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## **Developing accurate assessment and improving provision for children with complex needs within mainstream**

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**Developing accurate assessment and improving provision for children with complex needs within mainstream**

**Developing specialist provision within a mainstream infant school**

## School/Background Context

This small infant and nursery school based in the Southwest recently joined a Multi-Academy Trust. The SENDCO is shared between this school and a nearby junior school, with each receiving two days per week of SENDCO time. Currently, there are 105 children on roll, with 11 children holding an EHCP (10.5%) and 17 children having a school-based My Plan (16.2%), resulting in a total SEND percentage of 26.7%. The main area of need has recently shifted from Social, Emotional and Mental Health to Communication and Interaction, with 85.7% of SEND children falling into this category. The school has seen an increase in children with complex needs requiring specific support to make progress and has been working closely with a local specialist setting to enhance provision for these children.

## The Challenge

As a school, we strive to ensure that all the children on our role have access to a curriculum that they can access and that meets their individual needs. We have a number of children who would be appropriately placed in a specialist setting, however there are simply not the spaces available to accommodate them in these settings. It has been very important to us to make sure that these children are accessing provision that is as close as possible to a specialist curriculum. As well as being flexible and adaptable enough to incorporate the individual provision that is outlined on each of their EHCPs.

## What They Did

We have been working hard to develop a curriculum that can overcome the challenges outlined in the paragraph above. Initially, we were able to reach out to external professionals, such as SEND Advisory Teams, we then began to communicate with local specialist settings and then finally joining the development group that a regional education trust had in place. (Two trusts are currently combining to make one large Trust.) The group is made up of experienced SENDCOs from a selection of schools within the trust that have been collaborating to develop a Specialist SEND Curriculum Pathway (SSCP). The rationale set out the key elements the group felt were important when considering the theory of change and covered the following:

- **Access to a Broad and Balanced Curriculum** – the Specialist SEND curriculum pathway (SSCP) allows pupils with SEND to access a broad and balanced curriculum offer in a supportive environment, ensuring they are included in the wider school community whilst accessing a curriculum that prepares pupils for future success

## What They Did (continued)

- **Individual Need** – The curriculum is tailored to each pupil’s individual needs, focusing on their strengths and helping them overcome challenges. Pupils receive personalised support in line with targets set out on their EHCP. This ensures every pupil is provided with the right curriculum delivered in the right environment for them to make progress.
- **Developing Expertise** – The SSCP ensures that staff receive the right training to support pupils with physical, cognition and communication and interaction needs. This expertise also supports mainstream teachers, enhancing the school’s overall ability to meet the needs of all pupils.
- **Belonging** – Pupils accessing the SSCP will be able to access mainstream lessons and broader curriculum activities where possible, allowing them to build relationships with their peers, develop social skills, fostering a sense of belonging.
- **Whole School Inclusion** – Developing the SSCP encourages an inclusive culture, where all staff are trained to support pupils with SEND. This helps the whole school to value and support every pupil.
- **Early Identification and Support** – The SSCP can support early identification of need, providing timely support, and enabling pupils to access the curriculum, thrive socially, and reach their full potential.
- **Flexibility** – The SSCP is adaptable, allowing pupils to receive more support when needed, or gradually move into mainstream classes or a special school placement as they progress.

To structure learning effectively, the group developed three curriculum pathways—Pre-Formal, Semi-Formal, and Formal—allowing for personalised progression based on individual development. Practical and interactive learning, including educational visits and culturally rich experiences, are integral to the approach. The group also reviewed assessment systems to ensure progress is measured, enabling all pupils to experience success and reach aspirational targets.

With this in mind, we were able to enhance our empty classroom to create a large sensory space to support children that are accessing a pre-formal or semi-formal curriculum. We have created this space in order to specifically meet the needs of children that would be appropriately placed in a specialist setting. Some children access all of their learning in this classroom and have a much more sensory curriculum. They have bespoke, individualised planning and delivery of their learning, that is closely linked to the mainstream (formal) learning but that is highly adapted to support their own progress. The majority of these children are non or pre-verbal and so have very specific needs that can be supported at an individual level. Some children access this space more flexibly, they are able to transition between a more mainstream environment and curriculum for parts of the day and then to the sensory space for other parts. This works really well and allows these children to access the sensory and movement breaks they need in order to remain regulated, but also access a learning ability appropriate curriculum that remains ambitious but supportive.



More inclusive high-quality teaching



Better outcomes for learners with SEND



More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting

## Outcomes and Anticipated Impact

The children with SEND at our school are making fantastic progress with us. The children are regularly assessed using small step, personalised targets and their progress is monitored through their individual plans. Using specific strategies that are adapted to individual children has also encouraged complex children to develop their own independence. For example, children have access to their own visual timetables and now and next boards so that they can move their completed tasks into their 'finished jars' more independently.

Our school is often praised for our inclusivity by a number of external professionals and we are regularly recommended to parents of children with SEND due to the provision that we have to offer these children. The SSCP, though not officially formalised in setting yet, has been a huge factor in the further development of the SEND provision at our school. The collaborative work that we have been able to access alongside other experienced SENDCOs and particularly the specialist setting has been invaluable. Through this work, we have accessed specific staff CPD for our SEND support staff as well as visits to have a look at their settings in person.

We are hoping that, as the curriculum becomes formalised over the coming term, it will further enhance our provision. This is crucial timing as we already have 4 children with EHCPs ready to start in Reception with us in September as well as any other children with SEND that arrive. This professional development group has supported the school to further enhance a strong SEND provision that we can be really proud of and one that we anticipate will continue to meet the ever-growing number of complex children on our roll.



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