



Home Learning
college for a brighter future

**NCFE LEVEL 3 SUPPORTING TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN SCHOOLS**

1.1 Plan, prepare and maintain a safe learning environment

Every child has a right to feel safe, secure and protected from harm. One of your main responsibilities as a teaching assistant is to help those pupils with whom you work, to accomplish this.

When you are planning and preparing the learning environment, you must always take into account the safety, hygiene, comfort and security of those pupils who will be using it.

A learning environment could be any area inside or outside the school setting which is used for teaching and learning. For example a learning environment may be:

- A general teaching area such as a classroom or the school hall
- A specialist teaching area such as those set up for science, art, food technology or P.E.
- An outside area such as a playground or sports field

The features and condition of the learning environment can either support or detract from the efforts made by the teacher, the teaching assistant and the pupils. According to research, pupils are more likely to be responsive to and benefit from, the teaching and learning that takes places within a safe, well planned physical environment.

Plan the learning environment

Planning the learning environment is a task that should be done jointly between the teacher and the teaching assistant. When you develop a plan together that seeks to set out rooms and outdoor spaces in a safe and well organised fashion, the learning environment will be more effective because well-organised forward planning will maximise the time available for teaching and learning experiences.

The goals of a quality learning environment

When planning the learning environment, it may be helpful to bear in mind the three key factors that need to be promoted. Those are to:

- Maximise learning
- Create a safe and positive environment
- Minimise behaviour problems

Bullying

Bullying is a form of behaviour that causes misery and disruption to the learning of individual pupils. Although anyone can be the target of bullying, victims are often shy, sensitive, anxious or insecure. Sometimes a victim is picked on for physical reasons, such as being overweight, small for their age, for being of a different race or having a disability.

Bullying can take many forms, but three main types are:

- Verbal – name calling, insulting, making offensive remarks
- Physical – hitting, kicking, taking belongings
- Indirect – exclusion from social groups, spreading nasty stories, sending malicious letters, e-mails or text messages

Indications that a pupil is being bullied may include the following:

- Clingy, depressed or upset
- Behavioural changes, reduced concentration, becoming withdrawn
- Emotionally unsettled
- Reluctant to come to school
- A drop in performance
- Physical signs such as stomach ache, headache, sleeping problems, scratching or bruising, damaged clothes, over or under-eating
- Often short of money or loses possessions frequently

The role of the school in stopping harassment and bullying

Schools play a vital role in stopping harassment and bullying because most incidents happen on school grounds during break times, in dining rooms, or in the school toilets. It is the responsibility of school administrators, teachers, and other staff to educate and inform pupils about bullying and harassment. Schools policies must make it clear that neither will be tolerated. School-based programmes can help reduce harassment and bullying by:

- Forming clear rules about the behaviours that will not be tolerated.
- Increasing everyone's awareness of the problem through school assemblies and class discussions.
- Including information in pupil handbooks and promote awareness sessions for pupils.
- Educating and informing, for example, the school might display awareness posters throughout the school.
- Increasing the involvement of parents and teachers.
- Increasing the supervision of pupils on school grounds when pupils are out of the classroom.
- Providing support and protection for children who are bullied or harassed.

What makes a team effective?

An effective team is a group of people working together towards a common goal who share a sense of purpose. The aim is to achieve more collectively than each person could do individually.

Effective teams have a leader who motivates them, promotes commitment and co-operation between team members and makes sure that team members accept and practice the ground rules. These rules include:

- Agreeing a purpose
- Sharing views on the different ways in which goals can be achieved
- Agreeing ways of working that will facilitate achievement of goals

Checklist for effective team working

1. **Leadership.** The leader helps the team to perform rather than dominates it.
2. **Shared sense of purpose.** Team members clearly understand why the group is working together.
3. **Being well prepared.** Everyone knows what they need to think about, what tasks they need to perform and what they need to contribute before the next meeting.
4. **Time management.** Team members need to feel that they are making good progress towards the targeted goals. This requires short, well-focused tasks and meetings which start and end on time.
5. **Active listening and questioning.** Everyone listens and thinks about what is being said and feels able to ask for clarification to check their understanding of the points being made. The leader can help to create such a climate by using techniques such as summarising what has been said and encouraging questions. This will ensure that everyone is heading in the same direction.
6. **Keep focused.** Leaders must be able to bring discussions back on track when they get diverted, because when conversations do get side-tracked there is a risk losing the enthusiasm and motivation of other team members.
7. **Sharing differing views.** The environment must encourage members to voice any differences of opinion so that everyone is able to consider different viewpoints. This enables team members to practise presenting conflicting views without getting into conflict.
8. **Value the range of talents in the team.** An effective team uses and learns from the range of skills and experiences of all its members.

Review team performance

The team should regularly review your performance as a whole, by examining how closely you have stuck to the team vision and achieved the team goals. Ask yourselves, as a team:

- How well are we doing?
- What works well and should be continued?
- What is not working well and is not helping us achieve our goals?
- What should we start doing that will bring us closer to achieving our goals?

Review working practices

Review should include the examination of the structure of the team and everyone's roles, responsibilities and accountabilities within it. Check whether:

- Responsibilities are unclear and causing duplication of effort amongst members
- There are too few levels within the team, making delegation difficult
- The team leader spends time and effort carrying out operational activities instead of leading and managing the team

Review the effectiveness of team meetings

Are team meetings run as efficiently as possible? The team leader must insist that team members attend on time and make sure that the agenda sets a specific allocation of time so that the meeting does not run over. He/she should review action points from previous meetings, and ensure that all discussion is focused on the achievement of agenda items only, and finally, summarise points for action that must be performed before the next meeting.

Regular evaluation of the team's output and effectiveness: High performing teams frequently set aside time to review their team objectives to make sure that they are on target to achieve their goals within the original time span. This enables them to effectively manage any difficulties that arise and plan any additional resources that are required to accomplish their goal. Time is also reserved to review the effectiveness of each project so that sufficient learning is acquired and applied to future projects and goals.

Contribute to the review of team practice

In order to contribute to the review of team practices you should first ensure that you understand:

- The focus of the review.
- How and when it will be conducted.
- Your role in gathering and analysing information and formulating appropriate questions.
- How you will determine which areas require follow-up or further investigation.
- How your findings should be documented and reported.

The role of teachers

The class teachers probably have the most challenging role as they have to communicate and enforce the behaviour management policy on a daily basis. Their role in the learning environment is to:

- Follow and apply guidelines consistently.
- Encourage pupils to achieve their potential by giving praise and recognition in line with school policy.
- Promote good standards of behaviour set out in the list of rules and routines.
- Promote good working relationships with pupils.
- Support colleagues in applying the range of behaviour management approaches provided.

The role of the teaching assistant

Creating an environment in which pupils know and follow the rules is challenging, but not impossible. With a little patience and perseverance, you can lay a foundation for respect and positive behaviour.

Promote positive behaviour in line with school policies by:

- Encouraging good standards of behaviour at all times
- Supporting pupils in following instructions and the routines of the school
- Praising and encouraging pupils when appropriate
- Consistently enforcing school guidelines on behaviour management
- Encouraging pupils to work collaboratively with each other
- Encouraging pupils to pay attention and stay on task

Respond appropriately to behaviour which conflicts with school policies, either by dealing with it yourself or by reporting it to the appropriate person, usually the teacher. When you need to remind pupils of how they should be behaving, do so calmly and clearly, using language they can understand and relate to. Ensure that you understand the rewards and sanctions that are within your own power to administer and those which are within the authority of the teacher.

The impact of a good behaviour policy *'largely comes through being clear, teaching appropriate behaviour and giving positive feedback when pupils are behaving appropriately'* (Galvin et al., 1994).

It is very important that both you and the class teacher are consistent in the way you manage pupils' behaviour. Your joint approach should be underpinned by the school framework that governs how any adult in school works with pupils.

Strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour

The key to effective support work is a clear and consistent joint approach with the class teacher. The success or otherwise of this joint approach is greatly influenced by a clear understanding of the nature and scope of your respective roles and responsibilities.

Despite the emphasis on being a positive and proactive, there will be times in all classrooms when things do not go to plan – either because the adult makes an incorrect judgement, or a child does, or a mixture of both. It is important that as part of your planning you have considered in advance the range of consequences which are available to you in the classroom and, in particular, how, when and why you should use each one.

When responding to children's inappropriate behaviour bear in mind that you should:

- Aim for simple, low profile interventions which allow teaching and learning to continue.
- Use the hierarchy of consequences which pupils know and understand.
- Always deliver a consequence if it has been promised.

Classroom based procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviour include:

- Non-verbal messages such as moving closer to the pupil who is not behaving appropriately, or visual prompts such as fingers to lips.
- Tactical or planned ignoring is when the teacher decides not to notice specific behaviour from a particular child. This is part of a planned method of dealing with that child's behaviour and the behaviour will be discussed with the child at an appropriate time.
- A simple statement of fact describing the inappropriate behaviour, such as 'John you're out of your seat'.
- State clearly the required behaviour. 'John, sit down, thank you'. The use of 'thank you' rather than 'please' is a subtle way of showing that you expect the pupil to conform.
- Restate the relevant rule. 'John, our rule is that we stay in our seats'.
- Asking a question to show that you have noticed inappropriate behaviour. 'Why are you out of your seat John?' This can be sufficient to alert the child to the fact that you have noticed and he will stop the behaviour.

Where a child does not immediately comply with lower-level interventions it may be necessary to insist firmly on what is required. You can use a 'broken record' technique where you repeat the instruction

Implications of inclusion and equality of opportunity on how you support teaching and learning opportunities

Inclusion is based on having high expectations of all pupils and supporting them to achieve their full potential. It is underpinned by the belief that all pupils have abilities and the capacity to benefit from learning experiences.

The role of the school

The school and the education it provides have an important role to play in ensuring that those from different backgrounds all have the same opportunities in life.

Tolerance and respect of different cultures and faiths is often shaped by positive early experiences, so the school curriculum is an important element in promoting shared values of respect for diversity and support for cross-cultural contact from an early age.

The role of the school is to promote equality of opportunity and develop inclusive learning environments where all pupils and staff can feel safe, enjoy their work and be successful, regardless of their sexual orientation, race, religion or disability, maximising the advantages that diversity brings and minimising any disadvantages. Both equality and inclusion should be themes permeating through all school policies and procedures, curriculum opportunities and the wider school community.

Your role in promoting inclusion and equal opportunity

In your role as a teaching assistant it is important that you fully understand and implement the policies of your school that relate to inclusion and equality. You should also understand how stereotypical assumptions about gender, cultural background or disability can limit pupils' development and you must ensure that these do not influence your behaviour. Everyone should avoid negative stereotypes or assumptions that might constrain attainment or reduce expectations for pupils from particular groups or backgrounds.

Always look out for signs racism, sexism or special educational needs and report any concerns you might have to the teacher, bearing in mind the requirements of confidentiality.

Experience will enable you to respond effectively to equal opportunities issues as they arise in the classroom, including challenging stereotyped views, bullying or harassment.

Most children with special educational needs have varying degrees of strengths and difficulties in one, some or all of the areas of speech, language and communication. Their communication needs are likely to be both diverse and complex.

This area of need will include all or some children with:

- Hearing impairment
- Speech and language delay, impairments or disorders
- Specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and dyspraxia
- Features within the autistic spectrum
- Moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties
- Permanent sensory or physical impairment

Strategies that could be considered when planning how to best overcome barriers to participation include some, or all, of the following:

- Assistance with using alternative and augmentative communication systems
- Assistance with comprehending and using oral and written language
- Help with verbalisation
- Support the teaching of literacy skills
- Assistance with organising language

Identifying and supporting children with behaviour, emotional and social development difficulties

Children and young people who demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties may:

- Appear withdrawn or isolated
- Be disruptive and disturbing
- Be hyperactive and lack concentration
- Lack social skills
- Present challenging behaviours as a consequence of other complex special needs

Strategies that could be considered when planning how to best overcome barriers to participation include some, or all, of the following:

- Establish a safe and supportive environment
- Consistent use of praise to encourage positive behaviour
- Supporting the development of social skills
- Assistance with meeting school expectations and routines
- Promote positive interaction with peers and adults
- Reinforcement of class and school behaviour policy to control negative or difficult behaviours

An effective school ICT policy

An effective school ICT policy forms the basis for the teaching and learning of ICT and describes the aims and objectives for ICT use within the wider frameworks of the school. It provides clear guidance on the types of equipment, programmes and measures that need to be in place. The chief aim of the policy is to provide a broad, balanced and challenging range of ICT opportunities that will help pupils to prepare for their future role in society.

An effective ICT policy provides a framework for:

- What is taught
- How it is taught
- Why it is taught

The policy document gives an overview of only a few pages in length. This then provides the framework for more detailed ICT schemes of work and other working documents. The policy can be used to:

- Provide guidance in the use of ICT in the classroom.
- Provide guidance on how ICT can be integrated into other subject areas.
- Explain the school's approach to the teaching and use of ICT.
- Establish the expected standards and level of ICT facilities and equipment.
- Describe how ICT can be used to support the development and achievement of individual pupils, including those with disabilities and special needs.
- Identify the direction of future ICT developments.
- Set expectations for the monitoring of pupils' progress.
- Clarify the different roles and responsibilities in the use and teaching of ICT.
- Identify responsibilities for curriculum improvement and delivery.
- Identify responsibilities for maintaining the school's ICT infrastructure, and installing and maintaining software.

The ICT policy must be accessible and available for consultation by such individuals and bodies as:

- Ofsted and local authority advisers
- The school governors
- The head teacher
- Senior management team
- Teachers and teaching assistants
- Non-teaching curriculum support staff
- Non-teaching technical support staff
- Parents

Due to the fast-changing nature of ICT, regular reviews of The ICT policy should be carried out by the school staff and governing body.

- Establish how you can support either the teaching or the learning at each point in the lesson.
- Clarify your understanding of the learning activities, teaching objectives and learning outcomes with the teacher.
- Confirm the pupil's current ability with regard to literacy, including any specific learning targets or difficulties.
- Identify what useful information you could share with the teacher after the lesson.

Clarify and confirm with the teacher your role in supporting pupils to develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills and how this relates to the teacher's role

Teachers' plans are a vital component in helping you to provide good quality support for pupils.

The planning process

The teaching plans may relate to a single lesson or span a number of lessons. Plans may be recorded in writing or just agreed verbally between you. Where written plans are produced, you should be given a copy of it before the commencement of the session(s).

Your input

There are many benefits to be gained when the teacher includes you in the process of planning teaching and learning sessions.

You must be given the opportunity to jointly discuss beforehand, the main teaching points and the activities that are to be offered during the lesson so that you are able to offer suggestions regarding differentiating work for those pupils that you work with and come to an agreement on how you can best support those pupils that you will be working with.

The teacher's input

In such collaborations the class teacher must share with you all information regarding:

- Curriculum content, knowledge, understanding and skills
- Learning objectives
- Teaching activities
- Teaching resources
- Tasks to be completed by pupils
- Pupil targets
- Assessment opportunities

The teacher must also indicate in his/her plan what role you are expected to assume during the lesson and how that relates to his/her role.