

# HEADTEACHER

## UPDATE

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# Excellence in SEN

Practical advice and examples to help teachers and school leaders support their SEN learners, ranging from classroom practice, identifying student needs and Pupil Premium overlaps, to guidance on the roles of the SENCO and named SEN governor...

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# Supporting SEN best practice

**W**elcome to *Headteacher Update's* annual Excellence in SEN supplement.

SEN and inclusion form a key focus in *Headteacher Update* and throughout the academic year we publish a range of best practice content looking at effective practice and innovative approaches.

This includes topics such as pedagogy and classroom advice for teachers, CPD and support for SENCOs and other senior leaders, and case studies of innovative and effective work from schools across the country. Continuing these themes, this supplement includes:

- Rethinking the SEN labels in your classroom – a diagnosis is only a signpost on the way to effective provision. Practical advice for in the classroom. **See pages 3-5**
- Supporting your SENCOs – how school leaders can help

SENCOs to play a central role in our schools.

**See page 6**

- Starting out as SENCO – advice, ideas and approaches to help those new to the SENCO role.

**See pages 8-9**

- The named governor for SEND – a look at what the role entails and how to support and challenge your school and

SENCO to ensure effective practice.

**See pages 10-11**

- Pupil Premium – with clear links between Pupil Premium and SEN, we look at identifying need and working with parents.

**See pages 12-13**

- Case study – Kingsley St John Primary School has adopted a

range of approaches to support its pupils living with autism.

**See pages 14-15**

For more SEN best practice guidance and case studies, be sure to check out *Headteacher Update* magazine every half-term and our regular updates online. You can also download last year's Excellence in SEN supplement via the link below.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ For *Headteacher Update's* archive of SEN best practice articles, visit [www.headteacher-update.com/best-practice/sen/693079/](http://www.headteacher-update.com/best-practice/sen/693079/)
- ▶ Our 2018 Excellence in SEN supplement offers whole-school guidance & practical classroom advice to support inclusion & SEN. A pdf is available for free download via <http://bit.ly/2J8ZRKz>

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# Rethinking the SEN labels in your class

Every SEN child is different and their diagnosis is only a signpost on the way to effective provision. **Daniel Sobel** and **Sara Alston** explain how teachers must focus on the strengths and needs of SEN students, rather than seeing only their difficulties...

**M**y colleague Sara Alston and I are embarking on a new book in which we hope to fix all the ills of the SEN world! It is perhaps a surprising collaboration as we both of us grew up being told we were thick, stupid and lazy and would never amount to anything.

In fact, I have ADHD and Sara has significant dyslexia. Happily, nowadays teachers immediately understand and know what these behaviours and labels mean.

Over the years, Sara and I have learnt a range of coping strategies and we understand how to create a supportive environment to help us overcome our challenges. However, for children to achieve this they require and depend on

adult understanding and support. This article aims to share some of our thinking about this difficult subject. There are many problems that we face, including the following three issues:

- Lots of children are given a diagnosis which is then seen as the answer. However, a diagnosis does not tell the teacher how to support the child. It can act as a signpost but it does not provide a “map” or detail the support and adjustments the child needs to learn and be happy.
- Confusingly, many children are given the same diagnosis but present with different needs in the classroom (while children with different diagnoses can present with similar needs).

- Teachers need support and confidence to move beyond the label and see the whole child and their strengths and barriers to learning so that they are best able to support them.

## The trouble with labels

A diagnosis of autism spectrum condition (ASC), or any other difficulty, does not necessarily make a difference to a child’s needs in the classroom.

It is a matter of identifying what information is relevant to teachers and how best to use it to support children.

Hopefully, most teachers would have begun to put support in place for the child long before any diagnosis. Yet often the diagnosis is seen as a magic answer when it is

just a milestone on the way to supporting a child.

One example of the different “types” of SEN shows the principle in action. Each of these students has an ASC diagnosis but presents in different ways to the teacher in the classroom:

- An obsessive student who is: highly routine-bound, lines things up, struggles with labels on clothes, uninterested in peers, only interested in talking about their favourite topic (often at length).
- A girl who is: desperate to fit in, fixated on certain friends, managing well in school, having regular meltdowns at home.
- A child with high social intent who is: keen to learn social rules and applies them to make friends, interested in people, but struggles to manage to maintain relationships, frustrated by their “social gaffs” (leading to meltdowns). Similarly, consider three students with diagnoses of dyslexia, ADHD and ASC who can all present with the same challenges in the classroom, namely:
  - Poor focus.
  - Easily distracted.
  - Poor memory and word-finding.

- Misunderstanding of language.
- Issues with sensory overload.
- Low self-esteem.
- Struggles with self-organisation and managing routines.
- Struggles with friendships.

I recently attended a post-adoption meeting with a parent whose child had hit crisis. The various professionals were using up our very limited time discussing if the child met the criteria for a diagnosis of Attachment issues or ADHD or foetal alcohol syndrome or sensory processing difficulties. The discussion was going nowhere.

However, by focusing on identifying the child's needs and finding ways to support these, we could adequately find ways of simply helping the child to get on. This was an example of a child with a range of complex needs from a collection of co-occurring diagnoses. The challenge for the class teacher is to meet those needs so that they and others in their class can learn. We need to start with the child and their needs, not the diagnosis.

Having said that, one really important impact of a diagnosis is explained by Sara about herself: "For me receiving the diagnosis of dyslexia at 11 gave me an explanation as to why I found learning so difficult. For my whole primary school career, I was told that I was thick or lazy or both. I had always felt that it was not true but could think of no other explanation of why I found reading and writing so difficult. I was given a 'word' that explained and enabled me to find the courage to go on."

We believe that SEN practice needs two fundamental actions to help us shift away from the old way of thinking about diagnosis (as relevant to teachers).

First, we believe that SEN practice needs to shift away from the deficit model of SEN to one which encompasses strengths as well as difficulties, leading to a more personalised approach.

Second, instead of focusing on the child's global issues, we must think about their journey through the phases of a lesson and the day.

### Reject the deficit model

The most common question for teachers when told a child in their new class has SEN is "what do they find difficult?"

Even as a SENCO, when told a child with SEN is joining the school, my first questions tend to focus on the ways they demonstrate their SEND and the support they need. We rarely ask about their strengths and motivations.

Different people display their special needs in different ways and there are strengths that come with most non-neurotypical development. Views of SEND are often polarised. For example, popular views of autism include the anti-social genius like Alan Turing, the Rain Man-type savant or the locked-in non-verbal "head-banger". For most the truth comes somewhere in between.

We need to avoid developing a "special need as superpower" view and see children as whole people with strengths and difficulties, not just a descriptor of need.

A quick activity you can easily try in your school is to see what advantages your teachers perceive children with SEN as having. Here are some examples:

- **ASC:** Attention to detail and observational skills, logical,

good long-term memory and recall of details, unswayed by peer pressure, reliable, loyal, honest, non-judgemental (takes others at face value), knowledge of routines and desire for accuracy and order, ability to hyper-focus, thinks outside the box (novel approaches to tasks), visual learning, vocabulary (though they do not always understand the words they use).

- **ADHD:** Curious, highly engaged in the moment, energetic, creative, persistent, adventurous, big-picture thinking, thinking outside the box, copes well with unpredictability.
- **Dyslexia:** Visual thinking, creative and interconnected thinking, navigation, big-picture thinking, pattern recognition (useful for

prediction), spatial knowledge, sharper peripheral vision, narrative reasoning, verbal communication, good at reading people.

It is important to remember that different people show different strengths and co-occurring diagnoses produce different combinations of strengths and difficulties.

For example, a year 3 boy with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and an ASC diagnosis suffers significant social anxiety. He has a near photographic memory which means that he has excellent knowledge and recall, if not understanding. We celebrated this skill which gave him increased confidence and motivation to try to new things.

Recently, he entered and was runner up in a whole school Spelling Bee. After a detailed run through of what would happen, supported by visuals, and by keeping his trusted class teacher in sight for support, Paul stood up in front of the whole school and answered the questions. Our belief

your most challenging students (and how do you know)?

I hope that if Sara and I were in your classroom you would see us as individuals and identify our strengths and not just see us as labels and difficulties. Most importantly, remember that we have a fragile self-esteem that needs boosting because we are worried that we are "not good enough" and will never be.

### The daily learning journey

Ryan bursts into the classroom with a zealous hyperactivity inversely proportionate to his ability to participate in the lesson.

His teacher's cortisol level spike and she thinks of the after-school drink she has promised herself. "NO, THIS IS YOUR SEAT," she shouts as he tussles with Callum over the chair near the window.

As soon as he sits, he gets up again grabs Monique's pen and holds it up in the air protesting: "Miss, Miss, this is MY pen."

She screams: "SIT DOWN and SHUT UP!" She remembers how much she hates Ryan.

Ryan sits momentarily until the lesson begins when he gets up again: "I'm trying to find my pen Miss." This is met with the exhaustedly frustrated reply: "RYAN! GET OUT!"

Before we consider Ryan's SEN profile, there are two priorities which need to be addressed: his preparedness for learning and his ability to "settle" (and of course we need to think about the teacher's mental health and wellbeing too).

Unless Ryan can participate in the first 10 minutes of the class, at least, we cannot support Ryan's other needs and learning.

At this point, instead of focusing on Ryan's global issues, we must think about his journey through the phases of a lesson and the school day. The anecdote above demonstrates the first of these phases – transition, entering the classroom and preparedness to learn.

### Supporting Ryan

We may assume Ryan is presenting with ADHD, but he could equally be challenged by Attachment, sensory difficulties, executive functioning issues, ASC etc. What we need to think about here is how to get the lesson off to a great start for everyone.

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“ The challenge for the class teacher is to meet those needs so that they and others in their class can learn. We need to start with the child and their needs, not the diagnosis ”

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and recognition of this strength, supported by specific strategies, gave Paul the confidence and motivation to manage his anxiety and succeed, building his confidence for the future.

### Some practical takeaways

- Consider what your teachers understand about specific, personalised strengths and challenges beyond the diagnostic label.
- What ramifications would there be for your classroom teachers if you banned the use of medical diagnostic language (changing it to an entirely personalised version as we describe above)?
- Finally, can you answer this question with your senior leadership team: to what extent are your teachers trained to meet the needs of



The biggest challenge for good SEN practice is coming up with strategies which are going to be quick and easy for the teacher, rather than adding to their stress and burden. The mantra of any sustainable inclusive practice should be: “A lot to think about but little to do.”

Therefore, what do we need Ryan’s teacher to understand deeply but practise in the smartest, most efficient way?

To answer this question, let us think about Ryan’s journey into the classroom and then his first five minutes. What is going on for him?

His teacher needs to both understand and remember that however irritating and frustrating Ryan’s behaviour is that it is unlikely to be deliberately designed to wind her up. Behaviour is communication – when we do not have or cannot use words for our feelings, we communicate through our behaviour.

So, what is Ryan communicating? It could be anxiety, frustration or even excitement about what has happened before he came into the room – be that playing football at break, a successful science lesson, a period of exclusion in the deputy head’s office, an argument at home, or simply navigating a crowded corridor to reach the classroom. All these events and many more will influence Ryan’s behaviour before even he reaches the classroom door.

Once Ryan enters the room, he has to manage a whole new set of questions and emotions arising in response to them. Where do I sit? What is going to happen in this lesson? Will I be able to understand what I need to do? Will I fail? Will I look stupid? Will others laugh at me? Do I want others to laugh at me? If they are laughing at me, does that mean they are my friends? Will I get any help with my learning? And so on...

Just managing this internal dialogue is exhausting and stressful. Particularly when the thought that “my teacher hates me” is added. Ryan will know that she is stressed by him, even if he cannot understand or name her emotion. Her anxiety about his presence will add to Ryan’s anxiety, setting off a vicious circle of negative emotion.

His teacher needs to try and see

those first few moments from Ryan’s point of view and then support him to manage that maelstrom of emotion. By changing the narrative of that transition, she can begin to reclaim her classroom and control of the lesson. In general, we can assume that all children thrive on a routine, predictability and (most importantly) clarity.

### Some practical takeaways

Unfortunately, there are no silver bullets. A lot of what we are going to say is simply “good ol’ pedagogy”. Indeed, believe it or not, all good inclusive teaching is just “good teaching”. We need to make sure Ryan feels respected, his anxiety is managed, and the start of the lesson runs smoothly for him. So, we need to:

- **Meet and greet:** The teacher stands by the door and greets Ryan with a big smile and a warm, friendly “Hello, how are you?” making him feel welcome and wanted. Also, it gives her an opportunity to assess his emotional state and readiness to learn and plan her response.

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“Unless Ryan can participate in the first 10 minutes of the class, at least, we cannot support Ryan’s other needs and learning”

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- **Adapt the room to meet the child’s needs:** The teacher can reduce Ryan’s stress coming into the room by having a seating plan and sticking to it. Ryan will need to be reminded where he sits as he comes in. This needs to be a clear polite instruction, not a request as that gives room for confusion. Consider more imaginative responses too – Ryan might be allowed to stand at the back, or be allowed to walk the room before settling. Why try and


make a child who cannot sit still try to sit still if it is not absolutely necessary for the lesson?

- **Clear consistent starting routine for the lesson:** This should be a simple activity that can help Ryan settle – it could be that we hand him a word search (which he loves doing) the moment he walks in the room. A “settling task” that he likes is a way of cutting through the whole process of him having to get ready, unpack, sit in his seat and settle which he clearly struggles with.
- **Role in the room:** An easy way of achieving both a sense of predictable routine and “you are important to this class” is to give Ryan a job to do at the beginning of the class. It could be to hand-out any materials or work. This makes him feel good, supports him to settle and could provide some “heavy load” to help with his sensory needs.
- **Be clear what is going to happen:** The teacher should use a visual timetable for the start of lessons to remind Ryan what will happen and keep this visible throughout the lesson so that all children can track their progress.
- **Consider a staggered start:** If the teacher assesses at the door that Ryan needs five minutes of calm time before he starts the lesson, she needs to find a way to provide it (a simple walk up and down the now calm corridor or sitting at the back of the class with a book or drawing a picture may be enough). Alternatively, let him into the room first so that he can find his seat and sort himself out when it is quiet.

This should not be in front of peers and publicly shameful but done respectfully and with prior agreement. We should encourage Ryan to slowly take ownership about how he is feeling and consider his readiness.

- **Provide the resources:** For example, can you always have a pen available so that Ryan is not stressed by looking for or not being able to find his own? As a priority, we must help Ryan’s teacher to break out of this negative cycle. A chat with someone they both trust to reset expectations and to allow Ryan to say what he needs can work wonders. What is important is that he feels his teacher is interested in making this better.

The easy solution for some might be to plonk a teaching assistant next to Ryan, but this can do a disservice to the relationship between Ryan and his teacher. Ryan must learn that he “belongs” and is able to participate rather than feeling babysat with a teaching assistant.

By rethinking SEN into phases of a lesson in this way, we hope all teachers can be inclusive in their practice in easy, sustainable and ultimately more enjoyable ways. 

*Daniel Sobel is founder of Inclusion Expert which provides SEND, Pupil Premium and looked-after children reviews, training and support. You can find his previous articles for SecEd via <http://bit.ly/2jwoKP8>*

*Sara Alston is an experienced SENCO who also works as an SEND and safeguarding consultant and trainer at Inclusion Expert.*



# Supporting your SENCOs

There is plenty that school leaders can do to support their SENCOs to meet the ever-increasing demands of the role. SEN expert and NASENCO tutor **Abigail Gray** explains

**T**he role of the SENCO has changed quite a bit in the years since I was working in the role.

My own early career was spent as a SENCO in a mainstream inner city school and it would appear that each major educational shift in the two decades since has made this role more central, more complex and more demanding.

I now spend a lot of time working with groups of new SENCOs as a consultant and a tutor on Best Practice Network's National Award for SEN Coordination (NASENCO) and find myself increasingly convinced that the effective leadership and management of SEN is a key factor underlying a successful and thriving school.

The expectations for SENCOs are set out in just over a page of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). Notably, the role of the SENCO, unlike that of the headteacher, has to be filled by a qualified teacher and one with a Master's level qualification.

Armed with qualified teacher status and the national award, SENCOs must take on this operational, strategic and advisory role in delivering SEN provision alongside the headteacher and the governors.

The word most often repeated is "liaising" – this appears at least four times in the role description. For the machine of SEN provision to work it seems that the SENCO must act as a cog at its centre, ensuring the interconnections are both precise and productive.

While these connections clearly include senior colleagues, external agencies and parents, arguably the

key connection underpinning effective school-wide provision is that made with teachers.

Without collaboration with teachers, how else might a SENCO deliver on their responsibility to "oversee" and "coordinate" the provision and deliver a "graduated approach" including the identification of SEN? After all, every teacher is a teacher of pupils with SEN. That being true, the SENCO has a legitimate if somewhat onerous role with regards to the performance and professional development of their colleagues, including senior ones.

Yet we know from the 2018 report by Bath Spa University, Nasen and the National Education Union – *It's about time* – that SENCOs are still not necessarily members of the senior leadership team, particularly in secondary settings where this was true of 70 per cent of respondents (Curran et al, 2018).

It is hard for me to see the logic of configuring a school-wide, strategic role – one with budgetary, legal, external and internal lines of accountability – outside the key management structures that exist to create, monitor and evaluate a school's key mission.

Is it possible that our message – that effective, compassionate and aspirational SEN provision benefits everyone and not just the minority – is still unclear?

I have often written about the difference between SEN provision and other school departments. It is clear that SEN does not function like a limb – it cannot be isolated and reset in the same way. To be successful it must be integral. SEND provision may be overseen by the

SENCO, but it is expressed by all teachers and understood by those children with additional needs in the starkest terms of acceptance or rejection, inclusion or exclusion, future or failure. So, what can be done to support SENCOs in their role?

## They need authority

It is not simply about competency. Training and qualification guidelines considered that, in order to be successful, it is necessary for SENCOs to be supported by senior colleagues, whether they are part of the senior team or not.

Without the necessary authority to do their job, which let us not forget is to advise, to liaise, to coordinate, it is impossible to manage a complex, school-wide operation. It is surprising how often competency is stymied by systems that fail to recognise the need for genuine delegation, effectively neutralising impact because there is insufficient access to decision-makers and decision-making.

## They need access

SENCOs need access to their teaching colleagues – genuine regular opportunities for meaningful interactions about pupil needs, resources and strategies and also to share the school's approach and processes for monitoring, recording and reviewing the progress of pupils with identified or emerging needs.


The rationale for the school's approach to SEND should be clear to everyone. Good CPD is relevant, and not always about extending knowledge into undiscovered realms, but about deepening understanding of the immediate

context. Making a clear plan for points of contact around SEN allows for considered sharing of information.

## They need time to reflect

This is vital. The SEND Information Report should be known by and relevant to all. Sharing the review process for the SEND Information Report is an important aspect of evaluating and improving the operation and coordination of provision.

## Conclusion

The *It's about time* report reveals that SENCOs are both isolated and inundated, yet at the same time deeply committed to their pupils. The risk of course is that this way of working becomes unsustainable and that many will leave the profession. To stem this tide school leaders must do all they can to ensure that SENCOs are in a position to thrive in their roles. 

*Abigail Gray is a SEN consultant and course tutor on the National Award for SEN Coordination (NASENCO), run by Best Practice Network. Abigail has 25 years' SEN teaching experience and is the author of a number of articles. Her first book, Effective Differentiation, was published by Routledge in May 2018. Visit [www.senworks.co.uk](http://www.senworks.co.uk)*

## SENCO support: A checklist for school leaders

Is your SENCO isolated or supported? Abigail Gray offers some key questions to ask:

- ▶ Is SEND a permanent agenda item for the senior leadership team?
- ▶ Is there regular SEND CPD for all staff?

- ▶ Does our SENCO work directly with staff teams/individuals?
- ▶ Is there a SEND handbook for staff?
- ▶ Is the SEND Information Report process shared?
- ▶ Is our SENCO part of staff induction?
- ▶ Are staff supplied with

- contextual SEND data (Department for Education statistics, for example)?
- ▶ Is our SENCO on the senior leadership team?
- ▶ Does our SENCO hold the National Award? What about other relevant specialist qualifications?



### FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*, Department for Education, January 2015: <http://bit.ly/27yee0p>
- ▶ *It's about time: The impact of SENCO workload on the professional and the school*, Curran, Moloney, Heavey & Boddison, 2018: <http://bit.ly/2yF4VhN>
- ▶ For details of Best Practice Network's NASENCO programme, visit [www.bestpracticenet.co.uk/nasenco](http://www.bestpracticenet.co.uk/nasenco)

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# Getting started as a SENCO

How should those newly appointed to the SENCO role approach the challenges ahead? **Sean Harris** speaks to two SENCOs to get their ideas, advice and best practice tips

**S**itting in my office completing the school Pupil Premium action plan, Kieran knocks on my door for the third time. The previous visits were to discuss *Star Wars*. I simply do not have the time to discuss Jedi with him, otherwise Darth Line Manager will be speaking to me about my lack of strategy for Pupil Premium expenditure next year.

But this time Kieran is angry because he has a detention for not handing in his homework. Kieran is demonstrating to my office door that he is willing to embrace the dark side. He is angry and his Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) reminds colleagues and I that only a couple of strategies work when Kieran has these moments.

The SENCO arrives and offers Kieran a new hope, escorting him away with her soft tones and explaining that she can help him. Kieran goes away with little fuss. Meanwhile, two carers and other professionals arrive for a meeting with the SENCO regarding a different child.

However, the SENCO is not under pressure and manages to resolve the issue with Kieran promptly before attending the review meeting. I return to my work asking myself, who'd be a SENCO?!

Statistics from the Department for Education (DfE) show that the number of pupils with SEND has risen for the third year in a row (July 2019). With an estimated 1.3 million pupils recognised with SEND nationally and on-going calls for more funding, it is evident that the role of the SENCO is being placed under increasing pressure in our schools.

In seeking advice for this article, I spoke with two SENCOs. First, Jacqui Johnson offers her advice to those newly appointed to the role, and then Laura Robinson offers some general ideas and guidance for new SENCOs.

## The first 100-days

It has been a busy time for Jacqui Johnson, assistant headteacher

and SENCO at James Calvert Spence College in Northumberland. She joined the school this past year following her successful impact as a SENCO in North Tyneside and has been promptly appointed as the lead SENCO for Northumberland local authority based on her impact as a leader for SEND in the school. Jacqui offered her guidance for SENCOs new to the role.

### Pre-appointment

Jacqui found the following steps to be critical as she prepared to take up her new SENCO role. She said: "There is a danger that without taking steps such as these you will be less responsive to pupil needs from day one and be too reactive."

- Make sure that you visit the local authority website for the district where you will be working. Who are the key players? Put faces to the different roles as you will soon be relying on knowing who these people are and will be in regular contact with them. Take a moment to introduce yourself and the school where you will be serving.
- Find out who the head or lead of the local education psychology service is. Introduce yourself to this person via email or telephone. This person and this team will be critical to the support that you offer children and families.
- Examine how the SEND services operate by visiting the website, exploring policy documents and talking to any school contacts you have in this area. The services may operate very differently to your existing MAT or local authority, so it is important that you are up-to-speed to ensure a quick transition into the role.
- Try and visit the new school or setting as much as is possible. This will help you to feel more at ease about joining the new community and making your face known to colleagues and other professionals that you will be relying on in due course.
- Identify the name and contact

details of your virtual school head (they may be active on social media) and make a point of introducing yourself and visiting them if time allows.

### 'Once more into the breach'

The first few weeks are demanding. They will be busy and are a time for review, dialogue and effective communication:

- Communication is key. Consider publishing a newsletter to staff in the first few weeks with a focus on key pupils and the steps that you and the team are taking for this child. Jacqui found that even the catering and caretaking staff read her newsletter to ensure that they too were well equipped for interacting with the child.
- Child-centred meetings are key. Ensure that you block out some time in the first few weeks to informally meet with the children. This will be critical to helping you draft a pen portrait of each child and hear first-hand about their own experience of the classroom.
- Make sure that you map-out the teacher referral route for children with SEND in the school if there is not one already in place. It also helps to make this pupil-friendly so that children can self refer for support when they need to.
- Meet the parents! Making links with families is vital. Jacqui explained: "I sent out a letter introducing myself to families and said I was looking forward to meeting them. I got parents coming in that wouldn't usually and it didn't feel like an assessment to them because it was an initial informal discussion over coffee. It took time, but it is really worth it in the long term."
- Review the existing paperwork and ask yourself if the documentation is accessible for you, for parents and for colleagues. Ask if the paperwork is compliant.
- Remember that it is about teaching and learning – Jacqui made a point of immersing herself into various teaching and learning groups both





within and outside of the school community. She explained: "It is important to ensure that you understand pedagogy and understand how children learn. This is about teaching the children that struggle with learning the most."

## Effective working practices

Laura Robinson is the SENCO and a senior leader at Northwood Primary School in Darlington. She described some of her approaches to identifying SEN need among pupils, training needs among staff and to ensuring you do not work in isolation.

### Families first

Facilitated through a series of informal coffee mornings and SEN surgery sessions, Laura presents parents and carers with the opportunity to visit Northwood Primary School, part of Lingfield Multi-Academy Trust, to ensure that families understand who the SENCO is and the key contacts in the school.

She explained: "Find and explore a range of engagement opportunities to meet with these families. It is important that the parents' first meeting with you is not simply a formal meeting or a paper-based review. This is about developing trust and relationships with families that will need you the most."

Laura and the team at Northwood also invite multi-agency representatives to attend the coffee mornings, further reinforcing the fact that partnership

check to what extent EHCPs are being followed.

Instead, she conducted a thorough review of the SEN register, identifying which children had the

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“It is important that the parents' first meeting with you is not simply a formal meeting or a paper-based review. This is about developing trust and relationships with families that will need you the most”

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is key: "I wanted to help the school and local community in Darlington to understand that Northwood Primary acts as the bridge between the child and other agencies. Relationships are key to us."

The local authority also plays an active role in supporting the collaborative meetings and ensures that key representatives are present to discuss the support and interventions on offer beyond the school community.

### Professional dialogue

"Get to know your children. Observations are key, review your SEN register, but make sure that your colleagues are involved in the process. Create opportunities for professional dialogue."

Laura's assertion is that it is too easy to simply start dropping into lessons as a new SENCO in order to identify needs in children and to

most profound SEN and evaluating the diet that these children were getting in classrooms.

This exercise took time and it was not about simply then telling colleagues what they were doing wrong – rather it was about demonstrating to the wider team at Northwood Primary what strengths were in place and the work that needed to be done to ensure that all children with SEN could be further catered for.

She explained: "Drop into lessons for observations, but ensure that staff understand what can practically be done in classrooms to ensure that the child makes progress and responds well to learning."

"It is also important that colleagues understand the role of the SENCO," Laura added. Through a series of CPD seminars and regular staff briefings, she spent time developing the insights and expertise of her colleagues in the world of SEND, including the parameters of her role as a SENCO.

This helped to challenge misconceptions about the role and the complexities around it. It also helped her discern the CPD needs of her colleagues and work with them to develop expertise around supporting vulnerable pupils and children with SEN.

As a result, all staff in the school have completed Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) training as part of their CPD after this had been identified as a key need for a majority of SEN pupils. Laura also used the training and insights offered by Paul Dix in *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes* (2017) to develop restorative and inclusive approaches to supporting challenging pupils in classrooms.

### Don't work in isolation

While it is important to address the fine details of the world of SEND, it

is important that newcomers to the role do not feel overwhelmed.

"Don't work in isolation," Laura advised. "It is important to have a 'no islands' mindset. Work closely with your headteacher and other members of the leadership team. I have had invaluable support from my headteacher."

This might include putting SEND on the agenda for senior leadership meetings, weekly check-ins with the leadership team to update on key pupils, or using ebulletins to update colleagues about key children and current SEND challenges.

An audit of your website can also help to consider how accessible the school is to external audiences, particularly some of those hard-to-reach parents of SEN pupils: "It may seem like a small detail," Laura said, "but it could make the difference to those parents that you are struggling to get through the door."

Laura also encourages her primary colleagues to be proactive in contacting secondary schools and vice-versa.

As part of transition processes, SENCO and lead professionals must ensure they are sharing robust notes and professional dialogue to ensure that every SEND child is secondary-ready and to help ensure that interventions and support are put in place as soon as possible.

It is important to evolve this beyond the immediate sphere of SEND influence. Northwood Primary was labelled as the first school in Darlington to become "adoption friendly" last year and is now a strategic source of support for other schools in the town.

Laura's work is paying off. In January 2019 after a visit to the school, Ofsted said: "The SENCO is a consummate professional. She is methodical in her approach and leaves no stone unturned to secure for pupils with SEND an accurate diagnosis of need and appropriate support."

"She is highly approachable and has established warm and trusting relationships between herself, pupils with SEND and their parents."

*Sean Harris is chair of governors at James Calvert Spence College and area director for Ambition Institute in the North East of England. To read his previous best practice articles for SecEd, visit <http://bit.ly/2KIDQqc>*



# The SEND named governor

The named governor for SEND provision has a crucial role to play in supporting the school leadership, including the SENCO, to ensure provision is as effective as possible.

**Matt Bromley** looks at how the role works in practice, including in EHCP assessments

**L**ike many a school leader who is elected parent governor of their child's school, I was regarded by the board as a natural choice for the myriad link roles including that of SEND named governor.

I felt it important to do my research. In so doing, I not only improved my knowledge of SEND provision but also began to appreciate the importance of the link governor role. Here's what I discovered.

## A key duty

Every school has a legal duty to appoint a leader responsible for children with SEND. The SENCO manages provision for all supported pupils, not just those with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The SENCO should be a qualified teacher and must achieve the National Award in SEN Coordination within three years of their appointment.

Governing bodies also have responsibilities – and one key legal duty – in relation to SEND and these are often best carried out by delegating the responsibility to a sub-committee or single named governor.

Although most SENCOs have job descriptions, and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities – not to mention annual performance management objectives – the named governor's duties are often less formal or prescriptive, and thus open to interpretation. And yet I have learnt that the role is an important one.

## The role of the SEND named governor

What exactly does an effective SEND named governor do? Each school is different and thus each named governor will fulfil different roles and have different relationships with their SENCO. But I believe the SEND named governor might helpfully support the school to:

- Cooperate with the local

authority in reviewing the provision that is available and supporting them to develop the Local Offer.

- Use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEND gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet children and young people's SEND.
- Ensure that children and young people with SEND engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEND.
- Ensure that arrangements are in place to support pupils at school with medical conditions.
- Ensure there is a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEND.

*“The named governor can usefully be used to support and challenge the EHCP review process. It is in the school's interests to facilitate any such scrutiny”*

- Record accurately and keep up-to-date the provision made for pupils with SEND.
- Publish information on the school websites about the implementation of the board's policy for pupils with SEND (the school SEND Information Report).
- Publish information about the arrangements for the admission of pupils with disabilities, the steps taken to prevent them being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to assist access, and their accessibility plans.
- Ensure that there is a qualified teacher designated as SENCO for the school.
- Determine an approach to using their resources to support the progress of pupils with SEND.

## A clear vision for SEND

When determining a focus for the named governor's actions, it is perhaps wise to begin with a clear vision which articulates the school's objective for children with SEND.

The foreword to the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) offers this helpful statement: “Our vision for children with SEND is the same as for all children and young people, that they achieve well in their early years, at school and in college, and lead happy and fulfilled lives.”

In other words, schools have a responsibility to ensure – as far as is reasonably practicable – fair and equal access to all pupils, irrespective of need. This includes access to the school site and facilities, to its formal curriculum as well as extra-curricular

to support children with medical conditions.

The SEND named governor is a link between the governing body and the school. They might, therefore, help to ensure that budget-setting reflects the needs of children with SEND, monitor SEND provision on behalf of the governing body, and assist in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of SEND resourcing decisions within the school.

In order to perform these roles, there are four key legal documents that I would suggest every named governor needs to read and understand:

- The Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3).
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014.
- The SEND Code of Practice 2015.
- The Equalities Act 2010.

## SEND funding

To perform their role effectively, named governors need to develop a solid grasp of the funding arrangements. Broadly speaking, there are three sources of funding for most maintained schools:

- **Element 1:** Basic per-pupil funding is used for the general provision for all pupils in the school, including pupils with SEND.
- **Element 2:** The notional SEN budget is additional money to help make special educational provision meet the needs of children with SEND. It is called “notional” because schools can spend it as they think best. Most authorities assign a percentage of their deprivation and basic entitlement funding to notional SEND budgets.
- **Element 3:** High Needs Block funding which, as the name suggests, is funding for high-need, low-incidence SEND that comes directly from the commissioning local authority into schools. It is aimed mainly, though not





ensure the EHCP review is robust and thus minimise the chances of a legal challenge later.

### Other pupil support plans

Not all supported children will have an EHCP and the named governor also needs to develop an understanding about what arrangements are in place for these children.

While EHCPs are written by the local authority and are legal documents, other children may have a “My Support Plan” or a school-based plan such as an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or One-Page Profile.

My Support Plans are nationally recognised documents used for complex cases and when a child is supported by a number of professionals. They help provide a coordinated and personalised approach, and they can help demonstrate accountability for funding elements 1 and 2.

The school also needs to have its own systems in place for those children who do not have an EHCP or a My Support Plan. Any such system should set out clearly the support offered, and how the school plans and records its provision for that child.

In aiding the review process of any support plans – in any form – the named governor might helpfully consider what reasonable adjustments have been made to ensure fair and equal access to the curriculum.

This may include transport, staffing, timetable changes, adjustments to the physical environment, and so on, while also acknowledging that what matters most – and has the biggest impact – is quality first teaching.

The named governor may offer scrutiny in the form of a meeting with the SENCO, by reading documents, and by conducting learning walks around school. **SecEd**

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exclusively, at pupils with EHCPs.

- In addition, Pupil Premium monies may also be allocated to pupils with SEND and used to support provision in this area.

It is important for SEND named governors to know that the government expects schools to have spent at least £10,000 out of their core and notional budgets before High Needs Block funding can be accessed. As such, they should liaise with the SENCO to demonstrate how elements 1 and 2, plus Pupil Premium monies, have been used before supporting requests to the local authority for additional funding.

### EHCP assessments

SEND named governors need to develop an awareness that not all supported children will have been assessed or have an EHCP. Indeed, only a small proportion of supported children for whom the SENCO and they have responsibility will have an EHCP.

While all supported children should, therefore, remain in their purview, named governors need to know how EHCPs work as this is likely to be an area in which their support is most needed.

Often, a SEND named governor

– on behalf of the governing body – will be required to get involved when a pupil needs to be assessed by the local authority for an EHCP. It is important that they know the procedure so that they can support and challenge the school and help ensure a successful outcome for all.

A request for assessment can be made to the local authority by the child's parents/carers, the young person, or the school. Once a request is made, the local authority must make a decision whether or not to assess the child within six weeks and, once it begins an assessment, it must be completed within 20 weeks.

If the local authority decides not to assess, parents and schools have a right to appeal to a SEND tribunal.

Once a local authority has begun an assessment, it must seek advice from the child's parents or the young person, the headteacher of the school, a health care professional and educational psychologist, social care practitioners, and any other persons it deems appropriate.

Requests for advice must be met within six weeks. The SEND named governor might have a useful role in ensuring the school complies with this deadline if it is asked for

advice. It is important, therefore, that the governor is informed.

If the school makes the request for assessment, the named governor could help ensure that the pupil's parents/carers have been consulted and support the request.

If an EHCP is issued, it is the local authority's responsibility to maintain it, but it is the school's responsibility to ensure that it delivers against the needs set out in the plan.

A good EHCP will meet the requirements of the Children and Families Act, the SEN Code of Practice and the SEN Regulations. It will describe positively what the pupil can do – rather than adopt a deficit model outlining what they cannot do. It will be clear, concise, comprehensible and accessible. It will have been co-produced with parents and schools, and it will set out relevant outcomes.

Finally, an EHCP must stay in place until the outcomes in the plan have been met. They should be reviewed at least annually by the school.

The named governor can usefully be used to support and challenge the EHCP review process. It is in the school's interests to facilitate any such scrutiny because this will help



# The Pupil Premium and SEN overlap

The overlaps between Pupil Premium and SEN are clear. SENCO **Garry Freeman** looks at the crucial first step to all tailored provision – identifying needs – and discusses how we can develop effective working partnerships with parents and carers

**H**ow often do we, as educational professionals, hear the expression “closing the gap”?

We hear it and we use it when speaking of disadvantaged (Pupil Premium) learners and when we speak about the progress made by our young people with SEN.

The phrase itself can become somewhat hackneyed, all-too-often founded on a simplistic view of Pupil Premium or Pupil Premium Plus learners as a single, homogenous group of students.

The difficulty for me, and for many with whom I discuss this

issue, is that if we as SEN leaders in schools were to even contemplate addressing the needs of our SEN learners as if they were a single, homogeneous group, all with the pretty much the same needs, then we would be ridiculed – and rightly so.

Why, therefore, do so many educational professionals insist on addressing the needs of Pupil Premium and Pupil Premium Plus learners without first identifying exactly what those needs are? How can we even begin to contemplate closing the gap if we do not know, for each child or young person, what has caused the gap in the

first place? We also use the euphemism “disadvantaged” when referring to those young people for whom schools receive Pupil Premium funding. Yet what does that mean?

A parent once told me, when we were discussing the fact that the school received Pupil Premium funding for her sons because they were disadvantaged, that she had absolutely no idea what the label meant for her family.

When, however, we went on to discuss the precise needs of her children and exactly what we as a school could do to support their progress and attainment, our

conversation took a very different turn.

We were discussing the needs of two children and what they needed their teachers to do to support them. The fact that the school received additional Pupil Premium funding could of course play an important part in this provision, but none of it could happen – the boys could not make progress and achieve what school and parents believed they should – unless and until their needs were identified.

From this type of discussion arose a clear, purposeful and measurable strategy to:

- Identify the needs of each student for whom we received Pupil Premium funding.
- Put in place effective, measurable Wave 1 differentiated provision.
- Measure and evaluate the effectiveness of our Pupil Premium “spend” in terms of general – not simply academic – attainment and progress.

This brought to mind three questions:

- What do we need the children and young people to be able to do in X months that they



cannot do now (the “months” element could of course be “lessons”, “weeks” or whatever is appropriate at the time for the young person)?

- What do we need to do in order to support them to achieve this?
- With whom do we need to work in order to support them to achieve this?

What happened was that we were using the Assess, Plan, Do, Review strategy as outlined in the 2015 SEND Code of Practice to carefully evaluate the learning needs of our Pupil Premium students. We were identifying needs and then responding to those needs, rather than treating them as a single, homogenous group where we acted as if each of them, regardless of prior attainment, had the same needs. They do not – and we as a school, as a whole staff, needed to accept that.

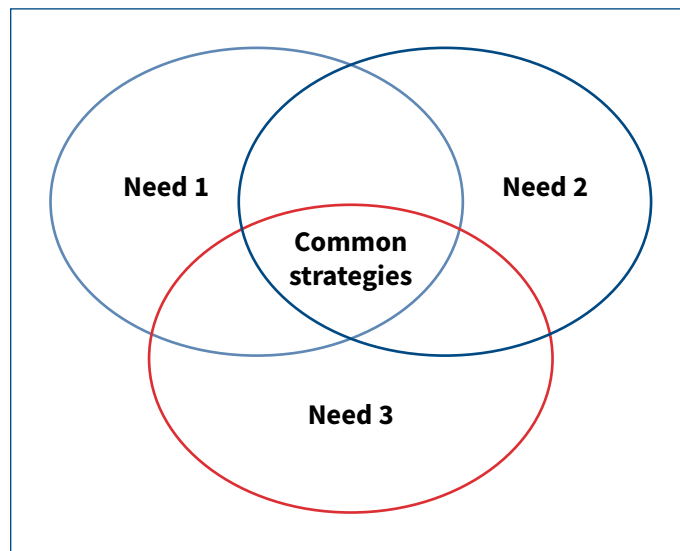
The key to this in any setting is for the Pupil Premium coordinator to work as closely as possible with the SENCO and other inclusion leaders, to take a leaf from their book and to work as closely as possible with parents/carers to evidence beyond doubt that the school as a community is prepared to listen, to respond to need, and to close the gap.

The SEND Code of Practice is clear: “High-quality teaching, differentiated for individual pupils, is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have SEN. Additional intervention and support cannot compensate for a lack of good quality teaching.”

Does this apply equally to “disadvantaged” children and young people for whom schools receive Pupil Premium funding? Of course it does. The advantage is that for these learners, additional funding is always available and so how schools choose to use that is crucial.

As with our SEN learners, provision for those we receive Pupil Premium funding should be dedicated and targeted if we are to make a real difference. Whether SEN or Pupil Premium, we should be making provision which is specifically targeted at perceived need – and building relationships where we get to know what strategies can work for an individual.

One way to think of strategies to meet need is to think in terms of



overlapping circles of provision (see diagram above).

Remember that the needs of a student may not be academic but, whatever they are, the provision to meet them can often overlap and help to meet additional needs.

To clarify our thinking we can ask a series of questions about our practice:

- What assessment information is being used?
- What criteria do we have for identification of any needs?

interventions over a period of time.

Relationships are another key element and we need, as school leaders, to nurture, build and develop those relationships with not only our students but also, and very importantly, with parents and carers.

The SEND Code of Practice calls for schools to meet with parents and carers of SEN students at least three times a year and this is a good starting point for schools to

“ Many of us have previously thought and spoke of ‘hard-to-reach’ parents. Perhaps it is more productive to think of ‘hard-to-reach schools’ ”

- How are pupils, parents, staff involved in the planning?
- Is it person-centred?
- What range of provision do we have in place?
- Are teachers taking responsibility?
- What support do they have?
- Are individual plans effective?
- How are outcomes being monitored?
- How are pupils, parents, staff involved in the review?
- What outcomes are being measured and how?
- How are next steps determined?

You may well need to take risks, think outside the boxes and be creative to meet need.

Within this, there may well be a need for leaders to mentor and coach colleagues through interpretation of data – as we need to know the impact of

think productively about their relationships with the parents and carers of Pupil Premium learners too.

We should, as SEN and Pupil Premium leaders, know the story that all our information and data is telling us about each student. However, if we are to do this effectively and influence outcomes positively, we must not only involve parents, but work closely with them as equals.

Remember that each parent and carer is the specialist on their child. In 2009, The Lamb Report shook the education world to its foundations and led to the 2014 Children and Families Act, encompassing as it did the SEND Code of Practice.

Brian Lamb’s focus was the nature, quality and impact of the home-school relationship and how schools generally needed to

**Assess, Plan, Do, Review: Schools require to find common solutions to overlapping circles of need – both for SEN and Pupil Premium students**

rethink their approach to working with parents.

As he said: treating parents as “partners with expertise in their children’s needs is crucial to establishing and sustaining confidence. Where things go wrong, the root causes can often be traced to poor communication between school, local authority and parent”.

He added: “In the most successful schools the effective engagement of parents has had a profound impact on children’s progress.”

And this in turn led to the SEND Code of Practice, which stated: “The knowledge and understanding that parents have about their children is key information that can help teachers and others to meet their child’s needs. Enabling parents to share their knowledge and engage in positive discussion instils confidence that their contribution is valued and acknowledged.”

Many of us have previously thought and spoke of “hard-to-reach” parents. Perhaps it is more productive to think of “hard-to-reach schools”?

In conclusion, let us as leaders of Pupil Premium provision work closely with SEND colleagues, identify need to inform our provision, and build effective, purposeful relationships with parents and carers. Then, and only then, can we truly say that our provision is on the road to being as effective as possible. hu

*Garry Freeman has taught for 41 years. He is a SENCO and assistant principal in West Yorkshire. He is chair of Nasen’s 0-11 Advisory Group.*



#### FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*, Department for Education, January 2015: <http://bit.ly/27yye0p>
- ▶ See also, *Assess, plan, do, review: The graduated approach to SEN*, SecEd, October 2017: <http://bit.ly/2PT2Tog>

# Autism spectrum condition in the primary school setting

Kingsley St John's Primary has a significant number of children with autism. School SENCOs *Rachel Jones* and *Samantha Gibson* discuss the range of approaches they use to support these pupils

**K**ingsley St John's CE Aided Primary School is a small mainstream school in the heart of Cheshire. Almost one-third of the school has registered SEND difficulties, mostly autistic spectrum condition (ASC). Approximately one-tenth of the pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) with full funding.

Why so many? Partly through parents choosing a primary school with small classes, a very nurturing ethos, and a reputation for meeting the needs of unique individuals with vulnerabilities. External professionals also recognise the extent to which strategies of support are embedded in the school's practice.

The philosophy of the school is paramount to the success of inclusion, management and outcomes. Ask yourselves, what does inclusion mean to you? What reasonable adjustments can be made in order to embrace a pupil with additional needs? How can you bring the staff on board, challenging and changing preconceived ideas, and harnessing the confidence to manage pupils effectively? To what extent do you grasp new strategies or recommendations then research and adapt for your own children?

Inclusion, to us, is the complete integration of all pupils in all aspects of school life. While pupils may access personalised targeted support, it is delivered within the classroom, alongside peers and with over-learning opportunities built into the school day.

"Reasonable adjustment" is a mind-set. It is not something we do and tick off, it is an approach; it evolves and develops with each child and mountains are moved so that a child can succeed.

There is clarity – from the headteacher to the bursar, from teachers to midday assistants. What is the outcome desired for this



child? How can we get from here to the outcome? A shared vision of reasonable adjustment, a consistency of language, of boundaries and flexibility, all as part of on-going practice. There is no destination, only journeys of learning and reflecting through the plan, do, assess, review, do cycle.

## School staff

The values that exist in a school form a foundation for what can be achieved. Those values begin and end with all practitioners and even the headteacher can learn from the newest of appointed staff.

There is not a fixed way of working, but training opportunities are embraced and there is a recognition of the value of peer coaching among staff. Adults' investment in every child in the school, however complex, is a fundamental aspect to pupil success and must not be underestimated.

For example, if a pupil was due to start school in a few weeks and required support from an assistant and communicated through Makaton, all staff would access training, learn key signs and begin to use these daily to embed a consistent approach. As such, this child will feel valued and be able to interact with all staff and vice-versa.

There are regular training experiences for staff in supporting

additional needs. Where possible, this is personalised to the needs of the children on roll. We use outreach opportunities from specialist provisions, targeted for all staff, not just those working with the pupil in need.

## Language

Using the right language with pupils with ASC or other SEN is a priority. Learning to state, rather than ask is important. As adults, our emotional literacy and human standards encourage us to "flower" language in order to present ourselves in a caring manner. This is not helpful for pupils with ASC. Simplified language, broken instruction and zero emotion is the key to successful communication in our school. As such, staff will not ask "Is that how you should be sitting?" but rather would say "Good sitting, thank you" (also using Makaton).

Highly cognitive ASC pupils may mask their difficulties and present as pupils with a greater understanding – monitor this carefully as it is easy to fall into the trap of over-explaining and trying to reason. Sometimes this can escalate anxieties and behaviours.

Visuals also support instruction for pupils. These are consistent in each classroom and are evident for all pupils. We use a range of these, such as: Now and next, individual visual timetables, social stories

(often drawn/written with the child present), behaviour prompts, task lists and reward charts. Language is always clear – a straight-forward "no, thank you", "safe hands", or "good listening". Capturing the small improvements, positives or exaggerating the positives is another key strategy.

## Interventions

Recommendations made from professionals are embraced and internalised. There is never a "one-size-fits-all" with such interventions and there must be a robust understanding that they are short-term, to be reviewed and adapted to meet need. If an intervention does not result in clear progress, it must be adapted.

Repeating interventions can be done usefully, but they should never be allowed to simply coast along.

The effectiveness of intervention is reliant upon the effectiveness of the adult delivering it. There should be monitoring, even at informal levels and an overview of implementation. The adult delivering the intervention needs an understanding of the theory behind the approach and the expected impact of the strategy. Above all the adult needs to be invested in its outcome and supported with CPD.

Some of the most fruitful interventions we have encountered include:



## Precision teaching

This can cover topics such as phonics, number bonds, multiplication facts, common exception words, see to read, and hear to write. This is completed, in our school, by a set group of words or sums being read or written and repeated daily (or three times a week) until secure. It does not need much time and offers lots of over-learning opportunity.

These sessions last for five minutes – we use a sand timer – and over time the list (hopefully) grows and the outcomes become more secure.

As an aside, when you are marking spelling outcomes, try ticking each letter, rather than the whole word – this will help the child to identify the tricky bit and acknowledges that there are some successes in the spelling attempt.

## The Homunculi Approach

This is an approach that supports a child's way of thinking about problems and looks at suitable strategies to manage them. The book – *The Homunculi Approach to Social and Emotional Wellbeing* (Greig & Mackay, 2013) is based upon characters who can access tools to help pupils with situations.

Schools can adapt these tools to help pupils manage different scenarios. For example, we have adapted:

- A perspective torch – one that can be used to see things from another point of view.
- An “is it my business coin” that can be flipped by the child when they think about getting involved in other children's disagreements.

## Some further ideas

- Max's Marvellous Maths: Produced by teachers in Cumbria, this is a quick and short-term intervention to plug some of the basic concepts in maths.
- Sensory circuits: This technique supports sensory processing and gets children ready for learning. There are books and supporting information online. We set up different stations each morning and focus on using the left and right side of the brain and wake-up activities, finishing with calming activities before returning to class.
- Language for Thinking: An excellent text book that

develops inference and understanding skills. It is made up of a picture stimulus, such as a crowd in a cinema, and then a range of comprehension questions focused on the picture (Parsons & Branagan, 2017).

- South Warwickshire hand-strengthening programme: A lovely set of strategies to build finger and hand strengthening, so that pupils can increase their writing stamina and form letters more accurately.
- Word Wasp and Toe by Toe: Spelling (Word Wasp) and reading (Toe by Toe) programmes based upon over-learning and reading through syllable breakdown.
- Time to Talk (Socially Speaking): A book and game which focuses on skills such as listening, turn-taking, asking and answering questions, basic conversations, non-verbal communication, eye contact and understanding feelings.
- Other interventions: We have also used 5 Minute Box, a Wave 2 and 3 intervention for literacy and numeracy, Plus 1 and Power of 2 books from 123 Learning, focusing on coaching in maths, and Nessy, programmes focused on helping pupils of all abilities learn to read, write, spell and type.
- Pupil-centred profiles: A one-page profile that is compiled in collaboration with the pupil, their peers and their parents, looking at the strengths of the child, their interests and how they can be supported.

## Small step learning programmes

Some children are visual learners, others kinaesthetic and some auditory. But most children are “chunk” learners – children who learn through small steps.

So, think about the success criteria for a lesson, then think about breaking that down further into more manageable chunks – such as six to eight smaller chunks on a ladder to achieve the objective.

For pupils with SEND this is the model that can allow success to be acknowledged. Try to be creative in the breakdown of steps. Some steps may be really simple to achieve – but at least the child can identify what they can already do.

## Supporting pupils with autism: Ten tips

- Limit your language, using statements, not questions.
- Allow enough processing time (10 seconds is the recommendation).
- Sensory profiling allows you to understand the individual before you.
- Timers are your new best friend – sand timers work well for us. Keep to therapeutic choices, not alarming countdowns.
- When dealing with behaviours, stick to the facts of what happened. Fact vs opinion/perception is far less emotive.
- Visual cues are crucial at all points, even when you think they are no longer necessary. They provide stability and structure. You may not think they are working in the short-term, but persist and embed them into your practice.
- Wherever possible use their interests as a hook. You will be astounded by the outcomes that can be achieved when their passions are engaged.
- Over-learning interventions, such as precision teaching, are hugely effective when delivered regularly and consistently.
- Consistency is key with whatever you do – approach, language, visuals, vocabulary, script.
- You have to enjoy the uniqueness of children with vulnerabilities and accept them – quirks and all. You cannot “fix” their difficulties. Mind-set is key alongside strategies to support and cope.

## Sensory support

Sensory processing difficulties are not always recognised as an educational need. Our first understanding of this came from listening to occupational therapist Lisa Hamer (from Shine Therapy Services). This led to the initiation of sensory circuits into our curriculum. Across the school a sensory diet is available, which is personalised and bespoke.


The consistent message is that it must be a tool to help – if it becomes a distraction it goes. For example, some children may need an invitation to do some wall pushes, others have sensory supportive seating, while some may need to crawl before writing.

There are many strategies, the importance is identifying the ones that will work for your children and which can be implemented with fluency.

Outdoor sensory equipment is also available in the shape of vestibular spinning equipment and a tyre park, with bouncy/rubber inserts.

## Conclusion

Teaching children with additional needs is such a fulfilling privilege. The challenge that accompanies this opportunity can, at times, be overwhelming. One day, you can be an oasis of hope and the next you feel like an NQT with it all still to learn. Hold on tightly, nurture a relationship with flexibility and

adaptability – always with kind eyes and clear language. And then, watch them succeed. 

*Rachel Jones is headteacher and SENDCO and Samantha Gibson is a teacher and SENDCO at Kingsley St John's CE Aided Primary School in Cheshire.*



## FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ *The Homunculi Approach to Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, Greig & Mackay, JKP, 2013: <http://bit.ly/2YO1PT4>
- ▶ Max's Marvellous Maths: <http://minimaths.club/mxs-marvellous-maths/>
- ▶ *Language for Thinking*, Parsons & Branagan, 2017, Routledge: <http://bit.ly/33hu8wu>
- ▶ South Warwickshire NHS hand-strengthening programme, part of its fine motor skills for schools project: <http://bit.ly/31vaU5d>
- ▶ Word Wasp: [www.wordwasp.com](http://www.wordwasp.com)
- ▶ Toe By Toe: <https://toe-by-toe.co.uk/>
- ▶ Time to Talk: [www.sociallyspeaking.co.nz/product/time-to-talk-game/](http://www.sociallyspeaking.co.nz/product/time-to-talk-game/)
- ▶ 5 Minute Box: [www.fiveminutebox.co.uk](http://www.fiveminutebox.co.uk)
- ▶ Plus 1 and Power of 2: [www.123learning.co.uk](http://www.123learning.co.uk)
- ▶ Nessy: [www.nessy.com/uk/](http://www.nessy.com/uk/)



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