

Target setting for pupils with complex needs

Rosie Budd Ashfield School, Leicestershire

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Dimensions of this study

The study was conducted within four classes at Ash Field School. Three of these represent between them the complete Primary age range: Reception/KS1, KS2 (Years 3 and 4) and KS2 (Years 5 and 6); the fourth class comprises KS3 pupils with complex needs.

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Target Setting in Special Schools

Reports of East Midlands DFES Regional Project Best Practice Research

Target Setting for Pupils with Complex Needs

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Characteristics of the School

Ash Field School is a co-educational day and residential special school for pupils aged 4 - 19 whose main presenting difficulties are of a physical nature, accompanied by one or more of the following: medical, learning, communication, sensory and emotional needs. 76% have moderate, severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. The largest proportion of pupils with more complex needs is within the Primary Department. The current number on roll is 114.

The school has recently been awarded Beacon status, following the invitation to apply for this on the basis of a very successful OFSTED inspection 3 years ago and subsequent HMI visits. It is highly regarded by parents. During a recent consultative meeting on inclusion, Ash Field parents whose children have experienced mainstream settings universally expressed a preference for Ash Field. The governing body is full, active and supportive.

The school has approval from the DfES under the Excellence in Cities initiative to put in a joint bid with a local Secondary School for specialist college status.

71% of pupils are of white British ethnic background; of the others, the majority are of Indian/Sri-Lankan ethnic background. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds (33% have free school meals). Pupils are resident within the boundaries of the LEAs for Leicester City, Leicestershire or Rutland (the latter two LEAs have no parallel provision).

Placement at Ash Field is dependent on the school being named on a pupil's statement of educational needs. Pupils may previously have attended playgroups or other non-specialist pre-school provision, specialist nurseries, mainstream schools or other special schools. A few pupils, mainly in the younger age range, have dual placements with mainstream schools; others have previously experienced such dual placements.

The school is organised into three distinct Departments: Primary, Secondary and 17+, with a total of 19 classes. Class sizes vary between 4 and 11. In the Primary Department there is some setting within age groups for core subjects. In the Secondary Department the curriculum is taught by subject specialists where possible. The 17+ Department operates like an F.E. unit.

All pupils are entered for end of Key Stage assessments at the appropriate age. Secondary pupils may be entered for GCSE, COA, CLAIT or NSP. Students in the 17+ Department may be assessed under the LVF, ASDAN and YAS schemes.

Internal objective testing in English and Maths is carried out annually with the majority of pupils. Teacher assessments in English, Maths and Science are completed by teachers every half term, and in all other subjects annually. These are used to inform pupils' Annual Review Reports. All pupils have an Individual Education Plan with three or four targets, which are updated half-termly (more details under *Existing Practice follows DfEE Guidelines*).

The school has 16 classrooms, a hall, a therapy pool, a curriculum room, a resources room, a room for each group of therapists (physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists) and two medical rooms. In addition it has an 18-bed residential wing, which is used by 49% of pupils on a rota basis from Monday to Thursday during term times to develop independence skills and support homework. Cubs, Brownies and Youth Club are provided by youth workers and residential staff.

Outside, the Primary Department has a playground, and the 17+ Department has a patio with a greenhouse. A wheelchair-accessible nature trail has been constructed at the rear of the building, with a nature area that includes a pond. Within the Secondary building there is a quadrangle used for ball games. Older pupils may use the local public pool for swimming lessons; riding for the disabled is also available.

In term time regular residential trips are provided, in England or abroad, for pupils in upper KS2 and above. These include an annual stay at Stoke Mandeville for sports competitions.

Activities are available during school holidays (notably a summer Playscheme for younger children and an Activities Week for older pupils).

The Leadership Team is made up of the Head Teacher, Principal Teacher, three Heads of Department and Head of Micro Technology Assessment Centre. Teachers between them have the wide range of experience and skills needed in a school of this type. All teachers have a subject leadership role within the school and attend internal meetings each term for that subject and other subjects that they teach. English and Maths co-ordinators attend regular meetings with their counterparts in other special schools within the LEA, supported by relevant LEA Advisors.

Because of the high proportion of pupils with medical needs, the school has a full time nurse. It also has a part time specialist health visitor. The physiotherapy team is full time, occupational therapists attend two days a week and there is a speech therapist present for three days a week. There is a weekly orthotics clinic, and a wheelchair repairer attends one day a week.

The school has links with mainstream provision throughout the age range, and local businesses are supportive. Links have also been established with special schools in Tanzania and Australia.

Housed within the school building is the Micro Technology Assessment Centre which assesses pupils in mainstream and special schools within Leicester and Leicestershire. There are currently more than 450 pupils in mainstream settings who are accessing the curriculum using equipment installed by the Centre.

Background to the study

As described above, children with complex needs constitute only a proportion of the total number of pupils at Ash Field School. Although for consistency all pupils have IEP targets, for those with complex needs IEP targets (based increasingly on P levels and their subdivisions) form the main way of charting progress. Alongside the results of GCSEs and other more traditional forms of assessment, statistics from IEP targets have recently been incorporated into whole school target setting in the manner shown below.

It is thus opportune to question the efficacy of IEP target setting in addressing children's individual needs.

Existing practice follows DfEE guidelines

- In December 1998, teachers, support staff and some school governors were given training in writing 'SMART' targets for IEPs, with emphasis on the components of the 'SMART' acronym (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related).
- Teachers are accustomed to setting IEP targets for each pupil in English, Maths and PSHE, with an additional target in another subject area (eg. ICT) if appropriate. These targets are reviewed every half term and replaced if necessary (see diagram on previous page).
- It has recently become school policy for teachers to use PIVATs for assessment; these are available for teachers to use as material for IEP targets if they so wish.

Modifications made for this study draw on good practice from the Foundation Stage

- An increasing number of pupils in the school have developmental levels that place them well within the Foundation Stage.

- At the specialist nursery in Leicester, combined short term planning/ observation sheets have been used to provide feedback on children's performance in specific targets.
- Such an approach is ratified by research on assessment methods within the Foundation Stage, which advocate the use of observations.
- This approach is also in harmony with the Foundation Stage approach of targeting IEP objectives through play.
- Three adapted short term planning sheets were therefore drawn up (for Literacy, Maths and other subjects) combining overall objectives for the lesson, individual targets and observations on pupils' performance.

Modifications allow for the complexity of the pupil population within the school

Because the modified planning sheets are versatile, targets can be set for pupils working at more advanced levels as well as for those with more complex needs.

Modifications are in line with analysis of data from previous IEP target setting

Over the last year it was found that IEP targets in PSHE were achieved less than other targets. The modified planning sheets could be useful for incorporating PSHE targets into other areas of the curriculum.

The research questions

- Would the individual targets on these short term plans facilitate the inclusion of IEP targets within the broader curriculum?
- Could previous IEP targets be repeated and consolidated by this means?
- Would the completion of observations on the plans provide evidence of the levels that pupils have achieved in the various curriculum areas?
- What other issues would be raised by the use of these amended short term plans?

The Study

- In 2001 a decision was made to scrutinise the effectiveness of the short term planning sheets that had been introduced in one Reception/KS1 class the previous year.
- Samples of the amended planning sheets (blank) are enclosed.
- The *Targets* column may include IEP targets or other targets that are relevant to individual pupils.
- *Observations* are normally of the pupils' performance with respect to the given targets (but they may include other observations of the pupils' performance).
- The circles may be used for writing the initials of members of support staff if the teacher intends them to make the observations on particular pupils.
- In May 2001 the same amended planning sheets were trialled in three other classes

- The teachers in these classes were provided with guidelines for using the sheets (they were already accustomed to using observations as a form of assessment)..
- They were also given a questionnaire to complete immediately after using the sheets.
- Two of these teachers were subsequently interviewed to clarify their views on the sheets. The classes of these two teachers are described in some detail below, along with the Reception/ KS1 class mentioned above.

Three of the classes in which the trial took place

1. A Reception/KS1 class

In this class there are eight pupils, all with physical disabilities, and with varying degrees of cognitive functioning. Their levels of attainment are between P2 and P5. All have medical conditions. All receive support from a speech therapist. Three are visually impaired.

2. A KS2 (Years 5 and 6) class

There are eight pupils with physical disabilities in this class. Five of the pupils are working below NC Level 1 (P4 to P8). Three of these are visually impaired and one has communication difficulties. Of the three higher-attaining pupils, two study core subjects in a separate set.

3. A KS3 class

This class comprises seven pupils with physical disabilities. Of these, four are working below NC Level 1 (P4 to P7). Five pupils have medical conditions, and two are visually impaired. Two teachers work with this class; both used the trial short term plans.

Implementation

The following strategies were implemented to support the operation of the study:

1. The Head Teacher and Head of the Primary Department were informed about the amendments made to the standard short term planning sheets.
2. The two support staff in the class where the main study was conducted were given brief training in using the planning sheets (these staff had previously received training in recording observations of children).
3. On completion of the study, teachers in the four classes completed an identical questionnaire ; two of them were afterwards interviewed.
4. The two support staff previously mentioned were interviewed.
5. A decision was made to purchase additional resources, in keeping with the principles of the study, to be made available to teachers participating in the study and other teachers with pupils operating at the lower levels. These will be ordered as soon as possible (they were not in use during this study so did not affect its outcome).
 - Some items chosen will lend themselves to being used to support low level targets through various curriculum areas eg. imaginative play props to encourage co-operative play and role play.
 - Others will enable access to co-operative and turn taking activities for those pupils with severe physical disabilities eg. a switch-operated spinner.

· Yet others have been chosen because of their appeal to pupils working over a range of levels. eg. miniature play sets that could develop simple or more complex targets.

6. The teachers involved in the study completed the planning sheets as shown in the example below (sections originally filled in by hand have been typed for clarity).

Outcomes

1. Do the individual targets on these short term plans facilitate the inclusion of IEP targets within the broader curriculum?

Of the five teachers questioned, one felt that filling in individual targets would be too laborious, and too detailed for pupils working at higher levels. Three of the other teachers find they can often simplify planning by setting IEP targets that are directly related to the planned curriculum; however, these teachers have difficulty doing this for the pupils at P5 or below. One of these teachers has continued to use the short term plans after the trial because she likes having the space to focus on each individual, even though she does not use the plans specifically to ensure that IEP targets are included. Another teacher felt it would be useful to use them once a week, to ensure a regular focus on the progress of individuals.

The remaining teacher, whose class consists entirely of Reception/ KS1 pupils operating at P5 or below, likes using the planning sheets to make sure IEP targets do not get overlooked in the play-based approach to teaching and assessing the National Curriculum that is particularly appropriate for this age group. This teacher was using PIVATs as the basis for IEP targets; even with this as a common basis she found that targets were often idiosyncratic and therefore hard to include without planning for them.

The most difficult curriculum area for incorporating IEP targets was cited by the four other teachers as PSHE, as this is often developed through other subject areas. However, the teacher using the amended planning sheets found this no more difficult to include than the other subjects.

The general planning sheet was not used by any of the teachers for focusing on IEP targets.

2. Can previous IEP targets be repeated and consolidated by this means?

Again, the responses to this varied. Because Maths and English topics are revisited, some teachers felt that pupils generally have the opportunity to consolidate prior learning, and can do so without reference to previous IEP targets. One teacher felt that she did not consolidate IEP targets sufficiently when using weekly plans. PSHE was again found to be particularly hard to consolidate.

Again, it was the teacher with the group of young children performing at P5 and below who found the trial planning sheets most useful for revisiting previous targets. This teacher felt that she could improve this aspect by being more systematic.

3. Does the completion of observations on the plans provide evidence of the levels that pupils have achieved in the various curriculum areas?

Replies to this were unanimously positive. Teachers felt that for the lowest ability pupils this form of evidence is probably the best we have. All teachers agreed that photos rarely capture the significant moment that demonstrates a child's ability; and that for pupils who are unable to produce written evidence a series of observations, recorded very soon after the events, can be a useful substitute.

Again, one teacher sounded a note of caution: for the evidence to be good, the planning sheets need to be filled in regularly, and this would be time-consuming. This teacher would not want to make this time commitment unless other areas of planning are reduced.

4. What other issues are raised by the use of these short term plans?

The two support staff who were interviewed like using the plans because they can quickly see what work is to be done even if the teacher is busy. One of them pointed out that it was easy for the sheet to get 'buried' by the equipment being used for the lesson, and suggested that it should be attached to a book stand or similar to avoid this. Both were happy to refer just to the individual target for the child they are working with, and did not feel the need to know the overall objective of the lesson (the Medium Term Plan has to be consulted to find this). They were concerned that they rarely had time to complete the *Observations* section because they have to be busy with pupils' physical needs; however, they were happy to relay this information to the teacher for her to record.

Although supply teachers were not specifically targeted in this study, one such teacher made the unsolicited comment that the individual targets made it easy for him to know exactly what to do with each child.

All the teachers felt it important that planning sheets should be very versatile, to cater for the needs of different teachers and different classes.

The following advantages and disadvantages were highlighted by various teachers who were involved in this project:

Advantages	Disadvantages
Having observations on one page for the whole group makes it easier to plan the next lesson.	Observations are unwieldy to transfer for writing reports, as several/ many pages need to be viewed.
Observations are clearly related to the context of the lesson in which they take place.	Writing observations takes time, either from the lesson or from the teacher's break afterwards.
Little effort is needed to use these plans for directing support staff.	A lot of effort is needed overall (for completing these plans on top of other planning, making resources etc.)
Support staff with training in an Early Years approach have usually been taught how to conduct and record observations, so use these plans readily.	Teachers, even those with Early Years training, have often not been taught how to conduct and record observations, so may have difficulty using these plans.
The plans are versatile: e.g. if time is short the individual targets can be omitted; the observations can then be completed in <i>general</i> terms.	The plans need to be modified if used for a class that has only a small proportion of lower achieving pupils, to allow space for the overall lesson objective to be recorded and to create more space for the activities.

Summary of Outcomes

Completing the trial plans was found to involve a significant time commitment; this was most worth while if the plans were used with pupils operating in the middle or low P levels. They could also be used, perhaps occasionally, for incorporating PSHE IEP targets into the curriculum. The support staff who have used these plans are positive about them.

The key strands of this approach

- Training in observation skills for all staff using the forms
- Time for teachers to complete the forms and translate the information from them into reports
- Adequate resources, so that targets can be meaningful
- Availability of present and previous IEP targets.
- Format that is consistent with other planning forms in use in the school, so that supply teachers can easily interpret them.
- Format that can be adapted to suit the needs of different classes and teachers (e.g. through availability on disk)

Further reading

- Bennett, N., Desforges, C., Cockburn, A. and Wilkinson, B. (1984) *The Quality of Pupil Learning Experiences* N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Blenkin, G. and Kelly, A.V. (Eds) (1992) *Assessment in Early Childhood Education*, London: Paul Chapman
- Hurst, V. (1997 2nd edn) *Planning for Early Learning*, London: Paul Chapman
- Moyles, J. (1989) *Just Playing? The role and status of play in early childhood education* Milton Keynes: Open University Press