

Inclusive school

In one school, inclusion was clearly valued and given a high priority. The inclusive perspectives of members of the school's management team underpinned the positive ethos of the school; these managers demonstrated their clear commitment to inclusion by adopting a flexible, learner-centred approach in order to provide a personalised education designed to meet the diverse needs of all the learners in the school. This ethos, focused on effective support for the individual learner and engagement with families and the local community, had its origins among the school's managers but also pervaded the work of the whole school and could be observed to be embedded in the day-to-day working practices of staff.

This rural secondary school worked in interesting ways. For example, the staff profile within the school was unusual. The school's senior managers had worked there for many years. They knew the young people, and their brothers, sisters, parents and members of their extended families, well. They were leading figures in the local community and ensured that the school was extensively used for community functions. They aimed to retain teaching staff over the long term, pursuing a concerted policy of internal promotion in order to reward excellence and promote loyalty. Being a school committed to teacher education and development afforded opportunities to identify strong new potential members of staff from among the students who came into the school for their teaching practice. Senior managers at the school viewed their approach to developing 'home-grown talent' as a success, arguing that it ensured stability within the structure of the school and helped to maintain, on a consistent basis, the school's values and ethos.

This school provided an education for an unusually high proportion of students with special and additional needs, many of them with Statements. A language unit was based at the school as a local resource for pupils with a hearing impairment or language and communication difficulties. Other pupils, many of whom had been regarded as having 'behaviour that challenged', came to the school following exclusions or unsuccessful school placements elsewhere; some had returned to local authority provision from out-of-county specialist placements. The school also welcomes students who had learning difficulties or other special educational needs.

Flexibility and creativity were two key factors in sustaining the school's ongoing and developing inclusivity. Members of school staff adopted a positive, 'can do' approach rather than focusing on problems. They were constantly open to (and supported in implementing and developing) new ways of working. They were innovators who would change what they did in order to respond to the needs of students. Their focus was upon each young person rather than school systems. The school continually invested in inclusion both financially and through the ongoing reinvention and refinement of practice.

This commitment to inclusion was again seen in the school's creative approach to supporting students beyond the age of 16. The school enabled a

small number of students to access a range of opportunities appropriate to their learning needs and difficulties beyond Year 11. One young person experiencing mental health problems was using support from the school as a way of securing stability while appropriate post-school services were identified. The school employed a former student who had learning difficulties as a member of the grounds maintenance team. One young man with Down's syndrome continued to attend some sessions at school in his late teens; the school supported another young adult who was undertaking longer-term work experience with the groundsman of a local primary school. Both these students had experienced the breakdown of placements in colleges of further education and the school had found ways of enabling them to continue their education.