



3. Practising inclusive education

3.1 Case study of inclusive education

Introduction

This section is a case study from a SENCO working with a high level tetraplegic student attending secondary school. The case study talks about the importance of involving the student, using technology, encouraging social contact, it covers their policies, how the teaching assistant's work, and how to make inclusion happen.

Our student has full access to academic and pastoral mentors to discuss issues to do with her learning and plans for the future. We have felt it is important she has the opportunity to express her views and explore the different options available to her. As in the case of any student, making decisions independently and encountering different people in a variety of contexts builds confidence to deal with matters yourself. We see this as an important life skill when entering the work place or going to university.

Involving the student

Following our student's trauma, she was surrounded by a lot of professionals involved in her rehabilitation and the process of integrating back into home and school life. The presence of so many people is to help but it can also be overwhelming. Suddenly an awful lot of people to deal with. At school we were aware that this can all be 'a bit much'. We felt it was important to encourage our student to make her own decisions and express her views but only when she specifically wished.

Technology

We encourage our student to use other learning styles and assistive technology like voice recognition software so she can be more independent. But for this student, the stage she is at is the one she is happiest with. We don't want to push her too hard but we do want to make her aware of what is out there. So that when she goes to university and then goes into the world of work, she'll be able to use these things to get through her day-to-day job.

Social/friendship

Our student has close friends and we endeavour to encourage as much social contact as possible during school hours, without the presence of an adult (teaching assistant). We try not to engineer situations because that's a very crass way of dealing with the matter. It's important to let the young person decide what they are comfortable with in terms of friendships. They still have their ups and downs and you have to allow them to deal with them how they wish.

Policies

We review our policies with regard to Health, Safety, Accessibility and Special Educational Needs provision regularly. At the time that our student returned to school after her rehabilitation, many physical adaptations were made and we work in an anticipatory capacity to ensure she has full access to the buildings and curriculum. We also have medical and evacuation plans. We meet every term to discuss these matters and an update of our student's needs is always on the agenda – but we do take a wider view of accessibility for all. It is useful to review regularly because the student's needs constantly change. Staff and pupils found it extremely useful to receive training in the needs of a student with a spinal cord injury from Back Up. It raised awareness, increased knowledge and made integration back into school life much easier.

TA's

The partnership between a student and their teaching assistant is inevitably, a close one. It's important both parties have someone to mentor the relationship. As SENCO I have responsibility to ensure the needs of the student and TA are met and to ensure the relationship works smoothly. Our student and her TA make a great team – but both sides need someone available to 'offload' to when necessary.

The TA of a student with a spinal cord injury needs to be very flexible and understand they will be learning alongside their student. The role is diverse and includes the pastoral and academic. This might include helping the student drink and eat, transporting the student from lesson-to-lesson; helping her plan study time and acting as a link between subject teachers, academic and pastoral mentors – and of course home. The TA sees the most of the student and takes her welfare and wellbeing seriously. The TA is often the first to notice things which ensure we offer the right level of support and care at the right times.

Encouraging advocacy

Everyone handles different situations in their own way but we've encouraged our student to be forthright with friends and those around her. It's OK to speak up if you feel you are being left out or side-lined.

On supporting inclusion

Inclusive practices should already be part of the approaches to teaching and learning in a school. On a practical level, issue each department with a personal learning profile of the student detailing their revised, learning needs. The departments should think about how they will address the student's needs – how will they adapt teaching strategies and activities. It's down to the teachers to think of how to make their subjects fully accessible and provide learning opportunities in the student's preferred learning style. Flexibility may be required with timetabling. For example, our student requires a slightly later start to the school day now. Her timetable has been created with that in mind. The teaching rooms she uses are equipped with technology to make recording and participating in the lessons easier.

Involving children and young people

As professionals with responsibility for the student's additional educational needs and welfare, we are very conscious of compliance. We've learned that there are great ideas and services to assist a young person with spinal cord injury – but it's essential that it's what the student wants. Just because it's available, doesn't mean that it is appropriate. Occasionally you have to be proactive with your student and negotiate, so it is understood what is in their best interests. However, they will do what they are comfortable with. You can't force the pace of change. They've already had so much to adapt to if they've experienced a trauma. You've got to let them take on new initiatives within a sensible timeframe and at their own pace. The worst assumption is that you have all the answers and know what's best.

On making inclusion happen

Inclusion is the duty of the school's leadership and it shouldn't be a new educational initiative in any establishment. However, bringing all the services available together

(even with CAF) is not always easy, especially as time goes on. Even with 'establish protocols' and schedules, it may still require one agent to bring all the relevant parties together and ensure that agreed actions happen. We are grateful to our student's father for being so instrumental in achieving this at the beginning of the process. However, some families may not have the confidence and knowledge of where to go to and who to speak to for assistance. A head teacher or SENCO may be the ones who can advise in this way.

Inclusion within an educational setting and by involving other services is possible. You have to be determined and assertive at times. If that is what the student wants, it's entirely their right to have.