

In 2020, Roger Mitchell was asked by his Local Authority, Barking and Dagenham, to reconstitute and to chair the 'SEMH Workstream', a group in which he brought together practitioners and commissioners from across education, health, social care and third sector organisations who support children and young people and schools in his borough.

Through this, Roger led on the development of the following free resources:

Through this very productive group, in the space of two years, Roger led on the development of and production of the following materials that have now been formally adopted by Barking and Dagenham LA:

- [The SEMH Handbook](#) – to support educators and others in developing their understanding and management of challenging behaviour;
- [The SEMH Banding Document](#) – to support the accurate identification and level of SEMH needs;
- [The Barking and Dagenham Inclusion Pledge](#) – a set of fundamental values that underpin a holistic approach to the inclusion of all children (including the pack written by Roger to support the Nine Values in the Inclusion Pledge).

What follows is the Inclusion Pledge, accompanied by the supporting articles that Roger wrote to support the Nine Values in the pledge:

Inclusion Pledge

Our ambition:

All who work with or on behalf of the children and young people of Barking and Dagenham undertake to promote and embed the following Values of this Inclusion Pledge:

1. The importance of maintaining an unconditional positive regard for all of our children and young people. We endeavour to develop meaningful and consistent relationships with every individual, group, and family.
2. Schools provide safe people and spaces to support children's rights and wellbeing. All children have the right to be safe, belong, achieve, be heard and contribute to their community.
3. Behaviour is communication of a need and not a need in itself. Understanding behaviour is essential. Needs must be met in a compassionate and informed way.
4. Language is a powerful means of communication and the way we use it directly impacts on the outcomes of our interactions. Respect for individual context, circumstances and needs means responding to individuals in a differentiated manner, seeking a positive outcome for each individual.
5. Nurture is central to the development of wellbeing, and young people need nurture and empathetic relationships alongside containment and structure.
6. Children and young people's learning and wellbeing are understood developmentally. We believe in access to education that promotes equity, empathy, aspiration and success for all.
7. Best quality communication between all professionals in all services is key to ensuring effective safeguarding and contextual safeguarding within both the school and the wider community. Engaging with and caring for the community around the child and the family.
8. The importance of facilitating effective transitions at all relevant points in children's and young people's lives. We strive to bring about positive change and develop resilience for individuals, groups and families, and communities, built on an understanding of contexts as well as individual differences.
9. A commitment to continually develop opportunities for our children and young people to realise their aspirations and ambitions within their own community. We value approaches to lifelong learning that draw on people's potential and cultures that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of our community.

This document was originally developed from [Nurture UK's Six Principles of Nurture](#), [London Violence Reduction Unit's Inclusion Charter](#), the [United Nations Charter for Children's Rights](#), [Principles of the Relational Approach](#), [The Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Charter for Social Pedagogy](#).

It was an honour to be asked to formally launch the Barking and Dagenham Inclusion Pledge on the 26th April 2024 at the Inclusion Matters Roadshow. In attendance were a broad group of stakeholders who were asked to consider the content of the Inclusion Pledge and make comment on it prior to it being finalised for adoption across our borough.

I am very proud of what we have achieved so far and I also believe that this development in my local authority is an example of good practice that should be shared more widely. So please do have a look.

Our Inclusion Pledge started life as a development by the borough's SEMH Workstream and was based on Nurture UK's Six Principles of Nurture. It has now been expanded through the work of our Inclusion Strategy Working Group to be a much more comprehensive set of values that draw from and reference a number of further sources – namely the London Violence Reduction Unit's Inclusion Charter, the United Nations Charter for Children's Rights, the Principles of the Relational Approach and the Charter for Social Pedagogy.

Consequently, this draft is not an isolated local strategy but sits firmly within the context of excellent inclusive practice drawn from highly respected regional, national and international sources.

It is no small thing to ask Headteacher colleagues in our borough to not only consider adopting the Inclusion Pledge but to then also work with their teams to embed each of the values within their own schools. So we are making it clear that the Inclusion Pledge is not intended to be a one size fits all approach. It is for schools (and others) to use in guiding the further development of their existing good practice.

That said, it also provides a vehicle to open up an informed discussion and an opportunity to reframe the narrative of inclusive practice.

Every school is different and I strongly believe that no school leader can tell another school leader how to run their school. However, what we can do, and what we must do, is take every opportunity to link up and share our best practice with each other so as to spark our inquisitiveness into how successes have been achieved in each other's schools. If we do that then we can draw on everything that compliments, and also positively challenges, our existing vision and ethos for our own schools to help us continually take them forwards.

On the following pages are nine short articles, each one addressing one of the Nine Values from the Inclusion Pledge, to expand on what each of those Nine Values mean to me.

I hope that this will encourage a broader sharing of what inclusion means and how we can work together by sharing our best practice examples and our expertise to enhance the offer we are able to make for ALL of our children and young people.

Roger Mitchell
Headteacher
Ripple Primary School

After a period of consultation, the Barking and Dagenham Inclusion Pledge was formally adopted in November 2024.

1. The importance of maintaining an unconditional positive regard for all of our children and young people. We endeavour to develop meaningful and consistent relationships with every individual, group, and family.

After Carl Rogers but adapted for the purposes of the Inclusion Pledge, to me this means accepting the child or young person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in the moment without conditions attached to that acceptance, because we are educators and advocates for the child or young person and, like every other aspect of educating or advocacy that we undertake, we start at the their starting point and move on from there. So it requires empathy and is not dependent on the child or young person behaving or presenting in "acceptable" ways in order for us to care for them, accept them, value them and support them.

Every day has to be an opportunity for a fresh start, but with open and honest reference to the prior learning from past events, no matter how challenging they may have been. And often the fresh start needs to be sooner than the next day. It may well be that the reset point is the next lesson or the next 10 minutes.

And we need to work in the same way with our families because, no matter how hard it may be at times, we need to understand their challenges and have empathy for the experiences that frame their choices. We need to understand and utilise all opportunities that we can access to support the child within the context of their family and the family in the context of their community.

If we work with the child in isolation there is a risk that the best we will achieve is to build their resilience so that they can cope better in spite of their lived experience. If we work jointly and holistically in a coordinated way we have the opportunity to change the child's lived experience.

But we can only do this by **working with and not at** our children and families.

We have all been taught about Maslow's Hierarchy in terms of our children's readiness to learn. When considering the wellbeing of our staff we will try to think about Maslow's Hierarchy in terms of staff member's readiness to teach. But how often do we ever consider Maslow's hierarchy in terms of our children's family's readiness to parent?

Following on from this, Neil Hawkes developed his Values Based Education (VBE) approach, which fully embraces the Humanist .

Values Based Education, in line with Maslow's and Rogers' theories, emphasises the importance of fulfilling the psychological needs of individuals to foster personal growth and self-actualization. It encourages educators to create learning environments that cater to the emotional, social, and psychological needs of students, promoting a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and personal fulfillment.

This approach not only aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs but also aligns with Rogers' person-centered approach, which focuses on the development of a positive self-image and the importance of unconditional positive regard in the learning process.

By integrating these principles, Values Based Education can create a nurturing and supportive atmosphere that encourages students to take charge of their own learning and to develop their full potential.

Here is Neil Hawkes briefly talking about the impact of Values Based Education:

[The Impact of VbE](#)

But there are some school leaders who just don't get it and, sadly, continue to be celebrated for their approach. For example, in this clip we see the BBC giving airtime to Alun Ebanzer about the importance of his zero tolerance, tough discipline approach.

["We must stop mollycoddling kids!"](#)

2. Schools provide safe people and spaces to support children's rights and wellbeing. All children have the right to be safe, belong, achieve, be heard and contribute to their community.

My key message regarding this value in the Inclusion Pledge is:

"If you lose the child from their school, you lose the child."

Our children and young people need to be genuine partners in their education. They need to know that they belong to their school and that their school belongs to them. And they need to know that they will be consistently supported and understood by the adults who are charged with their care during their time at their school. For this reason, my own school has developed a 'childspeak' version of the Inclusion Pledge. This is not only so the children understand full what we are saying we are, but also so they understand it well enough to be able to call us out on it if they don't think we are doing what we say we will.

A copy of our 'childspeak' Inclusion Pledge can be found on our school website at:

<https://www.rippleprimary.co.uk/our-inclusion-pledge>

There needs to be a minimum expectation that ALL staff who work with or on behalf of our children and young people have at the very least a sound basic understanding of attachment, Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Informed Practice. This is because schools need every adult to be an Emotionally Available Adult so that they can become truly Emotionally Available Schools for their pupils (and their families).

UNICEF's Rights Respecting School Award programme is a perfect vehicle for schools to develop this vision of our children feeling truly valued in schools where they feel safe and confident, know that their opinions matter and respect the opinions of others. Such is the recognition of the value of this programme that the London VRU, in partnership with UNICEF, has secured funding for ALL schools in London to sign up to this programme for free from 2024 to 2028.

Please do have a look:

[The Rights Respecting Schools Award | UNICEF UK](#)

The vast majority of children and young people, regardless of how challenging they may sometimes be, want to be at their school. They want the routine/clear boundaries/social interaction/feeling of belonging. For us to have our best chance to positively impact on our pupil's wellbeing, they need to consistently attend their schools. There are a number of reasons why children may not be in school. These include:

- exclusions and suspensions
- school refusal
- anxiety
- bullying
- conflict with friends/lack of supportive friendships
- family problems
- other attendance issues

We need to employ every cross-service resource that we can to ensure that every one

of our pupils maintains good attendance at their schools. We will achieve this better by working closely and effectively with our children and their families rather than threatening them with fines for absence.

In the current context in my own local authority, with the relatively early development of youth gangs, it has never been more important to acknowledge that their own school is a place of safety and security for all of our pupils, but even more so for our most vulnerable and most challenging. And if they don't have their school, they are significantly more likely to be exposed to contextual safeguarding risks including gang recruitment, CCE, CSE, radicalisation.

With that in mind, we need to ask ourselves if we have all properly challenged our own thinking about what we want out of an Alternative Provision, and when we are looking at referring a pupil to an offsite Alternative Provision, whose needs are we putting first - the pupil's needs or our own needs?

Not all Alternative Provision needs to be offsite. Onsite Early Intervention can make the difference between keeping the child or young person in their school or losing them from their school. But it needs the child/young person to be trusting enough to make this work and that in turn needs the adults to have developed that trust by being always emotionally available to them.

The following YouTube video will give you some more idea of what I am getting at here. It beautifully documents one school's approach to supporting vulnerable child both within the classroom and beyond it.

Please do watch it. It is less than 4 minutes:

[De-Escalation Spaces: Helping Students Manage Emotions](#)

"If you lose the child from their school, you lose the child."

3. Behaviour is communication of a need and not a need in itself. Understanding behaviour is essential. Needs must be met in a compassionate and informed way.

For this one I can find no better way to express what this value means to me than by directly quoting Nurture UK:

“People communicate through behaviour. It is the adult’s role to help children and young people to understand their feelings, express their needs appropriately, and use non-threatening and supportive language to resolve situations. Our first responsibility in dealing with difficult or challenging behaviour, after safety, is to try to understand what the child is trying to tell us.

The outward behaviour is often the ‘tip of the iceberg’, and so it is important to consider the immediate environment and what occurred just before the incident happened. School events, the time of year, and home circumstances can also give us clues. Adults need to be calm and consistent, and understand that children may communicate their feelings in different ways. Children and young people need to be encouraged to reflect on their behaviour, and understand how to express their emotions appropriately.

This does not excuse the behaviour, but helps us to ask why the behaviour is occurring. Given what we know about this child and their development, what are they trying to tell us? It helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being discouraged or provoked. Having a quiet area to help students to become calm, and giving them time before a discussion can often help, as well as recognising potential triggers and anxieties that could be avoided or reduced.”

NB – All of the above is also completely relevant when working with adults. It is important to ensure that ALL staff understand how to employ a **Low Arousal Approach** – see the **BDSIP SEMH Handbook** (compiled by the excellent [Lee Boyce](#)) for a comprehensive coverage of this (and much, much more):

[SEMHandbook](#)

The reason that is overwhelmingly cited for suspension and exclusion from education in the UK is **“Persistent Disruptive Behaviour”**.

We will not have reframed the narrative enough until we start to talk about **“Persistent Disruptive Need”**.

- 4. Language is a powerful means of communication and the way we use it directly impacts on the outcomes of our interactions. Respect for individual context, circumstances and needs means responding to individuals in a differentiated manner, seeking a positive outcome for each individual.**

Primary school example:

It is 7:45am and I am at the end of the Yr5/6 building corridor at the Suffolk Road site. At the other end of the corridor, the playground door slams open and Tony (one of our more challenging Yr5 pupils) rushes into the building.

A classroom door opens and, having heard the slamming of the playground door, out steps one of my Yr6 teachers. The teacher sees Tony rushing down the corridor.

Teacher (shouting): "What do you think you are doing in here at this time boy?"

*Tony (shouting back): "Why don't you just f**k right off!"*

Tony turns around and runs back out into the playground. The teacher turns and sees me approaching him.

Teacher: "Did you hear that? Did you hear what he just said to me? You need to exclude him for that."

Me: "To be honest, if you had approached me in that way I might well have responded to you in a similar manner. But I'll see you about that later. Right now I need to find Tony."

I did find Tony and he agreed to come and sit in the comfy chair in my office while I got on with some work. It took quite a while for Tony to calm down. But when he was ready to talk about it, a fuller picture emerged.

Had the teacher approached the situation in a different way ("Hello Tony. You're in early. Are you looking for someone? Can I help?") then they would have found out that Tony's estranged father had turned up at his house the previous night and badly beaten-up Tony's mother. The police had arrested Tony's father, his mother was in hospital, but he didn't know how badly hurt she was, he had spent the night on his aunt's sofa and he didn't know where his baby sister was.

Tony was in school that early because:

- *he was desperate to find his teacher (one of the safest and most trusted adults in his life at that point);*

and

- *he expected the school to be a secure space where he could feel safe.*

It only took a single teacher to intervene with a single sentence to completely undermine everything that Tony had needed (and rightly expected – right there, right then) from his school.

There is research to show that 90% of instances where there is a major confrontation

between a pupil and an adult in school the situation has been triggered and/or escalated by the adult.

Secondary school example:

Toni is in Yr8 (we know that, for many reasons, the transition from Yr7 into Yr8 can, for many children, be as challenging for some children as the transition from Yr6 into Yr7).

It is 8:50 and Toni arrives at school 5 minutes late. The school has a zero tolerance policy on lateness and Assistant Head who is manning the school gate gives Toni a red card. Toni tells the Assistant Head that it is not her fault that she was late and asks explain. The Assistant Head refuses to engage telling Toni that it is school policy. Toni gets upset and runs into the school building and into the toilets to calm down.

Toni has managed to calm down but, due to what has just happened, gets to her Form Room at 9:01, just as the register has been closed, form time has finished and her form are leaving to get to their first lesson, which is Geography and is one of Ton's favourites. Toni's Form Tutor tells Toni that they are marking her as late on the register and gives Toni her second red card. Toni tells the Form Tutor that it is not her fault that she was late and asks explain. The Form Tutor refuses to engage telling Toni that it is school policy. Toni gets very upset but tries to hold it together. She doesn't argue with her form Tutor. Instead turns her back, rushes out of the room slamming the door and runs down the corridor to get to her Geography Lesson.

Toni is stopped in the corridor by the Deputy Headteacher as she is rushing to get to her Geography lesson. The Deputy Head issues Toni with a red card for running in the corridor. Toni knows that a third red card means that she will receive an automatic detention. Toni pleads with the Deputy Head not to give her a red card and tries to explain that it is not her fault that she was late into school that morning and that she was only running to get to her first lesson as soon as she could. The Deputy Head refuses to engage telling Toni that it is school policy. Toni gets very emotional and runs off away from the Deputy Head shouting, "What's the fucking point!"

Toni gets to her Geography lesson 10 minutes late. She burts throught he door and rushes towards her seat, but her Geography Teacher calls her to the front of the room and issues her a red card for being late. Toni heads back to her seat muttering loudly, "Like I give a fuck! I'm already on a detention!". Her Geography Teacher hears this, accuses Toni of swearing at them and calls a member of SLT to escort Toni to the Isolation Room.

The member of SLT that turns up is the Deputy Head who says, in front of the whole class, "Oh. It's you again. I'm not surprised after the disrespect that you just showed me." Tony shouts, "I hate you and I hate this fucking school!" She runs out of the door with the Deputy Head in pursuit.

I think you are all pretty clear what went wrong here, and I am sure that you could list all of the things that could have caused Toni to be late in the first place. I am sure that you can all see the unfairness of not allowing Toni a voice to explain and provide context. And I am sure that none of you would run your own school like that.

There is research to show that 90% of instances where there is a major confrontation between a pupil and an adult in school the situation has been triggered and/or escalated by the adult.

At Ripple Primary School our whole ethos is based on two core foundations, which are:

At all times, maintaining the highest level of:

Professional Generosity

- *Looking out for each other and looking after each other.*
- *Always giving the benefit of the doubt.*
- *Even in the most challenging of circumstances, asking yourself why a child, a colleague or another adult has acted in the way they did before addressing with them what they have said or done.*

Professional Maturity

- *Professional self-management.*
- *Doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, not because you fear the consequences of doing the wrong thing.*

If the teacher's involved in the above incidents had been able to even partly embrace that ethos then the outcome of that interaction would have been very different. That teacher lasted a further term with me before deciding that my way of doing things didn't suit them and that it would be better all round if they pursued their professional future elsewhere.

But just take a listen to this clip of Katharine Burbalsingh, wearing her badge of being the country's toughest Headteacher with pride, while talking to Nick Ferrari on LBC.

["Britain's strictest Headteacher"](#)

And I have to ask the question, "Why did DfE 'Behaviour Tsar', Tom Bennett, only stayed in the classroom for 15 years before feeling the need to leaving his school based role in order to tell colleagues from outside a classroom, how to get children to behave inside one?"

And I would ask all three of them read:

"Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil," by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up
Because we ain't got an alarm clock
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,
Cause the lights ain't on
Even got my baby sister ready,
Cause my mama wasn't home.
Got us both to school on time,
To eat us a good breakfast.
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed
Cause I ain't got no pencil.

But it doesn't need to be that way. And, as I type this, I am proud to say that I honestly can't recall the last time that I heard a member of my staff raise their voice to a child.

5. Nurture is central to the development of wellbeing, and young people need nurture and empathetic relationships alongside containment and structure.

Nurture in schools is about providing an environment where all children and young people (and the grownups) feel that they belong. A genuine feeling of belonging is fundamental to forming strong, positive relationships (child-child, child-adult, adult-adult). Strong, positive relationships are the foundation on which social, emotional and mental wellbeing are based and they underpin the development of resilience and security.

Children and young people who truly feel that they belong in their school will be better attenders, better behaved, better engaged and, will consequently better achieve and attain; academically, socially and emotionally.

We have worked hard at Ripple Primary School to become what I like to call an “Emotionally Available School”. ALL staff have had training in attachment, ACEs and Trauma Informed Practice. They have also had training on what it means to be an “Emotionally Available Adult”.

An Emotionally Available Adult is:

- the person who is always available.
- the person who is genuinely pleased to see them every day.
- the person they can trust to be consistent and fair.
- the person who trusts that they can learn from their mistakes.
- the person who has high expectations of what they are able to achieve, even when they make mistakes.
- the person who is able to empathise with their difficulties (remember that this is different to sympathy – empathy means you are trying to connect with their challenges and understand how they are feeling).
- the person who reassures them and keeps them safe.
- the person who supports them to develop their resilience and is resilient themselves.
- the person who maintains a consistent and unconditional positive regard for them.

One emotionally available adult can form secure attachments and make all the difference and, for many children (particularly our most vulnerable children) that adult will be someone at school.

We often hear about Nurture Rooms but I challenge the idea of having a room where certain children ‘need’ to go to meet their social and emotional needs because, isn’t that just applying another unhelpful label? If every adult in the school is an Emotionally Available Adult then the whole school becomes a nurture room where everyone belongs.

We can ALL protect children by being Emotionally Available Adults. **We can interrupt the trajectory from childhood adversities just through our responses to children.** By being curious about challenging behaviour and learning

difficulties. By understanding the impact that adversity can have on long term mental, physical and social ill-health.

But we must also remember that children and young people want to feel security in their schools through consistency of expectations and boundaries. No child thrives through chaos.

Many of you will know this story but, growing up, [Ian Wright](#) faced a number of what we now refer to as ACEs. Decades before these concepts were formalised, Mr Pigden worked with him in a Trauma Informed way and provided him with the Emotionally Available Adult that he so desperately needed. But, as well as having the empathy to understand what Ian Wright needed when he needed it, Mr Pigden was strict and boundaried. He certainly wasn't a 'soft touch' but he was, most importantly, consistent and reliable.

This extract from Ian Wright's appearance on Radio 4's Desert Island Discs:

[Ian Wright - Desert Island Discs - YouTube](#)

There are three fantastic books that cover a lot of what I have talked about here, and much more. They are:

"The Kindness Principle: Making relational behaviour management work in schools" by [David Whitaker](#); "When the Adults Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in School Behaviour" by [Paul Dix](#); and "Becoming a Trauma-Informed Restorative Educator" by [Joe Brummer](#) and [Margaret Thorsborne](#). I would recommend them to all school leaders. If you only buy three books on education this year then make them these ones. You can find them here:

[The Kindness Principle - Amazon](#)

[When the Adults Change, Everything Changes - Amazon](#)

[Becoming a Trauma-informed Restorative Educator - Amazon](#)

Every single one of us has the ability and aptitude to be the Emotionally Available Adult that can make a real difference to a child's life now and to their future. And, as school leaders, every single one of us has a duty to be that role model to our staff teams so that we can insist that every child and young person has the best opportunity to thrive in their school.

And, apart from anything else, why wouldn't you want to be that person?

6. Children and young people's learning and wellbeing are understood developmentally. We believe in access to education that promotes equity, empathy, aspiration and success for all.

Without entering into a discussion that runs too deeply into the worlds of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, etc. it has been clearly evidenced that children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing, and their academic learning occur at varying rates from child to child and at uneven rates across different areas for each child. Our pupil's demonstrated abilities and skills are often fluid and may vary from day to day based on individual or contextual factors. So just because they are able to successfully undertake an academic task today it does not guarantee that they will be able to replicate this tomorrow, and they may in fact regress. This is also the case for a child or young person's social and emotional development.

The most important thing to recognise here is that the academic, social and emotional elements are inescapably interlinked.

As educators, I think that we are very able, willing and frequently highly skilled in differentiating our curriculum to match the needs of the child or young person's level of learning. We always look to do better so that all of our pupils get the best academic learning opportunities from our schools.

But I would challenge whether we are as good at differentiating when dealing with a child or young person's social and emotional development?

I am drawn to that old story about Tony, who couldn't read...

Tony can't read. His teacher is losing patience with him and tells him that if he can't read better by the end of the week he will have to stay in at lunchtimes in the Deputy Head's office until he learns to read better. By the end of the week Tony still can't read.

The Deputy Head is exasperated and tells Tony that if can't read better by the end of the week then his Mum and Dad will have to be called in to speak to the Headteacher. By the end of the week Tony still can't read.

The Headteacher has a meeting with Tony and his Mum and Dad and tells them all that if Tony can't read better by the end of the week then he will exclude him.

By the end of the week Tony still can't read. The Headteacher excludes him.

How do you feel about that?

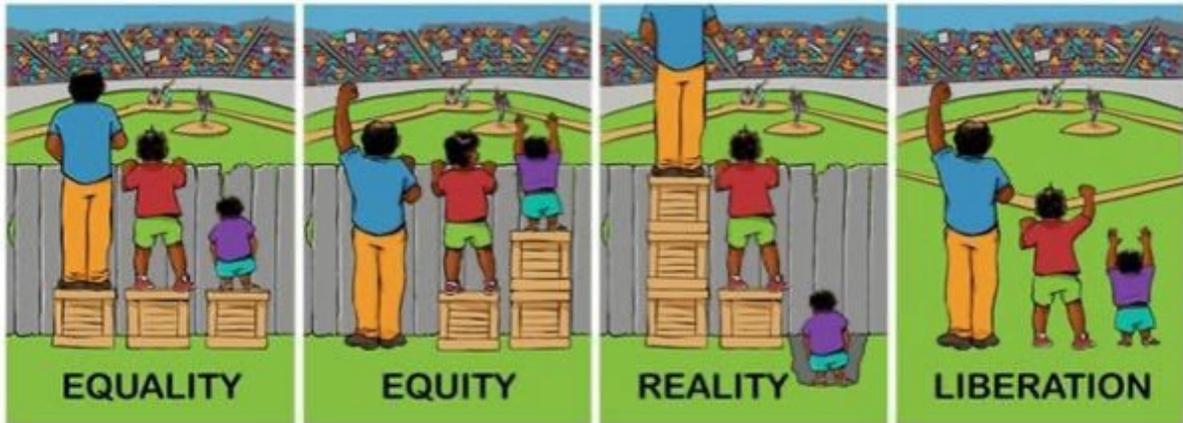
Now look at it again and replace the word 'read' with the word '**behave**'... How do you feel now?

Any notion that there are "stages" of development (be they academic or wellbeing related) that do not allow for considerable overlap is fundamentally flawed.

We need to continually take a good look at our schools and ask ourselves what inclusion means to us and be honest about the barriers that exist to being more inclusive.

And we need to continually acknowledge that:

“The greatest barriers to inclusive education reside within our own minds.”



7. Best quality communication between all professionals in all services is key to ensuring effective safeguarding and contextual safeguarding within both the school and the wider community. Engaging with and caring for the community around the child and the family.

I don't want to make this a history lesson but I do think it needs some context (please accept here that I am not a children's services historian and this is not by any means a comprehensive timeline).

In 1988, the guidance document "Working Together to Safeguard Children" was first published and then revised 1991 in response to the 1989 Children Act, which set out the legislative framework for the current child protection framework system in England and Wales. This was the first of many revisions and updates but that guidance document remains current today.

I was a baby teacher in my first year of teaching when it was published and I can't remember why it caught my attention so much but I do remember being blown away by it as an excellent read that completely captured my attention (and you don't often say that about DfE guidance do you).

Over time, further legislation influenced the guidance, e.g. the Children Act 2004, but the consistent core point of the guidance has always been to highlight the need for EVERYONE working directly with or working on behalf of children and young people to, where concerns were raised, fully share contextually relevant information across all services. This is because all services need to communicate effectively to provide a properly informed picture of need so that appropriate and relevant support and strategies could be put in place to best safeguard those children and young people at risk of harm.

"Working Together..." made it explicit that this most important requirement – to share contextually relevant safeguarding information between services – Top Trumped everything else. And that still stands, regardless of the any protestations from some who remain, even now, too fearful of GDPR.

The deaths of Victoria Climbié (2000) led to the Laming Report (2003) which contributed to major changes in the way that children's services were structured in England and Wales. But not before the deaths of other children, including Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in 2002. There have been many more cases with varying levels of publicity over the intervening years and these have led to further reviews and updates of "Working Together..." (the most recent being February 2024).

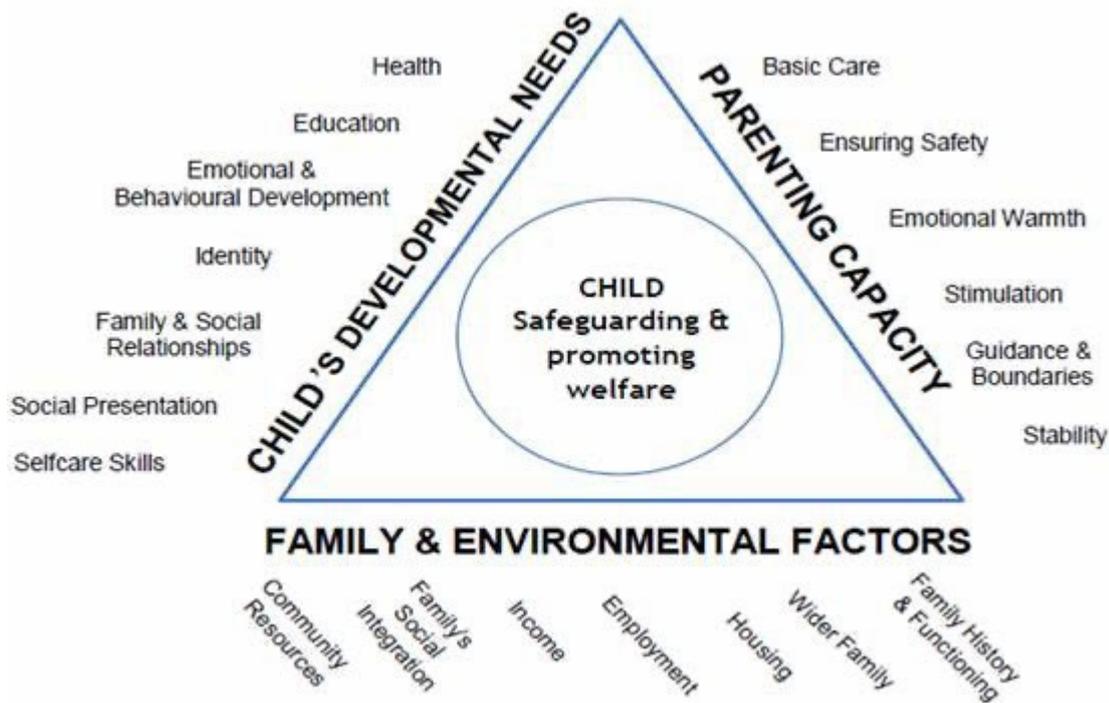
But despite that document being in circulation for decades it remains the case that, **in the majority of serious case reviews into a child death, the lack of effective communication between services has been highlighted as a contributing factor.**

So it is clear that every service that works directly with or works on behalf of children and young people has to keep effective communication with key partners of relevant information as a priority. We may feel that we do this already but we can never become complacent about it. And the watch word here has always been, and remains so:

“If something doesn’t feel right then it probably isn’t.”

Outside of the family, schools are the places that have the greatest level of contact with our children and young people. Consequently, it is schools who hold the largest and most comprehensive information on our pupils and their families. This is a highly privileged position and we have a duty to use it to provide relevant information about the children in our care to other services should we have a concern for them. But to do this most effectively we must be able to take a holistic view of the child.

In promoting this with my staff team, I have often used the following diagram – The Assessment Framework – borrowed from Social Care:



The Assessment Framework is a social care tool for assessing children in need and their families which requires a thorough understanding of children’s developmental needs, the capacity of parents and carers to respond appropriately to these needs, and the impact of wider family and environmental factors.

I have used it over many years in my school as a way to challenge attitudes and to ensure that, because **behaviour is communication of a need and not a need in itself**, every adult understands the importance of looking beyond the actions of the child and is able to be curious about challenging behaviour and learning difficulties in the context of the child’s whole life experience.

The understanding of staff has usually followed the following progression:

“That boy/girl needs to sort him/herself out.”

But if he/she could he/she would, but he/she can’t.

to...

"I know why he/she behaves like he/she does. I've met his/her parents."

But why are the parents behaving the way they do? to...

*"There is a complex set of circumstance that restrict the choices of the parents, and consequently restrict the choices of the child. No outcome is inevitable, but we need to take a holistic view if we are to best understand the needs of the child and effectively **interrupt the trajectory set in motion by their childhood adversities.**"*

And with that fullest possible understanding of the child, we can make informed decisions about when it "doesn't feel right" and to ensure that we don't just pass on that relevant information but also follow it up to assure ourselves that our voice has been heard.

8. The importance of facilitating effective transitions at all relevant points in children's and young people's lives. We strive to bring about positive change and develop resilience for individuals, groups and families, and communities, built on an understanding of contexts as well as individual differences.

We often only think about transition in terms of what we think of as the major ones, e.g. Year 6 to Year 7; but this should not be the case and, once again, Nurture UK have got this covered perfectly so I will quote here directly from them:

“Children and young people experience many transitions throughout their lives, and on a daily basis; transitions from home to school, between classes and teachers, from breaktime to lessons, or moving from primary to secondary school. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and young people, and school staff need to help the child to transition with carefully managed preparation and support.

Pupils should be included in the planning of support, as well as parents and carers where possible, and information should be shared at key transition points. Staff need to understand the emotions that may be triggered by both small and large changes, and children should be pre-warned or reminded about changes in routines, using visual timetables to emphasise this.

Consider periods of transition for your children; is there inexplicable behaviour just before the end of the day? Do staff feel frustrated by pupils who cause disruption as they move around the school? Children and young people may feel calmer if time can be made to discuss how they feel when things change, in an open and honest way, to help them put coping strategies in place.”

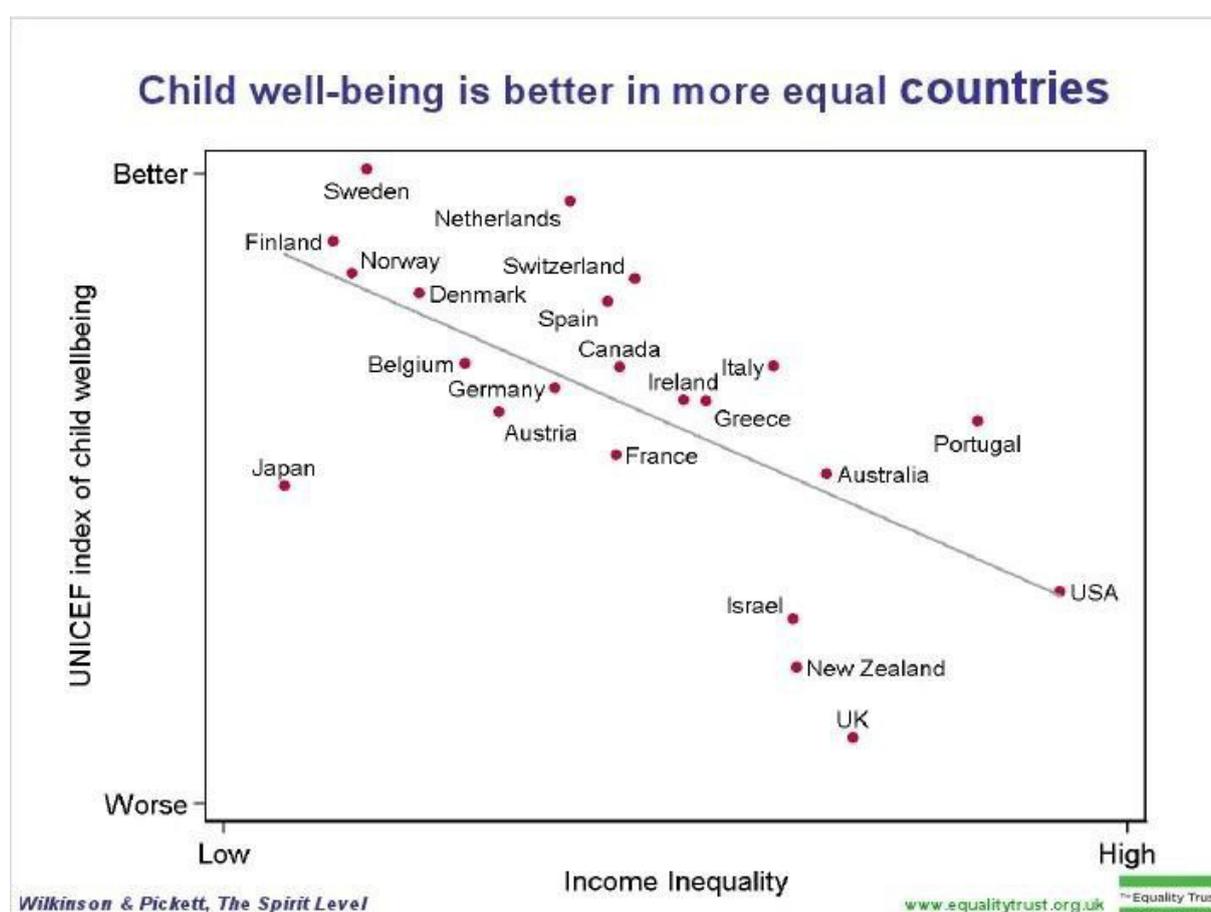
Apart from the above, I do feel that there is one transition that we could focus on more strategically and that is the transition from education into the world beyond education, especially for our high needs and vulnerable pupils.

9. A commitment to continually develop opportunities for our children and young people to realise their aspirations and ambitions within their own community. We value approaches to lifelong learning that draw on people's potential and cultures that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of our community.

According to the [World Happiness Report 2019](#), there are six key ingredients for national happiness: income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust and generosity.

The fact that 'income' is first on the above list highlights an aspect of inclusion that we maybe don't consider as much in our context as educators – that inclusion also means 'economic inclusion'.

And in terms of wellbeing, we in the UK certainly have some serious work to do to secure this:



There is a moral imperative for ALL stakeholders in our local communities and the wider community to provide ALL of our children and young people access to positive futures.

Stakeholders beyond education need to build and maintain the economic infrastructure into which our pupils can progress.

In turn, schools need to provide a curriculum that is contextually relevant to ALL of their pupil's futures. Our children need to clearly see the relevance of what they are learning in terms of how it supports their aspirations and ambitions if they are to fully engage with that learning.

The transition from the world of education to the world beyond education can be a tough one for all of our pupils, but significantly harder for those with inclusion needs. If we are to be truly inclusive, all stakeholders must have a clear understanding of the barriers that those with inclusion needs encounter when entering the world of employment. There is a moral duty for both educators and employers to identify and overcome those barriers in supporting ALL of our young people in moving from the world of education to the world of work.

On leaving care, looked after children have a Leaving Care Coach to support them. They act as advocates, enabling Children in Care have a voice in making decisions about their futures. They provide young people leaving care with advice and guidance around key areas to help prepare them to live independently, e.g. finding a home; managing bills, budgeting and money; finding employment (including CV writing, ensuring they know their NI Number, access to ongoing education and training, etc.); being healthy; knowing their rights.

Maybe schools need to consider having a greater level of support for their more vulnerable pupils by having 'Leaving School Coaches'? Maybe employers need to consider providing a greater level of support for their more vulnerable employees within the context of their own workplaces by having 'Entering Work Coaches'?

What we definitely need is a stronger partnership between the world of education and the world beyond education, including local and national policy makers, to identify and - not just overcome but - tear down those barriers that currently hinder our young people in moving from the world of education to the world of work.

Some LEAs are developing 'supported internships' and 'supported apprenticeships'.

Here are two examples

[Meet Kevin during his Supported Internship at The Phoenix Pub](#)

[Meet Max on his Supported Internship at Co-op](#)

These are some great examples of where this is already happening but we are a long way from this being a truly universally inclusive offer.