

Support planning

October 2023



Background

The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of secondary school-aged pupils who have a range of additional support needs and attend a variety of educational provision across Scotland. Children in Scotland has supported the Inclusion Ambassadors since 2016, and formally took over running the group in 2019.

At present there are 21 members of the group from across 17 local authorities. The group share their experiences of accessing additional support in school through online and in person meetings. Each meeting focuses on an issue that the group have identified they wish to discuss, or Children in Scotland have selected as being helpful to gather their views and experiences.

This paper describes the key issues for children and young people in relation to support planning. It demonstrates the impact on children and young people when this works well, but also the impact when it goes wrong. It also provides an indication of what children and young people want throughout each step of this process.

This topic of support planning has been discussed at a number of meetings held this year. Members shared their own experiences of being unable to contribute to their support plans, how things are going and whether the support is working. We also heard of instances where teachers were unaware of support plans being in place.

“If you want a student to do their best in school you have to make an environment that supports their needs”

Inclusion Ambassador

Many of the Inclusion Ambassadors recommendations are reasonably simple – in their own words they highlight, ***“we are talking about basic things”*** – but if implemented properly, they would make a positive change to the experiences of young people who are entitled to additional support in school.

The discussions that have taken place cover the overall impact, as well as observations and recommendations for each stage of the planning process. The Ambassadors own comments and words have been used throughout.





The impact of support planning

The group shared how it feels when things go well with their support at school. Members said it made them feel better in school and much happier. One member spoke about how it can reduce anxiety.

“It feels like a relief, like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders”

Inclusion Ambassador

“When I get help I feel happy. All different people help, lots of different people in different classes. Makes me feel fantastic and very happy when I get the support I need”

Inclusion Ambassador

It is critically important that staff work together to ensure a pupil's support works well and that their needs are listened to and met. Members of the group were clear about the positive impact this can have on their experience of school.

“In my High School, it was a joke. But at college they talked my plan through with me, wrote what I said down and went back through the updated plan. It was nice to be involved in something about me, not have people assume what I need”

Inclusion Ambassador

All of the members also emphasised the impact when things go badly with their support. Many had their own personal examples of the negative effect of poor support planning and how this made them feel.

“If your support gets taken away, you start to feel anxious and start to not understand your work. And it can end up an absolute mess”

Inclusion Ambassador

We also heard that for some group members that, when their support going wrong, they are left feeling anxious, especially when it has happened before:

“[I] Definitely feel anxious. I don't know how to describe it but feels like 'it's happening all over again'. Does makes it feel like a mess because you don't want to go back to that place. Fear of going back to not getting the right support can make me feel anxious”

Inclusion Ambassador

It is very clear that well planned support is key for supporting young people with additional support needs throughout their education.





The support planning cycle

Before making a support plan

The group stated that those responsible for planning their support must be aware of the range of people who should be involved. They spoke about the importance of the young person whose support plan it is being involved throughout the process:

“Support won’t work unless you include the pupils”

Inclusion Ambassador

This simple act empowers young people to know and demonstrate their rights. It also communicates respect and consideration.

The group highlighted that any adult responsible for supporting a young person should be involved in the creation of the plan in some way, including parents and carers. Setting clear roles, responsibilities and expectations of everyone involved creates an opportunity to discuss, ask for clarity or seek help.

The group also highlighted the importance of preparedness, stressing that once it has been identified who should attend it was imperative that staff were prepared for the meeting.

“Prepare ahead of the meeting and show that you take the young person and their support seriously”

Inclusion Ambassador

“Be organised, be prepared. Make me feel valued”

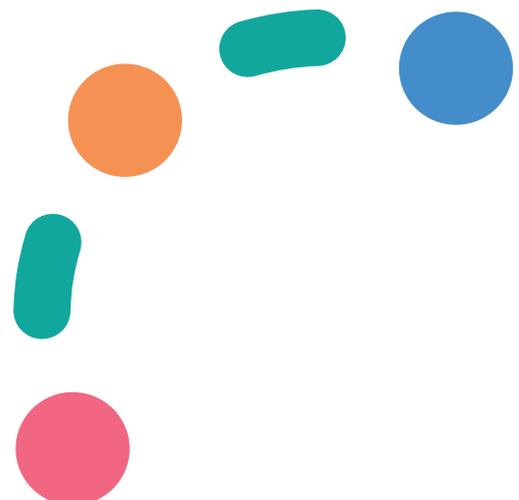
Inclusion Ambassador

The group also spoke about location and timing of the meeting being important in making sure it is a positive experience for the young person. The meeting should be held somewhere that is comfortable for the pupil as well as ensuring it is safe and accessible. Scheduling the meeting is also important, taking into account the young person’s day. Making time out of a busy day, or scheduling a meeting immediately after school hours, all emphasise the importance placed on the process, and the time that is being made to ensure the young person has a chance to be involved.

“Timing is important. For example, after school I had to wait for half an hour for my teacher. Waiting made me feel like I stood out”

Inclusion Ambassador

All members agreed that if staff were unsure as to the best time or venue for a meeting – ask the young person involved!



During support planning meetings

The opportunity to bring a supporting adult of their choice with them to support planning meetings was highlighted by the group as being important. This could be a parent, carer or advocate. We also know from other initiatives, such as [My Rights My Say](#), that encouraging the involvement of supportive adults could lead to young people feeling less intimidated and sharing their experiences, opinions and needs more freely.

All members of the group agreed that support planning meetings should feel accessible for the young person in every sense. They should take into account young person's preferences of how, where and when and to try to ensure it is not a daunting experience. Adults should demonstrate compassion and let the young person engage in the meeting in the way that works best for them.

“Sometimes it's more challenging to write down what I think rather than talk”

Inclusion Ambassador

The Ambassadors also reflected on the importance of building a young person's independence into any support planning. The group said they want to be as independent as possible and they wanted their support plan to reflect this. The group stressed the importance of staff focusing on their strengths and recognising their abilities whilst acknowledging that they need extra support to be put in place.

The type of support suggested should always be tailored to the young person and their individual needs. In addition, the Ambassadors wanted support to extend beyond academic need to help support inclusion in school generally:

“[Support] needs to include helping me engage with the whole school community”

Inclusion Ambassador

After the support plan is made

Once a support plan is made, it should be shared with the young person and their parent/carer to check that it accurately reflects their needs and what was discussed at the meeting. It should be written in clear and accessible language and refrain from using jargon as much as possible.

Support plans should be reviewed regularly by the young person they relate to and the people supporting them. The group were keen that review meetings should happen more regularly than they experience at present. This not only allows an opportunity for everyone to check in with how things are working, but allows plans to be adapted as support needs change. Reviews need to be carried out in a way and in an environment that is comfortable for the young person, with plenty of warning and open lines of communication.

"I've only had one review (now in S5). I Think it's Covid-related but don't know what's in it"

Inclusion Ambassador

"Pupils need prior warning when it comes to reviews, especially when that includes adults observing me in class"

Inclusion Ambassador

The members all highlighted the importance of speaking to pupils about their support needs in private. Some of our Ambassadors shared their own experiences of teachers talking to them about their needs in front of the class, which they found to be embarrassing and made them feel singled out.

Staff must ensure that they are up to date with the pupil's information on the young person's needs. The group shared experiences of times where staff had not read their support plan and had not put in place what they needed and how upsetting and distressing this was. In addition, it is crucially important that staff action what they say they will do and follow this up with the young person directly so they know that their support needs are being taken seriously.



Recommendations

- **Supporting planning should be rights-based.** Children and young people should be involved in the process as much as they want to be involved. It should be remembered that not all children and young people want to be involved in the process, but it is vitally important that they have the opportunity and support to do so if they wish.
- **Planning should be cyclical.** Planning should start early and have regular opportunities for review and reflection to ensure they remain meaningful, supportive and relevant.
- **Meetings should be informal and accessible.** Where young people are involved directly in support planning meetings, these should be done in informal and accessible for the young person and they should be allowed to engage in a way that works best for them.
- **Support planning is more than just academia.** Consider young people and their experiences in school as a whole. The support they receive should go beyond their academic work and look at support to be part of the school community in its broadest sense. All support plans should reflect this.
- **Communication is key.** Ensure that plans are communicated across the whole team who work with a child or young person. Provide opportunities to discuss this further and check in with staff to ensure they feel confident and supported.





Summary

Getting the right support is key to ensuring young people who require additional support needs feel included, engaged and supported at school.

The Inclusion Ambassadors have shared how it feels when this works well – and when it doesn't. They have clearly identified what adults involved in delivering education should do to make this process meaningful and beneficial for children and young people.

Central to this is involving the child or young person at every stage of planning their support, alongside those that know them well. They know what works for them and how they want to receive support in school. This should be at the centre of all support planning processes.

While we have described the process chronologically here, it is also clear that good support planning is a cycle. Regular opportunities for review and reflection on how support is going is central to getting things right for children and young people who require additional support, as is ongoing, regular and honest communication.

As many of the group have observed, planning for support in school does not have to be complex. However to get it right takes a willingness to meaningfully engage with children. We hope that this work with the Inclusion Ambassadors and the practice-focussed recommendations outlined above can support improvements in this area.



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