

Inclusion of visually impaired students

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Education aims to ensure that that all students gain access to skills, knowledge and information that will prepare them in life. Education becomes more challenging as schools accommodate students with diverse backgrounds and SEN needs. Meeting these challenges demands schools to have an ‘ inclusive’ education.

Inclusive education brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. There is now greater recognition that the special needs agenda should be viewed as a significant part of the drive for Inclusive Education (Ainscow, M 1995). The idea is that the concept of integration is being replaced by a move towards inclusive schooling/education. Integration demands that “ additional arrangements will be made to accommodate” pupils with disabilities “ within a system of schooling that remains largely unchanged” (Ainscow, M 1995 p 2). Inclusive education, on the other hand, “ is a larger and prior concept” (Flavell, L

1996, p 5) and aims to restructure schools in order to respond to the learning needs of all children (Male D, 1997).

An Inclusive school ask teachers to provide individualised support without the stigmatisation that's comes with separation, and to provide opportunities where all students can learn together in an unrestrictive environment where the quality of their education is not compromised. Appendix 1. 1 shows a model of inclusive provision (Dyson, A et al, 2004). Inclusion is not just for student and staff but for governors, parents and the local community (Flavell, L 2002). Research on effective inclusive schooling has shown schools improve thorough whole school responses and not just by teaching strategies that include all learners (Ainscow, M 1994). Appendix 1. 2 shows characteristics of these schools (Ainscow, M 1991; Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994)

1. 2 Legislative Context

The amendments to the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Part IV regulations came into effect on 1 September 2002 via the Special Education and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001). It requires school to implement the part of the Act that prevents such institutions from discriminating against students on the grounds of their disability. It is therefore mandatory for all teachers, including MFL teachers to make ' reasonable adjustments' to allow full participation by students with disabilities. Appendix 1. 3 is the overview introduction to the DDA while Appendix 1. 4 is the DDA Part VI.

1. 3 Fullhurst Community School Policy

The legislation makes it clear that all teaching staff is responsible for the provision for students with SEN and/or disabilities. (TDA, 1999) Appendix 1. 5 shows specific duties under the DDA outlined by the TDA (TDA, 1999) for use by schools. Thomas (1992) states that the whole school community should be involved in developing a policy on the organisation of support in the classroom. The Code of Practice (DfE 1994) calls for all schools to have a special Education needs Policy with outlines the agreed practice at each stage in meeting the needs of pupils.

As required by law all schools who receive government funding are expected to have a written SEN policy with regard to the Code of Practice. Fullhurst Community School has a comprehensive policy which is mandatory for all staff to be familiar with. It includes their guidelines, accessibility, definitions, SEN status, provisions, referral information, learning needs and conditions. Appendix 1. 6 is a partial copy of the Fullhurst Community School Guide to SEN.

2. Visually Impaired Students

2. 1 Inclusion of visual impaired students

“ It is estimated that there are around 25, 000 children and young people in Britain from birth to 16 with a visual impairment of sufficient severity to require specialist education service support.” (www. rnib. co. uk)

In the report entitled Education of the Visually Handicapped (Department of Education and Science, 1972) commissioned by the British government in 1968, it recommends that blind and partially sighted children would benefit

from being educated in the same schools. It did, however, also support the general concept of ‘ integration’ of children with visual impairments (VI) into mainstream schools. Further reports, such as The Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science 1978) and the subsequent Education Act (1981) consolidated that right of children with SEN to placement in local schools, with the consideration of the ‘ efficient use of resources’.

During the 70-80s there was a steep rise in the LEA services for children with VI (visual impairment) and an increase in local schools education of VI students supported by qualified in school support workers or peripatetic specialised teachers (Douglas et al, 2009). As this enrolment increased in mainstream schools, specialised schools for the blind were closing or adapting encompassing students with more complex needs (McCall, 1997).

The Code of Practice for SEN (Department of Education) accepted that the needs of most children with SEN could be met within mainstream schools but took a moderate stance on inclusion by emphasising the importance of maintaining a “ continuum of provision for a continuum of needs” (Hornby, 1999, p 153). By 2000 ‘ inclusion’ of VI children in mainstream schools had become well documented in policy and practice. Legislation continued to strengthen the rights of SEN children in local schools, culminating in the previously mentioned SENDA (2001) amendments to the 1995 DDA.

Appendix 1. 7 and 1. 8 highlight research and statistics pertaining to VI students in local schools.

2. 2 Visual Impairment and Modern Foreign Languages

“ No matter what their educational level, the visually handicapped often display a marked talent for learning foreign languages. This seems to be the result of a particular aural sensitivity and the memory training which forms part of the rehabilitation process”. (Nikolic, 1986 p222)

The major aspect of work in the modern languages is that while other curriculum areas use communication to teach the subject content, MFL use content to teach communication (Couper, 1996). MFL classrooms rely heavily on non-verbal method of communication and in most classrooms “ the visual sense plays a dominant though not exclusive role” (Couper, 1996 p 7).

2. 3 Adaption of teaching practise and materials

In traditional MFL learning, teachers use visual projectors, flashcards, wall posters, gesturing, mime and facial expressions to teach, however literature on teaching MFL to VI advocates using different means. Realia, enlarges pictures, mobiles are recommended to introduce new vocabulary and using games such as noughts and crosses, hangman and board games to enhance knowledge.

Price (1994) and Couper (1996) show that the adaption of materials for use in class is a time consuming and costly process and as such teachers often have to adapt materials themselves. Appendix 1. 9 shows a self-audit for inclusive modern languages lessons: planning teaching, learning and support provided by the TDA (2009) which allows teacher to observe and try out certain methods to keep their classroom inclusive.

Lewin-Jones and Hodgson (2005) outline strategies which can be used by teachers to ensure an 'inclusive' classroom. Strategies such as using student's names more frequently or touch (once pre-approved before) have been known to work effectively (Jones, 2004). Adapting the way you ask questions e. g ' what is the man in green doing?' to ' what is the angry man doing?' Teachers have to adapt the lesson to include repetition other than using the white boards but through the speaking and listening skills. AFL strategies such as thumbs up or down can be used simply instead of traffic lightsystem where VI students may have difficulty colour differentiating (Appendix 1. 9a). McCall (1997) postulates that these changes help, not only the learning of the VI students, but potentially all students learning.

From the skills in language learning: reading, writing, listening and speaking; reading and writing can be troublesome for VI students as it is difficult to skim/scan text or move between text and answers or locate specific information within texts quickly. Nikolic (1986) compounds this difficulty adding that that trouble lies in the infrequent contact a VI student has with the written form. Ways must be found for students to access these skills. In MFL it is important for ' mixed skill' activities. This will allow VI students to team up listening and speaking, where traditionally they may be stronger with reading and writing where they may be weaker (Couper, 1996).

2. 4 The learning Support Worker

VI students often get accompanied to lessons by classroom assistants or specialist teachers (LSW). Their role is not to take the job of the teacher but to enable the learning of the student. It is fundamentally important that

students continue to be independent and in control of their learning, the LSW can provide aid in practising dialogues, spontaneous and reading from cue cards. Studies show that the quality and quantity of the work provided by LSW's who speak French fluently is greater than those who don't (Lewin-Jones and Hodgson, 2005).

3. Inclusive Teaching in Year 7 with a Visual Impaired student

3. 1 Student X

My year 7 French class contains a VI student. On learning this I set about making steps to better inform my planning. I accessed the school SEN policy taking particular attention to the section on visual impairments. Appendix 1. 10 shows the SEN guide pertaining to VI. I organised a meeting with the school SENCO and with the students LSW. Appendix 1. 11 outlines the material provided by the school SENCO to all teachers of student X. It includes details pertaining to what s/he can see, what s/he needs in the classroom – braille, laptop, hardcopies in font N48 of anything taught on a PowerPoint or at a distance. Appendix 1. 12 shows information I learned from the SENCO and the LSW in our meetings and Appendix 1. 13 shows student X's school IEP. From this information I was able to start planning knowing students X's needs and limitations implementing inclusive strategies.

3. 2 Implementation of inclusive strategies

~ Differentiation by support:

LSW

Student X is entitled to extra disability related funding. This allowed them to have a full time LSW with fluent French accompany her to her French classes. From my meeting with the LSW we were able to work with the scheme of work module 2 and produce a comprehensive vocab list that the LSW was able to adapt in preparation for the term. Appendix 1. 14 has the schools Yr 7 SOW. In order for all materials to be correctly adapted lesson plans had to be submitted minimally 1 week in advance. However, having a fluent French speaker as an LSW allowed for ad-hoc French learning for student X. The LSW was able to explain to student X additional tasks. Appendix 1. 15 is a lesson evaluation showing how the LSW explained an ad-hoc task I had the students do on something which they were having problems. (avoir v etre).

My Teaching

I had to adapt my teaching style. As I had no training and the school provided me with some information I had to use what I had learned from the meetings and from “learn as you go” and “learn from your mistakes” approaches. Spelling out words I was writing and also reading aloud everything that was being written on or projected onto the white board were things I quickly picked up after hearing the LSW spelling out what I was writing in my first lesson. Appendix 1. 16 is a lesson evaluation form from my first lesson teaching this Yr7 class. As student X is an invaluable source of how s/he learns I had 2 meetings with student X and the LSW. Appendix 1. 17 included minutes of the first meeting. Regarding AFL I implemented

thumb up or thumb down policy. Appendix 1. 18 shows lesson plan showing this

~ Differentiation by resource:

ICT

All power point and ICT work was sent to students X LSW before each class. It allowed student X to use her JAWS software (appendix 1. 19) to access the information. An example of such use is appendix 1. 20 where student X was able to access one of the lesson tasks and submit her answer by print while the other students handwrote theirs. As the term progressed I was adapting to use aural repetition to strengthen knowledge of vocabulary and phrases. Appendix 1. 20 shows an ERF form during my placement highlighting increased use of repetition.

Braille

Assistive technology benefit the VI but according to Argyropoulos, Martos, and Leotskakou (2005, p 185) “ the cultivation of literacy skills may be delayed significantly....., and illiteracy may be increased”. Because of this it is important for student X to use braille to have exposure to the written form of French while would ensure written accuracy. Appendix 1. 22 has various examples of work adapted into Braille while some of them have been corrected by the LSW, as I cannot do this. In assessment student X is therefore no longer at an advantage at spelling as they have been viewing and using the correct version through braille.

Tactile Pictures

One of Students X preferred methods to learn new vocab is using tactile images. This allows student X to mentally perceive the image using touch. S/he is in essence picturing the same image as the students who are seeing the image. Appendix 1. 23 is a photocopy of the tactile images of animals I used while teaching animal vocabulary.

Handouts

As previously discussed all handouts are in a font N48. Appendix 1. 24 illustrates examples of adapted hand outs for students X's exercise book and also for listening tasks completed in class.

~ Differentiation by task:

An area where some of the more “reasonable adjustments” were made within the classroom. Student X has no problems engaging in listening and speaking tasks once the hand outs/instructions are in braille / correct font size. However when the student is using ICT /power point to do tasks it had to be adopted for student X. Appendix 1. 25. shows an example where student used information on the overhead to match questions with possible answers , while student X had the questions and answers were separately printed for them and then could join them up. Appendix 1. 26 shows examples of the “Differentiated by” section of lesson plan where the tasks are differentiated by the student's needs. The subject content is still the same just different how they work with it.

Concerning assessment feedback it was essential to go through it verbally with the student. While giving positive award postcards I was able to liaise with the LSW to get the material out into braille. An example of this is shown in appendix 1. 27 Student X is then able to access the feedback and comments whenever is convenient.

4. Implications of teaching a student with VI

Some of the key highlights and finding I learned with my practical experience teaching VI students are outlined below.

A comprehensive and effective school policy

The more adaptable teachers can make their classes the more schools can become inclusive. Adapting lessons to with certain SEN can have a benefit for other SEN and all students in general.

It becomes clear that planning is the key element and the earlier you have it done the easier adapting the material by experts can be. Similarly it means the easier you can change your lessons as required

Teachers have to allow extra time for preparation of classes, assessments tests and exams (Ornsin- Jones, Courtney, and Dickinson, 2005).

Teachers have to allow additional time for VI students to complete their work

Appropriate training should be provided where there are resources and sessions within the MFL department. It is not enough for meeting but teachers need to observe strategies for inclusion of VI in practise.

In terms of MFL teaching there are little resources or sharing of experiences (Stephens and Marsh, 2005). By extension schools should be able to keep on file work done in braille and differentiated resources for future use.

Teachers must be confident engaging students with disabilities, especially those with additional support. Prior discussion with the support workers can help strengthen your ability to do so during the lessons and allow you to improve your teaching practices both within and outside the classroom.

5. Conclusion

“ The success of children and young people with visual impairment in mainstream schools is heavily dependent upon the quality of support that is available to them”

(Mason and McCall, 1997 p 412)

As figures show more and more VI students are being educated in mainstream schools it is therefore important to have systems in place to help train and educate teachers who are teaching VI students. Evidence shows that special schools have played roles in supporting and training when necessary (McCall et al, 2009). As children with more complex needs enter local schools, the demands on the professional skills of those supporting them can only increase. According to Sutcliffe (1997) Effective inclusion of students with VI relies not only on the provision and appropriate access using differentiated resources, support or tasks but also on the administrative and day-to-day management of the learning environment. Schools need effective policies, a drive for inclusion behaviour, and training

for all staff. Also required is a creative, hardworking staff that put the needs of all their students at the top of their agenda.

For individual teachers, Orsini-Jones, Courtney, and Dickinson (2005) advise that there may be tension at times due to “reasonable adjustments” but that if teachers can identify the barriers and remove them for SEN students then you are creating an inclusive environment and positive atmosphere.

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