Leading an ambitious agenda for SEN – empowering leaders at all levels across the school

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Aims

01
To consider the holistic benefits for a school of inclusive approaches to education

02
To explore the power that senior leaders have in creating a culture of inclusivity

03
To outline ways that senior leaders can maximise their impact on culture change and for those not in senior leadership to maximise their influence on senior leaders

My background

- Historian by training with a deep interest in teaching and learning:
  - Lecturer in Early Modern History at Keele University
  - Research Fellow / Senior Academic Advisor Nottingham University
- Retrained as a teacher of History and RE
- Headteacher for nearly a decade:
  - Acting Principal of Stradbroke Primary Academy (4 months)
  - Principal of Cromer Academy
  - Executive Headteacher of Cansfield High School
- National Leader of Education, Ofsted Inspector, various research appointments
- Professor of Educational Leadership / Head of School of Education at Bolton 1 month ago

SEN and me

- I became Head of Cansfield High School in 2015

- Knew little about SEN beyond how to accommodate needs as a class teacher

- Barth (1984) Headteacher should be 'head learner' in their school

- Made this my priority: SENCO Award; Advanced SENCO Award; MA in Inclusive Teaching

- Opened x2 Specialist Resource Bases for students with ASC

- Honorary Visiting Professor at Liverpool Hope ... worked with team to design PGCert in Understanding Autism and Inclusive Practice

- Sat on Wigan LA board for transforming SEN provision

- Currently in process of opening a Centre for Inclusion and Trauma Informed Practice at the University of Bolton

- Led to sea change in my own approach and beliefs about the place of inclusion in Education

Why inclusive schools?

- I firmly believe that schools should serve the communities in which they are located and students with SEN should be educated with their peers, accessing mainstream as much as possible:
  - We owe it to individual students with an SEN
  - We owe it to families
  - Society is inclusive
  - The impact of students with an SEN on wider community
- What is an inclusive school?
  - The school does everything they can do to remove barriers
  - All students to access as much school provision as possible
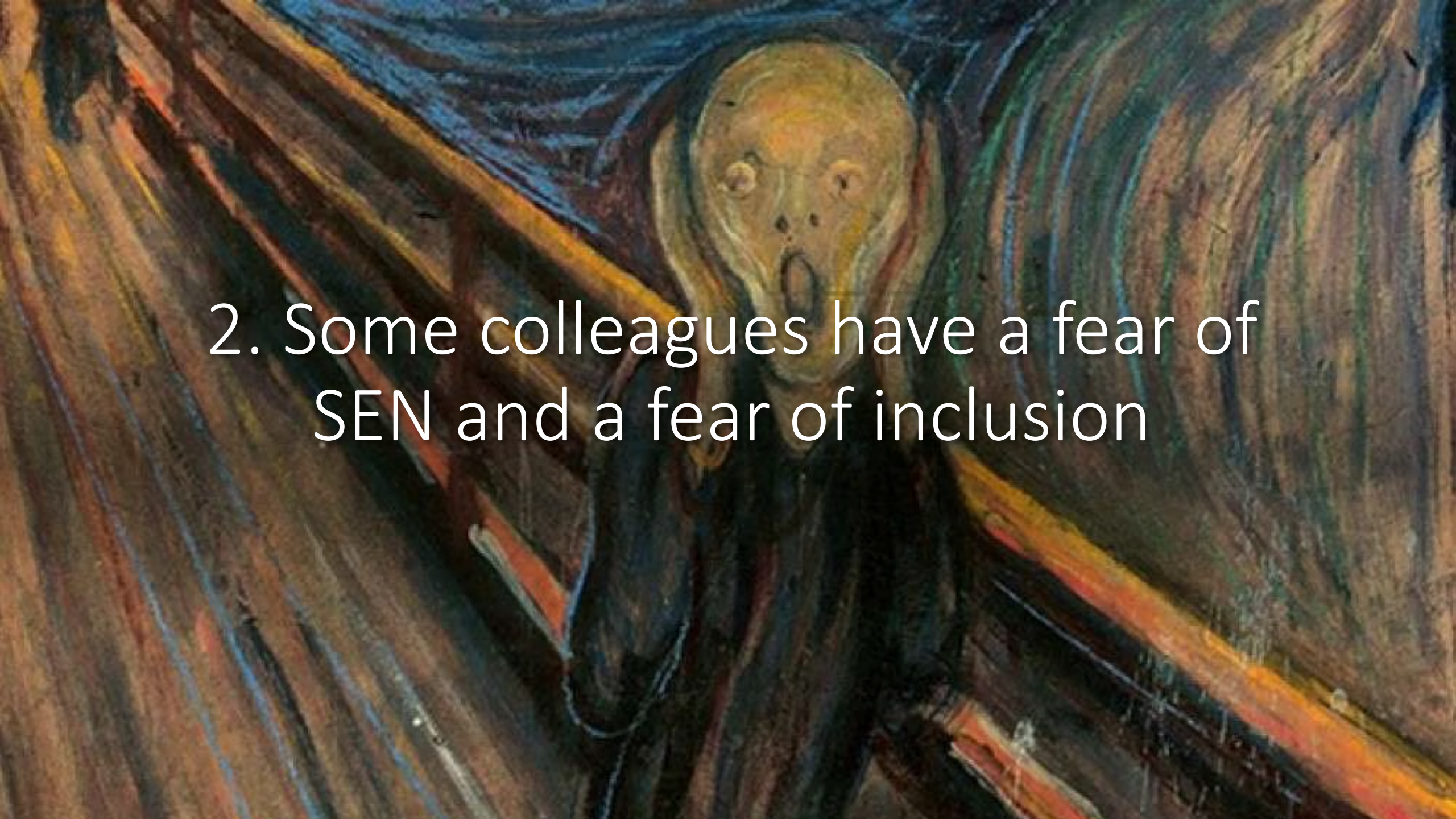 - Must be a schoolwide philosophy, not a bolt on

Lessons from Leading an Inclusive School

1. Senior leadership is key to building inclusive schools

- Does the SENCO need to sit on a senior team?
- Why must the Head and other senior leaders own SEN?
- How can this be done?

2. Some colleagues have a fear of SEN and a fear of inclusion

3. In an inclusive school SEN belongs to everyone

- SEN belongs to everyone!

- Importance of transparency: with staff; parents; students

- Inclusion must be OWNED by everyone (comprehensive)

4. Symbols have power in a school

- Language

- Physical space (the 'inclusion room')

5. Leaders can empower teachers to overcome their fears

- Locate champions

- Community of practice model to teacher development in this area: instructional rounds; peer observation; lesson study

- Knowledge is power: Knowledge of students; Knowledge of evidence-based approaches

Dangers of becoming an inclusive school?

- Is it harder to be an inclusive school?

- Will staff be on board?

- Will inclusion impact on behavioural standards?

- Can an inclusive school be a high performing school?

- Will inclusion change the demographic of my school? Inclusion and the 'honeypot school'

- Will inclusion be valued by external benchmarks? Bell and the 'culture of performativity'

- Will inclusion damage the reputation of my school?

What can you do? / Things to try?

- Get in touch with your moral compass
  - Challenge yourself ... read Gary Thomas
- Engage with student voice
  - Follow a student for the day
  - Speak to a student
- Speak to a parent
- Upskill yourself – locate ways forward for your professional development
- Be transparent / Importance of governance

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- Thomas, G. (1997), 'Inclusive Schools for an Inclusive Society', *British Journal of Special Education*, 24:3, 103-107.