The Principles of the Children and Families Act: Embedded Practice or Neglected Words?

**In 2014, The Children and Families Act brought in legislation and principles that underpin the current SEND Code of Practice. Yet reports from Local Area SEND inspections and third sector organisations suggest that these principles are not implemented consistently nationally. Let us remind ourselves of the nature of these principles.**

*The Children and Families Act (2014) Principles and Implications for Schools (adapted from DfE, 2016).*

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| **The principles of the SEND Code of Practice** | **Implications for local authorities and schools** | **Practical application** |
| Local authorities must have regard to the wishes, views and feelings of children, their parents and of young people themselves. | Listen to and respond to the concerns of parents, children and young people. | Person centred, pupil-friendly meetings, where the pupil is present.Age-appropriate and creative ways of engaging pupils, parents and carers in these discussions, even for very young children – for example, using pupil voice emoticons to indicate what is important to the pupil.The views and wishes of parents, children and young people reflected in planned outcomes and provision.  |
| The participation of parents, children and young people in decision-making about SEN. | Parents, children and young people involved in decisions from the start, i.e. in the initial decision about whether a child or young person has SEN. | A SEND policy stating that pupils and parents/carers participate in this decision-making from the first days of Special Educational Provision.Provision that can be traced back to decisions made by pupils and parents/carers.Outcomes, actions and support plans that have been clearly compiled with pupils, parents and carers in partnership. |
| Providing children, young people and parents with information and advice to support participation. | Must publish a SEN information report for school.Should provide children, young people and parents with information about the local Information, Advice and Support Service. | A SEN Information Report, written with the involvement of parents and carers, and accessible in its presentation.SEN Information Report and helpful links to the Local Offer and Information Advice and Support Service, clearly shown on the school website, that is easy to navigate with accessibility tools.Children, young people and parents have access to services that helpthem achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood. |
| Outcomes and improving progress for children and young people with SEN. | A focus on outcomes and impact.Gather evidence of the impact of the school’s provision on pupil progress.Publish information about how they evaluate the effectiveness of provision made for pupils with SEN. | Provision maps and support plans indicate the impact of the provision on progress and outcomes, not just the provision being made.There is an emphasis on outcomes as well as progress, e.g. ‘by using clear visuals, timetabling, and allowing him to watch first, Ellis is now able to join in with PE without becoming distressed’.A SEN Information Report on the website that is updated annually, to show transparently how the school has evaluated its provision for pupils with SEND, how effective it is, and what next developments it has identified. |

**Making it Practical!**

The principles of the Children and Families Act need to have practical meaning in schools. The principles are not just for local authorities to deliver on at the EHCP stage either. Thousands of children and young people at SEN Support in schools are also entitled to support that meets with these principles at school level too. Yet these principles can be easily lost among the service-centred approaches and the need to ensure the paperwork is complete and the records up-to-date.

It takes time to find out the views and wishes of different stakeholders, particularly children. Yet some of the most valuable information can come if we have staff who are confident in exploring their views and genuinely listening and responding to their wishes. The answers to children’s difficulties and concerns are often there within them and around them in the people who love them. We just need to give them a platform and the tools to be able to identify and communicate this.

One of the best reviews I attended embraced all these principles in one short hour. It was highly person-centred. The Year 6 pupil was involved in planning his Year 6/7 transition review. He updated his Support Plan to give to the high school SENCO. Having made some good progress in the previous six months, he was keen to showcase his work to the high school SENCO, which he did by bringing all his exercise books to the meeting to share.

He talked about how much he was looking forward to high school and the new subjects he would encounter. This was unexpected to some in the room as they had assumed he would be nervous or apprehensive – not so! He had only one concern – would he be able to join the lunchtime clubs he had picked out as he was worried about being bullied in the playground when teaching assistants might not be present?

Together, we celebrated his progress and wider outcomes through Year 6. We then agreed a plan of the lunchtime clubs he had chosen. However, this child had recognised his own vulnerability, having had previous experience of being bullied. With his approval, a plan was drawn up to provide a network of peer support for him, involving people he already knew and older pupils who would act as mentors. All agreed that whilst it was good to have a plan of lunchtime clubs in place, we didn’t want him to attend them just because he felt excluded from the playground.

Had this child not brought his own concerns to the table, I’m not sure our discussion would have been so focused on one specific issue. Yet he directed our thoughts to what was most important to him. By autumn half term, his mother was reporting that he had made a great transition to high school, was thoroughly enjoying Technology Club, Chess Club and Computer Club, made great friends and was getting on well with the peer support network. This is the principles of the Code of Practice successfully applied in such a simple way!

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