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# Good Practices of Educational Inclusion: Criteria and Strategies for Teachers' Professional Development

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**Abstract:** This paper provides evidence on how a school is able to offer a quality education to all students, while taking into account the diversity of their personal and contextual characteristics. From the analysis of the processes, it can be concluded that the key factor for the achievement of inclusive education lies in the good practices of teachers, and that the study of these practices should be implemented as a professional development project. The data presented here are part of a broader research project, and show the perceptions of teachers and families from four selected schools, focusing on the characteristics of good practices of coordination between the family and the school. These findings can contribute to greater educational attention being paid to students with Specific Needs of Educational Support (SENS). Within the framework of qualitative research, a multiple case study was carried out, using interviews as the main instrument for data collection. After an in-depth analysis of the data, some conclusions are drawn to show the educational community the educational actions that define professional and institutional development, which would be capable of effectively serving diverse students, therefore making the inclusive school a reality.

**Keywords:** teacher professional development; institutional development; inclusive schools; family–school relationship; students with Specific Needs of Educational Support



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## 1. Introduction and State of the Art

Optimizing the educational attention paid to Specific Needs of Educational Support (SENS) students and facilitating their personal, academic, social and occupational development, as well as their integration into society, was already a worthy goal long before it was included in the list of Sustainable Development Goals.

The educational goal of this work and the previous research it is built upon is to define the possibility of an inclusive school that promotes and ensures the presence, participation and learning of all students [1], in a way that allows them to reach their maximum development, regardless of their characteristics and personal situation.

As such, this work provides evidence that shows that an educational institution capable of offering quality education to SENS students is a school with professionals who have taken on this challenge as part of their own professional development. This raises the consideration that it is difficult for a school to be better than its teachers without making them solely responsible for the standard of education provided.

The experiences of good family–school relationship practices to ensure the best attention is granted to SENS students, which we have analysed and present in this paper, undoubtedly represent a good example of professional development. This is not achieved by chance but as the result of a deliberate and tenacious effort, widely shared among the educational community and sustained over time.

This work pivots on two key dimensions: firstly, attention to SENS students from the perspective of ensuring educational inclusion, with special emphasis on family–school cooperation; and secondly, teachers' professional development. Thus, the integration of both dimensions becomes evident: it is a matter of making the first an objective for the

second. The nature of this professional development project for teachers is described in these pages through the presentation of the conclusions drawn from the research we have carried out.

Assuming that it is not feasible in these pages to develop a broad review of the debates and agreements of either of the two dimensions we are concerned with, we will outline a succinct presentation of both, starting with the second.

There is much to be said about teachers' professional development. The definition of the teaching profession has been shaped over the years as a consequence of the myriad demands and expectations demanded of these professionals by society [2–4]. In this context, we have seen how teaching ceases to be a mere exercise of transmitting knowledge and executing instructions [5], and becomes a critical and reflective profession, with the ability to analyse, make judgements and make decisions that place student learning at the centre of its task. More emphatically, it should be said that there is a certain and quite generalized agreement in considering the teacher, a reflective professional, able to justify what it is he/she does, why this is done and for what purpose. Teachers are also expected to have a broad psycho-pedagogical knowledge on which to base, self-evaluate and innovate his/her own teaching performance, as well as the contextualization of the curriculum. The teacher should also be able to work in teams and participate collaboratively and collegially in the governance of the centre, and be able to take on the challenge of his/her own professional improvement, preserving his/her own emotional balance [6–12].

However, this understanding of the work of teachers, far from closing the debate on their identity and professional development, opens it up ([13], since it becomes clear that it is necessary to go deeper and more comprehensively into the profile of the teacher. The following are some of the questions that need to be asked: whether teachers should be understood as mere applicators of the curriculum or as critical interpreters of it, capable of reconstructing it to adapt it to the needs of their context of intervention [7]; whether it is necessary to redouble the recognition of teaching autonomy in line with the idea of democratic professionalism [14]; whether, in this process of construction of the teaching identity, it is necessary to create space for and respect the time required to strengthen the principle of integrating theory and practice typical of reflective professionals [15]; whether this requires an approach to professional development that pivots on institutional, cooperative and collegial work, rather than on individual initiative that is often isolated [16]; and if, given the current climate, it is essential to understand that this professional development is not only about digital competence, but is also about an developing an equitable competence and an eco-social competence, which, based on the principles of care and trust, incorporate the ethical and emotional dimension in teacher training [17].

Regarding the first dimension, it is clear that collaboration between family and education professionals is a fundamental pillar of educational quality, which is based on a broad research tradition shaped by: (a) research on the commitment, involvement and participation of families in school life as an indicator of educational quality, as a factor of improvement and recognition of teaching work and as a key factor in the construction of inclusive classrooms [18–22]; and, (b) research offering evidence that inclusive education aims to provide educational attention that favors the maximum possible development of all students and the cohesion of all members of the educational community [1,23,24].

Additionally, research on good educational practices has shown to date that knowledge and dissemination of these practices can contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning [25–30].

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Objectives

In this proposed framework, the objectives of this work are:

- To show the educational community the characteristics of good practices capable of optimizing educational attention to SENS and facilitating their personal, academic, social and occupational development, as well as their integration into society.

- To offer criteria and teaching strategies so that education professionals know how to respond to the diversity of students in general, thus improving their professional development and their own work as teachers.

## 2.2. Design and Sampling

This work adopts a qualitative methodological approach aimed at interpreting the perspectives of the participating subjects (both teachers and families) in order to better understand them, and by analysing in depth the everyday knowledge that is generated around our object of study [31,32]. The research method used is that of a multiple case study [33].

For our project, we did obtain the approval of the General Directorate of Education, Vocational Training and Educational Innovation of the Regional Ministry of Education of the Xunta de Galicia. In addition, all the participants in the project signed a research ethics agreement in which they authorised the recording of the interview and agreed that their institutional position and all the data obtained during the interviews would be mentioned in the research report and in future publications.

The data-producing sample of this research is made up of four educational centres in the province of A Coruña, which were identified as educational centres with professionals involved in quality educational care for SENS through a socio-community intervention approach, where the fundamental role is played by families.

The most relevant aspect of the sample is the process followed for its determination. Thus, it is important to highlight that the educational centres were not directly selected by the researchers. Instead, we relied on a group of teaching experts and qualified representatives of the collective of families in the province of A Coruña to identify them.

For the configuration of both groups of key informants, the strategy of purposive sampling was adopted with the sole criterion of going to the best possible informants, insofar as they accredited a broad knowledge of the basic education schools in the province of A Coruña in direct relation to our object of research. Thus:

- The group of teaching experts was made up of a total of 12 people belonging to three different groups: education inspectors, training advisors and members of the Specific Guidance Team. It is important to point out that, of the three groups, we decided to interview the main people in charge, on the assumption that they would have a broader vision of the province and of the educational centres.
- The group of representatives of the group of families was made up of a total of six people, belonging to two different groups: associations of mothers and fathers of schools and associations of families of students with Specific Educational Support Needs, and associations of families of SENS students of the province of A Coruña that have an agreement signed with the Department of Culture, Education and University Planning. It is important to point out that, in the first group, we interviewed the presidents of the Federations of Mothers and Fathers Associations of the province of A Coruña and members of the Specific Educational Support Needs Committees that are formed in some of these Federations; and in the second group we contacted the directors of the various associations.

In order to select the schools that were the object of our study, we proceeded to triangulate the information collected from both groups. Thus, out of a total of 51 schools (21 identified by teachers and 30 identified by family representatives), we found that the experts agreed on seven, of which five were also identified by families. Thus, these five centres became the invited sample, although the accepting sample consisted of four centres, as mentioned above. Accordingly, we would be dealing with a sampling of homogeneous cases, according to Patton's classification [34], that is, centred on a selection of similar cases in which people with similar characteristics give their vision and experiences with respect to a certain topic about which they have some experience.

Within each educational centre, the group of teachers we interviewed was selected by virtue of the functions they performed: the directors (D) who assume management

functions, the guidance counsellors (O) and the specialists in therapeutic pedagogy and audition and language (PT/AL) who assume functions directly related to attention to diversity. The group of teachers was made up of eight people. In this regard, it should be noted that, in two of the four schools, the figure of the director and the guidance counsellor coincided.

Finally, in each school the management team was asked to choose a family of SENS students as an example of cooperation and collaboration, so that the researchers could also collect their story.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In coherence with the general objective, the data collection process was oriented to identify the perceptions shown by the group of teachers and families of four selected educational centres, specifically regarding the characteristics of coordination between the family and the school that contribute to the quality of educational attention given to SENS students.

In this direction, we adopted the qualitative interview or in-depth interview as the most appropriate instrument to collect the perceptions of the participants regarding what happens and what is said in their environment regarding the subject under study.

To this end, following [35], we opted for a semi-structured interview, which was previously validated by judges, in which we prioritized openness and flexibility, while respecting the recommendations on a plan agreed with the interviewees [36], and on the friendliest conditions for them [37]. Once this had been ensured, we then resolved two fundamental aspects: what to ask (the specification of the interview script) and whom to ask (how to select the interviewees); thus, since we have already dealt with the second question in the section on the sample, we now focus on the first.

In our research, we designed two different interview models depending on the time of our fieldwork and the objective we were pursuing. Each of these models also had different versions, depending on who we were interviewing.

Thus, at the first moment of contact with the teaching experts and representatives of the family group, our objective, as we have already indicated in the section dedicated to the sample, was twofold: on the one hand, to identify and define criteria and categories that could be used to analyse our research problem; and on the other, to configure a list of schools in the province of A Coruña that would serve as an example of good coordination between the family and teachers for quality educational attention to SENS students. Having resolved this, in a second stage, our main objective was to describe, analyse and interpret the characteristics of good practices in the family–school relationship of SENS students through the perceptions, feelings, experiences and opinions of the subjects themselves.

It should be added that the interview was finally divided into ten main sections and fifteen questions, the wording of which, as we have said, is largely determined by what was indicated by the interviewees during the first phase. In addition, all data obtained in the research were collected through interviews, which were recorded and transcribed by the researchers themselves. The data were analysed using the ATLAS.TI qualitative data analysis software.

## 3. Results

This section presents a selection of the most relevant responses from the interviews carried out with the group of teachers and the group of families from the selected schools. For this purpose, we transcribe the answers given to each of the questions that make up the interview, the design of which, except for minor nuances, is the same in structure and content, both for teachers and families. It should be noted that we have ordered them in such a way that, after each question, we first present the answers of the educational experts and then those of the family representatives, followed by our own brief analysis highlighting the most relevant dimensions and characteristics. It is also important to say that the interventions of our participants are linked to a code format (X:X:X), with the first

digit being the number of the interview conducted in our research, the second digit the time of the recording and the third digit the minute of the recording.

Regarding the question: “What would you say that your school does so well that it has been singled out by experts in the educational and family field as an example of good practice in family-school relations for SENS students?”

The teachers’ collective responded:

*O.- The teaching staff are very sensitive to diversity. That’s another great thing, I think. That the teaching staff are not scared [...] (2:1:7).*

*D.- So, of course, they are hard-working, cooperative people who are very sensitive to inclusion. This can be an important agent. Then, what we do is that the environment of the centre itself favours inclusion. Also the way we work, the way we are, the atmosphere of coexistence that we have, which is stable and good. There are few coexistence problems. We have students with behavioural problems and we never label them, and they come to school here and they usually improve. And they don’t improve because we apply any specific behaviour modification techniques [...] but because of proper regulation of the classroom, clear rules and an open and flexible environment (2:1:8).*

*PT.- Let’s see, I suppose that what has happened with our centres is that they have a long history in relation to educational inclusion. They have been concerned about children with SEN [...] and the families know that, and that is why they look for us and come here (4:4:1).*

*D.- It is very clear to me as headmistress, and as a counsellor, that in this school we are giving a different educational response in which we include families. That is to say, families are a fundamental part for us. We are transparent. We want everything we do in the centre to be seen. But we want it to be seen on a day-to-day basis. I don’t mind if you come to the centre and go into the teachers’ room, for example. Because we have nothing to hide (5:3:1).*

The analysis of these statements shows that our informants identify the teaching staff as a key element and the backbone of their educational practice and, within this group, they have highlighted their attitude and willingness to work and organise themselves to cater for diversity, optimising all the resources available to the school. Additionally, the transparency and trust shown by the school to families in general and the involvement of the pupils’ Parents’ Association were also highlighted as key elements. Another underlying characteristic is the concept of a school that is open to the educational community.

The families’ collective said:

*Basically we came here because of the school’s director/guidance counsellor because he had been a counsellor at the previous school we were at. So we were told very well about this school and the director/counsellor for dealing with pupils with problems of this type. The reason is that they are very concerned about everything in general: the child’s environment, the playground. At the other school he was on his own. Not here. I mean, he doesn’t care because he prefers to be on his own, but we do. And here they organised an activity in the library and put him in charge and that helps a lot, it helps him a lot in terms of feeling important. They organise activities at recess, for example (3:6:1).*

Thus, from the analysis of the statements made by the families, the key elements of the educational practice of their centre are the attitude of acceptance of the Management Team, the concern of the whole centre for the educational process of SENS pupils, the involvement of the teaching staff and the predisposition of the centre to coordinate with external agents that support the educational process of such pupils.

Regarding the question: “How do you anticipate the arrival of a SENS pupil? How does it differ from that of other pupils? How do you prepare? Could you explain and describe what you do?”

The teachers’ collective responded:

O.- *I receive them individually. The first thing I want to know is why they are here, why they came here, whether they have been here for three years or whether they come from other centres. Then we go on a “tourist” tour of the centre. I show them everything. I hardly ever ask them directly if they have any difficulties. No, in fact I never ask them. I always try to wait for them to tell me. It seems to me that they have to take that first step, simply out of subtlety and respect. Because many families are in permanent mourning. When they tell me, I usually try to make it normal and explain to them how we take care of the children here, what resources we have and how we organise ourselves (5:3:4).*

D/O.- *We also have a Teaching Exchange Programme for all pupils, we do not distinguish between Specific Educational Support Needs and non-Specific Educational Support Needs pupils. So, when a child registers here, we know if he/she comes from a nursery school. I go there, asking permission from the families, and I do an interview with the teachers. I ask them about their habits, emotional level, sphincter control . . . In other words, I get to know the pupils to find out how they arrive at school. We usually do this in May, June, when the school year is coming to an end [ . . . ] (3:4:10).*

From the teachers' statements, the need for good inter-school coordination, respect for the families of SENS pupils and a positive attitude on the part of the school to offer an educational response adapted to the needs of the pupils can be seen.

The families' collective said:

*Well, we talked to the director/guidance counsellor several times beforehand. We even brought him along, you know, mainly so he could see what the environment is like and so on. We also explained to him: “Look, what do you think of the new school? Do you like it? Maybe next year we’ll change”. I think we came a total of about twice. Well, also the headmaster/headmistress and the other teachers showed him the school and the classrooms, and also the playground, the football pitch. (3:6:7).*

*We also agreed with the school that we thought it was right to anticipate things as much as possible. Above all to prevent him from getting nervous and upset, because changes are very difficult for him. He always likes to know what is going to happen next. Surprises are not his thing. It was a proposal that came from both sides: from the director, who was always available, and from us. (3:6:8).*

*Well, let's see, the first time I came without it. And I loved it. I don't know, I loved the centre, the colours, the silence. You can see that it's a school where there are rules and education, that there is order. I also observed the children and I could see that they were all happy. It was the headmistress who showed me around the school. And I had the feeling that there was a sense of tranquillity here. I don't know how to explain it very well, but it is a school made for them: the colours, the layout, the tables, the sofa at the entrance. Everything here brings serenity and tranquillity (5:4:3).*

*Perhaps what I liked most was that she played down the importance of my son's situation. And that she wasn't obsessed with the report and the diagnosis. I gave them to her and she took them, but what she really asked me to do was to tell her what my son is like, basic things, what they really need to know to manage their day to day life. I don't know, how he behaves, how he reacts to certain circumstances. That's what they asked me, and I loved that (5:4:4).*

Thus, from the statements made by the group of families in relation to the anticipation of their child's arrival at the school, the following stand out in particular: the need to build a positive relationship between the family and the school before the start of the school year, based on trust, closeness and transparency; the organisation and planning of their child's arrival at the school (with several meetings and interviews beforehand) and the care of organisational and pedagogical decisions (assignment of tutors, configuration of the class group, etc.).

Regarding the question: “How do you deal with the transition and adaptation period for SENS students who arrive at the school? What can you tell us about this?”

The teachers' collective responded:

*O.- Yes, children with Specific Educational Support Needs, especially when they join the centre for the first time, the first few weeks, the contact with mothers and fathers is almost daily. The parents come and that reassures them a lot too (2:1:12).*

*O.- Obligatory and urgent coordination with external services, such as Down Compostela or TEA associations. Also specific tutorials with teachers from previous stages. We also have a specific programme for Transition from Primary to Secondary Education with the figure of the accompanying pupil or pupil tutor, which works relatively well. But, well, it is good to have a pupil who accompanies the agenda, who accompanies a playground, who accompanies a specific need . . . We usually offer the tutors specific didactic material to work on the transition. [...] and we form a commission between the Guidance Department and the Management Team to accompany these first moments (4:3:6).*

*D/O.- Well, what we try to do is to give an individualised response at that moment, well, and at all times. We want families to trust us because, otherwise, there is little we can do. What I want is for families to have maximum confidence in what we do here. That is what I want to transmit (5:3:6).*

*D/O.- Yes, yes, the family can enter whenever they want. Let's see. If the whole teaching team and the specialists think that the fact that the family can come in to see them in the middle of the morning, at break time or whenever, is going to benefit the pupils, there is no doubt about it. The family comes in. If we have doubts or even if we see that it is counterproductive, we agree with the family and they don't come. In any case, they can come whenever they want. Of course, we have to know who is in the centre. We have to keep a certain order because we work with boys and girls. But no problem (5:3:9).*

Therefore, it is clear from the teachers' responses that the main characteristics that define their practices during the adaptation period are: flexibility in the school timetable, accessibility to the family to accompany the first weeks, teamwork and coordination between the family, the school and the external educational agents in charge of the pupils' educational process.

The families' collective said:

*No, you know what happens? In ESO they start at eight twenty-five. So, I started, we started at a normal time. . . But we had already talked about it, that maybe it was too much for him. Two other classmates who are no longer here, who have finished, came and did the primary school timetable. And we started like that for a month and we continued with that timetable (2:2:12).*

*I think they did something with his classmates to explain the characteristics of my son. I think so (2:2:13).*

*Well, very good. They made everything easy for me. They asked me what time I wanted to drop him off in the mornings, because there are already teachers in the playground very early in the morning who can look after him. Or that we could also come later. In the end it was not necessary because he was very comfortable from the beginning. But I was given all the possibilities. But I don't know, I was calm from the beginning because of the trust they gave me (5:4:7).*

*A very curious thing is that his teacher went on Erasmus for a week and they called me from the school to tell me, and to explain the timetable that my son was going to have, and who was going to look after him, so that I would know. I don't know, that's worth a lot. In another school I probably wouldn't even know about it (5:4:8).*

Thus, from the testimony of the families it is clear that it is important to have a flexible timetable at the beginning of the school year, to provide all the necessary information and to guarantee, with the necessary means, good communication between the family and the school.

Regarding the question: “What does the management team do to favour the family-school relationship with SENS students? How would you describe what you do?”

In this question, the interviewees were explicitly asked about the characteristics of the school’s educational project, that is, about the pedagogical line practised by the management team, which made the relationship between the family and the school for SENS students unique and noteworthy.

Thus, the teachers’ collective responded:

*D/O.- We have to explain everything, yes. When new teachers arrive, what we do is to welcome them, show them the school facilities and then explain our Educational Project and all the plans/programmes we carry out. We give them a copy of the latter. In addition, we tell them that we want these documents to be real, crumpled, usable, alive and accessible. And, of course, as a counsellor (and also as a director) I explain to them all the Educational Needs that exist in the Centre and the characteristics of all the students with their peculiarities, so that they are aware of them. I also explain to them the Intervention Plan that is carried out with them, at a specific and general level. (3:4:17).*

*D/O.- Clearly, we are a management team that has the initiative to promote inclusion, and that tries to promote inclusion (3:4:19).*

*PT.- Also to be very left-handed and to support and pamper the faculty. Because imagine if all the ideas we have from the library, from dynamisation, if there was a leader who didn’t accept anything. So, we have an idea and the director always tells us to move forward. So, of course, that helps. There has to be a cohesive team, that we all go along the same lines. And here that’s the way it is. Because this school has been characterised over the years as a very family-oriented school, because there are very few pupils and that allows for more individualised attention (3:5:8).*

*PT.- Look, I have experienced four Management Teams here and the truth is that there is a difference between one and the other. Here, what is very important, I think, is the sensitivity of the person, because that is going to imply a different sensitisation towards students with Specific Educational Support Needs. Moreover, you can see it in how they are there, how they support you and how they offer you support in the cloisters and in the co-ordination meetings. [ . . . ] Then there is also their concern to make the guidance department strong and to make it clear in the school that our proposals are strong, and that they are supported by the management. (4:4:2).*

*D/O.- What I also do is to have a meeting every Tuesday with all the teachers and there are discussions, of course there are discussions. But what I try to do is always to be transparent about what is happening in the school. And I think that’s a good strategy for me, as headmistress, to know what’s going on (5:3:16).*

From their account, it is clear that it is important to have an attitude of acceptance of SENS students, considering student diversity as an educational reality with which to live. This is a key principle that should be passed onto the rest of the teaching staff so that they can participate in the same dynamics. The importance of giving a voice to all people as an important part of an inclusive educational project is also highlighted, as well as the need to take care in welcoming new members of the teaching staff so that they are able to take on board the culture of the school.

The families’ collective said:

*I can tell you that the director is like another teacher, that is, she doesn’t go one way and the others another. Here everyone gives their opinion, everyone evaluates and everyone reaches a conclusion, and they all decide on the best decision, which is the one they make together. This is what I see (2:2:17).*

*Well, in general we highlight the attention we see for our son and for the others. The kindness towards us and towards the kids. With everything. Yes, and the concern about how he is doing, about how we are doing. I don’t know, a bit like that (3:6:15). Also the message that the management transmits, I don’t know, that they are going to do*

*everything they can to make sure that our son is well. And that was the case from the beginning, from the moment we arrived here and talked to him (3:6:16).*

*Yes, I don't know, I notice that behind the school there is this culture, this management. I don't know, for example, they managed the question of requesting authorisation to be able to talk to external professionals, because not just anyone can call here without authorisation. They are always willing, but of course, with a certain order. This centre favours inclusion, but of course, it has to be systematised. And there I do see that management and that culture behind it, you can see that behind any management or any problem there is a management. And you can see that the teachers trust the school management (4:5:11).*

*Well, they are one hundred percent involved. And you can see that she knows about everything and that she finds out about all the cases. Before the end of the first term, for example, I had a meeting with the tutor to find out how my son was doing, and she was there too. And that's good. And they already told me that at the end of the school year we will have another one, to manage how we plan the next school year. It's just great (5:4:11).*

Thus, the testimony of the families shows the need for the school management to be aware of the different cases of SENS pupils, and to assume a shared leadership role among the entire teaching staff. It is also important to facilitate access to the centre for families and maintain constant communication with them.

Regarding the question: "What is the contribution of the Guidance Department to this? How would you describe it?"

It is worth remembering that in Galicia all primary and secondary schools have a guidance department which has, among other functions, the task of advising and supporting the educational community in dealing with the diversity of students.

*O.- Yes, continuity is fundamental. I see it as fundamental, continuity. Because of other cases they tell you about. Of course, this year he was with one, then the following year he changed, he got scared, there was autism in between, the changes.... So continuity in that sense, I see it as something very positive (2:1:52).*

*O.- To involve the families... let's see, the counsellors must have maximum contact with them, inform them at all times about Curricular Adaptations (CA), about reinforcements, about procedures to apply for the scholarship or combined schooling or... But otherwise, we don't do anything special. Nothing. Well, that they feel listened to and that they feel that we know about their children [...] and help them with the process of acceptance (2:1:56).*

*O/D.- In the guidance department we try to be very present in the classroom, through observation and teacher training, if we are competent to do so. We also participate in innovation programmes and advise families (3:4:27).*

*O/D.- I think that what we have to transmit is calm, serenity and a bit of an explanation of what Specific Educational Support Needs consists of because, of course, not everyone has to know what hyperactivity consists of, or Asperger's Syndrome, or... I don't know. And then, on the other hand, to give guidelines and support to the team of tutors and teachers. And in this sense, the counsellor is the one who has to transmit confidence, because many times teachers do not want to ignore everything, but they are afraid of the unknown and do not know how to act (3:5:16).*

*PT.- Well, let's see, I value it well, I've already said it several times: we have weight in the guidance department, there are many of us, and they trust us. We work well as a team, in the distribution of tasks, in the distribution of students. I don't know, in general, we don't have difficulties. I would also say that we are a very self-critical department. Because they, the families, have come here and put their trust in us, and we have to respond 100%, and sometimes we don't, sometimes we do 80% and I have a hard time. [...] We also have to respond 100% because families are not the same as they used to be, now they ask*

*questions, now they are educated and they are increasingly critical of us. I can also tell you that the strength we have now was forged a long time ago, because there was a time when the people who made up the Department were very close friends, even outside of here, and we had an unbeatable harmony. From that moment on, the guidance department gained a lot of strength, and we are still going strong (4:4:3).*

*O/D.- Yes, I am constantly raising awareness. Let's see, in this school we greet each other every morning when we enter in sign language, because we have a deaf child. We also always play music, and music always in Galician language and with themes of education in values (diversity month, women's month, equality month. . .). And I also give a speech at any time, at all times. And of course, to give visibility to all students with Specific Educational Support Needs. To make them all visible. That they are known (5:3:26).*

Thus, the teachers' testimony shows the need for the guidance department to be made up of a cohesive team of teachers who work with rigour and professionalism, so that it can be configured as a department with weight within the educational centre in general. Furthermore, its role is also important in: raising awareness and training teachers and the educational community in general, giving visibility to diversity, listening to and supporting teachers and transmitting confidence and transparency to families.

The families' collective said:

*Knowing that I have access to all the information about my daughter. Yes, I know what my daughter does in class. I know where she goes. . . Because it's silly that she works on one thing with the PT, I help her at home with another and the speech therapist helps her with another. So what we do is coordinate (2:2:24).*

*Also that they are always available to attend to you, we usually come here and they always attend to us (3:6:19).*

*It was one of total openness, very positive. There was a lot of transparency, talking about each other's expectations. Then also that everyone was welcome here: people from other centres, from the associations. . . . Everyone was welcome here. And on top of that, there was fluid communication and no time limit. The counsellor let me express myself, we discussed some things, we exchanged opinions. He showed me the working philosophy of the school (4:5:12).*

*Then, for example, what they did with Sign Language is amazing. Every day they say hello with sign language because they have a deaf child at school. And well, although my son doesn't need it, it's not bad for him at all. I don't know, it's a way of learning together. And the entrance time is very nice. Everyone is silent and the headmistress always says something, a nice message, a song: sometimes about equality, violence, women. . . Yes, they do a lot of things, really. And the school is what you see, it's pure transparency (5:4:14).*

In the families' accounts, the need for the guidance department to favour the development of the values of trust, transparency, welcomeness and respect for the diversity of pupils is highlighted. It also highlights the need to facilitate and promote coordination between all professionals who deal with SENS pupils, both internal and external to the school.

With regard to the question: what do you do, what do you do, the teaching staff as a group in general to resolve the relationship with the families of SENS students?

The teachers' collective responded:

*D/O.- The majority of teachers are interested and there is a minority of teachers who are afraid at first (3:4:34). [ . . . ]. In addition, most of them ask for training and make an effort to be trained [ . . . ]. Then we have people who are more permeable than others: there are people who are very reluctant to bring PT into the classroom and others who are not so reluctant, well, in this centre, specifically, only one person (3:4:35).*

*O.- Let's see, the school has a clear determination in relation to these students, which depends on the school management. The teaching staff know this, they know it, it's in*

*the school's ideology, it's in the Management Plan, it's in all the institutional documents. They know that this is one of our priority lines of action. [...] And the truth is that the teachers at the school take it on with full dedication, doing, for example, tutorials with families that go beyond their working hours (4:3:8).*

*D/O.- Well, it depends on the moment. The philosophy that I have in this school I think is now accepted by most of the teaching staff. That doesn't mean that they agree with it exactly, but they generally agree with it. In general they agree with it quite a lot. What's wrong? They still have the mentality as teachers that they are here to teach a subject. So, when they feel frustrated because they are not able to transmit what they have prepared, they look for those responsible. But that doesn't mean that they don't love all the children we have here. They love them very much. Also because they feel that there is an incongruence between what I am proposing and the demands from above. So you have to change the vision, but the vision from above. The difference in the teaching staff is not in how they perceive diversity, but in how they perceive education in general (5:3:27).*

Thus, what emerges from the teachers' accounts is the need for a clear and firm line from the management team that assumes inclusion as part of its pedagogical ideology. At the same time, they point to the need for training and a flexible attitude towards student diversity.

The families' collective said:

*There was a teacher, who is very young, and I will be grateful to him for the rest of my life, who passed me my daughter's exams by post, so that the other children could... Look, I just get... My eyes fill up with tears... So that the other children could see that just as they were getting a seven, she was getting a seven. She sent them to me, so that they would learn them, understand them and so that she would feel the same way, and for those two years my daughter was, well, delighted with life. If you were to ask me at that time, I would tell you without a doubt that my daughter was included (2:2:6).*

*I don't know, I think his teacher believes in him, believes in my son, and believes that he can always improve. She is always looking for continuous improvement. I always see that she is always looking for my son's improvement, always going one step further. On the other hand, he has a lot of serenity, which is fundamental when working with these children. I don't know, his tone of voice, which seems silly, but it is very important (4:5:18).*

*Well, as I would say: they make light of the matter. I don't know, she's always very positive, very dynamic, very happy. And that rubs off on me. Every day that my son does something bad he always tells me about it, but giving much more value to everything he has done well. And you don't know how grateful I am for that. His words encourage you to move forward and not always focus on the bad things. And that is fundamental. Because I know I already have a problem, but the fact that they don't remind me of it too often helps me. For her my son is a child like any other child, with good and bad days, but no different from any other child (5:4:17).*

From the families' testimonies, the need for teachers to show sensitivity and a positive and accepting attitude towards the diversity of pupils is evident. They particularly emphasise how positive it is for teachers to believe in the abilities of SENS pupils, and in their potential for development and progress.

Regarding the question: What can you tell me about the resources available at the school for the specific educational attention to SENS students?

The teachers' collective responded:

*D.- Well, I think we mobilise the resources, the few we have, whatever we have. I mean, we only have teachers. And it is true that these two Special Education classrooms can mean that you have two PTs, that you have other people. But then it's with the teachers themselves. Well, if I have to substitute. Today there are not enough people, then I go. I don't have so many teaching hours. So I go (2:1:46).*

*D/O.- The main problem of this school was that it was not accessible in terms of architectural barriers. So, my first function as director, which was also encouraged by a child with Specific Educational Support Needs who attended the school, was to make the school accessible. That is to say, that any space in the centre can be accessed by any child. So, citing the accessibility law, the education law and common sense, the first thing I did was to ask for a lift and an access ramp to be installed so that this child, and any other child, could access any part of the centre (3:4:38).*

*PT.- The material resources we have are good. Yes, we usually have them and if you need something, you tell the management and you don't usually have a problem. In terms of organisation, we are also free to organise reinforcements, to distribute support, also to coordinate ourselves and yes, the truth is that we have a lot of meetings with primary and secondary tutors, with external services. . . (4:4:6).*

*D.- So I think we have to take advantage of the resources the school has. And I think we take advantage of them. That we don't have more PT. It doesn't matter! We can all support at any given moment. That's no excuse (5:3:31).*

From their answers it is clear that it is important to have resources, especially for teachers, but it is also very important to know how to optimise the resources one has.

The families' collective said:

*Very good, very good, and it has to improve because everything can be improved. We have to fight for more staff in all schools. And in schools in general. (2:2:32).*

*That's where I tell you about the staff service for nappy changing. Yes, to have a technical educational assistant, or the carer. Otherwise, I think it's fine. At least I have never heard of any teacher who cannot do something because of a lack of resources. And what I do know is that sometimes, for example, to get out of school, when they do need a lot of staff, they manage among themselves and they go out without any problem (4:5:28).*

*Well, I do think they need more resources. Yes, without a doubt. Above all because they deserve them, with all the commitment and vocation they have. They deserve much more. I am totally convinced, because with the needs they have in this centre, they would need more (5:4:20).*

For families, the provision of resources and having adequate and trained staff is very important in order to be able to attend educationally to SENS students; although they recognise and commend the efforts of the existing teaching staff, they understand that more human resources are needed above all.

Regarding the question: how is the participation of families regulated and how is their involvement in the life of the school and the educational process of their children?

The teaching community responded:

*D.- A lot of connection with them, a lot of explaining to them, until they start to see it. Or at least they see that you are doing what you can, that it's not for lack of wanting to, but that things don't work out, that they are going to have to accept it. There are those who accept it, the majority end up accepting it and living with the story, and then there are others who don't. And there are always those who leave. And there's always someone who leaves, I'll take him with me. . . . (2:1:57).*

*D/O.- I think they participate a lot actually. Yes, I feel that we have families very present in the school: whether it's in the interactive groups or in a troupe, or to decorate the Christmas tree, did you see it at the entrance? We also have a crochet group in the centre where we are making a blanket now. And we involve the school and the family. Well, many of us have children in school here. I think that the involvement of the families is good, although it could be better, and we aspire for it to be better, of course (5:3:35).*

Thus, it is clear from the teachers' accounts that the involvement of families is good and important, both for monitoring the educational process of SENS pupils, and for making the necessary decisions during the process.

The families' collective said:

*Let's see, we are involved because the situation of our children forces us. But well, I think that involvement depends on each family, but in this centre there is openness. I see it. We do have it because of our situation (4:5:25).*

*The rest of the parents are phenomenal, to be honest. One thing that struck me is that I perceive them as very discreet. And we have a WhatsApp group and my son is one of them (4: 5:26).*

*Here the relationship with the families is very good, as if we have known each other all our lives. It's the same with the child. If a colleague goes out with the mother, they are not able to say goodbye. You always have to be pulling for them. It's very good, yes, there's a very good atmosphere (5:4:22).*

Thus, from the testimony of the families, it is clear that there is a need for respect among them and that the welcoming of all pupils without discrimination in all the activities organised by the families is encouraged.

Regarding the question: What can you tell me about the families of SENS students? How would you describe their involvement in the school?

The teaching community responded:

*O.- Specific Educational Support Needs families do not participate more in the Centre's activities, but they are more present, more involved with their children, i.e., we have many more meetings with them (2:1:81).*

*D/O.- The sample of families of students with Specific Educational Support Needs is exactly the same as the rest of the families: some are more involved and others less (3:4:45).*

*D/O.- The involvement of the families of students with Specific Educational Support Needs is greater, without a doubt, it is much greater. But because they also demand much more from us and because we don't respond in the same way when it comes to pupils with needs. But, in general, they are such good people. So good, really (5:3:38).*

There is a consensus among teachers that the families of SENS pupils are more present, involved and committed to the educational process of their children. However, this is not the case with participation in the wider life of the school, which has similar characteristics to the rest of the families.

Regarding the question: What do you do in relation to collaboration and coordination with other bodies or organisations (associations, private offices, social services, medical services, town hall)?

The teaching collective responded:

*O.- Yes, and the tutor goes. So, anything more specific about Down's Syndrome that they can solve for us, a doubt, they solve it for us. And the same with ASPANAES, and the same with ONCE. We have a deaf-blind girl. And we have the Federation of the Deaf that also provided us with guidelines... (1:1:66).*

*D/O.- Of course we collaborate. It is our obligation. We ask for an authorisation to exchange information with the families, which is important because of the Data Protection Law. It's not a very pompous thing, but it says: I authorise Mr./Mrs., as head of the guidance department of the "X" centre, to exchange information with the associations/offices/services that attend to my child (3:4:13).*

*PT.- We have two annual co-ordinations with the services outside the school that attend to our students. During school hours. Two per child, where everyone is present: the tutor, the counsellor, the PT, the AL, the external association (ASPANAES, Down's, private offices...) Everyone is present. And they are during working hours. I don't know if I'm making myself clear, put 10 children. There are 20 h a year in which we stop the school because the tutor is not in class, the PT is not working, the AL is not working, the counsellor is not available. During those hours we have no limit. We talk about*

*everything, everything that concerns the child. Then the external service can come here as many times as you want, and we go many times. Because they know a lot, and in many occasions they help us here, in school things (4:4:8).*

*D/O.- Yes, yes. We coordinate from start to finish. I am still coordinating with a psychologist who looks after a child in this school who is in 5th grade of Primary Education. And I am still coordinating. And it is fundamental because if there is no coordinated response, there is no way for everything to flow with the child himself (5:3:5).*

As we can see, teachers express the need for frequent, rigorous and systematic coordination between all educational agents involved in the education of SENS pupils.

The families' collective said:

*Accessibility. [...] For example TEIMA, the Down's Syndrome Association wants to work a lot with schools. They are speech therapists, they are PTs.... They know a bit more about how to approach things than I do. And when it comes to communication and receiving them, and many other things, this centre is great. They don't have any problems here. No, you never have any problems here. On the contrary. Never, on the contrary. A lot of dialogue. No disinformation, a lot. And that is also very good, because, well, from, from various places you receive. In that sense, accessibility and tranquillity (2:2:3).*

The perception of families is, as we can see, that coordination between the school and external agents is fundamental, and that it gives them confidence and peace of mind.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The educational task is always complex, but even more so in those situations in which students are at a disadvantage, or socio-educationally vulnerable. Given this reality, this paper offers criteria and strategies so that education professionals know how to respond to the diversity of students in general (not only those with Specific Needs of Educational Support), thus improving their own work as teachers [18,20–22].

We have investigated the characteristics of various good practices that could optimise educational attention paid to SENS students, and the following recommendations have emerged from their analysis, which could be included in a professional development project for teachers.

##### 4.1. School

Regarding the school, as an educational institution at a general level, our informants tell us, first of all, that an educational centre that offers a quality education to SENS students adapts the educational response to the needs of the students. This supports what has already been said in the [38], which urged education systems to implement a series of adaptations and services to serve students with temporary or permanent educational needs. Similarly, the [29] stated as a principle that education systems should be designed and programmes implemented that take into account the full range of these different characteristics and needs.

Secondly, an educational centre with good practices in family–school relations for SENS students develops and implements an educational project based on inclusive values, which is assumed by the whole educational community. Along these lines, the Warnock Report (1978) also admitted that “organisational changes and additional resources will not be sufficient in themselves to achieve our aims. They have to be accompanied by changes in attitudes” (p. 73). In the same vein, [1,24,39,40] define an inclusive educational model based on the values of equality, participation, community, respect for diversity, sustainability and trust.

Thirdly, a school with good practices has a management team capable of transmitting to the rest of the educational community the values that define their school and which, as mentioned above, coincide with the values of an inclusive school. In this respect, Refs. [41,42] point out the importance of the head teacher of a school with good practices in assuming shared leadership, defining a school model that considers families to be another

educational agent of the students, who accepts their diversity, mobilises all strategies to improve their educational attention and, above all, is capable of creating a school culture in which all teachers make the attention to SENS students—and the collaboration with their families—a key factor in the educational development of the children.

Fourthly and finally, our work shows that an attitude of acceptance and optimism towards the educational needs of SENS students at their school is an essential characteristic of an inclusive school. This idea is fully in line with [43], who speaks of a school model in which diversity is not seen as a problem to be overcome, but as a resource to support the learning of all.

#### *4.2. Anticipation and Reception of SENS Students w in the Educational Centre*

In this case, there are two sub-categories to address.

Regarding the anticipation of the arrival of SENS students at school, the importance of schools knowing in advance whether they are going to receive such students in the next academic year, what their characteristics are and whether they will need ordinary or extraordinary resources is mentioned, concurring with [41] point out.

In addition, our informants talk about the importance of interviews between the family and the school (to enhance mutual trust and transparency and to avoid fears and doubts), the information provided to the teaching staff about the characteristics and needs of SENS pupils and the planning and organisation of the next school year to facilitate the inclusion of new pupils.

Furthermore, regarding the reception process, it is stated that an educational centre with good family–school relationship practices for SENS students shows flexibility for families in the reception processes. This concurs with [20,44,45], who describe the planning and development of the reception process as a classic family–school relationship action.

Finally, and associated with both subcategories, the necessary trust and transparency that the school must show to the families of SENS students from the beginning in order to avoid bad first impressions [42] and a positive and accepting attitude towards their children’s needs [18].

#### *4.3. Management Team*

With regard to the management team, our informants point out that the most important role these professionals can take is to guarantee a school’s educational project based on inclusive values (shared leadership, acceptance of student diversity, the idea of a school open to the community, etc.). It is also indicated that a school with good practices has a management team capable of transmitting to the rest of the educational community the values that define their school and which, as mentioned above, coincide with the values of an inclusive school.

This is in line with [42,46], who clearly identify the figure of the head teacher as a key player in getting families involved in the school.

#### *4.4. Guidance Department*

Regarding the guidance department, our informants agree that a school with good practices in family–school relations for SENS students is a school with a guidance department that plans and carries out awareness-raising actions aimed at the entire educational community [47].

In this sense, we have found in our informants many of the attitudes and behaviours that [48] recommends to favour the family–school relationship (listening to parents, organising times for conversation with them, paying attention to the changes produced and transmitting them to the families, showing confidence in the possibilities for improvement, etc.), and which need, both for their development and their consolidation, a process of constant awareness-raising on the part of school counsellors.

Accordingly, the guidance department of an educational centre with good family–school relationship practices is revealed as an important agent of change within a school,

to create a space charged with inclusive values [1,20,24], and which fights to eliminate the barriers that the education system introduces to the education and participation of all students [49].

#### 4.5. Teachers

Regarding the teaching staff as a group, our informants point to an attitude of acceptance of student diversity and the inclusive values of the school as an identifying characteristic of good practice. They also cite the need for them to receive regular training and to have positive expectations of SENS pupils.

Needless to say, this identifying characteristic is also pointed out in the [38], which referred to a change of attitude as a necessary prior step to achieving its aims. Furthermore, the framework of values on which an inclusive school is based [23] requires changes at the level of educational policy, school culture and educational practices, and also a very relevant aspect: individual and particular commitments to inclusion [1].

#### 4.6. Resources

Regarding the resources available to a school with good family–school relationship practices for SENS students, our informants indicate that it is very important to have the necessary resources (human, organisational and material) to attend to the diversity of students and to move towards an inclusive school, but they also speak of the need to optimise the resources that are available.

In this respect, historical research with an international reach, such as the [38] and the [29], highlight the need for education systems to have the necessary provisions and resources to adapt to the needs of students, and to offer quality education in ordinary contexts. In this sense, there is no doubt that SENS students and their families need the appropriate conditions (including human, material and organisational resources) so that the education system can respond to the diversity of their needs through greater participation in learning and cultural and community activities.

#### 4.7. Family–School Relationship

Our informants indicate that a key characteristic of the relationship between the family and the school in schools with good practices is fluid communication through appropriate channels, as well as strategies and mechanisms that favour and support this communication. This endorses [50] (p. 2) statement that “the relationship between the family and the school should be based on a permanent, open and constructive dialogue, which helps to accelerate the basic learning of all pupils, improves coexistence and the school climate, and, in short, helps to achieve an inclusive school”.

Furthermore, it is indicated that a school with good practices plans and organises joint activities in which both the family and the school can participate. This is in line with [48], who points out the importance of school professionals proposing activities in which the family can participate (collaborative activities within the classroom, extracurricular activities, training activities, etc.). Furthermore, it also coincides with a characteristic of good practices in favour of inclusion pointed out by the Institute of Government and Public Policy (IGOP) of the University of Barcelona, which identifies participation as a good intervention in the fight against exclusion. This can include involving the actors in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of the practice, through procedures and/or mechanisms that strengthen and (re)establish community links and networks.

#### 4.8. Coordination with External Services/Institutions

Finally, regarding coordination with external services/institutions in schools with good practices, our informants perceive the willingness of schools to coordinate with external services as an identifying characteristic of their good practices in the family–school relationship with SENS pupils.

In this sense, contributions such as that of [1] state that educational inclusion involves fostering mutually nurturing relationships between the school and the community. Ref. [19] highlights the creation of Educating Cities and the development of Community Education Programmes involving the school, families and various associations that can play a role as a point of union between the two as one of the actions that favour the involvement of families in the school.

Additionally, although not directly, the contributions made by [18] define a school model open to the educational community, which takes into account the resources of the environment to support the educational process of students within schools. Therefore, this inter-school coordination and coordination with external services/institutions could be considered the necessary first step to building true learning communities, following the line already established by [51]. Moreover, with them, we would favour the positive effects of family participation in school life as defined by [52–54]

Finally, we would like to point out the limitations in our research study:

- We have been able to analyse only our object of study in one province, so it is desirable to be able to expand the scope of the research with data from the whole community.
- Access to experts in the family group was very complicated. It would be desirable for future research to select a data collection instrument that would make it possible to access a greater number of informants, for example with a questionnaire.
- The sensitivity towards the diversity of the management figures in our selected schools could possibly be greater, since some of them are also guidance counsellors.
- The families selected to participate in the second phase of the research were selected by the school. It would be possible to use another method of selection, also through different family associations.

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