

Good practice in setting targets for communication development across the school -a collaborative approach with school staff and speech and language therapy staff.

Helen Joy Forest Way School, Leicestershire

Aim

To improve communication outcomes for all pupils within the school by baselining effectively and setting achievable but challenging targets.

Dimensions of this study

The whole school population (79 pupils in September 2000) were used for this study and baselined before and after the implementation of the target setting to show value added progress. The study took place over one academic year. Three pupils with varied needs were used as examples to show the efficacy of the approach; one with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder, one with profound and multiple learning difficulties and one pupil of the most verbally able pupils in the school.

Target Setting in Special Schools

Reports of East Midlands DFES Regional Project Best Practice Research

Good practice in setting targets for communication development across the school – a collaborative approach with school staff and Speech and Language Therapists



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Summary of findings for this study

62 pupils (78.5%) made progress as measured on the school's baseline.

17 pupils (21.5%) made progress in the 'P' statements for speaking and listening

16 pupils (20.25%) remained the same on the baseline and 'P' statement

1 pupil (1.25%) regressed

Two of the three pupils used as examples for the study (one with ASD and one with well developed language skills) achieved all three of their communication targets and had new ones set during the academic year. One pupils (with PMLD) achieved one out of three targets. All made some progress on the baseline.

Characteristics of the School

Forest Way School is a co-educational special school for pupils aged 3 – 19 with severe learning disabilities including profound and multiple learning disabilities. The pupils represent a wide range of ability, they fall within the range of P1 to NC level 2 as measured on the school's baseline assessment.

20% of pupils have a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder, 10% have PMLD. Approximately 40% of pupils have a form of epilepsy. Some pupils exhibit challenging behaviour and some have complex medical conditions. Every effort is made to accommodate children with these difficulties. There have been no exclusions in the last seven years.

The majority of pupils are white, three are from an Asian background. There are slightly more boys than girls and 20% of pupils have free school meals.

There is a strong parental preference for the school in Leicestershire leading to an increase in number of pupils from 57 (May 1998) to 83 (April 2001) and the need for additional classes, accommodation and staffing. The school is now above average size for a school of its type. Pupils travel from a wide area due to parental preference, ten pupils are resident in Leicester City LEA. There is a broad socio-economic range represented in pupils' families and there is excellent support from parents and carers. The school has a full and active governing body. There is currently a waiting list of people from the community who wish to become governors at the school.

Pupils are placed at the school by Forest Way being named on their Statement of Special Educational Needs. They may come from home, specialist nurseries, special units or schools and from mainstream schools.

All pupils have an Individual Education Plan with targets in all curriculum areas which are updated monthly.

The school is well equipped; it has nine classrooms, two group rooms for 1:1 or small group work, a hall, a swimming pool, large interactive soft play room, white and dark sensory rooms, a physiotherapy area and medical room. There are Optimusic movement operated sound/light systems in the hall and swimming pool. Outside it has a large playground an adventure playground. There are separate play areas for the pupils in Key Stage 1 and outside two of the Key Stage 2 classes. There is a double garage to accommodate two school minibuses.

The pupils are organised into classes in Key Stages. There are 2 classes in Reception/KS1, 3 in KS2, 3 in KS3/4 and 1 Post 16 base. The pupils are then grouped (within Key Stages) according to receptive language level for all literacy, numeracy, PE, swimming and food technology lessons.

The school is well staffed. Classes are an average size of nine pupils with a teacher and appropriate number of support staff. Additionally, some pupils have 1:1 ancillary support. A specialist teacher for AAC and a specialist music teacher work at the school for one day every week. The staff are offered an extensive training programme provided in-house and from external speakers. The staff have a variety of skills and expertise. All teachers have a curriculum co-ordinator role within the school and in some areas have joint meeting regarding their specialism with teachers from other county special schools.

The Management team consists of the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and a Senior Teacher.

The school is extremely well supported by the local community.

Background to the study

Although communication development had always been a priority at the school, in September 2000 a senior teacher was appointed who was also a qualified speech and language therapist. This coincided with the publication of the new approach to the 'Provision of Speech and Language Therapy Services to Children with SEN' (November 2000 Deputy Headteacher and DfEE).

Existing practice towards developing pupils' communication skills was already well developed

- All staff have weekly Makaton training and the school is referred to as a signing school
- A communication baseline had been produced as part of the school's English curriculum (reference here) and redrafted in conjunction with the Speech and Language Therapy Department.
- Targets were set in the area of Speaking and Listening
- An AAC specialist works at the school 1 day per week to develop high and low technology communication aids for a group of pupils
- Pupils are grouped according to receptive language level for literacy, numeracy, PE and food technology sessions

The deployment to the Speech and Language Therapists (SALT) time was reviewed and in conjunction with the local Health Trust was adjusted as follows:

- The SALT had 3 designated sessions to the school and this was unlikely to increase in the foreseeable future

- Instead of spending many hours of this designated time in reassessing pupils and writing annual review reports the time was spent initially in baselining pupils with school staff and then setting joint targets for inclusion in the school's IEP and Annual Review report. As there was not need for writing lengthy reports this time could be spent in the classrooms working on joint targets with the staff, modelling strategies and approaches (there is a more detailed report on this in Section on Implementation)
- Training on all areas of communication was given to staff in training days and after school curriculum sessions

The School's Baseline assessment schedule was administered to all pupils in September/October 2000 and July 2001 (one academic year)

- The baseline is based on best practice from various sources
- The baseline consists of 5 stages of communication development each having a receptive and expressive component:
 1. Preverbal Pre-intentional
 2. Preverbal Intentional
 3. Early Verbal
 4. Combining Words
 5. Linking Sentences
- It records both vertical (developmental) and horizontal (level of skill acquisition) levels of progression
- This can be recorded in numerical form to show 'value added' progress. Each pupil is baselined within their level of competence and each stage can have a possible total score as follows:
 1. 280
 2. 378
 3. 329
 4. 392
 5. 592
- Therefore even very discreet areas of progression (or regression) can be recorded using the baseline
- The baseline looks at communication under 3 main headings from stage 3 **functional communication, language (syntactical) development and development of meaning (semantics).**
- Baseline results were linked to Performance Level Descriptors (QCA 2001) for the Speaking and Listening component of the English curriculum guidelines for pupils with learning difficulties
- Baseline results were moderated between school staff and SALT

The research questions

- Could pupil's progress in communication be measured using a value added baseline?
- Would specific target setting derived from the baseline aid this process?
- What other factors are important in improving communication outcomes for pupils with SLD?

The Study

- 79 pupils with SLD (the whole school population) were baselined in communication development in September/October 2000 and again in July 2001-07-02 Each pupil had up to 3 targets set directly derived from the baseline. One was to develop receptive skills and one to develop expressive the third was set to develop a functional skill.

- Targets were worked on in all areas of the school day in a variety of ways
- Targets were evaluated and updated monthly by school staff. The Speech and Language Therapist helped update targets on a sampling basis by joining teaching and support staff when possible at IEP update meetings after school.

Examples of 3 pupils

1. A pupil with autistic spectrum disorder and SLD

This pupil was placed at Stage 3 of the baseline (Early Verbal). He was able to use a few Makaton signs to get his needs met but had no functional speech. He could follow simple instructions involving everyday phrases. The targets set were as follows:

- *To exchange one symbol for a desired item in 1:1 sessions*
- *To interact (with 50;50 initiation between adult and pupil) with an adult for 10 minutes*
- *To follow instructions 'stand up', 'sit down' and 'give me' without visual prompt.*

2. A pupil with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

This pupil was placed in Stage 2 (Preverbal Intentional) of the baseline. She has severe physical disability and visual impairment. She could vocalise pleasure and displeasure and responded well to familiar voices. The targets set were as follows:

- *To choose a song with vocalisation and body movement*
- *To choose a toy or object using body movement and/or switch*
- *To understand Objects of Reference for drink time and hoist*

3. A pupil with well developed verbal skills

This pupil was placed at Stage 5 of the baseline (Linking Sentences). He was able to put sentences of up to 3 information carrying words together and could understand sentences of up to 4 information carrying words occasionally or in specific situations. The targets set for him were as follows:

- *To answer questions beginning why*
- *To ask for help when he misunderstands*
- *To ask questions beginning where*

Implementation

The setting of targets was not expected to automatically create improvement in pupils' communication. The implementation of strategies to achieve this was crucial in this respect. The following strategies were put into place.

1. Targets were typed up into curriculum groups of pupils, laminated and placed on all classroom walls where these pupils might be taught. This drew attention to the targets for particular pupils to all staff and acted as an 'aide memoire' for busy teachers.
2. Training was given to all staff on the communication needs of our pupils. This included receptive and expressive development and strategies, understanding the baseline, communication strategies for pupils with ASD, PMLD and the use of AAC.
3. The senior teacher and Speech and Language Therapist were available to answer queries and offer advice regarding target setting and communication strategies more widely

4. All curriculum groups of pupils had a specific speaking and listening lesson every week where the senior teacher taught alongside teaching staff to model strategies and approaches.
5. The Speech and Language Therapist was timetabled into classes and 'drinks times'. This meant that she was able to have contact with all the pupils during a school term. The time spent in classes was in all areas of the curriculum and proved a useful way of modelling strategies to achieve communication targets in various settings. It also allowed for observations of individual pupils and more discreet assessment of progress toward communication targets. It enabled the Speech and Language Therapist to become more involved in joint planning of lessons to work on targets across the curriculum.
6. A resource base was established containing teacher resources and texts and equipment to be used with pupils.
7. A spirit of celebration of achievement in communication targets was achieved due to the enthusiasm of staff in this way of working.
8. Targets were jointly reviewed monthly with teaching and support staff. The Speech and Language Therapist was involve din this process on a sampling basis due to time limitations.

Outcomes

Reception Key Stage 2

(25 pupils)

Table 2a Baseline Table 2b 'P' Level

Number of pupils	25					Number of pupils	25		21	
	16						16			
	7			16			7			
	6						6			
	5						5			
	4		6				4			
	3						3			4
	2				3		2			
	1						1			
	0	0					0	0		

Regressed Stayed the Improved Improved Regressed Stayed the Moved up

same 1-30 baseline 30-60 baseline same a 'P' level

points points

Key Stage 2

(25 pupils)

Table 2a Baseline Table 2b 'P' Level

Number of pupils	25						Number of pupils	25		21	
	16							16			
	7			16				7			
	6							6			
	5							5			
	4		6					4			
	3							3			4
	2				3			2			
	1							1			
	0	0						0	0		

Regressed Stayed the Improved Improved Regressed Stayed the Moved up

same 1-30 baseline 30-60 baseline same a 'P' level

points points

Key Stage 3 / 4

(31 pupils)

Table 3a Baseline Table 3b 'P' Level

Number of pupils	31						Number of pupils	31			
	26							26		26	
	10			24				10			
	6							6			

5						5			5
4		6				4			
3						3			
2						2			
1				1		1			
0	0					0	0		

Regressed Stayed the Improved Improved Regressed Stayed the Moved up

same 1-30 baseline 30-60 baseline same a 'P' level

points points

Post 16

(8 pupils)

Table 4a Baseline Table 4b 'P' Level

Number of pupils						Number of pupils				
8						8		8		
7						7				
6						6				
5			5			5				
4						4				
3						3				
2		3				2				
1						1				
0	0			0		0				

Regressed Stayed the Improved Improved Regressed Stayed the Moved up

same 1-30 baseline 30-60 baseline same a 'P' level

points points

Overall School Results

(79 pupils)

Table 3a Baseline Table 3b 'P' Level

Number of pupils	80						Number of pupils	80			
	70							70			
	60							60		61	
	50			53				50			
	40							40			
	30							30			
	20							20			17
	10		16		9			10			
	5							5			
	0	1						0	0		

Regressed Stayed the Improved Improved Regressed Stayed the Moved up

same 1-30 baseline 30-60 baseline same a 'P' level

points points