



#InclusiveEducation



Fostering independence



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Success can look very different for individual children, particularly if they have special educational needs and/or a disability. Children in the same lesson/class can be working on dramatically different objectives and demonstrate fantastic progress and success through these. For many children, a key target to work on is their independence. This can take many different forms – organisation, learning, socialising, personal care, and more. Dependent on the child's individual needs and circumstance, it's important that a move towards greater independence is gradual and consistent (where possible).



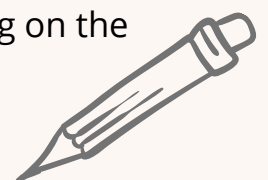
As always, every child is individual, and no two children's journeys or support needs are the same; pre-paid or pre-planned interventions or support packages must be adapted to the needs of the child.

Based on the targets outlined in the child's, e.g., care plan or individual education plan (or other), incremental tasks, activities, and responsibilities that set out realistic opportunities for success can be proposed. These tasks or responsibilities should be regular and achievable, and steadily increase in length/difficulty, with reduced support (where possible). This concept can apply to children of all ages and 'abilities', where it has been identified that an increased level of independence would be beneficial.



Needless to say, support for children with intellectual disabilities is often essential for much of the school day. (For children with profound, multiple, and complex learning difficulties, 1:1 support is often essential for the whole day.) It is important to consider, and review regularly, how much support is required for a balance between academic attainment/achievement and achievement in personal independence. Termly discussions on this topic with parents is useful – the parents' wishes may surprise you.

*The following are examples, which will need adaption, depending on the child's individual needs.





Organisational independence – Day-to-day routines are a great way to gradually build independence in children in the school setting. Setting up the school/class space so the child can access and retrieve their belongings and resources is conducive to feelings of independence. It may seem easier for a support staff member to collect items / pass belongings to parents / guide a child to their next lesson, etc. but these type of activities can build great self esteem and a feeling of belonging or inclusion, if they can be completed on their own or with limited assistance.



Tasks with a gradually increasing level of difficulty are beneficial in consolidating routines, behaviour expectations, and starting days and lessons positively. For a child to organise her stationery and collect what is necessary for a lesson, is an important skill that helps to prepare for increased demands in higher year groups. Moreover, it helps to focus the child on the upcoming lesson or activity. This activity can easily be simplified or expanded and merely serves as an example.



Independence for learning – One of the biggest challenges in the concept of inclusive education is the often hugely different lesson objectives and/or differentiation of teaching and tasks. A common result of this challenge is massive reliance on 1:1 support from a learning support assistant. A side effect of this is that the child completes less of her work independently and spends less of her time solving problems or working with peers. What's important for teachers to consider when preparing lessons is that our child needs to be gradually building reliance on herself, rather than relinquishing all of it due to the support offered.

Teachers must remember that children with additional support needs require the same opportunities to fail as everyone else, and that a lesson is not a failure if the child does not e.g., complete all of the work, or get every part correct. A lesson should be seen as a success if the child has completed some work independently and has made progress. Too often, teachers provide not enough work, or work that is too simple (or both). This is almost always due to a shortage of time and resource, not expertise or imagination.



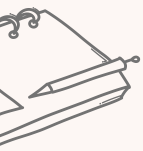


A gradual trend towards the child learning 'as one of the class' and completing a % of work independently should be the aim of teachers and their management.

This can be, for example, colouring in a picture by themselves without an LSA present for 5 minutes; sitting with classmates on the carpet for 10 minutes; looking at/reading a book during quiet reading time; writing the date and title; gluing in work; listening to instructions; joining in with sections of lessons with peers; playing sports; etc, etc. The list goes on and may not be suitable for many children – it may be a tiny fraction to begin with. But the key is the aim of moving steadily towards independence in learning.



Socialising – Peer relationships and socialising are massive parts of any child's development. As our child gets older it is important that she is given the chance to interact, make friends, have arguments, and socialise with the other children, wherever possible and as appropriate. Supported play, or support from a distance is a great way to get the ball rolling and may be required for long periods of time for some children. Organised games or clubs are often a good idea so long as the intention remains that eventually the child will gain skills in independence.



Activities and events where the children are not sat at desks provide great opportunities for children to interact more informally, and for children with e.g., an intellectual disability to pick up on social cues, or perhaps converse with their friends and peers in social situations. Where possible, our child should be encouraged to run with the pack. In turn, treating our child as one of the gang (where possible!) can enhance feelings of inclusion, belonging and independence.

