**A graduated approach**

**Some questions/ideas to think about:**

* Describe the assessment and planning approach that you use in your setting.
* What do you understand by the term ‘graduated approach’?
* Give an example of how you could adapt a learning activity to meet a child’s individual needs

What a ‘graduated approach’ is and how it can be used to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. This concept is central to support for children with SEND.

A ‘graduated approach’ refers to the on-going cycle of assessing, planning, doing and reviewing that happens in every setting every day; it is part of universal good practice for all children and you will already be doing this, even if you have not called it a graduated approach before. In simple terms, it means that practitioners observe a about what the child needs next. For most children, this cycle will continuously move onwards as they develop and make progress in line with expectations. However, for some children, a graduated approach will show that they are not making the expected progress in one or more areas; this may be the first indication that they have a special educational need and that they require ‘special educational provision’ to be made for them. In this case, the first response would be to try something different for this child (an ‘intervention’) and see what impact this has; if you still have concerns after trying several different strategies, it could be that the child has a special educational need and you should discuss this with the setting SENCO if there is one, as they will advise on the next steps.

The SEND Code of Practice states that, once a child has been identified as having SEN, all settings should adopt a graduated approach to meeting that child’s needs; this child will now be referred to as needing ‘SEN Support’. It is crucial that parents or carers are involved at every step of the process. A graduated approach will also be used for children whose needs have already been identified, and who may have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

The graduated approach describes a series of actions, which create a cycle upon which the setting’s response to SEN and providing support is based. The four parts of the cycle are: Assess, Plan, Do and Review. This cycle of actions is necessary to ensure that every effort is made to understand, address and meet the individual needs of the child. Once SEN has been identified, the graduated approach should be led by the SENCO, who supports and advises the key person throughout the cycle. The key person remains responsible for working with the child on a daily basis, continuously seeking to capture the child’s views using their preferred communication system and providing on-going opportunities for growing and developing participation. Watch the webcast ‘Listening to every child’ if you are not sure about this. The key person should also remain central to building the relationship with the parents, with support and advice from the SENCO as necessary.

The first stage of the cycle is ‘assess.’ Assessment of individual children’s development and progress is embedded in high quality practice within the EYFS, which states: ‘Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners observing children to understand their level of achievement, interests and learning styles, and to then shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations’.

Therefore, when considering assessing children’s needs using the graduated approach, it is important to ensure that all of the assessment tools and approaches which are available to support all children are being used effectively with children who may have SEN. The difference in this part of the cycle is that as well as using the tools which are used for all children, you may also need to use some additional information and tools which enable you to discover the smaller, finer steps of progress a child may be making; be selective and don’t feel to have to use everything that you have. You may decide in agreement with the parents and SENCO that you need specific expertise from beyond the setting to guide you on the next steps. The setting SENCO will have further information about what may be useful and will be able to help you to draw on support and information (see the webcasts ‘The early identification of children’s needs’ and ‘The role of the SENCO in supporting children with SEND’).

Part of the assessment process will mean using observation techniques which allow you to focus on specific aspects of effective learning and development for each child. These may include observations which focus on tracking and monitoring a child’s engagement across a session, observing how the child interacts and engages with other children and adults, identifying where the barriers to engagement and involvement are, to adjustments to the environment or experiences. It is important to use the cues from the child about how they learn most effectively and what they are particularly interested in. Give consideration to what the child’s key characteristics of effective learning are and use this to plan to scaffold learning opportunities.

As you gather information in this assessment phase of the cycle, you should involve the parents, the child and others who know and spend time with the child. It will be necessary for you to use effective formative assessment as part of a graduated approach. It is important to remember that whilst observing a child’s interactions and engagement, a key aspect of good inclusive practice is to be aware of and respond to the social, emotional and wellbeing needs of the child. So, for example, if a child is becoming distressed by an assessment activity, leave it and try something else or come back later.

Now it is time to ‘plan’. The importance of high quality, well informed planning is embedded in the EYFS. As part of a graduated approach you need to consider how effective your current planning processes are for individual children. It is a good idea to start by considering how, when planning opportunities and experiences as part of a setting-wide approach, this takes account of what you know about each child. Your setting’s overall approach to planning should already take account of each child’s unique approach to learning and ‘must take account of individual needs, interests and stage of development to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of development.’

When considering what is required, the starting point is to agree what the outcomes will be *for the child* once they have been supported by these actions. However, the importance of the planning phase is to ensure that your plan is likely to achieve the desired outcomes. The SEND Code of Practice describes outcomes as follows: ‘An outcome can be defined as the benefit or difference made to an individual as a result of an intervention. It should be personal….. it should be something that those involved have control and influence over, and while it does not always have to be formal or accredited, it should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART).’ The code goes on to say, ‘When agreeing outcomes, it is important to consider both what is important *to* the child or young person – what they themselves want to be able to achieve – and what is important *for* them, as judged by others with the child or young person’s best interests at heart.’

When it comes to recording the plan, you may use any format that you choose; some Local Authorities adopt a specific approach, so find out if yours does, and if so, use this rather than trying to write your own. In some LAs, this plan is referred to as ‘My Plan’ or ‘Play Plan’. There is certain information that all plans should have, so if you write your own, make sure it includes:

* The outcomes you are seeking for the child.
* The interventions and support to be put in place.
* The expected impact on progress, development and behaviour.
* Date for review

Plans should also:

* Take into account the views of the child.
* Select the interventions and support to meet the outcomes identified.
* Base interventions and support on reliable evidence of effectiveness.
* Be delivered by practitioners with relevant skills and knowledge.
* Identify and address any related staff development needs.

The ‘do’ aspect. It is the key person (or teacher) who remains responsible for working with the child on a daily basis; the SENCo should be available, confident and knowledgeable in order to offer the key person or teacher support to implement the actions identified in the plan and also to help assess the child’s response to any actions taken. As part of learning to meet the needs of individual children and understand the way they learn, it may be necessary for the key person to undertake professional development activities.

In order for the child’s needs to be met consistently, it is important to share key information and approaches with all those who may have contact with the child. This will ensure that everyone in the setting is able to meet the needs of the child and support his or her learning in an appropriate way.

It is worth mentioning at this point that how the child learns best will guide how the support is offered. Any support or additional activities, actions and adaptations should be made within the child’s usual environment and should avoid separating the child from their peers and other experiences which support inclusion where possible; they should also avoid any adult becoming a barrier to inclusion. The child can benefit from the high-quality universal offer in the setting and this is made possible by the adults sharing expertise and knowledge. Where a child needs an approach which requires something different to what is usually available, such as a distraction free environment, consider how this can be facilitated within the usual environment. Think about how the child will be able to transfer and use newly developing skills in their experiences in the setting and beyond, for example, using their newly-learned skill of putting their coat on at home as well as school. It is important to avoid the child’s skills only being effective in isolation or in certain contexts, because this does not promote effective inclusive practice.

Now you can review how well the support or intervention has worked. There may be a formal ‘review’ as set out in your plan, but you can review progress informally at any time too. The process of review can include a range of activities, at different intervals. As part of high-quality day-to-day practice, you will adapt and reflect on what is making a difference for individual children and discuss why you think that is, and how to create opportunities to build on emerging progress and success.

In terms of using general developmental guidance such as Early Years Outcomes and Development Matters, you will be aware of how a child is progressing according to their individual expectations. You will also be expected to report on progress as part of the 2-year review and provide a summary of progress for parents. For children on SEN Support, you will continue the cycle by assessing the progress toward the outcomes identified as part of the planning process. You will need to consider how effective the support has been and how it has contributed to the progress made. This will include evaluating the impact and quality of support; this is important as the setting increases their confidence and knowledge to provide inclusive practice. It is necessary to evaluate ‘what works’ in securing ‘good progress’ and why, and also what doesn’t work and why. In this way, each practitioner and every child will benefit from improvements in practice.

When reviewing the progress made, the parents, the child, the key person and SENCO will then decide what to do next as you start the next cycle of assess, plan, do, review. A record of a review meeting should be kept in the individual child’s file.

Through refining the steps in a graduated approach, all those involved will continue to share knowledge and information and gain a shared view of how to continue to meet the child’s needs and achieve the identified outcomes.

As part of the review process it may be decided that the child has made good progress and therefore no longer needs additional or different support or intervention, but will continue to be monitored using the setting’s usual assessment processes. Alternatively, it may be agreed that the child will benefit from continued support in order to maintain progress, or, if progress has been very limited for some time, despite adaptations and differentiation, it may be agreed that it is necessary to request an Education Health and Care Needs Assessment. (You can watch the webcast on Education Health and Care Plans if you want to know more about this).

If you would like to read about the graduated approach in more detail, refer to the nasen miniguide ‘SEN Support and the Graduated Approach’ on the nasen website.

**Reflection questions and activities:**

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| **Question/activity** | **Response** |
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| What do you understand by the term ‘graduated approach’? |  |
| Give an example of how you could adapt a learning activity to meet a child’s individual needs |  |