

PiXL INSIGHTS

PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS TO
**improve inclusion for
learners with SEND (ALN)**



PiXL INSIGHTS

“The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other.”

ROBERT JOHN MEEHAN

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WELCOME

This is our first PiXL Insights publication on improving inclusion for learners with SEND (or ALN for our Welsh colleagues), and the third in our PiXL Insights series following the successful release of our issues on raising boys' achievement and stretching more able learners.

PiXL Insights is much more than a publication, however. Condensed in these pages are the professional insights gleaned from colleagues in schools across the PiXL network, who have been working with us over the academic year 2022/23 to improve the learning experience and outcomes of children with additional needs. There are many ways of supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities. We cannot capture the full range of ways, but we hope that the insights shared in the following pages will give you ideas that can be adapted for your own context.

We want to take this opportunity to thank the schools and colleagues who have volunteered to participate in the projects that make up this issue. Schools are busy places, and we appreciate the time that staff have made to engage with us on this project. Please do share any feedback with us on insights@pixl.org.uk.



HANNAH COSTANZO

PIXL INSIGHTS PROJECT MANAGER

I am privileged to have worked full-time for PiXL for a decade. In that time, I have worked on a number of areas of project development, from the conception and launch of PiXL's character provision to the development of our PiXL TV platform. In my current role as Head of Cross-Phase Projects, I get to work on the development and delivery of strategies that support across our entire membership network from Primary up to Post 16. All of my work with PiXL has been fuelled by my desire to solve problems and support the brilliant work that teachers and school leaders do every day. I'm thrilled that PiXL Insights has allowed me to engage with that passion on a much larger scale.



KAREN COLLINS

PIXL INSIGHTS PROJECT MENTOR

I am an educational consultant with over 20 years of teaching experience, including time as a SENCO under the new Code of Practice. I currently work part-time for PiXL as a Head of Curriculum, where I am privileged to work with colleagues and educators who are committed to improving the outcomes of all students, including those with additional needs. I am passionate about education and believe that support and sharing practices across schools can help to provide an environment which will improve outcomes for all. It has been an honour to support this publication and I am sure you will find some interesting and useful ideas within these pages.

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

AT PRIMARY

At KS2, results from the 2023 national tests indicate that the gap between pupils with SEND and their peers achieving expected standard has narrowed slightly since last year.

Pupils who achieved expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined) – %

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
All SEND	22	x	x	18	20
No SEND	74	x	x	69	70
Gap	52	x	x	51	50

This slight narrowing appears to be consistent across the different types of additional need or disability. This is in spite of the fact that there have been some increases in the number of children identified as SEND. The table below shows the four SEND Primary Needs that have increased the most in the last year. The number of pupils with an EHCP has also risen from 29,097 in the national test cohort in 2021/22 to 31,515 in the 2022/23 cohort.

Number of pupils eligible for KS2 national tests by SEND Primary Need – most increased

SEND PRIMARY NEED	NUMBER OF PUPILS ELIGIBLE IN 2021/2022	NUMBER OF PUPILS ELIGIBLE IN 2022/2023	% INCREASE
Autism Spectrum Disorder	15,400	17,359	12.7%
Speech, Language and Communication Needs	23,061	24,719	7.1%
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	5,224	5,595	7.1%
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	26,427	28,235	6.8%

These figures are taken from the Explore Education Statistics Service at explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk and represent figures for England only.

AT SECONDARY

The GCSE, A-level and vocational data from Summer 2023 shows that although the gap between pupils with SEND and their peers has also narrowed slightly, and the overall outcomes have increased slightly, there has been no notable change between 2019 and 2023 (Ofqual, 2023).

The data at KS4

Here are the headlines from GCSE (raw outcomes/average GCSE grade).

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
All SEND		22	x	x	18	20
No SEND		74	x	x	69	70
Gap		52	x	x	51	50

Further breakdowns, including those for A-level and vocational/technical qualifications, can be found on the [Ofqual interactive analytics website](#) in the [Equalities analysis interactive report](#).

ABSENCE

There have been several reports published in the last couple of years, highlighting the increase in absence rates post-pandemic. Of particular concern is the increase in absence rates amongst students with additional needs, especially those with Statements or Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP). Pupils with SEND entered the pandemic with higher levels of absence than their peers: 4.7 days for SEN support and 6.5 days with EHCP, compared to 3.1 days for those with no SEND. This gap had widened by Autumn 2022: 6.8 days for SEND support and 8.4 days for those with EHCP, compared to 4.5 days for those with no SEND support ([Education Policy Institute, 2023](#)). This picture is also reflected in Wales: in 2022/23, 17.4% of half-day sessions were missed by pupils with ALN provision compared to 11.5% without ([Welsh Government, 2023](#)). In Northern Ireland in 2021/22, children with a Statement (SEN) had 14% absence compared to those without SEN of 8.7% ([NISRA, 2023](#)).

The Children's Commissioner commissioned two reports published in 2023. '[Attendance is Everyone's Business](#)' spoke to children missing from and struggling to engage with education to find out what they needed in order to get back into school. The report highlights that some schools are struggling to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEND to provide a suitable learning environment to meet their additional needs. Of particular concern is how students with additional needs are feeling about education post-pandemic:

- **67% of children with SEND are worried they struggle more with their schoolwork post-pandemic compared to 44% for those without SEND.**
- **60% of children with SEND felt their progress in school is worse than before the pandemic compared to 50% for those without SEND.**

'[Missing Children, Missing Grades](#)' looked at the relationship between school attendance and academic attainment. It is clear from the latter report that the impact of absence on those with additional needs is particularly severe:

	% PASSING AT LEAST 5 GCSEs INCLUDING ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS
Pupils rarely absent in Year 10 and 11	78
Pupils persistently absent in Year 10 and 11	36
Pupils severely absent in Year 10 and 11	5
Pupils persistently absent in Year 10 but not Year 11	54
Pupils with EHCP persistently absent in Year 10 and 11	9
Pupils with SEN support persistently absent in Year 10 and 11	22
Pupils without SEND persistently absent in Year 10 and 11	48

It is reassuring to see that there is a significant improvement in grades if attendance is improved in Year 11 even if there is persistent absence in Year 10.

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PiXL INSIGHTS

DEVELOPING OUR APPROACH

PiXL Insights was first developed in 2020. We wanted to find a way of supporting our members with stubborn national achievement gaps. The first area we wanted to tackle was the issue of boys' underachievement.

However, we knew that there were no silver bullets: no single strategy or technique that all schools could employ in order to eradicate the gender gap. Instead, we knew that context was going to be key – our students are all individuals, after all.

So we began to think: what if instead of sharing one idea, we deliberately sought out to share many?

What if we worked with individual schools across the network, for whom boys' achievement was a significant focus that year, and developed projects with them to specifically meet the needs of **their boys in their context**? And that's when Insights was born. In that first year we worked with dozens of schools on different projects at KS3, KS4 and KS5, and we published the professional insights of the colleagues who ran those projects in our first Insights publication.

We then started to think that there were other key cohorts of students that may benefit from the 'Insights treatment'. We agreed that we would look at the following four groups on rotation:

Raising boys' achievement

Stretching more able learners

Improving inclusion for learners with SEND (ALN)

Empowering learners from disadvantaged backgrounds

In academic year 2022/23, we worked with schools on projects aimed at more able learners and learners with SEND (ALN).

In academic year 2023/24, we are publishing the insights from those projects, as well as undertaking a new round of projects to target learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and boys.

In academic year 2024/25, we will publish the insights from the previous year's projects and begin a new round of projects looking at more able learners and learners with SEND.

And that's our plan for the future: to continue this cycle of investigation, innovation and support until the national gaps close.

Each project run as part of PiXL Insights is developed and designed by the participant school, however colleagues at PiXL are available to coach, mentor and support their thinking. We are on hand throughout the process to help troubleshoot issues, overcome barriers and celebrate success.

PiXL Insights is **not** action research, nor does it pretend to be. Projects run as part of PiXL Insights are just that: projects. The teachers share their professional insights (an underappreciated resource, in our opinion) and offer their perspective on what worked well and what they may change next time.

If you are interested in participating in future projects with us, do get in touch with the team on insights@pixl.org.uk.

“Nothing works everywhere, and everything works somewhere.”

DYLAN WILIAM

USING THIS PUBLICATION IN YOUR OWN CONTEXT

As you read through the projects, we hope that you gain an insight from each project into:

- why it was conceived
- how it was implemented
- what changes (if any) the project leads made throughout the process
- what the impact or outcome of the project was
- how that project might be continued, scaled up or moved forward.

Each project is by design bound up in the context of that school and all the other important work that they do. Getting the most out of the ideas shared in these pages will mean thinking carefully about how those ideas can be translated into your own context. We have included some ideas for how each project could be adapted or taken further at the end of each article. Each project includes some headline data about the school to help provide context. Don't skip projects just because, for example, they are targeting younger students than you support: there is so much that can be adapted and shared across different sectors.

The following reflection questions may help you get the most out of what is contained in these pages.

SHARING THIS PUBLICATION WITH COLLEAGUES

- Who in your school should read/use this publication? Key staff? SLT? Don't assume that the only person in your school who would benefit from reading this publication is the SENDCo.
- How will you disseminate the project and its ideas to others? Remember that some of the project ideas could be adapted and implemented at classroom level.

REFLECTING ON YOUR 'NOW'

- Are you aware, now, of where your biggest barriers are in terms of supporting the inclusion and achievement of your learners with SEND? Are there particular year groups, curriculum areas, or skills that come to mind? Have that in mind as you approach the projects in these pages.
- How aware are your staff of issues relating to the progress of learners with SEND in your school? How do you know?
- What is the culture of belonging and aspiration like in your school? Are you explicit about how that culture relates to **all** learners?

FOCUSING ON YOUR SCHOOL

- What in this publication might help you to improve the inclusion of learners with SEND in your school, college or provision? Are there common themes that emerge when you reflect e.g. independence, communication & language, staff confidence in making pedagogy inclusive?
- How can you identify the areas you want to focus on? What is your data telling you? How does your data compare to national headlines?
- Drawing on your professional expertise and knowledge, which projects will have the most impact in your context? What is already established? What mechanisms already work?

TAKING YOUR NEXT STEPS

- **Reflect on what you have read** – are you inspired to run your own project, or implement any changes based on the insights shared in these pages?
- **Speak to your PiXL Associate** – they are well-placed to support your thinking and to help you identify target groups and areas.
- **Make a plan** – identify your why. Reflect on what and how the project can be developed, including any necessary adaptations for your context.
- **Contact us on insights@pixl.org.uk** if you have any questions or wish to speak with us about future participation.



BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND BELONGING





CLAPTON GIRLS' ACADEMY TARGET YEAR GROUP: WHOLE SCHOOL

The Green Room Group: supporting autistic people

INTENT

As an all-girls school, many families in the local area with autistic children choose to send their child to us. I noticed that the girls were struggling with high levels of anxiety, poor attendance and burn-out during the academic year from the pressure of "masking" to fit in. I wanted to empower students with autism to enable them to have a say in their own education.

The initial step was to have a discussion with an autistic Sixth Form student (Dorothy) about these issues; she proposed a mentoring group, where pupils on the autistic spectrum could meet. To support this idea, we wanted to create a space for students to share solutions to common barriers and offer each other support and advice. Pupils would be able to offer advice and insight to teaching staff on the school environment and guidance to teachers on making pedagogy autism-friendly. The group was comprised of around 20 students from Years 7 to 13. This group included students with a diagnosis and also some students who were in the process of seeking a diagnosis. The initial scope of the project was for students to have a safe space to meet and discuss any issues or concerns, and to have an input within school and feel a sense of belonging and support.

IMPLEMENTATION

The first step was to designate the mentoring group as an intervention and negotiate a time and place for them to meet – Thursday afternoons. Having a timetabled, regular and predictable time and place for the group to meet was very important to the girls who took part. The group was named ‘The Green Room Group’. The group was democratically organised, led by Dorothy and facilitated by me (Colin, Assistant Headteacher). Decision-making was delegated to the group with topics proposed by the students. Over the course of the project, we looked at a range of issues, including:

- **the language staff and pupils used to describe autism**
- **common misconceptions**
- **areas of the school that were difficult to navigate**
- **sensory issues in classes and corridors.**

The group also developed teacher training and Autism Acceptance Week resources.

Although the initial scope of the project was within school, once I mentioned the group at the local SENDCo forum, we started to receive requests from outside agencies. Several individuals visited the group to ask for advice on local services. The students were involved in a local authority project to design play spaces, advised Child and Adolescent Mental Health services on service use, took part in a pilot project to speed up autism diagnosis locally, produced video resources for the local NHS, advised the Educational Psychology Service and took part in video conference calls with autism researchers. Dorothy and I also spoke with local primary schools about the journey through primary and secondary school to the parents of autistic children under the age of five. The girls soon started to become proud of the work they were doing and the impact they were having, being able to see change locally on the perception of autism.

IMPACT

The impact of this project has been most easily measured and expressed in the feedback from the students involved. Below is some of the feedback that students provided:

“It’s like therapy!”

“I have made friends which I find really difficult.”

“There are people there who are like me.”

“It gives me something to look forward to.”

“It has a sense of community.”

“I have met more people who I can relate to, and it has helped me stay in school more.”

“I feel able to share personal experiences without fear of judgement.”

“It helps me get through the stresses of the school day.”

“I get to see more people who are like me.”

“It’s so great. I love being friends with these people.”

“Now I don’t feel alone or confused.”

“It has helped my mental health hugely, having time in the week to decompress and unmask.”

“The group has helped me understand my own autism more and better explain it to my parents.”

“It has helped me to be more outspoken and confident when talking to others, especially strangers.”

When asked which interventions at school were most successful for their child, parents overwhelmingly responded that The Green Room Group had been the most impactful. The impact of the project, as perceived by the students and their parents, has been the sense of community and benefit to wellbeing. From a school and local perspective, the students’ contribution to staff training and their insight into the use of local services has proved instrumental in making reasonable adjustments in the environment and resources by offering an insight to professionals from the autistic students themselves. The project has been reciprocally beneficial to all those involved. This project has cost little or nothing to set up and run, and empowered a marginalised group of students, resulting in positive benefits for the whole school community. What began as a vague idea about mutual support has grown into a really positive fixture of the overall support package offered by the school, resulting in the parents of other autistic students choosing the school for their children.



NEXT STEPS

The group will continue into the future, and we hope to increase the numbers over the next few years. When Dorothy is unable to run the group, she will pass on the leadership to another sixth form student.

Success is down to the imagination and insightfulness of the young people involved. As a member of staff, my role has simply been to facilitate and network so that we can spread their feedback and insight as far as possible.

The girls' advice on scaling up the project was to start as many similar groups as possible within schools across the local area to produce a network that could join together to share advice, information and insight into their school and experiences of local services.

Colin Gall

ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER SENDCo
CLAPTON GIRLS' ACADEMY

Dorothy Scott-Griffiths

SIXTH FORM STUDENT
CLAPTON GIRLS' ACADEMY

Adapting these ideas

- The message of this project, about putting student voice and experience at the heart of 'intervention', is really powerful. Consider which groups in your school may benefit from coming together to share their experiences of school and life: beyond learners with SEND, and depending on your school context, you may want to consider something similar for young people with EAL, those who have experienced the social care system, or members of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- You may well already have excellent support and advocacy groups in your school. What opportunity might there be for those groups to engage in the wider community, as The Green Room Group have?
- Transition may be a key area to look at for maximising the power of a project like this: if you are in a primary school, could you ask your local secondaries if their learners with SEND could buddy your Year 5s or 6s? If you are a secondary school, could you offer the same to your feeder primary schools?
- What this project demonstrates is how capable students are to run projects like this themselves with minimal staff involvement. Think about support that is currently delivered by staff in your school – are there any things that might benefit from students owning the direction and delivery?

CLAPTON GIRLS' ACADEMY



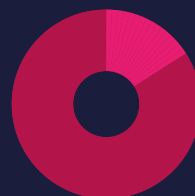
REGION
East London

1186

NUMBER ON
ROLL



YEAR GROUPS
Years 7-13



SEND / ALN
16%



PUPIL PREMIUM
42%



AUTISM
~~AWARENESS~~
SUPPORT
CARE
ACCEPTANCE
LOVE
COMMUNITY



BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY

TARGET YEAR GROUP: KEY STAGE 3

Using Pets as Therapy (PAT) to reduce anxiety levels of pupils diagnosed with ASD

INTENT

We have a number of pupils with anxiety known to the Learning Support Department (LSD), some of whom require time out during the school day to access the learning support facilities. In order to reduce their anxiety, some of these pupils may have already been dis-applied from one or more subjects. Other pupils are quite anxious in social settings and have struggled to make friendships. We aimed to utilise Pets As Therapy (PAT) as a strategy to assist pupils who have Special Educational Needs, particularly with a view to helping pupils with high levels of anxiety, to become more comfortable within the school environment. The PAT project was open to pupils across Key Stage 3. The choice of pupils to participate in the project was largely dictated by the availability of the PAT volunteer. We were able to secure an hourly session on a Thursday morning, and four pupils – who had transitioned from primary school in September 2022 – were involved in the project. All of the pupils involved were known to the LSD and had been selected as they had a diagnosis of ASD and anxiety. One of the school-based Adult Assistants sat in on the sessions. The plan was for Barbara and Monty (a West Highland Terrier), our PAT volunteers, to meet with the pupils on a weekly basis. We hoped the interactions would help build the pupils' confidence and self-esteem, and reduce their anxiety levels.

As well as gathering evidence regarding anxiety levels of pupils who have Special Educational Needs (SEN), we hoped to explore other potential benefits of the therapy, including:

- improved communication skills
- improved social interactions
- improved ability to sustain eye contact
- improved emotional wellbeing
- improved speaking and listening skills
- increased cooperation and levels of attention.

Approval for the project was secured from our Principal in January.

IMPLEMENTATION

Prior to the project getting underway, our Animals in School Policy was amended to include reference to the project:

PETS AS THERAPY

Pets As Therapy (PAT) is a national charity. Their volunteers and temperament-assessed pets visit establishments such as care homes, hospitals, hospices, schools and prisons. PAT Teams who visit schools can help to raise a pupil's reading standard, boost their self-confidence, and improve concentration levels and behavioural problems. The visits can have a positive impact on a child's educational, social and emotional welfare.

As part of the PAT programme the School must:

- be registered with PAT together with the volunteer and dog
- have up-to-date insurance cover provided by PAT
- gain parental consent for a pupil to be part of the PAT programme
- ensure that the dog is under the care of its owner at all times
- make volunteers aware of Health and Safety procedures
- ensure volunteers wear their Pets As Therapy photo ID and that of their pet
- ensure volunteers register at reception at the beginning of each visit and wear the School pass
- ensure volunteers are accompanied at all times by a member of staff and never left alone with a pupil
- carry out a risk assessment to ensure pupils and members of staff with a dog allergy are not put in danger
- notify the PAT Head Office in any event where there is an incident involving a PAT volunteer or their pet

We encountered some initial difficulties as Barbara, our PAT volunteer, was unavailable due to complications following surgery. As a consequence, our start date was pushed back from the Spring Term to the Summer Term.

We had intended to run the project on Monday afternoons as during this time we had three Form 2 boys who attend Learning Support, two of which had a diagnosis of ASD and anxiety. The third pupil has suffered trauma from a physical injury. However, the day and time that suited our volunteers was a Thursday morning, so we changed our group selection to include four boys who had found post-Primary transition into our secondary setting particularly difficult. As it was the Summer Term, we also had to revise our intention of using a Sixth Form pupil as an assistant, and instead assigned one of the Adult Assistants on our team to attend the sessions.

Once the project was underway, we encountered no further problems. Barbara and Monty were very supportive and easy to work with, and the pupils were extremely engaged and eager to attend the sessions. Barbara's expertise and Monty's training were very much in evidence throughout the sessions, and this undoubtedly contributed to the overall success and impact of the project.

IMPACT

We agreed in advance to measure impact through qualitative evidence, such as evaluations from pupils and members of staff. We also monitored the attendance, engagement, and progress of these pupils. Barbara noted a marked difference in the pupils from the first session to the final session in terms of communication with her and Monty, and with each other. One of the pupils in his evaluation form wrote, **"The sessions with Barbara and Monty made me feel calm and released the tension and stress of examinations"**. Another pupil commented, **"I thought it helped me open up a bit more"**.

Anna from our Learning Support Team provided the following feedback:

"The final memories of leaving P7¹ can be so positive for so many – where they have left a place they have loved, known, and felt supported. In contrast, the unfamiliarity and size of their new post-primary school can feel isolating. Pets As Therapy has really closed the gap on isolation and familiarity, as Monty – as impeccably behaved as he is – embraced and accepted the boys week on week. He was a shared topic of conversation, and the boys have not only learned about caring for pets but have learned about themselves and one another. PAT is definitely a positive programme for this school to participate in with more growth and acceptance to be intuited for junior school and some senior pupils alike".





“The sessions with Barbara and Monty made me feel calm and released the tension and stress of examinations”

BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY STUDENT

We believe that this was a very successful project and welcome the opportunity to establish this as a strategy in school going forward. Staff reported an improvement in communication skills with pupils using more eye contact. They also observed pupils listening and contributing during social interactions, as well as increased co-operation and attention. In addition, the feedback suggests an improvement in their emotional wellbeing as their choice of words to describe the sessions included: comfortable, lovely, happy, calm, interesting, important, excited [sic] and enjoyable. Although we encountered some issues in terms of securing the volunteer and working around their availability, these issues were easily resolved. Discussions had previously taken place at Senior Leadership Team meetings about the possibility of having a school dog. The cost implications and possible impact on the animal meant this did not become a reality. The PAT scheme circumvents these issues and concerns, providing the positive impact of animal therapy.

NEXT STEPS

We have ambitions to scale up the project going forward, and are keen to involve some of the senior pupils who are known to the LSD, with a view to affording them a leadership opportunity in a safe and controlled environment. We would highly recommend the Pets As Therapy scheme to other schools who may be considering introducing it. All the participants were extremely positive in their assessment of the experience, and we are very much looking forward to getting this underway right from the outset of the next academic year.

Ms W Graham

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL
BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY

Mrs D Keenan

LEARNING SUPPORT CO-ORDINATOR
BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY

¹ The Northern Irish equivalent of Year 6 in England and Wales

Adapting these ideas

- Are there students in your context whose anxiety levels in school may be lowered by working with animals? Remember that you don't have to begin with a dog, and that interactions with other, smaller animals may also have impact for children.
- If you already engage with animals as therapy in your school, how targeted is that work towards your students with SEND? Do/could you offer older learners with SEND the opportunity to develop their leadership by supporting younger children in accessing these opportunities?
- If you want to hear more about how working with animals can benefit young people, you may want to check out our PiXL in Action episode on Wellbeing for Staff and Students – there is a chapter in that episode where we visit The Green Room Kingsley, an Alternative Provision set on a farm.

BELFAST ROYAL ACADEMY



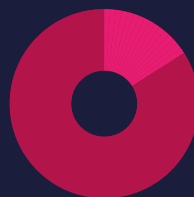
REGION
Belfast

1430

NUMBER ON
ROLL



YEAR GROUPS
Years 8-14
(7-13 in England/Wales)



SEND / ALN
20%



PUPIL PREMIUM
14%

Belfast Royal Academy, founded in 1785, is the oldest school in the city. In the Academy, pupils of all faiths and social backgrounds are taught together. This diversity has fostered a distinctive ethos within the school which is characterised by an appreciation of difference, good will and mutual respect. The school's ethos, which has evolved over many years, values pupils as individuals with unique qualities and talents, and seeks to develop the potential of pupils and members of staff in a humane, supportive environment.



DANIEL SOBEL IN CONVERSATION WITH PiXL
TARGET YEAR GROUP: WHOLE SCHOOL

Thinking differently about inclusion

As a networking organisation, PiXL prides itself on being able to share ideas between member schools. But we also want to bring you the latest and best thinking from experts across a range of disciplines. Our PiXL in Conversation series on PiXL TV is one way that we do that. Each episode is an in-depth conversation between PiXL CEO, Rachel Johnson, and an invited guest who is an expert in their field. Daniel Sobel is an internationally respected author and educator, who specialises in inclusive education and helping leaders and teachers better support the young people in their classrooms. What follows here is a transcript of the first part of the conversation between Rachel and Daniel from our latest series (Series 2 Episode 2).

RACHEL JOHNSON: Daniel, thank you so much for being with us today. I'm really excited about what we're going to talk about, because I think it's so important, and not talked about enough. First of all, tell us about yourself: why you're here, what your background is.

DANIEL SOBEL: Thanks for inviting me. I'm delighted to be speaking with you and honoured. I think we're going to be talking about inclusion, which is my field. And actually, very often I get asked what inclusion includes. Because in England we've got certain labels: Pupil Premium, SEND and the like. But actually, that isn't widely accepted all over the world, and I work more globally. And so, even in England there isn't a full understanding of the broader spectrum of what inclusion means. And I think that might be a useful starting point. So I think inclusion refers to people or children who feel outside of everybody else. And that sense can occur to anybody and everybody at different stages. But for some it's more the usual and the regular, and there are causal factors such as growing up in a particular community, having neurodiversity so having grown up with a different brain mechanism, having social, emotional

or mental health issues, or growing up in certain circumstances. Children in military families, for example, who may move around a lot. Children who come from certain difficult homes or unusual homes and so on and so forth.

Inclusion groups, broadly speaking, in any given society usually stretch or refer to about 30%. What you normally see is that they occupy what can be described as the bottom 30% of the attainment factor. However, actually that's not really true. There's something which I talk about which is that, let's say in particular with SEN, what you see in the outcomes is more like a K-curve. A K-curve is, well literally the letter K. And you have a large group of people who really fail right at the bottom. But arguably in society, the highest attainers are probably SEN as well.

There was a mate of mine who was a professor of speech and language and she did an interesting piece of research at one of the Cambridge colleges looking at science and maths departments, and found that the prevalence of SEN was about 80+% – covering autistic spectrum and other different neurodiversities and so on. And she did the same piece of research in slightly different circumstances – in one of London's biggest prisons – and found that the prevalence of SEN was about 80% again. Therein lies your K-curve. The most successful people in the university world, probably the leading professors in the world, have some kind of neurodivergence. In fact, I would question whether it's possible to be one of humanity's great innovators in life if you don't have SEN. Everyone has heard of these Hollywood actors who have dyslexia. These business innovators have ADHD. I was thinking the other day about – what's the area in America where all the high tech is?

RJ: Oh – Silicon Valley?

DS: Silicon Valley! I mean, is it possible to get a job in Silicon Valley if you're not SEN?

RJ: I don't think so! I don't think you'd be allowed in.

DS: I'm looking around this wonderful room you have here with all this technology. I mean, look at the amazing technology you have here. I mean, where does this technology come from? Who innovated this? Who's found the maths principles and the physics and engineering and everything for this to exist? Well, probably your SEN crew. So the problem which we have, just the very birth of this conversation, is that it seems to be all about children with problems, right? *"Them lot – oh, what are we going to do with them?"* And in fact, we codify the language of these children and people with tremendous negativity. The word dyslexia – dys – it's dystopian. It's showing what they can't do. And this or any discussion is not helped when the starting point is what children can't do. And certainly, if the goal of inclusion is the sense of actually you can belong, you do belong. The labelling with, you know, "you're not one of us, you are different to us" and that constant referral to it, that is the wrong direction.

RJ: It's stopped me in my tracks, what you've just said there. Because that's a different take on the story that everyone's telling themselves. And that's a story that needs to be out there, and I hope we can explore today how we get that out there. How we can change the thinking about that, is your life's work, essentially, isn't it? Changing the narrative around children who are labelled incorrectly, inappropriately, or who are made to feel like they're outside instead of inside.

This article represents 6 minutes of a nearly 60-minute conversation.

If you would like to watch the whole episode, please head to <https://auth.pixl.org.uk/tv>

We have other episodes of PiXL in Conversation that you may also be interested in, covering a whole range of issues affecting educators. Particular ones of interest to readers of this publication may include Alex Wheatle (making the invisible visible, on growing up in the care system) and Hannah Wilson (on diversity, equity and inclusion for schools). For more from Daniel, please head to his website (inclusionexpert.com) for a range of training and CPD on inclusion. Daniel is also one of the authors behind the Global Inclusion Teaching Initiative: ifip.group/page/giti.



THE GREEN ROOM FOUNDATION IN CONVERSATION WITH PiXL

Building trust and empowerment through coaching

The Green Room Foundation began as a small, one-room operation called The Green Room which aimed to re-engage young people in education. The Green Room Foundation now runs three independent Alternative Provisions:

1. **The Green Room Windsor (GRW) – a small provision for 13-16-year-olds**
2. **The Green Room Kingsley (GRK) – an 11-16 provision based on a farm**
3. **The Green Room College (GRC) – a sixth form provision based in a community-run pub**

I reached out to speak to the team about how coaching is integrated into the approach taken to support young people with EHC Plans. I spoke to members of the leadership team at GRK – Becky Thompson (Head of School) and Rob Mynard, as well as Director of Education for The Green Room Foundation, Danielle Haxby. Becky states that a lot of the progress they make with the young people they work with is made through relationships. The children they work with have often (but not exclusively) had negative experiences in mainstream school settings, and so establishing trust with them when they join GRK is imperative. It's hard to miss the importance of coaching in establishing strong working relationships between staff and students at GRK. It is the main vehicle through which they hope to re-engage students, build their self-confidence and promote positive behaviour change through high support and high challenge.

WHO IS COACHED AND WHO DOES THE COACHING?

One-to-one coaching is offered to all students at GRK as part of the curriculum and is protected in the weekly timetable to demonstrate that the staff value this time with students. The coaching time allows students to show up with complete authenticity and gives them a safe space to discuss anything that's on their mind, away from the pressures of engaging in a classroom environment. This has been particularly beneficial to students who are highly anxious. Out of 21 staff members at GRK, 9 of them are coaches. This means that the practice and culture of coaching is one that is well-understood across the teachers in the school, with just under half of them actively engaged in coaching students. There is CPD time for coaches to share their practice with one another.

WHAT DOES COACHING LOOK LIKE?

The first few coaching sessions that students have will focus on their experience and journey with education so far. It's important for the staff at GRK to communicate absolute acceptance of their students as individuals, establishing a baseline of trust and support. From this foundation, they can then begin to introduce some more challenge, so that the sessions are productive and purposeful (rather than just a nice opportunity to have a chat). To help provide some of the rigour needed to ensure the sessions are purposeful, the team use Level Best, which was created by *The Green Room* founder Joe Sparks, and which PiXL members may well be familiar with, as it forms part of our PiXL Change strategy available to all members. **Level Best** is a system that helps pupils change their own lives for the better. It consists of three levels, each one comprising of self-imposed challenges that must be achieved before progressing to the next one. By taking ownership of what is holding students back, they are able to work together with their coaches to move forward.

Despite these strategies being very well used by staff in their coaching sessions, Rob does acknowledge that they aren't always the right approach for every student and that particularly Level Best can sometimes be a challenge to set up with some students. Other structures that the team may use include sessions on looking to the future and helping students plan aspirational futures for themselves. For others, they may look at what the team call their 'extra 5%', which is where students explore what would make their school experience 5% better – for example an activity or club that they'd like to engage in but which isn't currently offered. It is very important to the team that experiences with coaching are child-led. For some students, who value routine, each coaching session will follow the same journey – looking through behaviour data and taking the conversation from there, for example – whereas others prefer the sessions to be more flexible and adaptable based on their needs in the moment. This adaptability is reflected in the location for the coaching sessions, which is again child-led: some students prefer to sit down at a table face to face, whereas others are more comfortable walking side by side around the farm. If a coaching session has been particularly challenging for a student, then they have the option of being able to take a short walk around the farm to decompress before heading back to their lessons.

CONSISTENCY AND TRANSPARENCY

The weekly coaching sessions are underpinned by a robust tracking system supported by Arbor, which helps to keep the coaching consistent and transparent. The system is linked closely to the rewards system, where students earn positive points for their behaviour that build towards them receiving different tiers of awards. The tracking system is linked to the ROCCIT values of Resilience, Organisation, Communication, Community, Initiative and Teamwork.¹ Students' demonstration of these values during the week can then form the basis of their coaching conversations – for example, *"why have you got some negative communication points on Arbor this week, what's going on there?"*.

Coaching is a long-term commitment and, aside from these small adaptations that are child-led, the team endeavour to create as much consistency as possible. For example, they try to keep each child's coach consistent for their time at the school, so that the relationship between coach and student can become really strong. There is absolute transparency, however, that the coaching sessions are not a secret and that the coach will share appropriate information and reflections with the wider staff team. In that way, students also feel like they have a real voice in the conversation, as the things they may want to bring up and challenge will be fed back to the wider staff. Equally, coaches are keen to get as much staff input into the coaching sessions as possible – inviting staff to share observations and reflections from recent lessons that could be addressed through the session. This can mean that the coach, who in theory has the strongest relationship with a child, is able to have some challenging conversations with them on behalf of other members of staff.



WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF THIS?

It is telling that of the students they work with, a very small minority do not choose to engage in the coaching on offer and even those instances are usually only for short amounts of time. It is clearly valued by the students. I asked the team what the benefits were of adopting coaching with learners with SEND. Becky said that for her one of the biggest ones was time: coaching provides specific time to drill down into some of the underlying sources of challenge that there might not be space to tackle at any other opportunity in the school day. For Rob, it's all about using that time in order to effect change. The coaching gives students the opportunity, and makes explicit their power, to change things that they don't want to be true about themselves anymore – whether that is anger or lack of confidence or anxiety or anything else that may be getting in their way. For Danielle, it's about empowering students to speak for themselves. Many young people with SEND, or on an EHCP, will experience adults (undoubtedly very well-meaning) speaking for and about them all the time. The experience of the team at The Green Room is that often these statements made about children will focus on what is not or cannot be possible – they won't get on a minibus, they can't do this or that. That can be a very disempowering experience for young people. Coaching empowers students to take accountability for their own decisions about their own lives.

WRITTEN BY HANNAH COSTANZO IN CONVERSATION WITH

Becky Thompson Head of School
THE GREEN ROOM KINGSLEY

Rob Mynard SLT
THE GREEN ROOM KINGSLEY

Danielle Haxby Director of Education
THE GREEN ROOM FOUNDATION

MORE ABOUT COACHING

- The team at The Green Room Kingsley featured in all four episodes of Series 1 of **PiXL in Action**, and they discuss coaching specifically in a couple of the episodes:
 - **Episode 1: Sharpening up the Conversation** – how they have adapted their precise approach to pastoral intervention
 - **Episode 4: Wellbeing for staff and students** – how Level Best and coaching work at the school, including how coaching feeds into the therapeutic approach of the school
- For more information about PiXL Change (including Level Best and 1Up), all PiXL members can access advice and guidance about this via PrimaryWise (for Primary Members) or the Members Area (for Secondary and Post 16 members).

¹ ROCCIT is a framework that GRK use to track learners' personal growth and development over a course of project-based and experiential learning. Through participation in this course, learners will develop new skills, apply knowledge and broaden their mindsets. You can find more information here: <https://thegreenroomschool.com/roccit>

Adapting these ideas

- What opportunities are there in your school to really spend time one-on-one with children who are struggling to start to tackle some of the deeper issues or concerns that lie beneath their behaviour at school? Remember that finding the time to really get under the skin of an issue may release a lot of time later on down the line when it comes to managing behaviour, for example.
- You may not be in a position to be able to offer timetabled coaching to every child in your setting, but are there particular children who might benefit from this one-on-one time to build trust, confidence and self-reflection?
- Does your rewards system provide meaningful data that could be used as a basis for having constructive high-support and high-challenge conversations with the children in your school? If it doesn't, how could you adapt to ensure the data being captured about student behaviour has the opportunity to be empowering for students?



“Coaching empowers students to take accountability for their own decisions about their own lives.”



ACCELERATING PROGRESS







DEESIDE SIXTH FORM (COLEG CAMBRIA) TARGET YEAR GROUP: KS5

D6th BOOST Programme

INTENT

Following our A-level results in 2022, it became clear that although the majority of our learners made good progress there was an emerging attainment gap in two areas: those in deprivation bands 5-6 and those with SEND / ALN. Our KPIs at D6th always aim to keep attainment gaps within 4% therefore we began planning a bespoke strategy that would go further than our usual pastoral / academic support options. The strategic plan really came together following the first PiXL Post 16 National Conference of the year, where I was handed a copy of the Insights brochure on raising male attainment. I began reading it on the train and soon realised that although we did not have an issue with male attainment at D6th, the same strategies could be used to 'BOOST' our ALN / Deprivation level 5-6 learners.

As the RSL for D6th, I chose to lead the project myself and enlisted the support of my Curriculum Leads (four in total) so that they would have an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. We met several times over the course of two weeks in order to review the two sixth form-based strategies in the Insights brochure and then created the final programme based on an amalgamation of the two. We named the programme 'BOOST' with the idea that each year, following exam results, we could use the strategy for any group that required a 'boost' to their learning. The programme was added to our CIP (Continuous Improvement Plan), which formalised the targets and enabled us to discuss progress with the Cambria executive team throughout the year during our 'Impact Review' meetings.

To select learners, we analysed the list of learners in deprivation bands 5-6 and those on the ALN register and chose those with the lowest levels of attendance (e.g. <80%). The reason for this was that these students were historically more likely to drop out and not successfully achieve. We used both AS and A2 students although the majority were AS learners as we felt that we could have more impact with the first years. In total we had 18 students from bands 5-6 and 22 SEND / ALN learners. They were all taking a variety of different A level subjects as well as the Welsh baccalaureate.

IMPLEMENTATION

Once we had reviewed the PiXL Insights strategies, we looked at which elements we could adapt in our college setting. This was then written up as a 'guide' so that staff, students and parents were clear as to what the programme would entail. This consistent approach enabled us to review which elements were effective and which were not and also made the staff involved in the programme accountable for its outcomes.

The programme was then implemented in two stages:

PHASE 1: IMPLEMENTATION

The selected students were all invited to a launch assembly during which myself and the Curriculum Lead explained the benefits to the programme and why they had been selected. The session was interactive and required students to reflect on their own study habits, motivations and goals. We specifically focused on the DAC model by Lazarus: a) Demand – what is demanded of me? b) Ability – do I have the skills to complete the activity? c) Consequences – what is actually at stake? They then also listened to examples of high-performance athletes / CEOs in order to boost motivation and aid with goal development. Students were given a copy of the programme in a letter to take home and share with parents / guardians. We asked the students to formally 'sign up' to the programme in order to pledge their commitment to getting the best possible outcomes from the year.

Following the assembly, each student was allocated a weekly one-to-one slot with either myself or one of the four Curriculum Leads. Building up a rapport with learners during the sessions was key as we wanted to set a professional yet supportive tone, where learners could be open and honest about the barriers to their learning. The structure of the one-to-ones would involve the following:

- **Attendance and punctuality checks**
- **Creating a study period weekly plan / mock revision timetable**
- **Timetabling supervised study time with a manager / member of SLT**
- **Ensuring one extra past paper question per subject was completed each week**
- **The use of PiXL DTTR tasks for revision**
- **Asking learners to RAG their revision for their next test**

The one-to-ones initially lasted six weeks alongside a weekly workshop whereby students would be introduced to a small study skill in order to enhance their revision. This was based on the premise that if they build an ingrained routine into their studies, they should perform better in their next test. The skills are taken from **Mini Habits: Smaller Habits, Big Results** by Steven Guise¹.

In order to manage the programme and ensure all staff were accountable for their one-to-one cohort, we created a shared spreadsheet where staff recorded their one-to-ones along with other relevant data such as individual student attendance and test scores etc.

PHASE 2: FOLLOW UP

Following the data capture taken from the first mock in December 2022, the cohort then received an exam wrapper one-to-one with a manager and were then categorised into one of two groups.

- **Those who were still underachieving who were then put on an 'Academic board' list where parents were met and issues discussed. They then had continued supervised study periods on their timetable added.**
- **Students who have shown some improvements were then given continued supervised study periods on their timetable without the weekly one-to-ones or parental meetings.**

IMPACT

In order to measure impact, we looked at a) attendance data b) test scores (most notably the two main mocks within the year). The Phase 1 findings from the students in bands 5-6 showed that attendance went up on average 5% per learner, with the majority of learner attendance being within 4% of the cohort average. In terms of test scores, 12 out of 18 learners went up at least one grade in the December mock compared to their AP3 score (taken in October). Six learners remained on the programme for Phase 2 with increased intervention, with the remaining 12 just receiving

supervised study. The final Phase 2 findings showed that attendance remained within 4% of the cohort average and that all but one learner had increased by at least one grade in their final mock (April). We put this down to the value of having regular one-to-ones with staff who are there as more of a mentor / guide rather than someone who is there to instil discipline. Incidentally, retention in bands 5-6 also rose to 93.1% and is now the second highest.

The biggest impact was seen in the SEND / ALN findings, which showed that 74% of learners increased their attendance over the six-week period of Phase 1, with only a 3.4% difference between theirs and the cohort average. Phase 1 attainment data showed that 45% of learners increased at least one grade in the December mock compared to their October test scores. This increased further at the end of Phase 2 with 64% of learners increasing by at least one grade in their final mocks (April).

When it came to the A-level results we were extremely happy with the impact of the BOOST programme.

The results for students in bands 5-6 on the programme were extremely positive with 15/18 learners successfully completing the year and progressing onto either University or A2. For those with SEND on the programme, 21/22 successfully completed the year with 1 learner going back to AS to resit. The most impact can be seen when looking at retention rates for bands 5-6 as they are the highest (94.6%) after eight weeks for both AS & A2 combined. This is much higher than in 2021/22 when it was 85.7%. The programme will now become common practice at D6th and something that we will aim to use year on year with learner groups that require support. The student feedback from the programme was positive with 91% of learners agreeing that they now felt 'more in control of their studies', and 95% stating that they felt the programme 'helped them to remain focused'.

Miriam Riddell

HEADTEACHER

DEESIDE SIXTH FORM (COLEG CAMBRIA)

¹ Guise, Stephen (2013), **Mini habits: Smaller Habits, Bigger Results**. Selective entertainment LLC, ISBN 1494882272

Adapting these ideas

- How could you adapt the DAC model by Lazarus (Demand, Ability, Consequences) to support your learners with SEND in your context?
- Miriam's project demonstrates exactly what we hoped would result from the Insights project. She read an article in our previous issue on raising boys' achievement (the BOOST project from St James' Catholic High School) and adapted it to her very different context. Which students in your context might benefit from some of the ideas in this publication?

DEESIDE SIXTH FORM (COLEG CAMBRIA)



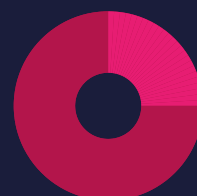
REGION
North Wales

630

NUMBER ON
ROLL



YEAR GROUPS
Year 12 - 13



SEND / ALN
25%



PUPIL PREMIUM
/ EMA 11%

Coleg Cambria is one of the UK's largest colleges, with over 8000 full time students across five sites located in North Wales. Deeside 6th is one of two sixth form colleges in the Cambria group. All students at D6th take three A-level subjects alongside the Welsh baccalaureate. 25% of learners are from the most deprived localities (Deciles 1-3), with 5% of all learners at the college from the most deprived locality (Decile 1) which is substantially higher than The Welsh Index of Multiple deprivation (WIMD) data for the region.

“The student feedback from the programme was positive with 91% of learners agreeing that they now felt ‘more in control of their studies’, and 95% stating that they felt the programme ‘helped them to remain focused’.”

MIRIAM RIDDELL, HEADTEACHER, DEESIDE SIXTH FORM





ROMANS FIELD SCHOOL

TARGET YEAR GROUP: KS1 & KS2

How the use of communication resources and visual aids has supported writing for pupils with SEND

CONTEXT

Romans Field School is a Special School for children aged 5 to 11. We have children with SEMH, ASC who follow the National Curriculum, and pupils with significant complex needs who follow a bespoke Romans Field curriculum. Often, we find that one of the greatest challenges we face as a school is ensuring that our pupils are ready and able to access their learning. As part of this we ensure pupils have the correct provision, routines and expectations in place to support which in turn will enable our pupils to flourish socially, emotionally and academically. Our aim at Romans Field School is to provide our pupils with a caring and nurturing environment which encourages all children to succeed and be the best versions of themselves.

INTENT

Raising standards of attainment and progress has always been a significant priority for us at Romans Field School as many of the children who join may have been out of education or working on a reduced timetable in another setting for a significant period of time. This, in turn, often means that pupils have significant gaps in their learning and more often than not will be working significantly below age-related expectations.

Our approach at Romans Field is to provide the children with a bespoke curriculum tailored to their individual needs so that they can feel successful within their learning, develop greater independence and understand how to develop resilience when faced with challenges – a concept that many of our children find challenging.

Often, we find that when children arrive with us at Romans Field they will be very dependent on adult support and require a lot of intensive support to complete the learning tasks set. We found that this was particularly apparent in writing where our pupils would often find it challenging to know where to start or how to develop their ideas to suit the purpose. Using additional communication resources such as Colourful Semantics and Widget, we were able to provide the children with additional structure to help them develop the necessary oracy skills to support their writing.

Our aim was to provide the children with enough structure and scaffolded learning so they were able to write coherent sentences or paragraphs of writing based on their individual capabilities.

This project was predominantly used with the children within the complex needs pathway within our setting. For our pre-communicative children, Colourful Semantics was used to support their language development. For those pupils with greater oracy skills, Widgets were used to support the Talk for Writing process.

When using Colourful Semantics with the pupils, the children would work through various scaffolded stages of learning to develop key language to be able to articulate a sentence and then subsequently be able to write a sentence to communicate their ideas.

IMPLEMENTATION

The use of visual aids such as Colourful Semantics or Widgets was integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. This has ensured that the children understand the approaches used and can refer to them to communicate their ideas more effectively.

The Writing Lead within our school has worked closely with the Complex Need Lead to ensure that all staff within the complex needs pathway understood how these resources could be used to support learning – from writing short sentences following the 5 stages of Colour Semantics to creating a story map from Widgets to support the Talk for Writing process. Each strategy was tailored to each individual pupil's needs to develop greater independence in writing. All learning was bespoke so that they could make the greatest rates of progress from their starting point.

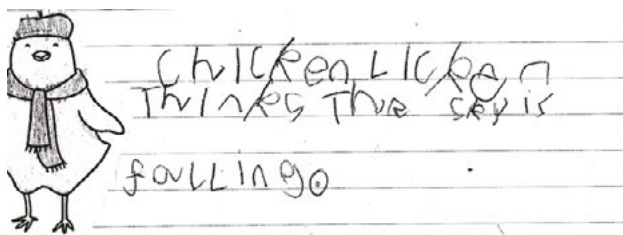
Data for writing was closely monitored each half term by the Writing Lead and Deputy Headteacher to ensure that the levels of progress were quality assured. There was an ongoing focus on increasing pupils' stamina when writing, ensuring the children could communicate their ideas in coherent sentences.

IMPACT

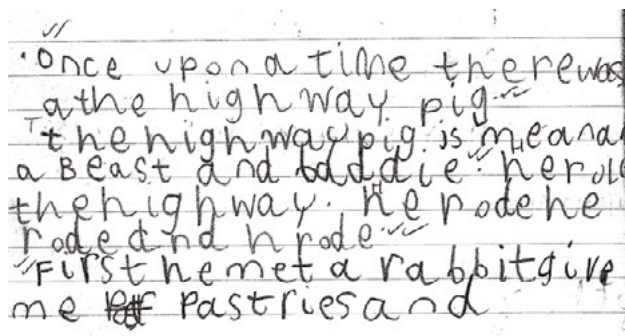
We found from our results that where the systems of using communication devices and visual aids were applied consistently, in all aspects of the curriculum, pupils made the greatest rates of progress. In the class where visual aids and communication devices were used consistently, 100% of the pupils made accelerated rates of progress in writing across the academic year 2022 – 2023.

In relation to all pupils within the complex needs pathway, 65% of the pupils made accelerated progress in writing in 2022 – 2023. The aspect that had the greatest impact for our pupils was creating routines and structures that the children used consistently; this enabled the pupils to understand how to use the resources to support their own learning and, in turn, created greater independence.

PUPIL A
SEPTEMBER 2022



PUPIL A FEBRUARY 2023
AN EXTRACT FROM PUPIL A'S 2-PAGE STORY



The greatest area of focus moving forward is to ensure that pupils are encouraged to broaden their choice of vocabulary, thinking carefully about how language can be used for effect. As a school we are having a significant focus on this, thinking carefully about how teachers can plan for meaningful opportunities to promote and broaden language development.

The use of communication devices and visual aids cannot be underestimated when trying to raise standards of attainment in writing. The most important factor I would consider when implementing this approach is to ensure that the appropriate resource is used in line with each pupil's individual ability; it is not a 'one size fits all' approach. You must know your individual children and have a thorough understanding of what they can access independently and the scaffolds they require to best support their needs.

Chantelle Baldwin
DEPUTY HEADTEACHER
ROMANS FIELD SCHOOL

Adapting these ideas

- If you are not familiar with the use of Colourful Semantics or Widgets, how might these be used to support the development of children in your context? Which students might benefit the most?
- It is explicit in this project that it was the **consistent** use of communication devices and visual aids that they believe made the difference. Particularly if you are in a secondary setting, how could you improve the consistency of approach across multiple departments? Are support strategies being used in English, for example, also being shared with colleagues in other faculties where there is significant writing required?

ROMANS FIELD SCHOOL



REGION
Milton Keynes

65

NUMBER ON
ROLL



YEAR GROUPS
Years 2-6



SEND / ALN
100%



PUPIL PREMIUM
73%

Special School



“This enabled pupils to understand how to use the resources to support their own learning and, in turn, created greater independence.”



NINE MILE RIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL

TARGET YEAR GROUP: EYFS

Creating a universal approach to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

INTENT

Following the pandemic, there was a need to improve the provision of Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) within my setting and to ensure that pupils were being exposed to a language-rich environment. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research suggests the measures taken to combat the pandemic deprived the youngest children of social contact and experiences essential for increasing vocabulary. Of 58 primary schools surveyed across England:

- 76% said pupils starting school in September needed more support with communication than in previous years.
- 96% said they were concerned about pupils' speech and language development.
- 56% of parents were concerned about their child starting school following the lockdown in the spring and summer.¹

¹ Education Endowment Foundation (2021), *The impact of Covid-19 on School Starters: Interim briefing 1 Parent and school concerns about children starting school* [April]. Available from: [Impact of Covid19 on School Starters - Interim Briefing 1 - April 2021 - Final.pdf](#)

As we can see, Speech and Language Therapy plays a vital role in the lives of children and young people. Unfortunately, the amount of time offered to schools by the NHS Speech and Language Therapy Service continues to be on a downwards trend, whilst the knowledge and skills of teaching staff in identifying and supporting children and young people with SLCN has risen. The early identification of children and young people with SLCN is crucial, as there is a direct link between SLCN and educational outcomes. A questionnaire was circulated to schools within my Multi Academy Trust (MAT), which identified a need to support SLCN across all school communities. This correlated with the national picture and the report published by the EEF that provided evidence that lockdowns had an impact on young children's language skills.

“Data from 50,000 pupils has shown an increased number of four and five-year-olds needing help with language. Evidence shows poor speech development can have long-term effects on learning.” JEFFREYS, 2021².

The overall aim of my project was:

- To prioritise speech and language as it is both an essential building block for a range of cognitive and social and emotional skills, and predictive of a range of later-life issues.
- To provide an evidence-based approach to support students with speech and language challenges.
- To meet the needs of pupils and young people and give them access to the appropriate speech, language and communication support needed.
- For every pupil to have access to a SLCN assessment pathway.
- To have a clear process for SLCN identification and support.
- To have access to SLCN training and intervention resources.
- To engage parents in developing their understanding of SLCN.
- To focus on Early Years Foundation Stage pupils as my starting point.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation was seen as a process, rather than an event. I needed to create a leadership environment and school climate conducive to effective implementation. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. In order for my vision to be successfully implemented, I needed to recognise that leading change is a process, and there was no magic wand to do it for me³.

Firstly, I identified information and resources, engaging with professionals who would support my project. I used the Lippit-Knostrer Model to manage change using the five key elements for success (Vision, Skills, Incentives, Resources, Plan)⁴.

My main actions:

1. Identified two SLCN champions amongst the staff, and ensured that CPD built knowledge, motivated, developed teaching techniques and embedded practice.
2. Researched a variety of Speech, Language and Communication programmes and resources.
3. Ensured the Early Years Reading and Language Lead was on side, to ensure a consistent use of correct vocabulary being used across the school.
4. Identified and acted on barriers and enablers, shared strategies to encourage and recognise 'buy-in'.
5. Purchased resources to trial.
6. Carried out baseline assessments with all Foundation Stage pupils using an online speech assessment tool.
7. Carried out speech support with pupils in identified 'sound' intervention groups.
8. Reassessed and reviewed pupils the following term to indicate whether further intervention was needed, or a referral for a Speech Therapist.
9. Created Speech & Language Assessment Pathway.

² Jeffreys, B. (2021), **Lockdowns hurt child speech and language skills - report**. [27 April]. BBC. Available online: [Lockdowns hurt child speech and language skills - report - BBC News](#)

³ There is a useful blog article from **The Change Management Blog** that gives more information about this model: <https://change.walkme.com/managing-complex-change-2/>

⁴ Knostrer, T., and M. Lapos (1993), **Reflections on inclusion at school and beyond**. Lewisburg, PA

IMPACT

The evidence from the MAT questionnaire and baseline screening of Foundation Stage pupils helped reinforce 'the Why' for my project which ensured the engagement and collaboration of staff. Project updates were regularly shared with the Leadership Team and the wider staff. This collaboration ensured clarity and a shared learning experience. The SLCN staff champions felt empowered to act as a resource for colleagues in delivering universal, targeted and specialist-level interventions.

SLC needs of pupils are being met through a consistent approach across the school. Pupils are being identified earlier which increases the knowledge of staff to potential barriers to learning. At the first screening assessment in November, 38 out of 52 Foundation Stage pupils were flagged as having a Speech, Language and/or Communication Need requiring intervention. When the same pupils were reassessed in February, the number had dropped to 24 and when reassessed in May, only 8 pupils needed additional support and each of these pupils needed to be referred on to other agencies.

The main driver for my project was to build a self-sustaining Speech, Language and Communication Needs provision in school to meet the identified needs of the individual pupils in our care. I would like to further develop training sessions for parents. My next step is to move my project from a small-scale project in one school to roll out across The Circle Trust to enable all primary and secondary schools to have a consistent approach.

Clare Demblon

INCLUSION MANAGER

NINE MILE RIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Adapting these ideas

- PiXL Primary launched a package in January 2024, in collaboration with Speech and Language UK, to support the development of speech and language in the Early Years, which may support work in this area. The package contains six, short CPD sessions led by Jean Gross CBE, within which the key points are exemplified through specially recorded footage in schools. A Leadership Thinking Guide aims to help school leaders support staff undertaking the CPD and a Practitioner Guide supports staff in considering how the CPD and accompanying resources can be used for impact.
- Consider implementing the PiXL Oracy Leadership Guide to cultivate a robust school culture that values and celebrates spoken language, fostering an environment where every voice is heard and respected.
- Our PiXL Debate resources provide pupils with structured opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings, fostering a supportive environment for open discussion and critical thinking and enhancing their ability to engage in respectful, informed debates.

NINE MILE RIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL



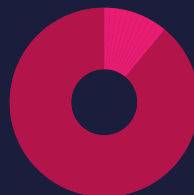
REGION
Berkshire

365

NUMBER ON
ROLL



YEAR GROUPS
EYFS - Year 6



SEND / ALN
11%



PUPIL PREMIUM
6%



“The SLCN staff champions felt empowered to act as a resource for colleagues in delivering universal, targeted and specialist-level interventions.”



CARMEL COLLEGE WITH GCSEPOD TARGET YEAR GROUP: KS3 & KS4



Unlocking the world of STEM for every student

Engaging with complex subjects like science and maths can be challenging. For those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), these challenges are often multiplied.

Here, Naomi Bartholomew-Millar, Head of Science and Maths at Carmel College, explores how schools can foster an inclusive and engaging learning environment, ensuring that every pupil can unlock the fascinating world of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES

The first step toward creating a truly engaging and exciting culture within the classroom is recognising that every student learns differently. Teachers and teaching assistants need to be trained to not only identify these different learning styles, but also be equipped to adapt accordingly.

There is an array of learning difficulties which can impact students and there needs to be better understanding across the education sector if we are to avoid leaving students behind. Dyscalculia is one such example, predominantly affecting students' progression in STEM subjects. Students with Dyscalculia find it difficult to understand numbers – essentially it's 'maths blindness' and it can lead to fairly significant gaps in students' understanding if the condition goes unnoticed.

Over time, this lack of understanding will shift to a lack of engagement and then a lack of confidence, almost certainly leading to poor behaviour in the classroom. Schools need to break this spiral as quickly as possible and ensure every pupil knows that STEM is accessible to them.

ADAPTING THE CURRICULUM

Should a teacher identify a barrier to learning, changing how the curriculum is delivered should be the first port of call. Traditionally, for STEM subjects, this was more difficult, with the depth and volume of the content meaning that teachers had limited freedom when it came to planning more creative lessons. Textbooks were viewed as the 'go-to' resource, with sporadic practical lessons in biology, chemistry and physics. More recently we've seen this change, with teachers creating modified lesson plans, incorporating multimedia resources such as video, or organising more regular practicals. Especially for SEND students, the ability to visualise what's happening in a scenario will help to make abstract concepts much more tangible.

THE BENEFITS OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

Of course, some students may require additional support and it's our responsibility to ensure that we continue to invest in specialised resources and personnel. That's why the STEM Impact Program offered by Access Education was such an attractive offering.

Being able to map out knowledge gaps and what students need to know before starting a topic ensures that we can effectively tailor lesson plans. With students able to track their own progress via the dashboard, they can see how many 'pods' they have successfully completed and their grades, building confidence over time.



As the GCSEPod software is easy to use, we can also engage parents, enabling them to sit down at home with their children and work through the assessments. The 'Check and Challenge' functionality has also created some healthy competition between students, with many now getting excited by the prospect of a computer room lesson as they know they'll be using the software.

For me, it's all about finding out what makes students 'tick' and then weaving that into lesson plans – the GCSEPod software has certainly allowed us to do that, thanks to its extensive range of content, offering educational material for over 30 GCSE subjects. We're looking forward to seeing the impact the new **STEM program** has on our 2024 GCSE exam results. As well as this, we're currently trialling GCSEPod's new **KS3 content**, and we are already seeing the positive impact it's having on developing students' knowledge and engagement – proving how valuable education software can be for every secondary school year.

BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Building an inclusive and engaging learning environment extends far beyond the four walls of the classroom. By developing open communication channels between parents and caregivers, teachers, teaching assistants and other external organisations, schools can support the learning journey of every student. Speaking from my own personal experience, I've always enjoyed maths as I had a really inspirational teacher who always pushed me to continue with the subject. That doesn't mean I didn't find it a challenging subject and it by no means came easily to me – it was all about the support systems I had in place that helped me pursue this ambition.

To find out more about the Access Education STEM Impact Program, visit www.theaccessgroup.com/STEM.

Naomi Bartholomew-Millar
HEAD OF SCIENCE AND MATHS
CARMEL COLLEGE



AN ARTICLE BY AMJAD ALI SENIOR LEADER AND SEND EXPERT

Top tips for developing a more inclusive classroom practice

Monday morning, new term: welcome (back) to your space, your domain, your theatre of dreams or in other words your classroom, where in this environment you will undoubtedly find individuals with a variety of needs and challenges all approaching or greeting you with sighs, smiles, or with nerves and as much trepidation as you!

In the post-Covid modern classroom, although the sentiment of inclusivity and additional and special needs has been a long standing one, you really are a teacher of mixed prior attainments, mixed aspirations and ambitions, and mixed resources and budgets. To be truly successful in your classroom, and to be able to be truly inclusive, you will need to undertake the following strategies amongst many others.

Firstly, start with really getting to know your students. 'Knowing your students as not just students' is a phrase I often use to make the distinction between knowing the students actually in your classroom and the students that are generically referred to in educational books, blogs, podcasts, or journals. You know, the 'regular', the 'average', the 'usual' students, that may or may not apply in your classroom. So, forget about what 'Little Johnny' (interesting how it is always a young boy that's the naughty one, right?) is doing, and think about what little Jamal is actually doing in your actual classroom, in front of you.

So, get to know your students initially by referring to their 'blurb.' Blurb?! Yes, the information about them that does not explain everything about who they are, what strengths and difficulties they may have, but gives us a little insight (a PiXL insight?!) on who they are. So, what is in this blurb? Well, do they have any additional, special educational needs? Which of the hundreds of acronyms are they having to navigate the school day, and their daily life, with? ASD? ADHD? VI? SpLD? (My new book has a whole glossary on the various acronyms you are likely to encounter in schools when working with SEND students – little plug, sorry!) OK, so, you find they have a SEND need; you also note they are entitled to FSM, and they have EAL. So, what now? Well, get to know them, read their profiles, look at the current data, reading ages, SAT scores... Get your initial information on them to be able to set some foundations for yourself. But do not cap your expectations or put them in boxes. More on this later!

Going back to getting to know your students, seek out (hopefully this information should be streamlined and accessible to you anyway) if your students have got a Pupil Passport, an IEP (Individual Education Plan), a student profile or an EHCP (Education Health Care Plan). If so, then your SENDCo, Teaching Assistants and/or Designated Safeguarding Leads amongst other pastoral staff are your key people to learn from. Pick their brains, ask them questions, pitch your ideas to them and ask for suggestions – they will be eager to help.

Now, get to know them directly, by asking them some questions to probe into their thinking and understanding of learning; ask them to finish the sentences:

1. I learn best when... 2. I do not learn when... 3. The best teachers are... 4. I wish my teacher knew...

Once you have read your students' responses, pay careful attention to what works well, what to avoid, and ensure you think about how any individual targets could be met in your classroom. Unfortunately, lots of our students who struggle in lessons do so because they have not tasted success. They may not be able to articulate how they learn, or what stops them from learning, but those very responses mean you are learning about them. Take this opportunity to remind students that only having 'fun' lessons, instead of lessons where work is too 'hard' or 'boring', will not allow you to learn about their needs. What will help is when they provide concrete examples of how previously they have made progress learning something. (See [here](#) for a ready-to-print template).

Something else an effective, inclusive teacher should do is set your bar extremely high.

'When we expect certain behaviors of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behaviour more likely to occur.' (ROSENTHAL 1985)

So, expect to see and hear the very best from your students once you have shown, shared and reshown and reshared how it should be done. (I just avoided using the word 'modelling', but that's what I mean – but not just once, quickly, but modelling repeatedly and reminding of the modelling too.) I always say it is far easier to remind than to get annoyed that somebody has forgotten! It is worth noting that **The Pygmalion Effect** or the **Rosenthal and Jacobsen Effect** (1968) ¹ describes that positive expectations influence performance. Equally, if you have negative viewpoints about your students, even subconsciously, it will have an adverse effect. This is known as the **Golem Effect** ² or the reverse **Pygmalion Effect**. Or in simpler terms, a self-fulfilling prophecy as they work both ways!

Do not forget parents and carers know our students better than us: call them, meet them and ask for their advice and learn top dos and don'ts too! Don't wait until things are going very wrong, or something negative has occurred: be proactive. Let's flip the phrase from 'parents are hard to reach' to 'schools can be hard to approach'.

Next, think about this: 'steps to success' should be a phrase that rings over and over in your mind when planning, preparing and teaching. 'At what point in my lesson will there be an opportunity for success?' Think about how it is very rare to ever meet a student who will say 'I really enjoy, learn and achieve well in (enter here whichever subject you wish) but I hate it'.

¹ **Rosenthal and Jacobsen Effect:** Read more here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_effect

² **Golem Effect:** Read more here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golem_effect

So, chunk and sequence all your instructions, set timeframes on how long each instruction should take, and explain why that time is being allocated to that instruction. Also, enable full clarity in your classroom by informing your students of the expected noise level. For example: 'I need you all to read the extract in front of you. This will take four minutes as it is two paragraphs long. This will be done at zero noise level, as you don't need anybody else's input or distraction when reading.' Then ask for repetition: 'what have I asked you to do?' Ask students to say back what they must do, how long they have and what noise level the task should be completed at.

Now, inform them what they can do if they get stuck. This I will leave to you, as that's where you, as an expert, come in. What can I do as a teacher to support/scaffold/adapt/help if a student is struggling? For the reading task I have exemplified above, this would have required quality first planning, rather than adaptive teaching per se. So, I would have done some pre-teaching of the difficult vocabulary in the extract. I would also go and sit next to somebody who might need to read to me directly to help them focus.

IN SUMMARY

- **Get to know your students.**
- **Keep higher expectations than you currently have.**
- **Plan for pitfalls in advance.**
- **Build in opportunities for success.**
- **Do not provide support until attempts/failure has occurred.**
- **Keep a calm, controlled, routine-based classroom.**

AMJAD ALI

SENIOR LEADER AND SEND EXPERT

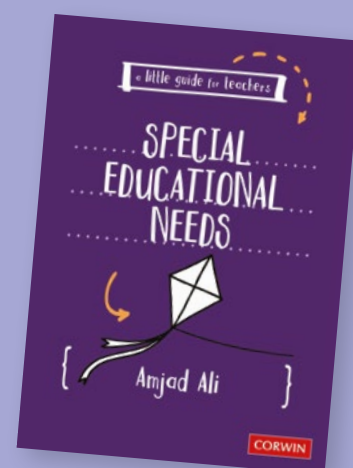
More from Amjad Ali

Amjad has recently written a book for the '**Little Guide for Teachers**' series all about Special Educational Needs in schools. These books are written to be small in size but big in support and inspiration for teachers, new or experienced, SENDCOs, deputy SENDCOs, senior leaders and anybody with busy day-to-day lives.

Each book in the series is:

- Authored by experts in the field
- Easy to dip in and out of
- Interactive, with activities and space for written reflections

Amjad's title is coming out on by **April 2024** and is available to pre-order now on www.TryThisTeaching.com. You can also book Amjad as a keynote speaker or to deliver low effort and high impact CPD and training through his website (details in section below).



ABOUT AMJAD ALI

Amjad Ali is a teacher, Senior Leader, SENDCO, speaker, consultant and author of **A Little Guide For Teachers – SEND In School.**

Amjad has worked with children his entire life and is dedicated to ensuring inclusive practices are at the forefront of what we do in our schools and classrooms. Amjad works four days a week in a secondary school and delivers CPD and training on his fifth day of the week (<https://www.trythisteaching.com/cpd>). He does this to ensure the ideas he shares and promotes are tried and tested and rooted in experiences 'at the chalkface'.



“Let’s flip the phrase from ‘parents are hard to reach’ to ‘schools can be hard to approach.’”



SUPPORT ACROSS THE SCHOOL





AN ARTICLE BY CATRINA LOWRI FOUNDER OF NEUROTEACHERS

Fostering inclusion: How school leaders are transforming work environments for teachers with special needs and disabilities

INTRODUCTION

In today's educational landscape, fostering inclusivity for staff with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is a crucial aspect of creating a supportive work environment for educators. As with pupils, there are four main categories of SEND in adults: physical, medical, and sensory needs, cognition and learning needs, communication and interaction needs, and social, emotional, and mental health needs. Not all adults with additional needs identify as disabled because of the word's medicalised connotations. There is a perception that this term only applies to physical or sensory needs, yet many staff with a variety of different SEND needs will nonetheless require reasonable adjustments under the Equalities Act 2010. Under this legislation, school leaders have a duty to meet needs regardless of diagnosis. Moreover, all staff benefit from inclusive practices in terms of human resources (HR) policies and culture. Such measures help staff feel a sense of belonging and community, thus improving both recruitment and retention.

In Britain and many other developed countries, there is a significant retention and recruitment crisis (Whittaker 2023). This is especially pressing because of the national skills gap in education (Oxford Learning College 2023) and the high number of unfilled vacancies, especially in additional needs support (QA Education 2023). The 2023 DFE research suggested that there are significant gaps between the amount and level of work disabled teachers would like to carry out and their ability to access the reasonable adjustments they require. It would therefore make sense for employers to look at the barriers which disabled teachers face and consider ways to remove them. Employing disabled teachers presents an opportunity for schools. As well as acting as great role models for disabled children, they also teach typical children about the diverse range of strengths and needs in the human condition. They may also have skills and knowledge which can be hugely useful and enriching to a school community. This article will examine the current situation around the employment of SEND staff and examine some examples of best practice through the medium of four mini case studies.

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

According to a 2021 (Schools Week 2) report, only 1 per cent of the staff across all education sectors are disabled. This is likely to be a gross underestimate, however. The most recent census data for England and Wales suggested around 17% of the population are disabled (Schools Week 2). Moreover, Europe's largest neurodiversity charity, the ADHD Foundation, estimate that 20% of the population are neurodivergent (ND), many of whom would certainly qualify as having additional needs. It is statistically likely that there are many more ND teachers than currently publicly identify as such. The fact that social media groups supporting ND staff are increasing in popularity suggests a small but significant minority may exist within the profession (Neurodivergent Teachers Network). Although, no current statistics are available to verify the exact number or percentage of teachers with ND strengths and needs.

In the DFE's two recent papers, both produced in 2023, data on this protected characteristic was not collected in 52% of cases. The reports suggest this was largely due to under reporting by staff and poor follow-up by schools.

School leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the culture of their institutions, and an essential aspect of this responsibility is ensuring that teachers with special needs and disabilities are fully included in the workplace. The following case studies explore the various strategies and initiatives that nursery, school and college leaders are implementing to improve inclusion for educators facing unique challenges with a wide range of special needs and disabilities.

CASE STUDY 1

A. Overview of the challenges faced by teachers with special needs and disabilities.

The DFE report (DFE 2) suggests three reasons why data on disabled staff may not be accurate: inconsistent questioning such as 'Do you have a disability that we should be aware of?', staff hoping to avoid stigma – especially around invisible disabilities, and finally HR officers and Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) having concerns about follow-up for fear of enhancing stigma and perceived discrimination.

These points were reviewed recently by an HR manager at an FE college. The organisation recognised that the numbers of SEND staff were not being accurately recorded. It was felt that high levels of absenteeism may be masking unmet need, particularly amongst staff who supported SEND and other vulnerable learners.

They explored how the three barriers could be removed through conducting an anonymous survey with staff.

B. The importance of inclusive workplaces in promoting diversity and enhancing overall organisation culture.

The FE College survey had a good response (N=73). Participants were asked to respond to all three points raised in the DFE paper by giving short answers. The results suggested rewording the first question to 'Do you consider yourself disabled? If so, what adjustments would help you to be more productive and contented at work?'. Respondents also suggested allowing staff to change their status on employee records to 'disabled' at any time during their employment.

Over 60 per cent of staff agreed that there were stigmas around disabilities. This affected both disclosure of SEND from staff and follow-up by leadership. The HR officer felt that there was a piece of work to be done around increasing awareness and acceptance and is currently finding a partner college with good disability affirming policies to learn best practice. This will include looking at:

A. Establishing Inclusive Policies:

1. Developing and implementing inclusive hiring policies
2. Ensuring fair and equal opportunities for professional development
3. Creating policies that address the unique needs of teachers with disabilities

B. Training and Professional Development:

1. Providing training for school staff on diversity, equity, and inclusion
2. Offering specialised training for administrators on supporting teachers with special needs
3. Collaborating with external organisations and experts to enhance professional development opportunities.



CASE STUDY 2: PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMMODATIONS

In the case of one early years setting, adjustments needed to be made for a practitioner with mobility needs and hearing impairment. This was done in the following ways.

A. Creating Accessible Workspaces:

1. Modifying physical spaces to accommodate diverse needs

The nursery already had ramps at entrances to the setting. These however proved unsuitable as the member of staff walked with a crutch and uneven ground was harder to negotiate than steps. Tailoring adjustments to individual needs, the setting applied for a grant to widen some doorways to outside areas to make it easier for the staff member to fit through entrances with their crutch.

2. Implementing assistive technology to enhance accessibility

The hearing aid the staff member had did not allow for filtering out the background noise of children busily playing and learning. The practitioner was encouraged to contact their audiologist and given protected time off work in order to attend the medical appointment necessary to gain the right equipment needed to support them in their work.

CASE STUDY 3

A member of staff at a secondary school had severe mental health issues following a sudden bereavement.

1. Flexible Work Arrangements

The school offered a leave of absence, followed by a phased return, which was implemented following recommendations by Occupational Health. Upon returning to work, the member of staff was offered extra non-contact time, use of quiet space along with a minimum number of necessary meetings online only.

2. Emotional, Social and Mental Health Support

Building a Supportive Community was key to helping the unwell member of staff return to full-time work after mental illness. This was done by fostering a culture of empathy and understanding among staff through peer support. They also implemented an informal coaching system, encouraging open communication and active listening. The staff worked together to implement mental health programmes and resources for all educators. Possibly most importantly, they recognised and addressed the unique stressors faced by teachers with mental health needs.

CASE STUDY 4

Celebrating Success Stories:

A primary school had a higher-than-average number of pupils with neurodivergent (ND) needs such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia. Rather than using celebrities and famous role models, the school staff wanted to create 'local heroes'. They did this by highlighting success stories of teachers with neurodivergent needs who have thrived in inclusive environments. They had two members of staff who were happy to talk about their successes and needs. One was an autistic classroom teacher, and another was a dyslexic member of SLT.

The colleagues did a joint assembly called 'Celebrating Neurodiversity' in which they talked about how their different minds and brains gave them varying strengths as well as needs. Snippets of this were recorded and shared on the school website and social media. This was then picked up by the local paper. This had a positive knock-on effect for the reputation of the school as an inclusive environment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, creating an inclusive work environment for teachers with special needs and disabilities is a multifaceted effort that requires commitment, understanding, and proactive leadership. School leaders who prioritise inclusivity not only contribute to the wellbeing of their educators but also set a powerful example for students and the wider community. By implementing inclusive policies, providing necessary support, and celebrating diversity, school leaders can make a lasting impact on the educational landscape.

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- <https://qaeducation.co.uk/news/teacher-shortages-fears/>
- **Oxford Learning College** <https://www.oxfordcollege.ac/news/skills-gap-statistics-uk/>
- **Neurodivergent Teachers Network** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1001669034065988>
- **Schools Week** <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/7-bleak-findings-that-show-school-recruitment-crisis-is-intensifying/>
- **Schools Week 2** <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/disabled-staff-teachers-disability-data-dfe-guidance-reporting/#:~:text=The%20government%20has%20said%20previously,truly%20reflect%20the%20real%20position%E2%80%9D>

MORE FROM NEUROTEACHERS

You can currently purchase **The Ultimate Neurodiversity, Reflective Practise & Adaptive Teaching EBook**.

This includes the following three Ebooks:

- Ultimate Guide to Neurodiversity
- Neurodiversity and Reflective Practice
- Adaptive Teaching

Catrina Lowri

FOUNDER OF NEUROTEACHERS

ABOUT CATRINA LOWRI

Catrina founded *Neuroteachers* to help educational settings work with their autistic and neurodivergent learners to find simple solutions for inclusive practice. Catrina is neurodivergent herself, having the dual diagnosis of dyslexia and bipolar disorder. She is a qualified special needs teacher and an experienced SENCO and advisory teacher. Catrina's particular area of research is around exclusion prevention. She has written two papers for the *Good Autism Practice Journal*. The first in 2018 was a case study about preventing exclusion for an autistic, ADHD boy with extreme demand avoidance. The second, published in 2020, looked at reintegrating autistic children into school after a period of persistent absence. **Catrina believes passionately in true inclusion for all.**

TO CONTACT CATRINA

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- **Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@neuroteachers>
- **Book a meeting:** Paula@neuroteachers.com
- **Website:** <https://www.neuroteachers.com/>





AN ARTICLE BY EVE HEDLEY

TARGET YEAR GROUP: WHOLE SCHOOL

Every Teacher a SEND expert

Developing a culture in school where every teacher is a SEND expert is key to closing gaps and overcoming barriers to learning. Ensuring our SEND students achieve is not just the responsibility of the SENDCo but is a key role of all teaching staff in school. This often requires a shift in mindset or a culture change which can be achieved through a carefully thought out, whole-school strategy which is implemented effectively.

The EEF's 'A School's Guide to Implementation' says 'Treat implementation as a process, not an event, and execute it in stages'. Below are suggested stages which are key in developing a culture where teachers' SEND expertise is constantly developed and embedded in day-to-day practice.

AWARENESS

Teachers need to be very aware of which students have special educational needs or disabilities. This information must be at our fingertips as it is unlikely that we can hold all of this information in our minds, especially if we have multiple classes. Asking teachers to create a 'teacher file' (an actual lever arch file) is a simple way of ensuring all teachers have the right information to support students with SEND, in one place. The file contains class lists where SEND students are identified, support plans provided by the SENDCo, seating plans with students' needs explained as well as medium term curriculum plans for each class.

The teacher file not only assists the teacher in supporting their pupils, but it also facilitates quality assurance of SEND provision. Senior leaders or external visitors can drop in on a lesson and see at a glance where the pupils who have additional needs are and be reassured that the class teacher has taken the time to identify them and has the information they need to support them. The teacher file should always be available on the teacher's desk.

“As a senior leader, I can go into any classroom and pick up the teaching file and see which students have SEND. I can also see what teachers have planned for them and I can see the planning in action. The SEND planning policy has raised the profile of our SEND students and causes teachers to think carefully about the needs of these students, giving them equity of access to the curriculum.”

I. TULLY – CHRIST'S COLLEGE SUNDERLAND

PLANNING FOR SEND

Knowing who our SEND pupils are isn't enough; we also need to plan for their needs and give careful thought to how we adapt our teaching so that all students can access the curriculum. The teacher file can once again be helpful in ensuring that all staff are doing this. Now that teachers have identified who their SEND pupils are, they can start to plan for the needs of their pupils every lesson by annotating their medium-term curriculum plans with strategies and techniques which will support them. The evidence that teachers are planning can be seen in their written annotations which makes quality assurance easy.

“Having the teaching file in my classroom has meant that I have knowledge of students in my classes at my fingertips rather than having to go to the electronic register. I can instantly see SEND and medical needs on my seating plan and I then annotate my curriculum plans with my adaptations. I keep my medium-term plans in my file too so I can make any tweaks to the curriculum. As a department we discuss the adaptations we've made and review our curriculum regularly.”

C. WEBSTER – CHRIST'S COLLEGE SUNDERLAND

Making SEND planning part of your planning policy means teachers have to think about the needs of their SEND pupils and the strategies that they will use on a lesson-by-lesson basis so pupils can access the lesson. This avoids the situation whereby teachers only think about these students at the start of the year when they are setting up seating plans. It also helps teachers to develop their knowledge of SEND strategies because they are having to do this for every lesson.



ON-GOING TRAINING

All schools and colleges give teaching staff an update at the start of the year about pupils and students who have SEND, as well as guidance about how to cater for individual needs; however, if all teachers are to be SEND experts, CPD on SEND and adaptive strategies needs to be on-going. Consider ensuring that every CPD session has a SEND focus. Whether the training is on effective explanations, classroom dialogue, literacy or a new marking policy, we need to reflect on how it will impact on and be adjusted for SEND pupils.

It is also wise to give the SENDCo a short slot every time there is whole-staff CPD to ensure the needs of our SEND pupils are at the forefront of our minds. The needs of our students change throughout the year with new students joining or new diagnoses mid-year, so regular updates are essential.

Christ's College in Sunderland, which is an all-through school, have implemented many of the strategies mentioned here and were recently commended by Ofsted for their commitment to raising the quality of education for SEND, which is a real strength of the school. The school also provide staff with a SEND planning guide which describes all of the different educational needs and disabilities that we could encounter, with guidance and suggested strategies to try. Teachers refer to this as they are planning and annotating the curriculum for SEND pupils and in doing so, they are continually building their SEND expertise.

A CULTURE OF SHARING

We often discover new strategies and techniques that work particularly well with some pupils as we get to know more about them, throughout the school year. Building in time in our CPD programme for staff to share what works well with our SEND pupils can be very helpful in developing a strong SEND culture. Set time aside for 'Show and Tell' and ask key staff to volunteer to be observed delivering effective strategies to pupils with SEND. You may also want to set up a working party who do research on SEND strategies and feed back to staff on best practice.

Bishop Perowne Church of England College in Worcester, who are doing an Insights project with Year 11 disadvantaged boys, have a unique idea called 'Reverse Parents' Evening'; this involves the pupils visiting each of their teachers in a parents' evening style event but rather than the teacher giving the students information about their progress, the students give their teachers information about what helps them learn. This might be something you want to do with SEND students, possibly with their parents, to find out even more about how we can give the best learning experience to our young people.

Implementing some of these strategies in school will help ensure that the progress and achievement of our SEND students is not seen as the responsibility of our SEND department but rather as a shared responsibility of all staff. Developing strong SEND provision across our schools will help ensure that all of our pupils can access the curriculum and in doing so improve their life chances and opportunities.

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Date Published: 2 December, 2019

Source: EEF

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OFSTED: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50234428>

Eve Hedley

PIXL CONSULTANT ASSOCIATE



“The school quickly identifies pupils with SEND. Staff are provided with the right information to support pupils with SEND. Teachers use ‘teacher files’ in classrooms to ensure that they use supportive strategies. These are used consistently and enable pupils with SEND to access the curriculum with success.”

OFSTED REPORT, CHRIST’S COLLEGE SUNDERLAND





AN ARTICLE BY JEAN GROSS AUTHOR AND EDUCATION EXPERT

How to get the best from support in the classroom

Some time ago, an HMI told me about a time when he'd been observing a lesson while the class teacher was giving instructions. As she spoke, a boy turned to a nearby teaching assistant (TA). 'You'd better listen to this, Miss', the boy said, 'cos you're going to have to tell me in a minute'. The story illustrates one of the pitfalls of TA support – over-reliance on adult help, by class or subject teachers and by students themselves.

HOW TO REDUCE OVER-RELIANCE

TAs often tell me they have to repeat teachers' instructions to children, because they don't remember them. But there are many ways in which teachers can scaffold children's independent comprehension and recall. They could, for example, supplement verbal instructions with visuals. They could ask another child to repeat back an instruction, leave instructions on the board or on a laptop in the corner of the room, or tell children they can start if they are ready or wait to have the instructions explained again if they would like to. These are all examples of teacher scaffolding to take away the need for an additional adult on whom the child comes to rely. Others include:

- previewing texts to teach potentially tricky words to the whole class, exemplifying their use in contexts the students will know or are interested in, inviting them to create a symbol or drawing for the word, or completing a **Frayer model**;
- supporting independent writing by providing writing frames (with more key words/phrases, less complex sentence starters, reduced space for extended writing for some learners), **structure strips**, and **graphic organisers**;
- providing an 'Enable Table' or Helpdesk in a corner of the classroom, where pupils can find resources to scaffold their learning – a laptop with a PowerPoint of the lesson loaded up so they can review it, key vocabulary lists, a quick read pen that scans words and reads them aloud, spelling resources, and maths manipulatives;
- **avoiding sensory overload** and teaching children self-regulation techniques to manage strong emotions.

Technology is probably the best way of all of minimising the need for extra adult support. The accessibility options in standard operating systems now make it possible for any student to have text read aloud to them, to dictate using speech-to-print, to look up the meaning of any word they don't understand, and to record assignment instructions. The '[Diffit](#)' app will translate text into a chosen reading level using AI. Apps are also available to help children stay on-task, manage to-do lists, generate reminders, and organise information. One of the best investments any school can make, in my view, is in an adult (potentially a TA) whose role it is to keep up with developments in assistive technology, advise on matching it to the needs of individuals, coach staff and pupils in its use and trouble-shoot inevitable glitches.

WHY SHOULD WE MINIMISE THE NEED FOR EXTRA ADULT SUPPORT?

The purpose of TA support is of course to maximise pupil participation, independence and achievement. Research, however, shows that it can have the opposite effect. Studies (Giangreco, 2010) find that where a TA is nearby to provide support in class, children are less likely to work independently, and that the presence of a TA often prevents the child from interacting with other children. A study of children with EHCP-level support (Webster and Blatchford, 2013) found that where they had a TA with them, they had half as many interactions with their classmates as other pupils.

And then there is attainment. The well-known, large-scale DISS study (Blatchford et al., 2012) found that the more in-class TA support children had, the less academic progress they made. The difference in progress made by children with substantial TA support was large: as much as a whole year's school progress.

This was not because those supported by TAs had SEN or were lower achievers to start with. The researchers compared similar children – children with similar academic levels or levels of SEN – so were able to rule out this explanation.

INTERACTION PATTERNS

The reason for the unexpected negative impact on attainment may lie in another finding from the DISS study, that children with SEN who had TA support were half as likely to be talking and working with the class teacher as children without SEN. The greater their level of SEN, the less likely they were to be spending time with the teacher.

A wise HMI once said 'The DISS study does not show that the more time TAs spend with pupils, the less progress they make – it shows that the less time they spend with their teachers, the less progress they make'. In your school, could it be true that the most skilled and qualified adults are often spending the least time with children who most need their help?

More and more teachers are addressing this issue by deliberately varying roles, so that in some lessons the TA works with middle- or high-attaining groups while the teacher works with the lower-attaining. Others 'flip' support, deploying a TA to patrol the classroom, managing behaviour and answering queries, freeing the teacher to work intensively with a group who have fallen behind. Others split the class so that some pupils engage in carefully planned activities supported by the TA while others experience from-the-front teaching, then swap. Pre-teaching or review of key topic vocabulary can be a particularly useful activity for the TA to undertake here in their support role.

These forms of deployment are perfectly legitimate. Even though overall allocation of TA support across the school may be based on putting more time into challenging classes, this does not mean that the class or subject teacher has to deploy that support exclusively or even particularly to the individual pupils who present learning or behaviour difficulties. The only exception to this would be where a child has an EHCP that specifies a prescribed role for a TA, and/or where a child has physical or medical needs that mean they must have personal support for health or care reasons.

It is important, however, to make sure that parents of students with SEND understand the reasons for deploying TAs in ways other than attaching them to individual children. My book [Beating Bureaucracy in Special Educational Needs](#) has an information sheet on the potential negative effects of 1-1 support that can be shared with families, for example in a workshop.



EFFECTIVE DEPLOYMENT

Whilst velcro-style in-class TA support is best avoided, research shows that other types of TA support do lead to good academic progress (Education Endowment Foundation, 2015). This tends to be when TAs are taking an individual child or group to follow a specific time-limited programme to improve literacy, language, maths or social and emotional skills. The TA will have been well trained to follow the programme, and the class or subject teacher will also have had training, so that they know about the content of the extra sessions and can follow up in class.

Other useful TA roles are preparing scaffolded resources for students to use independently in lessons, running lunchtime clubs to support those who find unstructured times difficult, and acting as key worker to link family, pupil, school staff and outside agencies.

SHARED EXPECTATIONS

I'll end this article as I began, with a story. It was told to me by a primary headteacher who went into a Y5 class and saw a group of children working together on a maths problem. They were struggling but were nearly there with the solution. Just then, a TA nearby noticed that the head had come in. Immediately, she moved over to the group and ended their struggle with heavy prompts. Essentially, she completed the task for them.

The headteacher was deeply concerned about messages that leaders and teachers may have inadvertently been giving support staff – that what mattered was task completion, rather than learning. She immediately instigated a CPD programme for support staff and teachers, focused on the scaffolding framework featured in the EEF's [Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants](#) guidance.

Information was also provided to teachers and parents about the conditions where over-use of TA time can prove unhelpful, and teachers took part in training on how to promote independence in learning by using scaffolding techniques.

The result is a setting where there are now shared expectations. There is support for **learning**, provided by the right adult at the right time, rather than support for **children**.

The difference is important, and worth reflecting on.

Jean Gross

AUTHOR AND EDUCATION EXPERT




ABOUT JEAN GROSS

Jean is a national expert on educational disadvantage and special educational needs. Her best-selling books include ***Beating Bureaucracy in SEND*** (4th edition, 2023), ***Time to Talk*** (2017) and ***Reaching the Unseen Children: practical strategies to close stubborn attainment gaps in disadvantaged groups*** (2021).

She has been a teacher, an educational psychologist and head of children's services in a local authority. She was formerly government Communication Champion for children, headed the **Every Child a Reader** and **Every Child Counts** one-to-one tuition programmes, and led on inclusion within the government's National Strategies. She was awarded a CBE for services to education in 2011.

[@JeanGrossCBE](#)

www.jean-gross.com



“One of the best investments any school can make, in my view, is in an adult (potentially a TA) whose role it is to keep up with developments in assistive technology, advise on matching it to the needs of individuals, coach staff and pupils in its use and trouble-shoot inevitable glitches.”

More from Jean Gross

- Jean features as a guest on our second series of PiXL in Conversation on PiXL TV. In this in-depth discussion with our CEO, Rachel Johnson, they discuss how we can best support those children and families who are often seen as ‘hard to reach’. This conversation spans what schools can do at leadership level and classroom level to make education a more equitable experience for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Jean has also been involved in our EYFS project with Speech and Language UK, referenced on page 38 of this publication.
- Jean is the author of many books, most recently *‘Beating Bureaucracy in Special Educational Needs’* (NASEN, 2008) and *‘Reaching the Unseen Children’* (Routledge, 2021).

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AN ARTICLE BY KAREN COLLINS

TARGET YEAR GROUP: WHOLE SCHOOL

Finding effective practice - making use of Estyn

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales. As part of the inspection process, centres are often asked to share good practice on the [Estyn website](#) under 'Effective Practice'. A search for SEN or ALN will provide a series of short articles sharing good practice that may be useful in your setting. This can be filtered by sector, although there will be practice in other sectors that you can adapt for your pupils. We looked through the site when compiling this Insights on SEND/ALN publication and found some interesting practice that we thought you might like to hear about.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO ALN - THE 'LOOK BOOK'

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/different-approach-aln>

CARDIFF MUSLIM PRIMARY SCHOOL

When pupils returned to school after the closures due to the pandemic, the gap between pupils in the same year group was large. In addition, pupils in Year 3 and 4 were not yet able to read effectively, pupils lacked confidence and were heavily reliant on the teacher and support staff to complete tasks. To help support students, the school employed an independent external specialist teacher as their Additional Needs Coordinator (or SENDCo) on a part-time basis and an intervention teaching assistant. Together they introduced Year 3 and 4 intervention groups covering literacy and mathematics, broadly following the teacher's planning but adapted to meet the needs of the pupils. This work was adapted to ensure it did not merely follow the activities and tasks being delivered in the classroom.

'Look Books' were used to encourage pupils to be more independent in their learning. These acted as a pupil visual reference bank: they are more discrete than using visual references on the walls and can be carried by the pupils to wherever they are learning. Pupils are encouraged to manage and take responsibility for their learning – they can add anything they like to their look book including colouring, games, times tables, mnemonics, high frequency/ topic words etc. Once it is no longer needed, these forms of scaffolding and support can easily be removed.

This concept of the Look Book could be used in any setting where SEND/ALN students may need additional support; fostering independence by giving the pupil autonomy for selecting what is placed inside. In a secondary setting this may include scaffolding and support materials for a wide range of curriculum areas. The portability of the book enables the pupil to have access to this wherever learning is taking place.

SCHOOL PROVISION AND SUPPORT PANEL – THE 'WELLBEING TEAM' AND 'SUPPORT PANEL'

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/rationale-and-impact-schools-provision-and-support-panel>

YSGOL ST CHRISTOPHER'S SPECIAL DAY SCHOOL

The school governing body and senior leadership team recognised the need to quickly develop its support for pupils' wellbeing and staff's professional learning to manage the challenges of the curriculum for Wales and ALNET Act 2018. The school wanted to ensure that specialist support and guidance was available to all staff to support them through the changes.

To enable staff to have access to timely specialist advice they developed a wellbeing team, built around a family liaison officer, attendance and engagement lead and healthcare co-ordinator, with the later addition of a mental health co-ordinator. This team works closely together to provide families with the first contact at school. They respond to attendance difficulties, queries about school, issues in the classroom and work closely with new families. The school also facilitates an internal provision and support panel that meets monthly. School staff can refer to the panel to request additional advice and guidance as they plan to meet their pupils' needs in class. The panel brings the wellbeing team together alongside a speech and language therapist, assistant educational psychologist, behaviour analyst and occupational therapist. The panel discusses the referrals, works closely with staff and families, provides advice and models how best to meet the needs of the pupils. The panel also makes referrals to outside agencies when required.

The introduction of the wellbeing team and the panel have provided the opportunity to discuss and share ideas and bespoke professional learning for staff. This has meant that staff feel more confident planning for and meeting the needs of pupils with a range of complex additional needs. Although it may not be possible for all schools, particularly those who are not specialist provisions, to have such a comprehensive panel of experts, the principle could still be used in other settings. Make use of internal expertise and form a panel, to whom staff can refer pupils, who are then able to provide expert advice, guidance and professional learning.

Karen Collins

HEAD OF CURRICULUM (SCIENCE, ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH)





HOPE ACADEMY

TARGET YEAR GROUP: WHOLE SCHOOL

The SEND Review: Best practice in meeting the needs of learners with SEND

CONTEXT

Given the exponential rise in the numbers of students identified with learning difficulties and complex needs since COVID-19, nationally, the skills of teachers have been put to the test. Many teachers have had little or no prior training in pedagogy or curriculum design for learners who have a reading age four or more years behind their chronological age, with concentration, communication, and interaction difficulties (medical and physical) in a mainstream setting. External support from multi-agencies is very limited and generally does not deliver the level of improvement required for students to make progress in line with age-related expectations. It is apparent that there is a distinct lack of understanding and experience about supporting the educational needs of our learners from Health and Social Care professionals, who in turn can misinform parents. Many parents and carers feel that they must apply for an EHCP to gain appropriate funding and support for their child, with unrealistic expectations, in some cases misguided by external professionals who have nothing else to offer. So how do we as educators meet the diverse needs of all our school population effectively, given the constraints of DfE guidelines in Standards and Expectations, Ofsted inspections, and reducing school budgets? Schools must be creative. The SEND Review is a great starting point for schools to address the most effective ways of meeting the needs of our learners with SEND. This article looks at the best practice and impact of the SEND Review across a variety of schools across the North of England.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SEND REVIEW?

The review process is intended to be an opportunity to share good practice from experienced practitioners in parallel with seeking advice on areas which need to be improved. A SEND Review is designed to support schools in the most effective use of resources, identifying training and listening to the voice of the learners to ensure that all children achieve their very best, including the knowledge, skills and qualifications that they need for successful transition into adulthood, further education and employment. It should be led by an experienced practitioner with an established track record of gaining excellent outcomes for learners with SEND. The Lead Reviewer partners with a professional from another school who is training to be a lead and works collaboratively in the whole school SEND Review.

Any school can request a SEND Review from an experienced trained professional (SLE) in a linked Trust school, or Archdiocese/Diocese school. Schools can choose to commission a SEND Review from NASEN or the DFE.

A SEND Review is:

- focused on self-evaluation
- a practitioner-led process developed through collaboration
- powered by peer-to-peer support
- non-confrontational.

A SEND Review is not:

- an Ofsted inspection
- to review the capacity of the SENCo
- about gathering evidence against anyone
- a judgement of **any kind**.

The SEND Review takes a full day; it is a thorough whole school review including interviews with Headteachers, SLT, SEND Governors, Heads of Department, Pastoral Leaders, SENCos, Teaching Assistants, ECTs, students and parents. Reviewers will carry out Learning Walks, look at assessment for learning in book scrutiny, reflect on schools' data monitoring processes for SEND and discuss the main areas of need and the quality of information shared with staff by the SENDCo. The Review may include a 'Golden Thread' exercise where one student (or more) with an EHCP is examined through:

- their progress data
- student and staff interviews
- learning walks
- looking at individual EHCPs
- evaluating information shared with staff when they plan learning
- speaking to parents.

Time is built in at the end of the day for the SEND Reviewers to write a summary report of the Areas of Strength and Areas of Development for the school. The Headteacher and the Senior Leadership Team will be invited to hear the summary findings from the Reviewers before they leave the school. Within the next two weeks, the Lead SEND Reviewer will send a detailed report to the school of the SEND Review and include links and advice on how the school may further improve practice, to be included as part of their school improvement plan. Throughout the process, areas of strength are to be celebrated and this can be taken back to the SEND Reviewers' own schools to support improvement.

IMPACT

A SEND Review, particularly through the eyes of someone outside the school, can have a large impact on outcomes. Subject leadership can be strengthened as curriculum leaders identify pedagogy and in-class interventions to support students. **SEND Reviews have helped to contribute to the improvements seen at Hope Academy:**

- SEND gap closed and exceeded non-SEND by half a grade overall.
- Progress 8 score was higher than the previous 3 years. SEND outcomes +0.43 above National.
- LA students made the most progress.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The Appraisal/Performance Management of TAs and teachers could be enhanced with the use of:

<https://www.wholeschoolsend.org.uk/send-development-pathways-school-workforce>

This resource provides a directory of free online CPD, relevant to different career roles for the school workforce.

It would help to maximise TA deployments if formal time for evaluation was created for teaching and TA staff and the following documents would support this process: **Whole School SEND (2017): TA Deployment Review Guide**

<https://www.wholeschoolsend.org.uk/resources/teaching-assistant-deployment-review-guide>

EEF: Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/teaching-assistants>

There is strong evidence that the deployment of specialists prior to EHCP assessment can have greater impact on the quality of teaching for a wider group of learners: <https://www.wholeschoolsend.org.uk/resources/deploying-specialists-mainstream-settings-improve-outcomes-learners-send>

Phillippa Hible

STRATEGIC SEND LEAD HOPE ACADEMY

Phillippa Hible is the Strategic SEND Lead at Hope Academy. She also leads SEND Reviews across the Merseyside Archdiocese Secondary Schools at the request of Headteachers.





PREPARING FOR LIFE AFTER SCHOOL





YOUTH EMPLOYMENT UK

TARGET YEAR GROUP: KS5

Careers experiences of young people with additional needs

Youth Employment UK is a leading voice on the successes and challenges young people are facing. As home to the Youth Voice Census, the largest youth voice survey of its kind, we hold unique insight and data sets for young people aged 11 – 30 across the UK. The 2023 Youth Voice Census found that young people feel that their opportunities are scarce, and that their experiences within their communities, schools, colleges and work are more challenging than ever before. The purpose of this report is to focus on the experiences of young people with additional needs in the education system, narrowing in on the particular needs that these young people have and how they would like to experience careers support and information. The Youth Voice Census captures additional needs from a predefined list. It also gives the opportunity for young people to tell us more about their needs. We recognise the limitations in labelling in this way and have completed careful and considered work to ensure that these data sets are as robust as possible with the information provided.

CAREERS EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL Whilst overall careers experiences increased for young people in education against last year's Youth Voice Census scores, we see that young people with additional needs were less likely to have been offered the same variety and frequency as their peers.

- Young people with additional needs were 9.4% less likely to have received visits from employers. Of these, young people with SEN had received 37.4% more visits from employers than those with a physical disability.
- Young people with SEN were 20.9% more likely to rate the career education they had received so far as 'poor' or 'very poor' at supporting them to make informed choices than their peers.
- Young people with speech, language and communication needs were 43.3% less likely to seek support from friends.

“Being able to access 14 – 16 college options would have helped. Not everyone is academic.”

YP WITH A SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTY

“I would have preferred to learn a range of university and college opportunities, in multiple different fields. I would also like to see more support for people with additional needs who are looking to have a professional career.”

YP WITH BEHAVIOUR, EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

WORK EXPERIENCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL Covid 19 and the rise of hybrid working have meant that work experience opportunities have been heavily disrupted, with lots of young people missing out on valuable opportunities to gain knowledge and skills from employers. Under a third (29.2%) of young people had the opportunity to undertake work experience in the previous 12 months.

- Young people with additional needs were 9.7% less likely to state they had undertaken the work experience.
- Generally, young people with additional needs expressed that they had relied heavily on their parents to help them get work experience, as schools required them to find their own.
- Respondents with behaviour, emotional & social difficulties were 43.7% more likely to rate their work experience as 'average'.
- Young people with additional needs were 34.7% more likely to have received a week of online live sessions with an employer. Those that undertook virtual work experience appeared to view it as a positive experience.
- Where we heard negative experiences of virtual work experience, it related to a lack of inclusivity – for example, one respondent stating that they were deaf and there were not any captions.

SKILLS Young people are concerned that they aren't being prepared for the future. Very few believe that employers will want to hire them with growing worries that the expectations employers have of being 'work ready' are attainable to them.

- Young people with additional needs were 12% less likely to understand what skills employers are looking for than the all-age group, with just 36.8% stating that they understood the skills employers were looking for.
- 64.7% of young people with SEN felt they were not supported sufficiently by their school to develop their skills for the future, compared to 23.1% of respondents in the all-age group.
- Young people with additional needs were 20 percentage points more likely (39.4%) to state that they were 'not confident at all' or 'not very confident' with their speaking skills.
- Young people with additional needs were 13.7% less confident working in teams (teamwork), with 39.1% of respondents with behavioural, emotional & social difficulty scoring this way.
- 69.6% of young people with behaviour, emotional & social difficulties stated they were 'not confident at all' or 'not very confident' at staying positive.

“I feel like the school did very little to support me to learn the skills that I need and never did anything to adapt to me personally and the support I need.”

YP WITH BEHAVIOUR, EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE The future seems unclear for young people of all ages with just 12.4% thinking that there are opportunities for them where they live and those with additional needs were at least 7% less likely to think there will be opportunities for them.

- 91.2% of young people with a profound & multiple learning disability and 75% of young people with a severe learning disability felt that there were not opportunities for them.
- Young people with additional needs were 10% less likely to have heard about green jobs and green skills. They were also 10% less likely to apply for a 'green job' than their peers.

A young person's journey is not always easy or straightforward. One of the biggest and most preventable mistakes that people make is to make assumptions about young people, their needs, and how best to support them. The experiences of young people with additional needs (and the nuance and overlay of other protected characteristics) needs to play into wider system change and support that really works for their individual needs. It is important to showcase these findings and share with the PiXL community the experiences of young people with additional needs, but this has to be the start of the conversation – there is much more work to do in partnership to ensure that we hear from all young people before we shape and share solutions.

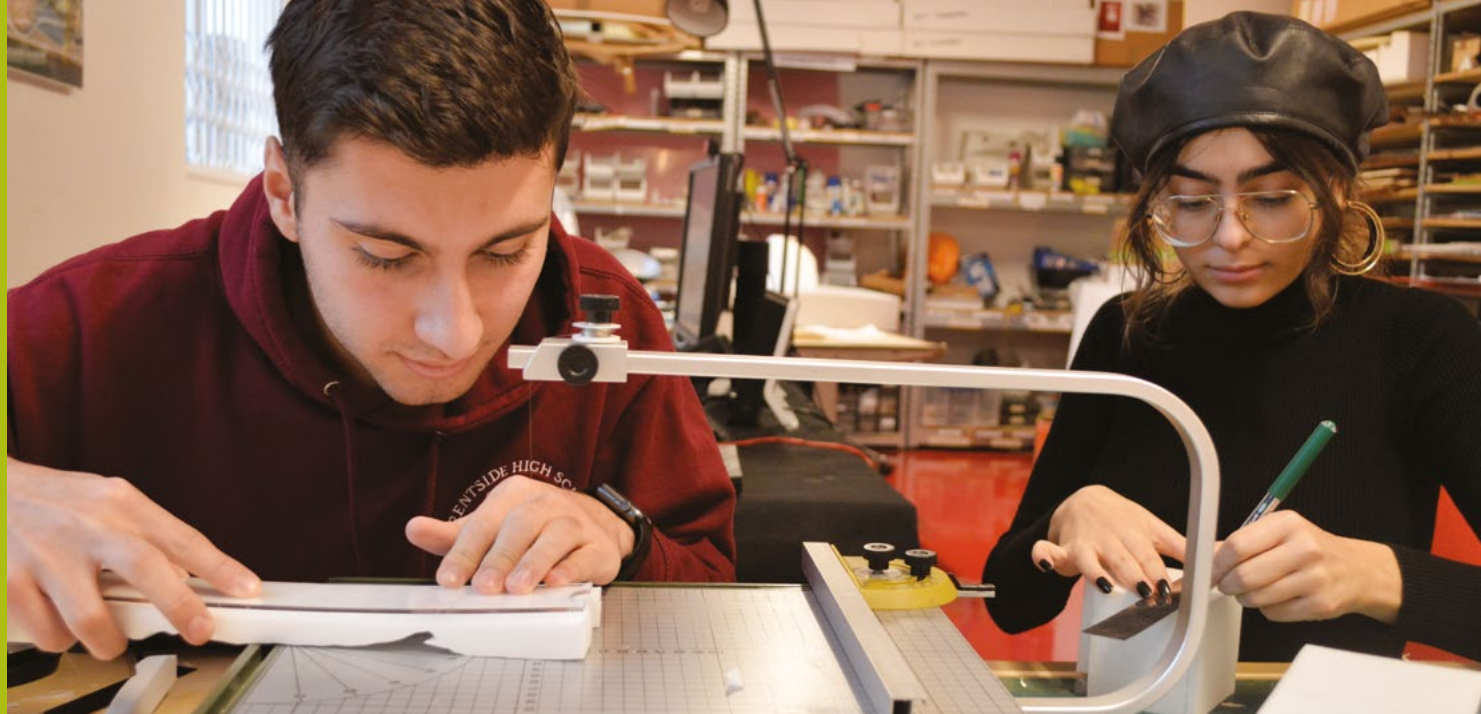
Eleanor Chambers Youth Voice, Policy & Research Co-ordinator
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT UK

Lauren Mistry Deputy CEO
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT UK

APPENDIX: RESPONDENTS

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| - Moderate learning difficulty = 4.9% | - Speech, language and communication needs = 3.6% | - Special Educational Needs (SEN) support but no specialist assessment of type = 4.9% |
| - Severe learning difficulty = 1.5% | - Hearing impairment = 3% | - Other (ADHD, CMD, Chronic illness, Dyslexia, FND, Misophonia, Seizures, Tourette's) = 7% |
| - Specific learning difficulty = 13.3% | - Visual impairment = 2.1% | - Prefer not to say = 1.9% |
| - Profound & multiple learning difficulty = 1.4% | - Multi-sensory impairment = 1.7% | |
| - Behaviour, emotional & social difficulties = 7.9% | - Physical disability = 6.8% | |
| - Social, emotional & mental health (SEMH) = 15% | - Autistic spectrum disorder = 24.6% | |

Please note that respondents may not have answered every question, therefore there may be questions with lower amounts of responses from a particular group.



SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS

PROJECT: NORTH EAST LEP

Festival of Careers

CONTEXT

The number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) increased to 1.49 million pupils in 2022, representing 16.5% of all pupils. Out of this cohort, in 2020/21, just 18.3% of pupils with SEN achieved grades 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs, compared to 58.0% of pupils with no identified SEN. Additionally, in the 2020-21 financial year, only 5.1% of adults with learning disabilities aged 18-64 receiving support from social services were in paid employment (DfE, 2023). This dire state of affairs led to Speakers for Schools speakers partnering with North East Ambition to deliver the North East SEND Festival of Careers. The festival ran for three days, 24th – 26th January 2023, bringing together employers and inspirational speakers with students with additional needs to raise aspirations.

INTENT

The festival was designed to raise the awareness and motivation of disabled young people. It had the following aims:

- To provide a range of insights into different sectors across three days, to inform young people about opportunities they may be interested in and to give them a chance to ask employers any questions.
- To give young people with additional needs the confidence to request reasonable adjustments.
- To inspire young people with additional needs to aim higher by giving them real-world insight into the world of work



SPEAKERS
for schools

**Empowering
young people**
from state schools & colleges to reach their potential

IMPLEMENTATION

We decided to engage students on this theme by providing opportunities for them to hear from a diverse range of society leaders, some of whom were disabled or neurodiverse, about their journey to success.

- **Jessica Taylor-Bearman, author and blogger, spoke about her experiences suffering from a chronic illness and the joys of achieving her dream of becoming a best-selling author.**
- **Chris and Piers discussed how neurodiversity is a desired talent by a growing number of top firms.**
- **Ed Petrie, TV presenter and actor, shared what it is like to work in television and emerging opportunities for disabled actors.**

We also aimed to make young people aware of the support available to enter the world of work and the diverse pathways they could take to achieve the career of their dreams by partnering with 11 employers to deliver insight sessions on job opportunities, skills and employment within their industries.

- **Equinor: showcasing emerging job opportunities in the green energy sector.**
- **Northumberland National Park: highlighting the potential of working outdoors for neurodiverse young people.**
- **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): showcasing what young people need to be work-ready, support available from the government and careers within the civil service.**

Students from 14 different schools and colleges across the Northeast participated in the festival. The average attendance age was 16. 43% of attendees were male, 56% were female, and 1% preferred not to identify their gender.

IMPACT

- **86% of educators said their students were more confident about looking at the world of work.**
- **The webinar format worked well, allowing speakers to explain relevant information and give the group questions to discuss collectively.**
- **Presenting information clearly and at a level students understood was helpful too. Presentations were designed to be delivered at a slow pace, supported with good graphics and great interaction tools for students. The interactive quiz questions for the students were a hit.**
- **Listening to the progression stories of young employees and getting insights into the different roles available in the partner employers' industries, particularly with footage of the workplace, boosted participants' engagement.**
- **65% of students said they felt more informed about the different sectors.**
- **A young person who joined the humankind work placement put it succinctly: *"They do a lot of different things to look after people. They made it easy to understand what I could do too."***

We believe in continuous improvements, and some of the lessons we learnt from delivering this complex festival involving multiple schools, employers and eminent personalities are:

- **We need to seek more commitment from SLT to attend. Of the 26 registered schools, only 14 participated, meaning employers committed resources that were not used in some instances.**
- **Scheduling activities to accommodate multiple schools is demanding. Finding times that suit all schools is tough, and communication needs to begin earlier to seek the best timeslot for the majority.**
- **Only offer one employer session at any particular time slot. Giving multiple choices of which employer sessions could be attended was confusing for educators who felt conflicted about choosing one opportunity over another.**

Employers recognise the benefits of offering work experience to improve their inclusive recruitment practices, but they are also nervous about the practicalities of hosting SEND students on work placements. Educators can leverage projects like this to build partnerships with Speakers for Schools and other charities to provide students with workplace experiences and support in accessing careers in industries they may not have previously considered.





SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS

PROJECT: SOUTH EAST MIDLANDS LEP

Finding Futures

INTENT

In 2021, our research showed that around half of young people with special educational needs who were offered work placements needed to be more informed about the support the business provides to employees with additional needs. Yet, 97% of these students said they would consider a future career in the industry where they were offered a work placement.

This mismatch between SEND students' aspirations and knowledge of pathway options and available support was why we sought to partner with employers to create bespoke solutions aimed at educating SEND students on pathways into these sectors and the support that employers are providing to ensure that their workplace is inclusive and represents a diversity of talents.

This programme aimed to support 12 SEND and PRU schools in South-East Midlands by pairing them with an employer in the region to work together on a week-long project to be agreed between both parties with the support of Speakers for Schools.

The goal was to inspire, inform and support SEND students and to increase their confidence in exploring future career and progression opportunities.



SPEAKERS
for schools

**Empowering
young people**

from state schools & colleges to reach their potential

IMPLEMENTATION

Before the project, Speakers for Schools facilitated meetings with each employer and educator to ensure that the session's contents were appropriate for the participating students. Each week-long project was designed to deliver a minimum of three employer/young person interactions inclusive of the following:

- **The employer visits the educator to introduce their organisation, explain roles within their business, undertake an interactive activity and set a project brief.**
- **A mid-week check-in (virtual or in-person) to answer questions and provide further guidance regarding the project they have set.**
- **A visit by the group of selected students to the employer's premises to meet their employees, tour the place of work and discuss their projects.**

To ensure that the programme created a lasting impact, we also designed activities to take place after the intervention, including:

- **A follow-up activity created in collaboration with the employer that the educator can utilise with future groups.**
- **A webinar aimed at employers to demonstrate the impact of the programme that had taken place and aimed at encouraging further employers to participate in providing future opportunities to SEND cohort.**

IMPACT

7 out of 10 young people on the intervention said they had never attended a work experience before and needed to know the type of jobs available in the business that offered them work experience. However, by the end of the placement week, 80% of participants knew what the business does, and 6 out of 10 could identify jobs or careers in that business. One young person reported, **'It helped me to learn that within the construction industry, many jobs and roles are available for everyone'**. We know SEND students struggle with softer skills needed to thrive in employment, with only 35% of participants saying they were confident when speaking in front of people before their work experience. Following their work experience, half of the participants said they felt confident in their speaking skills. The knowledge about what employees do daily, and delivering projects alongside those employees, helped boost the participants' confidence. For some, it allowed them to articulate their skills, while some said it made them realise that some jobs that fit their skills did not match their interests. The Finding Futures project effectively brought various employers and schools together. The young people reported a range of benefits, but we are also aware that we can do better, and the steps we are considering for the next iteration are:

- **The range of needs within school groups means that group opportunities are unsuitable sometimes, and individual opportunities will be provided where possible.**
- **Securing SLT buy-in and commitment to reduce the drop-out rates and ensure the timetabling works.**
- **Ensuring that educators provide up-to-date information on the accessibility needs of students in their group to make the intervention inclusive and engaging for all.**

The employers viewed the programme as an opportunity for future cooperation with the school, as they are transition options for some students and their team were inspired to work with some of the most underserved cohorts regarding employer engagement. We look forward to supporting these schools in years to come and seeing the long-term impact of sustained employer engagement in the educational and career journeys of the participants. Employers recognise the benefits of offering work experience to improve their inclusive recruitment practices, but they are also nervous about the practicalities of hosting SEND students on work placements. Educators can leverage projects like this to build partnerships with Speakers for Schools and other charities to work together regularly to provide workplace experiences to their students and introduce them to the support provided to access careers in various industries they might not have previously considered.

Adapting these ideas

- Speakers for Schools work with schools across the UK – you can find out more about how they can support your school by emailing info@speakersforschools.org or by visiting www.speakersforschools.org.
- As we saw in the article from Clapton Girls' Academy on page 12, there is a lot of power in asking students what support/intervention they need. Ask your young people with SEND how they feel about careers and gaining work experience – what, if any, barriers do they identify? What do **they** think would help?



FURTHER READING

We have two other PiXL Insights publications that may be of interest to you and your colleagues:



BOOKS FOR ADULTS

SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH SEND

1. Ali, A. (2024) **Corwin UK**
A Little Guide for Teachers: Special Educational Needs
2. Bombèr, L. M. (2021) **Worth Publishing**
Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in School
3. Brooks, R. (2019) **Jessica Kingsley Publishers**
The Trauma and Attachment-Aware Classroom: A Practical Guide
4. Chaves, J. & Taylor, A. (2021) **Routledge**
Creating Sensory Smart Classrooms: A Practical Guide for Educators
5. Durrant, G. (2021) **Jessica Kingsley Publishers** *100 Ways Your Child Can Learn Through Play: Fun Activities for Young Children with SEN*
6. Grandin, T. & Moore, D. (2016) **Future Horizons**
The Loving Push: How Parents and Professionals Can Help Spectrum Kids Become Successful Adults
7. Kelly, K. & Phillips, S. (2022) **Corwin UK**
Teaching Literacy to Learners with Dyslexia: A Multisensory Approach
8. McCann, L. (2018) **LDA**
Stories that explain: Social Stories for Children with Autism in Primary School
9. Pavey, B. (2016) **Routledge**
Dyslexia and Early Childhood: An Essential Guide to Theory and Practice
10. Smith, J., Donlan, J. & Smith, B. (2012) **Jessica Kingsley Publishers**
Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions Through Everyday Transitions: Small Changes - Big Challenges
11. Sobel, D. & Alston, S. (2021) **Bloomsbury Education**
The Inclusive Classroom: A New Approach to Differentiation
12. Ward, C. & Galpin, J. (2021) **Jessica Kingsley Publishers**
The Anxiety Workbook for Supporting Teens Who Learn Differently

ON INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS MORE BROADLY

1. Gross, J. (2022) **Routledge**
Reaching the Unseen Children: Practical Strategies for Closing Stubborn Attainment Gaps in Disadvantaged Groups
2. Major, L. E. & Briant, E. (2023) **John Catt**
Equity in Education: Levelling the playing field of learning
3. O'Brien, J. (2016) **Independent Thinking Press**
Don't Send Him to Tomorrow: Shining a light on marginalised, disenfranchised and forgotten children in today's schools
4. Sobel, D. (2018) **Bloomsbury**
Narrowing the Attainment Gap: A Handbook for Schools
5. Ward, C. (2019) **Crown House Publishing**
On the Fringes: Preventing Exclusions in Schools through Inclusive, Child-centred, Needs-based Practice
6. Wilson, H. & Kara, B. (ed.) (2022) **University of Buckingham Press** *Diverse Educators: A Manifesto*

ON SEND BEYOND EDUCATION

1. Grandin, T. (2013) **Rider**
The Autistic Brain
2. Hendrix, S. (2015) **Jessica Kingsley Publishers**
Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Understanding Life Experiences from Early Childhood to Old Age
3. Silberman, S. (2015) **Allen & Unwin**
NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter about People Who Think Differently
4. Steer, J. (ed.) (2021) **Jessica Kingsley Publishers**
Understanding ADHD in Girls and Women

BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

If you haven't come across Inclusive Books for Children (<https://inclusivebooksforchildren.org>) then do go to their website - it's a wonderful resource for finding diverse children's titles.

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Thank you for reading.



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