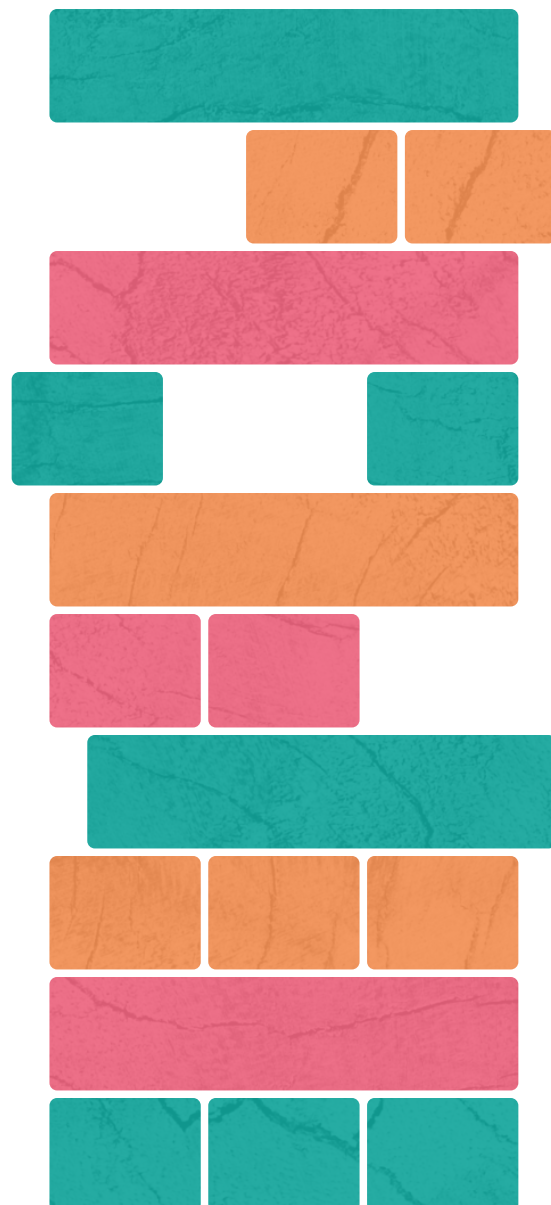




# Inclusion Ambassadors

Meaningful participation and engagement of young people with additional support needs:

A Resource Pack for Education, Learning & Support



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## Vision Statement for Additional Support for Learning

In 2021 The Inclusion Ambassadors created a Vision Statement for Additional Support for Learning:

***'School should help me be the best I can be.'***

***'School is a place where children and young people learn, socialise and become prepared for life beyond school.'***

It also must be recognised that success can look different for everyone.

But it is important that all the adults that children and young people come in to contact with in school get to know them as individuals. They should ask, listen and act on what the young people say about the support that works best for them.



**Inclusion  
Ambassadors**

## Meet the Inclusion Ambassadors team



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## 1. Introduction and Purpose



The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of children and young people from across Scotland with a range of additional support needs. We work together to discuss the issues that affect them and ensure their views are heard in national decision-making relating to education.

In partnership with Enquire, Children in Scotland has been supporting the Inclusion Ambassadors since 2019.

In this time, we have learnt a great deal about supporting young people with additional support needs to share their views. Working and communicating remotely since March 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, has also helped us understand both the positive and negatives of non-traditional ways of working. This has been especially important when discussing the young people's experience of learning and accessing education from home.

The Inclusion Ambassadors have so far engaged directly with parliamentarians, decision-makers and the Scottish Government. Whilst national representation is important, we also recognise the value and the impact of local improvements and change.

We believe it is important to create more opportunities for a wider and more representative group of children to share their views about additional support for learning and want to share our learning to help others develop similar, more localised groups. We know there are already similar groups across the country and an increasing desire among practitioners to replicate these models. With that in mind, this resource pack is intended to help provide guidance, support and learning that can help create a link between our national group and other local and regional groups.



We have used our knowledge and experience of working with our Inclusion Ambassadors to create this resource but please note, this is not a fixed 'how to' guide. It is important to remember they are a small group, and should not be considered representative of all children and young people with an additional support need in Scotland. All young people have different interests and needs and what worked for us may not work in all contexts.

Ultimately, we hope that this resource provides a greater opportunity for children and young people with additional support needs to be heard on issues relating to their education and support for learning.

## 2. Children's rights and participation



This resource is embedded within Children in Scotland's rights-based approach to participation and engagement. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that all children and young people have a right to be heard in matters that affect them. Projects like the Inclusion Ambassadors support this right to be upheld.

We use the UN Committee's definition of participation and engagement as a starting point. It reads:

***"Ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes"***

It is important to remember that there has to be a mutual benefit for all people engaging. The process should be about **all** parties learning together and sharing their views.

We asked the Inclusion Ambassadors, and those who have worked with them, about the value of the group. They told us:

***"Sometimes I am not confident but this proves I can believe in myself"***

***"It makes you believe in yourself, I used to not speak but am now more confident"***

***"It will help lots of people"***

***"A voice to talk about our experiences and to benefit people in the future"***

*Inclusion Ambassadors*

***"The Inclusion Ambassadors involvement in the review and thereafter has been essential. The commentary they provided fronts up all the review recommendations and their vision, created in response, should be the test by which all future developments are measured"***

*Angela Morgan, Chair of the Independent Review of the Implementation of Additional Support for Learning in Scotland 2019 - 2020*

Carrying out meaningful and effective participation work is an ongoing process with barriers and challenges to overcome. We encourage you to try things, see what works and keep learning!

For further information on participation and engagement with children and young people, please see our Principles and Guidelines for the Meaningful Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People. The guidelines have been created to share our learning about working with children and young people and lay out how to approach the planning, delivery and evaluation of your work. [Click here to read the Principles and Guidelines.](#)

We are also able to provide commissioned training on working with children and young people (see page 16 for contact details).

### 3. Setting up a group



The Inclusion Ambassadors is a national group with the aim of feeding into national decision-making about additional support for learning and education. The current group has members from 16 local authority areas. This allows us to make sure we are hearing from people across the country and taking account of different issues.

Members are not considered to be representatives of their school or their region, but ensuring representation from across a range of local authority areas facilitates sharing of a range of experiences and within a wide variety of circumstances and contexts. In so far as possible, we ensure the group discussions are based around their interests and demonstrate a truly young person-led approach. It should not be tailored to the adults who deliver services or make decisions.

It is important when setting up your own group that you are clear about its scope and purpose. Some things to consider include:

- Is it tied to a school or region? If so, will this directly impact the focus of work? Is it aimed at working with young people who have a specific additional support need or receive a specific type of support?
- Is it time-limited or does it have an open-ended timeline?
- Is it feeding into a specific group or committee within the school, local authority or region?
- Will meetings take place online or in person? Will it be both?

#### 3.1 Establishing clear roles and letting young people lead

It will be important to communicate what role the young people will take on and ensure everyone is clear about expectations.

This will depend on the young people involved and their different needs, skills and interests. As far as possible, you should make space for this to be young person-led and ensure you are guided by what they want to gain from being part of the group.



It is also important to recognise your role as an adult facilitator in organising, making plans and keeping things moving.

Some things to consider are:

- What roles can young people take on?
- What role do you need to take on?
- How long are young people going to be involved for?
- What expectations are there on the young people?
- Are there any qualifications or accreditations tied to participation?



### 3.2 Practical considerations

There are a number of practical considerations to take into account when setting up the group such as consent, safeguarding or social media. You can find out more about this in our Principles and Guidelines for the Meaningful Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People. [Click here to view the Principles and Guidelines.](#)

You will also need to consider the specific needs of the young people you are working with. People may wish to participate in different ways and you should base your approach around these needs. For example, some people may want to work in groups while others feel more comfortable working alone. You also might have some members of the group who wish to work creatively in a visual way, while others prefer to discuss the topics in a more informal way. It is important to provide options and give people a choice about how they wish to contribute.



Here are some ways to ensure that your group or project can support children and young person-led participation:

- **Participation is optional and voluntary.** Children and young people choose to participate in the group on their terms and can leave if they want.
- **Meetings or group gatherings are held in a child-friendly space** that allows the young people to feel safe and comfortable.
- **If working online, let young people engage in the way that works for them,** such as with their camera off or using the chat box.
- **Adults should act as facilitators to help support the group with their objectives.** The group identify the topics for discussion, with adults supporting them to do this by ensuring information is accessible and the activities are engaging for members.
- **Adults are there to support individuals to share their opinions, but it is the choice of the young person to be an active member of the group.** Active participation may differ for young people based on their interests or time.

### 3.3 Getting started

Setting up a new group or beginning a piece of work can be challenging. It can be hard to balance making progress and allowing people to develop relationships. However, we have learned from our experience that one will often influence the other. Good relationships will lead to more meaningful output as the group sees their meetings as a safe space to share experiences and be honest about what they think needs to change.

#### Top tips for setting up your group

**It is important to communicate clearly what the aim of the group is right from the beginning.** Be clear about why people are attending and what they might be able to achieve together.

**Focusing on fun and getting to know each other will be important, especially in the early stages.** People will be more inclined to share if it feels like a safe space. This will also help you get to know the individuals better, identify areas of work going forward and establish how the group can work to get the best results for all involved.

**Developing a group agreement can create a sense of shared ownership.**

Having the young people create the group agreement together helps lay some ground rules. It also helps cement the group as being young person-led and young person-focused.

### 3.4 Keeping in touch

It is important to have a clear, consistent plan for keeping in touch with members of the group. For the Inclusion Ambassadors, this is through a school contact by email. This is both for practical reasons – meetings take place during the school day – and to allow us to keep staff up to date about the project.



You should consider whether you wish to keep in touch with young people directly through school, other support organisations or via parents/carers. If you already have a relationship with the young people, keeping in touch with them directly may be the most appropriate.

We do not believe there is a 'correct' way of keeping in touch. Structure, consistency and clarity are more important, as is having a method that works for the young people that they can engage with and access.

### 3.5 Planning sessions

It is important that all sessions are clearly planned to ensure that you have an idea of activities and discussions. This will allow you to keep a clear structure to meetings and ensure they are purposeful for the young people involved.



We prepare a full plan for each Inclusion Ambassadors sessions with timings agreed and all staffing roles planned in advance. This allows staff members to prepare for any section they are leading on. The focus of the meetings are shared with the Inclusion Ambassadors, via our school contact, ahead of time which can allow people to prepare if they need to. We also plan who will take notes at each session and utilise a template for recording the meetings, ensuring consistency.

## 4. Supporting participation



Our overall aim is to support the Inclusion Ambassadors to reflect and share their opinions about issues important to them, relating to their educational experience. To do this we encourage each member to participate in a way that is meaningful but that also works for them.

A few things we have found useful when establishing and working with the group:

**Get to know the members of the group individually**

**Include breaks and opportunities for the group to chat and form friendships**

**Give the group time, space and opportunities to contribute in a variety of ways**



**Be flexible in your approach**

**Work in partnership with the group as part of a learning process**

**Have realistic expectations**

**Get to know the members of the group individually.** This could be done through icebreaker activities, team building exercises or by including time within your meetings to chat with them. It is important to build in time for members of the group to talk to each other.

**Be flexible in your approach.** The support needs of individuals and the importance of including all members of the group may mean altering or adapting activities and topics. Prioritise meaningful participation and modify your approach if you need to.

**Include breaks and opportunities for the group to chat and form friendships.** Snacks always go down well!

**Work in partnership with the group as part of a learning process.** Let them know that you are learning with them. They are the experts in what matters to them and their opinions can offer a different point of view.

**Give the group time, space and opportunities to contribute in a variety of ways.** Asking and listening to how pupils want to be supported will help them participate. Use methods and approaches that work for them and they feel comfortable with.

**Have realistic expectations.** Being directed by the group and sensitive to the needs of individuals may mean you don't get through everything – that's ok! Meaningful engagement on a few topics is more valuable than covering everything on the list with no useful information to take away.

**Finally, have fun!** Being part of the group should be an enjoyable and social experience for all those involved, adults and young people alike.

## 4.1 Getting to know the group

We recommend starting every session with children and young people with an icebreaker or fun activity. We believe this is a key part of supporting participation, helping members get to know each other, feel comfortable in the space, and get used to contributing to discussions.



They are also a good way of identifying different ways of working among the group allowing you to see who prefers creative work and who prefers discussion-based activities.

We have listed some of the activities we have used at the back of this resource.

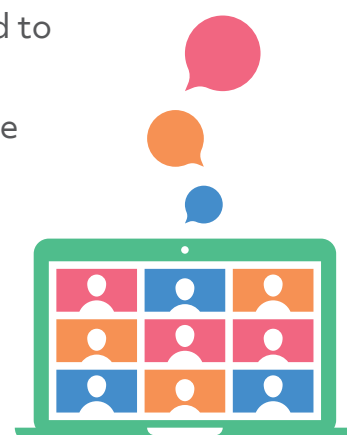
## 4.2 Online / digital meetings

Working online has changed the way we have approached engagement with the Inclusion Ambassadors group. With a bigger reliance on technology, there must be consideration of the different levels of experience and confidence using online platforms.

With this change in approach, we also found art and creative activities did not work so well with our group in this type of setting. In response, we identified alternate ways of structuring our discussions to support people to participate in different ways. This involved creating chances to share responses verbally or through the chat function.

We also found that short, specific and structured questions helped to open up wider discussion. Some examples of this include:

- Scoring a statement out of 10 and offering an explanation for the answer. For example, 'school is a place I get to see my friends' – everyone scores out of 10 in the chat box then explains their answer verbally or by posting a longer response
- One thing that works/doesn't work in my school is... (everyone responds)
- Agree/disagree or thumbs up/thumbs down with a statement.



## 5. Discussion Topics

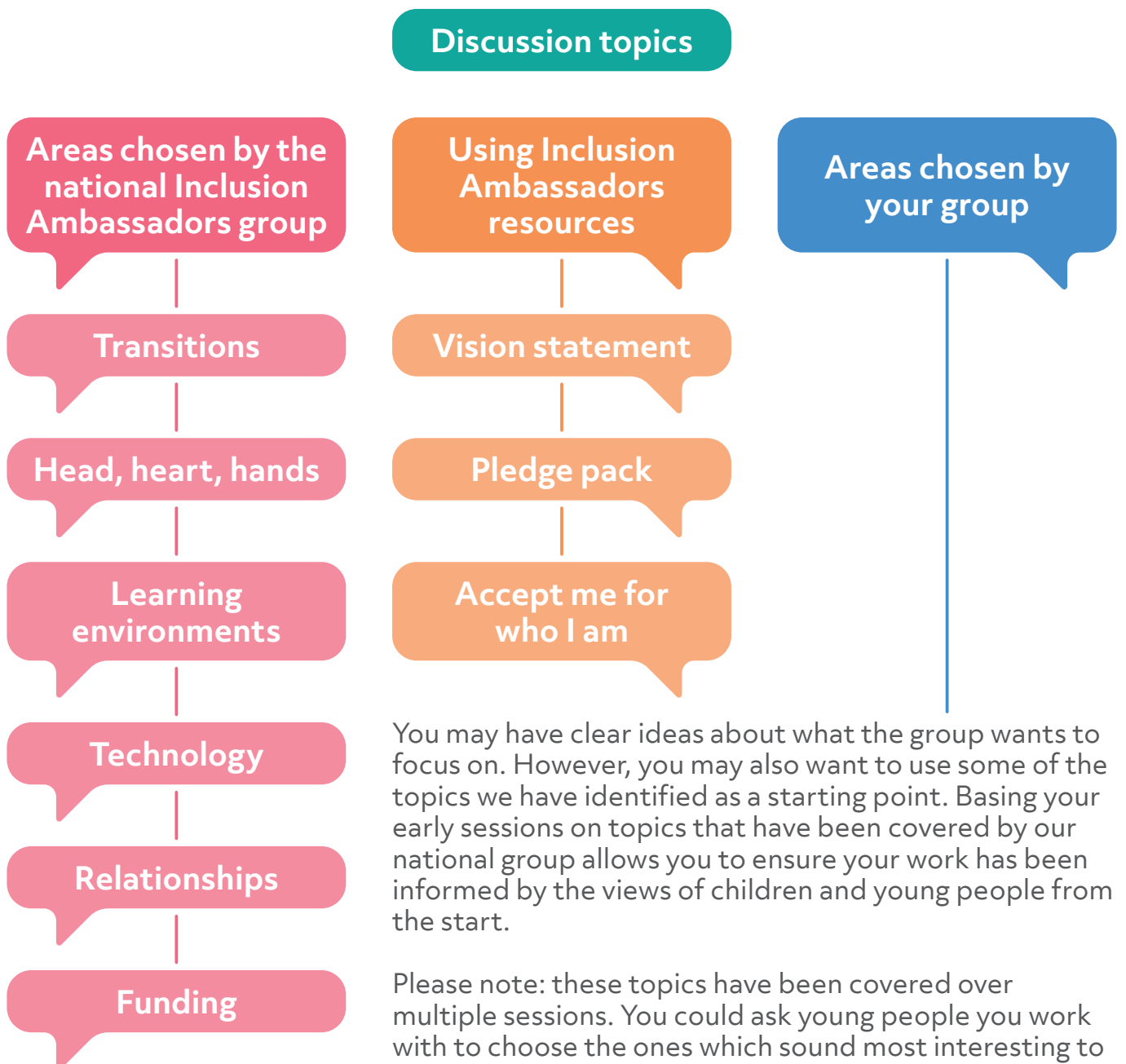


As we have discussed (see [3. Setting up the group](#)), topics should be led by the members of the group as far as is possible. However, this may look different for different groups.

You may want to ask people what they want to cover, but you might also use what you hear the group talk about to inform future sessions.

It is important to understand your role as an adult and the knowledge you bring. You may know about specific opportunities and bring these to the group, for example. However, when doing so, ensure they are in line with what the group is working on or want to discuss.

In this section we aim to give ideas of topics that you may want to cover with the group. We have identified three main routes for this:



## 5.1 Topics from the national Inclusion Ambassadors group

### 5.1.1 Transitions

Support for when people leave school has been an important topic for the members of our group. We have covered this in a number of meetings.

We have considered different aspects of this including:

- When people want to start talking about leaving school
- Who should be involved in transitions discussions?
- How you would know you are ready to leave school?
- Experience of support in school – what works well and what doesn't. What is missing?
- Where to look for information. Do people know where to get support?
- How confident people are that they would get the support they need.

We have found it is important to look beyond support relating to further study and consider support for developing life skills. This was identified as being particularly important for the group we work with.

You could also explore the Scottish Transitions Forum's Principles of a Good Transition to inform your discussions.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1.2 Head, Heart, Hands

The Inclusion Ambassadors have also helped us think about the sort of qualities people might need to work in Inclusion-focused roles. Given the scope of our work, this was discussed specifically in the context of staff at Children in Scotland but could be used to inform new appointments in your area of work.

We have often used a Head, Heart and Hands activity:



You could use this to help you think about the qualities and competencies of new staff, informing job descriptions or helping form relevant answers to interview questions about values or approach.

It may also be used to form the basis of a discussion about what personal and professional qualities are needed to work with young people effectively. It may be helpful to think about specifics based on where you are working or if the discussion relates to a specific job role.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scottishtransitions.org.uk/7-principles-of-good-transitions/>

### **5.1.3 Ideal Learning Environments**

Many of the issues we speak about relate to the wider learning environment. We explored this as a whole topic with the group, covering a wide range of topics including:

- What a good teacher would be like
- Seating arrangements and how busy the class would be
- Sensory issues such as light and noise
- Technology and resources – what should be available?

Working together, we spoke about the different issues in turn. A series of prompts were used during each discussion to encourage reflection. We also used different ways to bring play and fun into each section such as role play, art, flash cards and tactile resources.

### **5.1.4 Other topics raised by the group**

A range of other topics that we plan to discuss with the group or that they have highlighted as important:

- Use of technology
- Relationships with peers and staff
- Funding for support.

## **5.2 Your group, your topic**

Whilst these topics are intended as a guide, you may wish to start with what you hear directly from the group and what they highlight they want to speak about.

It is important to develop the topics you want to talk about over time. Whilst it may feel counter-intuitive to begin without a list of topics to focus on, it is important the topics discussed are relevant to the young people involved. We know people are more likely to share ideas and suggestions as relationships develop and as such would suggest working towards agreeing a list of topics over the first few meetings.

Depending on the group of young people, you may also need to develop plans based on themes that you hear across different discussions, not just on what people explicitly say they want to speak about.



## **5.3 Using Inclusion Ambassadors Resources**

The Inclusion Ambassadors, with Children in Scotland, have created a series of resources designed to support work around inclusion.

### **5.3.1 The Vision Statement**

The Inclusion Ambassadors developed a Vision Statement for Additional Support for Learning for the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan (see page 3).

The Vision Statement is intended to provide an overarching statement that everyone involved in supporting additional support for learning should aim for.

You could explore the vision statement with young people you work with to see whether they feel they experience this.

We broke the vision statement into a number of related statements about school:

- School should help me be the best I can be
- School is a place where children and young people learn
- School is a place where children and young people socialise
- School is a place where children and young people become prepared for life beyond school
- Success is different for everyone
- Adults that work with you in school know you as individuals
- Adults that work with you in school ask, listen and act on what you're saying about the support that works best for you.



There are different options for supporting people to discuss how they feel about the statements.

**Sliding scale:** Members of the group rate their experience of each statement out of 10 and explain why they thought this.

**Think – pair – share:** Pupils consider a statement independently, then discuss with a partner. They then share their ideas with the rest of the group.

**How many reasons?** In pairs or small groups, pupils list as many things that they can think of that answer one of the questions.

**Creative activity:** Members of the group take one statement and make a poster or short video about their experience of it in their school. This is then shared with the group, or more widely.

Whichever you use, you should encourage people to think about their current experience and what they would like to see change.

### 5.3.2 Video: *Accept me for who I am*

In 2019 the Inclusion Ambassadors developed an animation called 'Accept Me For Who I Am'. It shares the experiences that the group have at school and how they think pupils should treat them and each other.

[Click here to view the animation.](#) There are also teaching resources available from Education Scotland.



### 5.3.3 Pledge Pack – Being happy and safe in school

The Inclusion Ambassadors developed a pledge pack for schools to show how they would ensure young people with additional support needs felt happy and safe. The pledge pack could form the basis of an activity with your group. [Click here to download the pledge pack.](#)

The pledge pack presents three key areas that young people in the group felt were important for being happy and safe in school:

- Children and young people with additional support needs can work with teachers that they trust
- Children and young people with additional support needs have enough opportunities to see their friends and socialise
- Children and young people with additional support needs will have a say in decisions about their education.

As a group, consider the pledges in turn and how the young people feel about each. Is this their current experience? If not, what would they like to see change? Alternatively, this could be approached as a creative activity. For example, in line with the second pledge, young people in the group could draw who they want to sit with in class or what they enjoy about break time and out of school clubs. You can then discuss their answers.

If you are working in a school, you could share the findings of the discussion with senior management and encourage further use of the pledge pack. The work from your discussions could be used to shape the schools' pledges and show how they will meet them going forward.

If you are working at a regional level, you could use the discussion to inform future planning and to consider how the pledges could underpin decision-making about policy within the local authority.

If you use the pledge pack, please send any work into us to let us know what difference it is making!

## 6. Making a difference



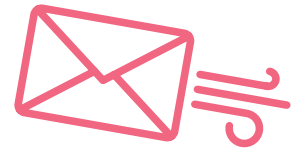
The Inclusion Ambassadors group provides a national platform where children and young people can share their experiences of school and the support they receive. However, it is important for more pupils to be included in communicating their experiences to decision-makers.

***“We need to create positive stories about pupils with additional support needs rather than focus on the negatives”***

By creating a regional or local Inclusion Ambassador group – or by using this resource to direct some of the work you're doing with a pre-existing group – you can help add to the evidence we have about additional support for learning and the experiences of children and young people.

## 6.1 Sharing your work

Please keep in touch with us and share your work through one of the following ways:



- Tell us directly what your group has been discussing. You can do this by emailing us at: [pshirazi@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:pshirazi@childreninscotland.org.uk) or by sharing your work on social media using the hashtag #InclusionAmbassadors.
- Use the online form to comment directly on the topics the Inclusion Ambassadors have been addressing. By doing so, the voices of your group will be shared with decision makers – either through our reporting or as a direct response to a consultation. [Click here to access the form.](#)
- Have the voices and experiences of your group published on [reach.scot](https://reach.scot). You can do this via the [Get Involved page here.](#)
- Keep up to date with our quarterly newsletter, where we will share the main talking topics for the national Inclusion Ambassadors group. [You can find it here.](#)
- Attend one of our webinars about what the national Inclusion Ambassador group is doing, future topics for discussion and for any further help you may want. [Register your interest by emailing: pshirazi@childreninscotland.org.uk.](#)

## 7. Additional support and resources



There are a number of resources available for further information about engagement and young people's rights.



You can find out more about what the Inclusion Ambassadors have been up to on the project page of our website: [childreninscotland.org.uk/inclusion-ambassadors](https://childreninscotland.org.uk/inclusion-ambassadors).

In 2022-23 Inclusion Ambassadors staff team plan to hold a number of webinars and practice development sessions to share learning and provide opportunities for discussion. Our staff and services are also available.

Children in Scotland can also provide training and support on participation and engagement work with children and young people.

Our staff are happy to speak to you about your work, offering guidance and identifying where to find the best support.

Contact: [pppteam@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:pppteam@childreninscotland.org.uk)



# ENQUIRE

Enquire is an advice service that provides families with advice and information and aims to raise awareness of children's rights to extra support in school. They have a website, numerous help-sheets and operate a confidential advice line. Visit [enquire.org.uk](https://enquire.org.uk).

## RESOLVE : ASL

An independent mediation service for parents and carers of children and young people with additional support needs.

Resolve: ASL currently works in 14 local authorities across Scotland. Visit [childrenscotland.org.uk/our-work/services/resolve](https://childrenscotland.org.uk/our-work/services/resolve) to find out more.



In Scotland, all children have the right to have their views considered when decisions are made about the support they get with their learning.

My Rights, My Say is a support service to assist children to use their rights and make sure their voices are heard. It is an independent, confidential service and easy to use. Find out how to contact the service at [myrightsmysay.scot/referral](https://myrightsmysay.scot/referral).

## REACH

Reach provides advice for children and young people who may need extra help with their learning. The service helps pupils understand their rights to additional support for learning and their rights to be included, listened to and involved in decisions about their education. Visit [reach.scot](https://reach.scot) to find out more.

## A. Appendix: Icebreakers and practical activities



All of the activities listed in this section are intended to be used in a fun, informal environment to help members feel relaxed and at ease with their peers, as well as the adults present at the group meetings. We recommend completing one of these at the start of each session.

Whilst the majority of these activities can be translated to virtual meetings, some may be best completed when members can attend together, in person.

For each activity, consider how people may wish to contribute and if best working individually or in small groups. Some may welcome an art-based approach, others may feel less comfortable. Remember to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure everyone feels willing and able to contribute in a way that feels comfortable for them.

### **Activity: If I had a million pounds**

Participants share what they might do if they had a million pounds. This is a nice way to learn about people's interests and personality.

### **Activity: Headteacher for a day**

Ask the group to share what they would do if they were the headteacher for a day.

- One serious thing about my school that I would change is ...
- One fun thing about my school that I would change is ...

### **Activity: When I grow up**

Everyone in the group shares something that they want to do when they grow up

**Or**

Everyone in the group shares their dream job. This could be what they wanted to be when they were younger, or could be what their dream job would be now. Are they the same?

### **Activity: Desert Island**

Everyone picks one item they would take if they were going to a desert island. Discuss what people have chosen and why. Is it something practical, or something sentimental? Is it an item for entertainment? Did anyone pick the same item?



### Activity: Design your own Shield / Crest

Using a template, members design their shield or crest. After dividing up into four groups, members are asked to consider and demonstrate:

- Things you enjoy
- Things you do well
- How you like to work
- Things that help support you.

### Activity: Human bingo

Create a list of facts about members on a bingo-style sheet. These can be specific to members of the group or more general (eg find some one who travelled by train). Members walk around the room and speak to each other to find people who match the facts on their sheet.

The first person to complete their sheet shouts “bingo!” You can then work through the different facts and ask people to discuss their examples or experience of each.

### Activity: Circles

The group is asked to form pairs, and each pair is given a set of two circles. The circles are placed on a surface, overlapping.

Each pair is asked to identify things they have in common. Ask them to write, draw or discuss the things that they have identified and place them where the two circles meet.

Each pair are then asked to identify any differences they might have. These are written down or drawn and placed in the outside parts of the circle.

Groups then feed back on what they have in common and what difference they have.

You could provide some prompts eg outdoors, gaming, flowers, school, seaside, books, music to assist with identifying differences and similarities / similar interests.

### Activity: Things I Like About You

Instead of asking participants to introduce themselves, ask each of them to introduce someone else in the meeting and two things they like about them. Please note, this only works once the group are familiar and comfortable with each other.

### Activity: Guess Who

Everyone writes down one fact about themselves. This is put into a hat. A fact is selected at random and read out to the group who then have to identify who they think each one is. How many were identified correctly?

