? What evidence do you have to support this?

What systems of safeguarding the most vulnerable children does your school have in place? How are these communicated?

How do your communications with parents and carers show that you value the contribution that they can make to support their children's learning? How do you know that the communications are good and work for parents?

What opportunities are provided in your school to set targets with children and young people with parents/carers? How do you communicate these targets?

In what ways are children and young people involved in your school's decision-making processes?

Implications of the new Ofsted framework (September 2009)

The new Ofsted framework provides useful criteria for reflection and support for school self-evaluation. Successful implementation of Strand 3: Provision for developing wider outcomes (see DCSF 2009c Guidance for Schools) for further details) will help schools to provide evidence in support of their SEF regarding the new well-being indicators within the revised Ofsted framework (September 2009). The new Ofsted framework has an increased focus not only on pupil well-being but also on safeguarding arrangements and partnerships with other services, organisations and providers. In addition, this strand of Achievement for All will support schools in reviewing their Disability Equality Scheme (DES) and in providing the core offer of extended services by 2010.

It is also worth noting that some aspects of the Ofsted inspection schedule will have limiting grades – that is, grades that contribute to and effect other judgements, including overall effectiveness. These apply to only a small number of critical aspects that Ofsted considers to be essential in assuring the quality of education and the well-being of children, young people and adult learners. The three critical judgements that will apply to all remits are safeguarding, equality and diversity, and capacity to improve. In many remits, the judgement on achievement will also be a limiting grade.

The overall judgement on children and young people's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning takes into account the quality of learning for pupils identified with SEND and their progress.

Thus, the Ofsted framework can help leaders reflect on the effective implementation of the key strands of Achievement for All; and the effective implementation of the strands will also help schools to meet some of the significant expectations underpinning Ofsted judgements.

Conclusion

We hope that this document will provoke reflection and discussion about the characteristics of effective school leadership in general, and about inclusive leadership in particular. In conjunction with the Guidance for Schools booklet (DCSF 2009c), we hope that it will help schools that are engaging in the Achievement for All project to identify the strengths of their provision and priorities for development and improvement. The prompts can be used to stimulate personal reflection, to encourage and support discussion both within leadership teams and also across the whole staff and to provide clusters of schools with starting points for reviewing their collective practice.

As the Achievement for All project unfolds and schools develop practice, we hope that more learning about leadership will take place and be shared beyond the Achievement for All project.

Above all, we hope that this document will help school leaders to make even better provision for children and young people with SEND to improve further their achievement and progress.

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Appendix 1: Key strands of the Achievement for All project

The Achievement for All project is based on three clearly defined strands (see DCSF 2009c for further information specifically related to the strands).
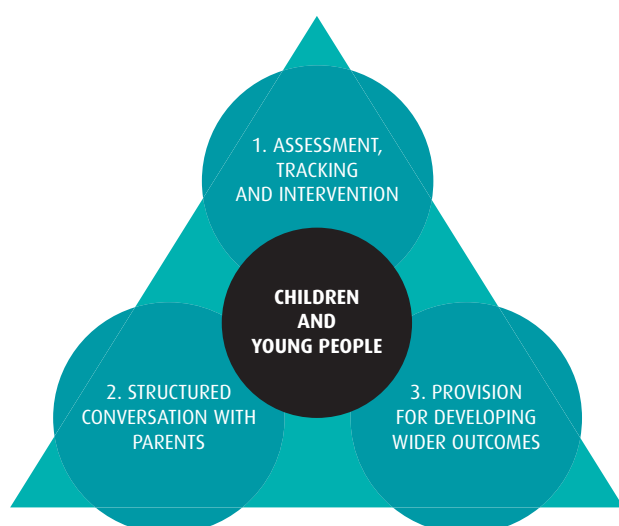
1. Assessment, tracking and intervention includes the use of assessing pupil progress (APP) to track children and young people's progress, the setting of curriculum targets and implementation of appropriate interventions to support children and young people to make progress in their learning.

2. Structured conversation with parents focuses on the use of a clear framework for developing an open, ongoing dialogue with parents about their child's learning.

3. Provision for developing wider outcomes involves schools developing key actions to support children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to make progress in one or two of the following areas: attendance, behaviour, bullying, developing positive relationships and increasing participation.

Key outcomes

The Achievement for All project seeks to realise a range of important outcomes in terms of school and local authority practice and provision, as well as outcomes for children and young people. The success of Achievement for All will be shown by:

- children and young people with SEND being more confident learners, having a positive attitude towards their education and seeing their potential;

- increased levels of progress relative to their starting points, attainment, overall achievement and expectation for all children and young people;

- parents being more engaged in their child's learning and having increased confidence in the education system;

- teachers having a wider range of successful, inclusive learning and teaching approaches in place and being confident they are meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND;

- school leaders feeling confident staff share their commitment to an inclusive ethos;

- local authorities feeling confident they have provided high-quality educational opportunities for children and young people with SEND, have resources that are being used effectively and are directly improving services for children and young people with SEND and their parents.

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services is committed to excellence and dedicated to inclusiveness. We exist to develop and inspire great leaders of schools, early years settings and children's services. We share the same ambition – to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people.

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