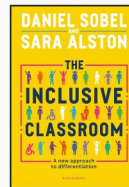




King Athelstan Primary School

Special Edition: Inclusion Newsletter March 2022



Spotlight on Inclusive Classroom Practice

This academic year we are having a whole-school focus on inclusive classroom practice. Ms Govan has been inspired by 'The Inclusive Classroom' (Daniel Sobel and Sara Alston), and has been delivering related training for staff and assemblies for children. We PRIDE ourselves on being an inclusive school and our core value of 'Respect' embodies this for the children. We talk a lot about the King Athelstan family, and we believe strongly that our diversity is what makes our school great. Read on to find out more about what we have been learning, and the sorts of things we have been trying out on our journey towards making our classrooms as inclusive as possible.

Whole School Ethos - At King Athelstan we:

- Invest in inclusion as a priority. This includes our skilled Inclusion Team and funding high levels of additional support from outside agencies, such as Educational Psychology. Ms Govan, Assistant Headteacher for Inclusion ensures that this is high on the agenda within all Senior Leadership Team discussions.
- Respect and celebrate diversity of all kinds, through our curriculum, assemblies and special events. Did you know, we recently appointed Miss Meggitt as our new Equality and Diversity Lead? She will be evaluating our current policy and practice to ensure we are reflecting our values and community.
- Make 'reasonable adjustments' for children who need something additional to, or different from their peers (as is our statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010).
- Believe in the principles of nurture and that children need to be 'ready to learn' in order to make the best of their time in school. This is a fundamental part of the work of our Inclusion Team.
- Recognise, and regularly evaluate, the limits of our offering (in terms of balancing the needs of each person, and the constraints of our space) and continually develop this, whilst being transparent with families about what we can offer their child.
- View each child as an individual with a right to access quality first teaching.

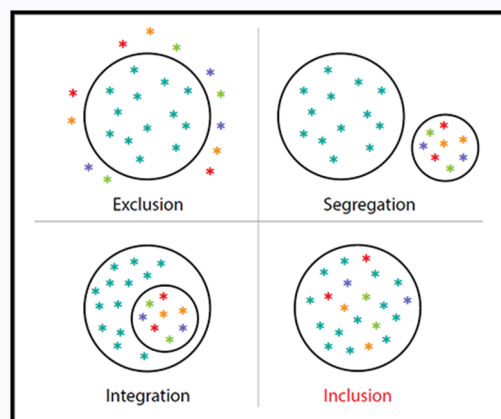
Staff Training

Teaching staff have participated in 4/6 planned training sessions based around different aspects of inclusive classroom practice. We have also begun delivering versions of the training for support staff. The planned sessions include:

- The learning environment
- Routines and transitions
- Engagement and instruction
- Independent learning
- Group work
- Assessment and evaluation

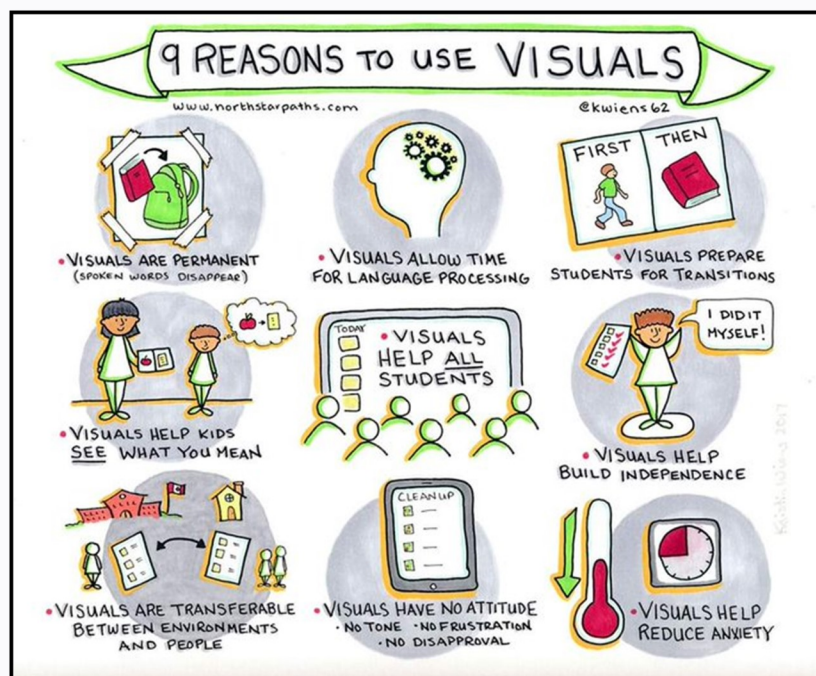
What is 'inclusion'?

This image has been shared with both staff and children to illustrate what is meant by inclusion'.



The Learning Environment

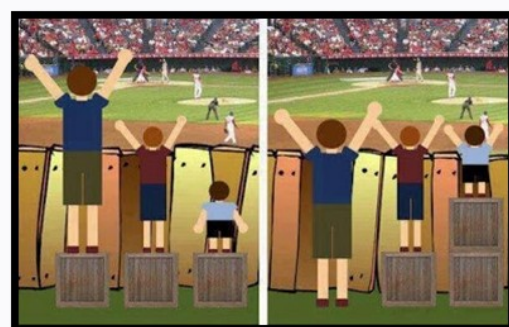
We have been looking at ways to tweak our learning environment to make it more accessible and inclusive. One strategy, used increasingly widely across the school is the use of visuals to support learning and routines. There is a definite balancing act between providing supportive visuals and not overloading children with too much competing information—and this will be different for each class. Check out the graphic below for why visuals are so valuable:



Equality vs Equity

Fair isn't everybody getting the same thing; fair is everybody getting what they need in order to be successful.

This powerful image, which now forms part of our behaviour policy, is regularly used to explain to children why their peers may need to receive something different to them.



Colourful Semantics

Colourful Semantics is a teaching strategy that uses a colour and shape code to show visually how a sentence is made up. Each colour/shape represents a word or part of the sentence. All children can benefit from the use of Colourful Semantics as all children need to develop an ability to think about sentences. This approach is used in many of our classrooms, as well as with individuals and small groups. Colourful Semantics activities help children;



- make requests, describe pictures, talk about events
- formulate sentences of increasing length and complexity
- understand vocabulary and develop their story-telling skills
- understand and use grammar
- develop functional reading skills

Scaffolding

Staff are increasingly using a 'scaffolding' approach to supporting learning, in order to maximise independence. The idea is to offer the 'least help first', as it is very hard to withdraw support once in place—we often use the analogy of cooking with chilli: you can keep adding more to taste but can't remove it if you add too much. This way, children complete as much of the learning as they can, and receive support only for the parts they need it for, reducing over-reliance on adult support. We also talk about support staff being linked to their focus child (ren) by 'elastic not Velcro' - signalling that they will move around the room, and regularly return to 'check in', rather than remaining seated next to one child.



Providing structure

Some children find additional structure supports their understanding and/or wellbeing. In our classrooms, you will find us increasingly using tools such as task management boards (to break down tasks into steps), visual timetables (to show what is coming up) and visual check-lists (to support memory and reduce overload).

Why adapt our approach?

The number of children in our school with an identified Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) has increased greatly—currently 90 children across the school—and there are many more who need lower level accommodations, particularly as a result of the pandemic. This mirrors the picture both locally and nationally. There is an ever growing body of research, helpfully summarised here by the EEF below, which we are using to inform our practice to ensure it continues to be the best we can make it.



Sensory overload

In order to further reduce sensory overload within classrooms, we will be gradually moving towards all display boards in classrooms being backed with hessian, creating a limited, natural colour palate. Our EYFS classrooms have been set up this way for some time and with great impact!



Are you sitting comfortably?

Some of the advice we have encountered on our journey towards inclusive classroom practice has really challenged our thinking and teaching habits. For example, we have been contemplating what is involved in 'paying attention'. Historically, the focus was often on children sitting up straight, sitting still and looking at the teacher. We now recognise that, for some children, behaving in this way actually prevents good listening and understanding as they are having to invest so much energy in maintaining these expectations that there is none left for learning. We have been exploring in our classrooms acceptable alternatives to meet individual needs. For example, we are finding some children work better in a sitting or lying position rather than seated; others take in far more information when the expectation of eye contact is removed; and for some, having sensory input (e.g. a fidget tool) is a must! This is a culture shift for everyone, and it will take a while to replace old habits with new ones, but we are already seeing some positive impact on engagement.



Fidgets—Tools not toys

In school we are promoting the idea with the children that fidgets are tools to support learning, not toys. We have a wide range of sensory tools available in school and so we ask that, unless a specific item has been pre-agreed with a member of staff, that items are not brought in from home. To reduce the distraction for others, we are increasingly using discrete every-day objects for sensory input during listening time (e.g. Blu-Tac, pipe cleaners, ribbon, pegs, pom poms, etc.) and saving larger/noisier items for dedicated sensory breaks. Additionally, we are teaching children who need to fidget that this must be in their own space and in their lap/under the desk to minimise the impact on others. Children will be asked to put hand-held fidgets away during independent/group learning time as they need to be recording their ideas, however there are other options such as sensory cushions, available during these times if needed.



SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Summary of recommendations

1

Create a positive and supportive environment for all pupils, without exception



2

Build an ongoing, holistic understanding of your pupils and their needs



3

Ensure all pupils have access to high quality teaching



4

Complement high quality teaching with carefully selected small-group and one-to-one interventions



5

Work effectively with teaching assistants

