

SEN pupils – principles of effective practice

The following questions are ones that all staff should consider carefully when planning, delivering and evaluating support for SEN pupils. These are not listed below because they aren't being adhered to, they are there simply to assist staff to analyse and evaluate the quality of provision on a cyclical basis.

i) Asking the 'impact question'

Class teachers should periodically evaluate the impact of additional support on the performance of pupils receiving that support. Over time is this support resulting in the pupil(s) concerned securing improvements? Is it making an appreciable difference? If the answer to these two questions is 'no', or 'negligible' they should consider what further action to take.

ii) High expectations for all

SEN pupils achieve the greatest progress when their teacher consistently has the highest expectations for their social and academic progress. All staff should start from a position of believing that every SEN pupil can succeed and the knowledge that they are more likely to do so if expectations are high.

iii) Facilitating independence and self-help, or reinforcing dependency, with a possibility that this may result in 'learned helplessness'.

Being an effective support assistant is a challenging role. There is always a danger that - with the best will in the world - one of the unintended consequences of providing support to a child is to make them reliant and dependent, rather than self-motivated and independent.

iv) The scheduling of support

Withdrawing a pupil from a classroom creates issues around the continuity of a child's learning experience. Pupils can find it a disorientating experience rejoining a class mid-session. In addition, teachers should be mindful of the classwork the child is missing during the time they are out of their classroom. Withdrawal support is a complex matter. Teachers need to take into account the experience of the child when scheduling this form of intervention.

v) The location of withdrawal support

The physical design of the buildings at Barnes Primary School provide a number of shared, 'breakout areas'. Many of these are located within access routes. As a consequence, they are not the ideal location for more sustained withdrawal work (over 15 minutes) as there are frequent distractions. Whenever possible enclosed, or semi-enclosed, spaces should be used for this form of provision. Whilst many suitable spaces exist, demand for rooms often outstrips supply.

vi) Ensuring balance in entitlement

Some pupils, such as those with an educational statement who have a large number of support hours, spend a great deal of time in one-to-one learning situations with an adult. In this scenario there is a danger that the opportunity to engage in learning with their peers is restricted. Peer-to-peer reciprocal learning is an important element in the overall learning experience. It is therefore important that all pupils

have access to a full range of learning situations, including one-to-one, small group and whole class.

vii) Communication between staff

Effective communication between the classteacher and additional adults is essential if pupils are to make good progress. Time together is precious . . . and there is never enough of it! It is important that senior managers and class teachers are creative and resourceful in establishing opportunities for regular liaison.

viii) Precision in target setting

Individual education plans should contain SMART targets that are precise and specific, rather than generic and vague. As a general rule, at least 75% of the targets set should be achieved. The SENCO's role in the pupil planning meetings is an advisory one. Class teachers know their children best and it is their responsibility to come to these meetings with draft targets for discussion.

ix) Reducing movement and increasing focus

Beware of moving SEN pupils around too much! Effective classroom teachers tend to minimise unnecessary pupil movement within the classroom. In general, SEN pupils find it harder to achieve the optimal state for learning: relaxed alertness. They are likely to become unsettled, fidgety and restless more easily and more quickly. Put simply, they find it hard to focus and they find it hard to maintain focus. So, it is important that their movement from one location to another is managed efficiently and effectively. The onus should be on assisting them to maintain the calmness and composure that enables them to concentrate their attention upon their learning.

x) Reaching out to parents

A key facet of successful SEN practice is the establishment of a solid relationship between the teacher and the child's parents. This can often be highly skilled, sensitive work. The most effective teachers are able to reach out to these parents, gain their trust and establish an ongoing partnership centred around helping the child to overcome the barriers to learning the child faces.

xi) Fostering resilience

All SEN pupils have experienced failure; older SEN pupils have experienced such feelings for a longer period of time. As they get older they become increasingly aware that most other pupils find learning easier than they do. Inevitably this affects their self-esteem and their feeling of self-worth. These pupils require regular feedback that clearly indicates what they have achieved and what their next steps are. They also require pastoral guidance to assist them to persevere, develop 'learning stamina' and show resilience when faced with challenge.