

Inspiring leaders to
improve children's lives



National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Achievement for All: Leadership matters

Resource

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Purpose

The focus of this document is on leadership - the impact that effective leaders have on their schools and their pupils; and the impact that the project has had upon the leadership styles and strategies within participating schools. It aims to:

- provide an overview of the key strands of the AfA project and give evidence of the impact it has had
- identify characteristics of effective leadership that best support the achievement for all children and young people
- share key learning from the project and provide illustrations of successful practice from participating schools
- encourage other leaders to reflect on their own practice and to adopt AfA as a strategy for improving pupils' attainment and progress in their schools

Throughout this document questions are suggested for schools to use to prompt discussion with the leadership group, staff, governors, parents and pupils, where appropriate.

This document draws on the experiences and perceptions of school leaders engaged in the Achievement for All project (AfA). While the initial focus of the project was on the achievement of children and young people identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), it has become apparent that this project has been about the achievement of all pupils.

Achievement for All school leadership is having a profound impact on pupil progress

Background

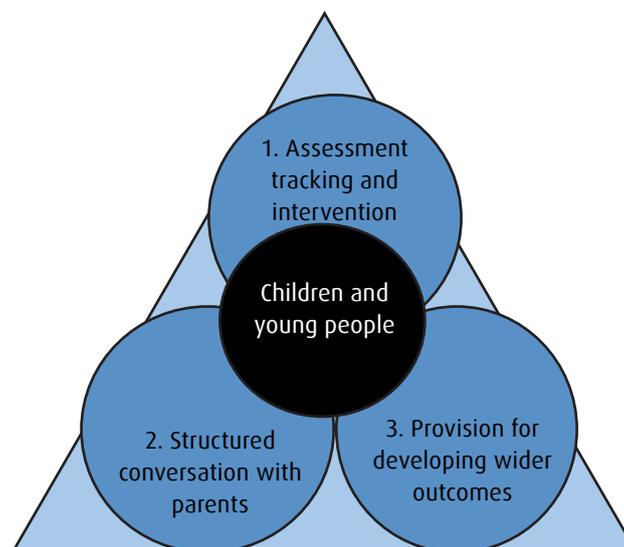
The National College has been a partner in the Achievement for All (AfA) pilot together with the Department for Education and National Strategies (2009-11), engaging with leaders representing over 400 schools, to reflect on the characteristics of effective leadership and their impact on vulnerable learners. Visit: www.nationalcollege.org.uk/primaryleadership-achievementforall

Achievement for All takes a whole-school approach to school improvement. It was introduced as a two-year pilot in September 2009 in 454 primary, secondary and special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) across 10 local authorities in England. The pilot included pupils in years 1, 2, 5, 6,7,8,10 and 11 identified with SEND on school action, school action plus or holding statements. The local authorities engaged in the pilot project were: Bexley, Camden, Coventry, East Sussex, Essex, Gloucestershire, Nottinghamshire, Oldham, Redcar and Cleveland, and Sheffield.

Although the initial focus of activities was aimed at children and young people identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities, many participating schools have extended the AfA approaches to all pupils.

Vision, commitment, collaboration and communication are important features of effective leadership in all contexts. They are absolutely vital within the context of AfA with its emphasis on vulnerable learners.

The three strands of Achievement for all



Achievement for All has three approaches to school improvement. It aims to:

- **improve the aspirations, progress and achievement** of all pupils, through high expectations, effective use of assessment and focused target setting supported and informed by;
- **improving engagement with parents;** in supporting their child's learning through target focused structured conversations which;

-
- **improve the achievement, access and aspiration** of pupils and provide a **wide range of learning opportunities** in the classroom and beyond

Throughout this document the examples of leadership and reflections from schools are based on AfA as a whole, bringing together all three of the strands into the above coherent strategy.

Reflection

Think about where your school is in relation to the three strands above.

What are your current strengths?

What might be the main areas for development?

How do these three elements fit together as a whole in order to provide effective support for vulnerable pupils?

Gathering evidence

From the launch of AfA in 2009, the National College commissioned a reference group to analyse, examine and identify learning opportunities for leaders with the core aim of improving inclusive practice within schools. This group consisting of headteachers from various phases and regions, as well as representatives from the National Strategies and the Department for Education, has met at regular intervals throughout the year.

The National College organised 12 focus groups comprising leaders from primary, secondary and special schools to discuss the characteristics of effective leadership and its impact on the Achievement for All project.

During the first year of AfA, six case study schools were selected from a range of phases and regions to capture some of the initial leadership learning. Once selected, the case study schools were asked to consider their own priorities, plans and intended outcomes for the introduction of AfA, recognising the specific challenges for leadership and considering what opportunities AfA offered within their particular contexts. Strategies adopted were then investigated and evidence of impact was sought and analysed. As all schools were in the early stages of AfA, initial lessons learned and next steps were examined to consider how AfA could have even greater impact as the programme progressed.

As well as specific case studies the National College has gathered evidence through:

- discussions with leaders, parents and AfA local authority project leads throughout this first year
- the AfA leadership conferences focusing on the characteristics of effective inclusive leadership
- Spring conferences where leaders identified learning challenges and successes
- data collected by National Strategies and the Department for Education

All this has led to a clear understanding of the key leadership characteristics needed to achieve greater inclusion in school. These characteristics are discussed and illustrated further in this report.

Outstanding impact of Achievement for All on pupil learning

AfA has had a profound impact across the majority of participating schools regardless of size, type, phase, location of school or their Ofsted rating

The impact of AfA is evident on both internal strategies and processes, including more effective leadership and engagement with parents, and outcomes for pupils - their progress and attainment and wider indicators such as improved attendance and reduced instances of bullying. Overall, across the participating local authorities, pupils in the AfA project have generally made better progress than non-AfA pupils. The following outcomes in some of the pilot areas typify the impact of the programme:

- AfA pupils are out performing their SEND peers, on average Year 2s are 0.5 sub level higher than their peers.
- In one local authority 80 per cent of Year 5s (277 students) have made significant progress in English and mathematics with 10 per cent have made at least six sub level gains.
- In another local authority, over 4 terms, 45 per cent of the year 10 cohort have made at least three sub level gains in English and 36 per cent in Maths. 18 per cent have made at least six sub level gains in English and 15 per cent, similarly in Maths.
- 44 per cent of Year 10 SEND pupils across seven secondary schools have made at least three sub level gains.
- In a further local authority, 65 per cent of Year 10 pupils have made at least two sub level gains in English, as have 38 per cent of Year 5s.

Wider outcomes 2009 - 10:

- Parental engagement in all schools has improved. In one school, attendance at parents' evenings by parents of pupils identified with SEND have increased from 25 per cent to 100 per cent.
- Participation in wider activities has increased with the majority of schools reporting increased participation in music, dance, drama and sport activities.
- Persistent non-attendance has decreased in a number of schools, with one secondary school reducing persistent non-attendance of pupils identified with SEND from 23 per cent to 3 per cent.
- Over half of participating schools are reported to have improved peer relationships.

Leadership is vital to the successful implementation and positive impact of AfA and the following pages explore the characteristics of effective inclusive leadership.

Reflection

Which of the above areas of impact would be most significant for you in your school context?
How might AfA help you to realise similar improvements?

Impact of leadership

Involvement in the AfA project has shown impact both of leadership and on the quality of leadership. Above all, it has demonstrated the need for whole-school leadership, with leaders at all levels taking collective responsibility for the achievement of all pupils. The project has, in many cases, changed the behaviour of leaders. In particular, it has had an impact on:

- the status of SEND in each school
- development of clear strategies designed to support the progress of pupils identified with SEND
- distributed leadership and the development of other leaders within schools
- self-reflection and school self-evaluation
- improving pupils' learning, progress and wider outcomes
- parental engagement – listening to and taking account of the views of parents
- re-visiting the vision and values of the school
- planning for sustainability and real change
- achievement, access and aspirations for all pupils

"For the first time I really feel that we have truly listened to our parents, they do now feel part of the team."

Headteacher

"My child is really inspired by school at the moment, I know particular activities have been set up with him in mind, I'm truly grateful for this and the hard work put in to make this happen."

Parent

"As teachers we all have ownership over the progress of our SEN children. Something that has been lacking in recent years."

Teacher

"I have never had so much information regarding the children in my class. I know what after school clubs they do, their interests and talents in all areas, it is really making a difference back in the classroom."

Teacher

"The structured conversation has enabled me to find out so much I didn't know about particular children in my class, it worked so well I want the opportunity to have this for all the parents in my class."

Teacher

"AfA has given structure, clarity, and direction to enable our school to narrow the gap for our SEND children, it has made a huge impact and changed expectation throughout our school."

Headteacher

Pupils' progress 

Engaging parents 

Wider outcomes 

Characteristics of effective inclusive leadership



Effective inclusive leadership is supported by the AfA framework and has made a significant impact on the performance of all pupils. This is founded on:

- a strong vision for **all** pupils, supported in equal measures by **commitment, collaboration and effective communication** with parents, pupils, teachers and leaders
- **strong values** demonstrated by the behaviour of staff, governors and pupils
- **leadership strategies**, embedding Achievement for All in all classrooms
- **professional development** for all leaders, teachers and support practitioners to engage pupils and parents in learning
- **a focus** on the achievement, access and aspirations of all pupils

Reflection

You may find it helpful to reflect on the behaviours in your leadership team in relation to vision, commitment, collaboration and communication.

What are the current strengths / areas for improvement?

Vision

Successful leaders are driven by a set of core values and beliefs around the entitlements and expectations for all pupils, especially those identified with SEND. They model these values in their interactions with pupils, staff, parents and other professionals engaged in the education and care of these pupils – particularly in relation to:

- the expectations for pupils' progress and achievement
- the positive engagement with parents
- valuing and providing a wide range of learning opportunities for pupils

The vision is apparent in both informal and formal communications – staff meetings, conversations in corridors, meetings with parents and other agencies. Effective leaders are reflective thinkers, who are constantly evaluating, questioning and challenging current school practices and culture. They embed their belief that ALL children can achieve and make progress constantly.

They are able to demonstrate:

- a core moral purpose
- consistent message and role-modelling
- knowledge and context of community
- accountability and responsibility
- self-awareness and ability to reflect
- risk-taking and innovation

The following case studies demonstrate how two schools have used AfA to review their visions and values; the actions leaders have taken to develop and embed these; and some indication of the impact these have had on internal processes and outcomes for pupils.

Westwood School (Oldham)

As a pilot school for AfA, Westwood saw this as an opportunity to impact positively on all children in their school, and not as a framework solely for improving the progress of pupils identified with SEND. Their belief was that AfA would enable them to restate their vision and values and importantly, to embed these in wider systems and practice.

AfA enabled them to take stock, reflect and evaluate the ownership of their vision and values, and plan for maximising their impact. This has been an on-going process of reflection.

The leadership team recognised that AfA was not an area that could be delegated; it had to be integral to the core values of the school if it was to succeed. They modelled the behaviours required in any school interactions, be they formal or informal.

AfA has enabled the school to:

- reflect on and evaluate its values and vision
- restate and communicate the vision
- act collectively to achieve the goals of the framework
- model behaviours required by leaders and teachers

Lee Chapel Primary School (Essex)

The leadership team of the school was passionate about providing outstanding education that would improve life chances of all their pupils identified with SEND. Viewing education as the key to improving life chances for their pupils, they were determined not to allow a ceiling to be put on children's attainment because of their socio-economic background or special educational needs. They did everything in their power to remove any barriers, implementing the project quickly.

Through training days, the leadership team communicated the AfA action plan to staff and their role within it. This approach was well received by all the staff. More in-depth conversations were arranged with staff regarding pupils' individual needs and every member of staff was encouraged to lead or support an AfA activity. The leadership team recognised that sharing the vision of an AfA action plan had been the major driver for a whole-school commitment to AfA.

Some of the outcomes of AfA in the school include:

- The AfA Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) have taken on a 'team' identity, becoming a mutually supportive and collaborative group of professionals who are helping to drive the AfA agenda in the school.
- LSAs have been empowered through continuing professional development, coaching, observation and feedback, and the leadership's faith in their ability to make a difference.
- LSAs responded positively to skill development opportunities and for taking on more responsibilities as part of Lee Chapel's team around a child.
- There has been 100 per cent take up of before-school, lunchtime and after-school interventions, activities and support.
- Punctuality has improved 100 per cent because the pupils are at breakfast club by 8am.

For a more detailed account of AfA at Lee Chapel Primary School please visit:

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/lee-chapel-primary

Reflection

To what extent is the vision for in your school shared by staff, governors, parents and pupils? What strategies might you use to review and share that vision to ensure that all pupils achieve?

Commitment

Successful leaders reflect their values and commitment to the pupils through their behaviours as leaders and managers. They are relentless in securing the most appropriate provision. They commit to providing high quality resources and engage specialist staff where appropriate. They invest in ensuring effective strategies and systems are in place to track pupils' progress. They have a strategic view of what is needed to skill their workforce to improve inclusion, are committed to constant development of staff and successfully deploy appropriate staff to meet the needs of the individual. They ensure that time is committed in staff meetings and elsewhere to discussion and dialogue about improving provision for vulnerable pupils. They value the engagement with parents by committing time and resource to ensuring effective structured conversations can take place within and outside the school day. Above all, they secure the commitment of all staff and ensure that their commitment is underpinned by a sense of collective responsibility for the achievement of all pupils.

The following case studies indicate how leaders secured the commitment of staff to AfA and also committed time and resources to ensure the success of activities like the structured conversation with parents

Bankwood School (Sheffield)

Bankwood School is on a journey of improvement and change. The leadership of the school recognised that to achieve their SEND goals, it was crucial that they had a commitment to their values and vision. Ownership and commitment were achieved by creating clear structures and systems to support a shared vision, and expectations were clarified with staff. Relevant professional development opportunities were identified and fed into performance management targets. This enabled the impact of staff training on classroom practice to be monitored. In addition, the leadership team undertook regular reviews with staff to discuss challenges and to celebrate success.

Structured conversations were introduced and initially modelled by members of the leadership team. This was crucial in monitoring understanding and buy-in to the vision.

Regular AfA staff meetings were held to support staff and ensure commonality of process and progress. A termly review was held by the leadership team, which also provided an indicator of the effectiveness of the vision and the extent to which this was embedded throughout the school.

AfA has enabled the school to:

- deliver the training required which allowed for the up-skilling of staff
- clarify expectations, share difficulties and celebrate successes
- develop staff ownership of values and vision, leading to more shared responsibility for outcomes
- role-model effective practice and empower staff

Caedmon Primary School (Redcar and Cleveland)

A status audit was completed by the whole school team in an attempt to enable collective responsibility towards improving inclusive practice within the school, and to create commitment to the overall school vision. Using the data from the audit, the leadership team created an implementation plan which identified roles and responsibilities, and gave a purpose which had clear objectives for each specific area of the school. Results were then communicated to staff during a staff meeting, ideas and opportunities were shared and further collaboration time was then given so that all staff felt ownership of the plan and, in time, would feel ownership of the outcomes.

One example of the impact achieved by this sort of commitment was more precise assessment and tracking, with more strategic interventions. This has led to increased pupil progress of 1.7 average point score, enabled by tight, regular pupil progress meetings between members of the leadership team and class teachers.

For more information about the activities undertaken by Caedmon Primary School and the impact of Achievement for All please visit: www.nationalcollege.org.uk/caedmon-primary-school

Reflection

How does the leadership in your school demonstrate and ensure a commitment to the vision and values held within the school with particular reference to the achievement of all pupils?

Collaboration

Successful provision to ensure that pupils identified with SEND progress and achieve wider outcomes requires a culture of collaboration – with and between staff, parents and other agencies. Effective collaboration relies on leaders in and across schools working together with a sense of collective responsibility for vulnerable learners and pupils identified with SEND. It also means that leaders are outward facing – they look beyond their own school, they show an appreciation and understanding that all schools are different, and that strengths and good practice can be shared. Effective leaders model shared working practices in school and between schools and phases of education. In the successful schools within the AfA project, leadership is both a collaborative and distributed activity.

The following examples illustrate how two schools have collaborated effectively with parents, the local family of schools and other agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Huntcliffe Secondary (Redcar and Cleveland)

Effective collaboration maximises the impact of Achievement for All, particularly between school phases. The Huntcliffe School recognised that AfA presented an opportunity for collaboration between their family cluster. This opportunity has now been realised and the school has become the collaboration ‘hub’ for its feeder schools.

The person leading AfA for this family cluster did not have a background in SEND. The school wanted someone who displayed the leadership skills to drive AfA through effectively and not someone who simply had SEND knowledge. This resulted in leaders actively role-modelling positive collaboration, as they had to work closely with others to gain knowledge and expertise of effective practice in leading and teaching pupils identified with SEND.

By working collaboratively, the cluster agreed a strategy for embedding AfA; identified and undertook collective CPD opportunities; developed a shared vision; worked to introduce a successful transition process for pupils between phases to ensure the continuity of vision, values and practice; and communicated jointly with parents.

A significant and positive outcome of this collaboration was that all of the schools moved away from traditional parents’ evenings. Instead, they introduced structured whole-school conversations, which allowed parents to have more time with school staff and identify further achievement opportunities.

AfA has enabled the schools to:

- share vision, values and practices across phases
- ensure continuity during transitions within and between school phases

Lyng Hall Specialist Sports College and Community School (Coventry)

The headteacher has been instrumental in seeking out and negotiating partnership work with key external agencies including multi-disciplinary teams, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, social housing and social care. Although this has taken a great deal of leadership time, the benefits have resulted in new working agreements with the Education Welfare Service and the Primary Care Trust. These teams meet with a team from the school to talk about action to be taken with referrals, which the school brings along to discuss. Staff at the school will also negotiate on behalf of families, for example to bring forward medical appointments. Identified staff working collaboratively with parents over a period of time has been key to the success of AfA. Once a supportive relationship has been developed with parents, they are very willing to accept help and advice, and to admit they also find it is a challenge to support their child.

The range of impressive outcomes of the AfA project include:

- Persistent absence has reduced from 12 per cent in 2008-9 to 3.9 per cent in 2009-10.
- The school is now established as a Citizen's Advice Bureau Outreach Centre, with advisers, a kiosk and an information centre for parents and the local community.

To read more about AfA at Lyng Hall please visit: www.nationalcollege.org.uk/lyng-hall-school

Reflection

Using the AfA framework, how could you improve collaboration and sharing of knowledge about learning styles and of pupils' ability to learn?

How do you ensure that information about each pupil is shared – class to class, key stage to key stage, school to school?

How are the transitions within school and between schools managed? Do these enhance learning?

Communication

The successful leadership of SEND relies on effective communications at a range of levels – with pupils; parents and carers; with staff in and between schools; and with other services/agencies. Successful leaders are good at engaging others. They nurture relationships with pupils and their parents/carers. They are good listeners and can demonstrate that they value the contribution of others. They invest time in communicating with parents.

Effective leaders articulate and communicate a vision which they encourage others to share and develop. They actively encourage formal and informal dialogue about strategies to improve the achievement for all pupils. They share information about pupils' attainment and progress and celebrate achievement. Through their communications they give value to wider outcomes as well as those reported in performance tables.

Coundon Court School (Coventry):

Communication, especially in large institutions can be challenging. Coundon Court, a large secondary school, realised this was something they would need to address at a very early stage in the AfA pilot. The headteacher realised the importance of communicating the purpose and objectives of the AfA pilot. To reach the widest audience and achieve the greatest engagement, this communication was undertaken departmentally and all department leads were asked to undertake some action research. This aimed to demonstrate the impact of AfA in each subject area but also increased the profile of SEND in the school.

Staff within the school wanted to create a culture of active listening and therefore quickly opened communication channels with pupils.

A group of 130 pupils were surveyed to gather their views on what would impact on their own learning and how they could be helped to achieve maximum progress. Using the results of the survey, an AfA sports club was set up, as well as a cookery club, which led to students working towards a BTEC qualification. These clubs were filmed and outcomes fed back to all departments on an INSET day. This has led to other departments investigating setting up their own clubs. This demonstrates a commitment to active listening.

AfA enabled the school to:

- demonstrate a commitment to listening to, and acting upon, feedback from students
- instigate new models for communication to reach the widest audience

St Michael's Church of England Primary School (Camden):

The project leader produced a condensed guide to AfA for all staff and communicated this, enabling all to understand the project and where their role lay within AfA. Regular updates were produced ensuring all staff had current knowledge of AfA, including feedback from training.

A dedicated AfA display board was created for staff showing the leadership structure of AfA, pupils' case files and targets together with progress reviews, training feedback and a strand-by-strand section outlining the school's vision and aims to achieve AfA targets. This visual board created opportunities for professional communication among staff which leaders within the school actively encouraged.

An AfA 'thought wall' was put up in the staff room and all staff were encouraged to share ideas. These were then discussed at senior management team meetings to ensure the staff's collective voice was heard and implemented in planning ways forward. They were pleased that the wall was instrumental in developing both formal and informal discussions and was a time-efficient method of sharing ideas and collaboration. Through the 'thought wall', all staff were engaged in thinking about improving behaviour in the playground, and some excellent ideas were contributed and implemented. This was a new, simple approach to address a whole-school concern which resulted in positive outcomes. The format can be used again and again.

Sharing the AfA vision with the governing body was achieved by a presentation by the project leader. This was well received and she regularly updates them on progress.

The project leader developed more positive and effective relationships with parents through formal and informal conversations. Parents were invited into school to work alongside their children in a variety of ways and as a result parents readily accepted and supported AfA. A coffee afternoon for all AfA parents, with key teachers, the project leader and parent liaison co-ordinator acted as an open forum regarding inclusion, AfA and their children. Attendance was very good and they were particularly pleased that parents used the forum to talk to one another and share experiences.

Some of the significant outcomes of AfA in this school include:

- the school's Ofsted report, published in January 2010, noted that pupils identified with SEND make as much, if not more progress than other pupils.
- assessments show pupils identified with SEND, in most cases, are making a minimum of two points progress per term; of the pupils identified with SEND making progress, the majority have made four points progress
- the school's focus work on friendships and playground behaviour has shown playground incidents are less frequent and pupils are keen to win the half termly 'fabulous friends award'.

To find out more about the AfA project in St Michael's Church of England Primary School visit:
www.nationalcollege.org.uk/st-michaels-cofe-primary

Reflection

How effective are the systems for communication in your school?

How do you encourage dialogue across the school about valuing and securing achievement for all pupils?

Conclusion

The National College's review of characteristics of effective leaders found that within the AfA framework leaders:

- have a clear core purpose and vision for educational practice in support of vulnerable learners, particularly those identified with SEND
- secure a commitment from all to the vision that **all** pupils can succeed
- work in collaboration and are accountable to improve outcomes for pupils identified with SEND
- are effective in communicating the message that **all** pupils, at whatever starting point, need or ability, will increase access and raise achievement within a culture of high aspiration

Schools that have demonstrated **vision, commitment, communication and collaboration** have seen a significant impact on the progress of pupils identified with SEND by focusing on:

- assessment, tracking and intervention
- structured conversations and parental engagement
- improving wider outcomes

This document has sought to identify and illustrate some of the approaches that successful leaders use in promoting achievement for all pupils. These processes are also validated by the evidence of impact that the project has had on pupils' progress and attainment, as well as on significant wider outcomes such as attendance and bullying. Effective leadership has been of vital importance to ensuring the positive impact of the AfA project; equally the project has had a significant impact upon the quality of leadership in many of the participating schools.

We hope that this document will have encouraged you to engage with AfA and adopt the strategies you have read about in the previous pages, for the benefit of all pupils but especially those vulnerable learners within your school's community.

If you require any further information about the AfA project, please contact: afa@nationalcollege.org.uk.

Further resources

Achievement for All Leaflet

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/achievement-for-all-leaflet.pdf

Characteristics of effective inclusive leadership

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/achievement-for-all-characteristics-effective-inclusive-leadership.pdf

National College Achievement for All webpage

www.nationalcollege.org.uk/primaryleadership-achievementforall

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Triumph Road,
Nottingham NG8 1DH
T 0845 609 0009
F 0115 872 2001
E enquiries@nationalcollege.org.uk
www.nationalcollege.org.uk

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