



CASE STUDY REPORT

IDP: The development of effective strategies to support pupils on the autism spectrum in a primary school

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This study was originally published in 2011 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to increase awareness and understanding of autism spectrum (AS) among staff, improve teaching strategies, and ultimately enhance pupil progress.

Aims: The main aim of the Inclusion Development Programme (Autism Spectrum) was to raise awareness and provide effective teaching strategies to improve participation, social interaction, and personal relationships for pupils on the autism spectrum.

Methods: The participants included governors, headteacher, LA adviser, middle leader, parents, SLT, teachers, and teaching assistants. The school used CPD sessions, self-evaluation checklists, pupil questionnaires, observation outcomes, and parent meetings to measure progress towards success criteria and impact on pupil learning.

Findings: The main findings are that the CPD programme has had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership. It has increased staff awareness and confidence, improved pupil behaviour and concentration, and strengthened relationships between staff and pupils.

Implications: The findings of this case study suggest that increased awareness and effective teaching strategies can lead to improved pupil learning, increased self-esteem, better behaviour, and stronger relationships between teachers and pupils. It also suggests that increased collaboration between staff and support services can lead to better management of SEND.

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Keywords: Primary education; Behaviour and attendance; Inclusion

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

The school has a significant number of pupils on the autism spectrum (AS) across each year group and it was felt that a focus on the specific needs around AS would enhance teaching and learning and ultimately pupil progress. The school also wanted to know if what they were doing to support pupils with AS was effective and meeting pupil needs. Parents also needed support and the school felt that the Inclusion Development Programme (Autism Spectrum) would be an accessible programme to follow.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Governor
- Headteacher
- LA adviser
- Middle leader
- Parent
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Teacher
- Teaching assistant

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- All aspects
- Behaviour and attendance
- Inclusion

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

We intended to impact on pupil learning through the raised awareness and effective teaching strategies resulting from the CPD, based on the IDP (AS) e-learning modules.

The SENCO had identified areas that required developing across the school to improve participation, social interaction and personal relationships. Individual pupils were identified by the school in consultation with the Communication and Autism Team, Head Teacher and SENCO. Parents were informed that by letter about the IDP and asked if they would give permission for their child to be included in the programme.

What were your success criteria?

- All staff would have an increased knowledge and understanding of AS and pupils would be taking part in a greater range of activities across the curriculum.
- Parents would have a greater confidence in the school regarding the level of expertise of all staff and the level of provision for their child.
- There would be an improvement in the range of resources and a wider range of strategies to support pupils across a range of activities.

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the CPD approaches you used

With the support of the head teacher the SENCO arranged for a series of 8 hour long CPD sessions which were voluntary sessions for staff after school. At the first session the head teacher outlined the programme of training and made it clear to colleagues that both she and the Governing body were in full support of the programme. Staff who took part were asked to complete the self-evaluation check list before the training session and also after the input. Parent views were also sought before the programme began. The sessions were led by the LA Communication and Autism Team in conjunction with the SENCO. The first session involved the introduction to the IDP DVD resource, going through Unit 1 and giving an overview of the DVD. Staff were set a task which would enable them to become independently familiar with the programme and the resources within it. The outcomes of this were reviewed at the next session where staff were encouraged to identify what resources they felt would be beneficial and to discuss these during the session. This enabled staff to work at their own pace. Over the next 6 sessions each Unit was delivered and as the programme went on more activities were incorporated into day to day teaching. The SENCO and SEND Teaching Assistant also supported teachers after each session with materials and through supporting pupils in class. The SENCO was available to give advice to colleagues and also to monitor the outcomes in class. The governors were invited to see the IDP materials and resources. Parents were invited to an open evening to view the materials and the IDP (AS) DVD.

The CPD sessions were open for all staff to attend and the SENCO expressly targeted some staff due to the numbers of pupils with AS in their class. However, attendance at the sessions was voluntary. The voluntary aspect of the training ensured that all participants were committed to the programme. Of those staff who were targeted, not all attended, but having seen the outcomes and witnessed the effect it has had on staff confidence and expertise are now keen to participate in the programme.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

All staff had a copy of the IDP (AS) DVD to work on in their own time. All 8 units of the DVD were covered in the twilight sessions, however not all were covered in the same depth, which left room for staff to explore the materials for themselves. The SENCO set 'homework' during the twilight session and everyone completed it. It was evident that this approach had advantages as it allowed staff to work at their own pace. The SENCO selected aspects of the DVD to support monitoring of the programme and used the sensory section of the DVD to carry out a sensory profile and environmental audit of the school. Pupil participation was carried out through an individual pupil profile in order to ascertain their sensory responses. The structure, delivery and materials generated a considerable amount of discussion and interest from the staff.

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff
- School leader
- SEN staff
- Support staff
- Teaching assistant

How were you supported?

The Communication and Autism Team gave external support on the delivery of the programme and provided the neutral voice. They also fully supported the process and provided additional materials to develop the work of the school which included an environmental survey. The Head Teacher provided continuous low level support which moved the programme on within the school such as; attending the CPD sessions where possible, encouraging

the governors to support the programme and attending the parents' meeting. This continual presence was very effective in driving the process. The TAs produced a range of materials to support the programme and provided a significant amount of in class support for individual pupils.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

The self-esteem of pupils has grown; this was ascertained from the pupil questionnaires. Pupils are more positive about their experiences in class and about how they feel about their learning (age related evaluation sheets). Pupils at Key Stage 1 and 2 showed a marked increase in positive ticks on their questionnaire. The concentration of pupils increased. This was specifically noticed and reported by the TAs and teaching staff: pupils are able to spend longer on tasks and remain focused. The teachers' relationships with the pupils have strengthened due to greater understanding of their needs. This was reflected in the reported levels of improved behaviour from the pupils. Parents have demonstrated a willingness to take the school's advice on board and this has led to the school increasing the level of resource for parents to use at home.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

The outcomes are very positive for the pupils. Due to the raised profile of AS the teaching staff and TAs have a different perspective, are more aware of pupil need and are able to offer a greater range of strategies. Parents feel confident in the school's capacity to support their child and are encouraged to work with their children at home whilst fully supporting the work of the school. This activity has increased staff awareness of the role of the SEND department which now has a greater status within the school. The chair of governors is more aware of the work of the SEND department and wants to know more about future developments across all areas. This has significantly raised the profile of SEND across the school and has therefore impacted on standards.

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Pupils are more confident in their work with a more positive attitude to lessons. Behaviour is significantly better, especially at Key Stage 1 with pupils responding positively to learning. Colleagues have remarked on the developments of individual pupils. Pupils have demonstrated their capacity to speak out in class, appear less frustrated, and have a stronger voice overall. There are higher levels of integration both within class activities and in the play ground. The progress of focus pupils is shown in the document below.

What has been the impact on teaching?

AS sensory has come to the fore in teachers' and TAs' planning and teaching. There has been a noticeable increase in teacher awareness which has grown as the process has gone on. Teachers are reflecting on their teaching and the SENCO has noticed that more teachers are asking for advice and they have also come forward with pupils who they have identified as causing concern regarding possible AS.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

'After the CPD sessions the teachers and TAs were enthusiastic about trying out strategies.' (SENCO)

- 'Staff are very positive about the process, they said it had opened their eyes and that everyone in the school should be involved in this developmental process.'
- 'The management of pupil behaviour has improved.' (Teaching Assistant)
- 'Teacher skills have increased and they are also more able to make the reasonable adjustments in order to effectively include pupils with AS' (Communication and Autism Team)
- 'The school has really focused positively on AS.' (School Governor)

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

As a result of this project the school now holds weekly meetings, not just about AS but other aspects of SEND. Teachers are not isolated, they are now working more collaboratively sharing concerns and subsequent problem solving. Communication between the SEND department and main body of the school is now more focused. Colleagues, including TAs, are more willing to take things on board and are keen to introduce a range of different teaching strategies. Teaching has become more robust and confident. Teachers are prepared to try a range of strategies and are less frustrated when things don't quite work as expected as they just try another angle until it works for the pupil.

The data from self-evaluation before and after the training shows how confidence in knowledge and application has improved (see below).

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The strategic lead from the SENCO has driven the process further than expected. Overall the school is better organised regarding AS with a range of strategies and lead personnel, and the school has identified a lead TA for AS. There has been a high level of support and contribution from the head teacher and SLT and this way of working has now been taken on board as a model for CPD and as part of the school development plan.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The school is building on this process and has formalised this pro-active process. It has strengthened the relationship with the LA as there is less reliance and more ownership around the management of AS, this has led to a more strategic use of the support services with better informed expectations of their role. The SENCO and TA have been invited to support training of new SENCOs for the TDA National Awards on the roll-out of the IDP(AS) programme.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The leadership of the SENCO, full support of the Head Teacher and the role of the Communication and Autism Team.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- The IDP (Autism Spectrum) DVD
- additional materials from the support services

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

All sessions in the DVD built on each other and gradually developed the confidence of staff.

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Identify the group of pupils they wish to support and what area of the curriculum or aspect you specifically wish to target.
- Carry out an Audit of existing provision and involve the support services. Use the questionnaires to stimulate interest, baseline teacher knowledge and raise the profile of the CPD.
- One crucial element of this case study was the roll out of the CPD, making it voluntary but ensuring that 'homework was set' and monitored, delivering every section of the DVD so that staff could see that the school was fully committed to the activity.

Essential elements:

- The full support of the head teacher.
- Teachers and TAs working together to problem solve
- Everyone being willing to take risks
- Involving parents and pupils
- Gaining the support of those staff most willing to participate
- Governor involvement
- Making it a whole school initiative by tackling some of the underlying issues across the school and building the programme up on that
- Having a high level of commitment to raising the attainment of pupils.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

This has established a precedent for training and whole school initiatives which will be followed by another range of activities for TAs and Staff. The Head Teacher has initiated a rolling programme of AS training for all staff which is integral to the School Development Plan.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Strategies used in St Peter's CE Primary School to support children with Autism
- Social stories
- Everyone makes mistakes
- Plan Do Review sheets
- IDP AS Pupil Progress
- Pupil survey data
- Before and After self-evaluation.

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This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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