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Strengthening strategic SEND leadership in a primary school

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Whole School SEND:
Peer Mentoring for School Improvement 2022–2023

Building a culture of belonging and high expectations for pupils with SEND

School: Secondary

Overview of Focus of Peer Mentoring Support

The Peer mentoring project was undertaken to support a secondary mainstream school, the school had been graded as requires improvement (RI) with the need to improve the quality of SEND provision identified in the what the school needs to do to improve section of the report. The peer mentoring was undertaken by a Whole School SEND (WSS) Regional Lead.

Background

At the end of 2021, the SEND team at the Academy changed almost entirely, with only one member of SEND staff remaining. A new principal, vice principal and SENCO were appointed. Therefore, the school has been subject to significant and rapid leadership change. Plans were quickly prepared to develop the culture in the school regarding effective and prudent SEND provision with those students being empowered in classrooms and wider school life. The aim was to strengthen the expertise of all staff and the leadership of SEND. The school was inspected in the same academic year and OFSTED agreed that effective, inclusive SEND provision should be a key focus for development, whilst also acknowledging the progress that had been made in a short space of time. OFSTED also acknowledged that the plans we had made were accurate and prudent- we just needed more time as a group of leaders to implement those plans and raise the profile of effective classroom provision through quality-first, inclusive Teaching and through a well-staffed and effective team of teaching assistants (TAs) and through simpler, more accurate support plans that were efficient, accessible and easier to work with and implement.

Implementation

The vision for SEND provision at the school was to get SEND students back in the classrooms and eliminate the pre-existing culture that these students were seen as somehow different and separate to the main school, and even as “non-academic” and not capable of achieving in mainstream lessons.

 More inclusive high-quality teaching

 More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting

 Improved mental health and wellbeing of learners with SEND

Implementation (continued)

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We began with an exhaustive and thorough whole school SEND review, with specific and targeted feedback given to staff and best practice shared with them. We wanted to focus on the classrooms being inclusive and having space for all students to flourish and in enhancing the working knowledge and expertise of the staff to create truly inclusive practice that allowed an ambitious and exciting curriculum to be delivered in an accessible way so that there was ‘ambition for all’. This was largely through raising the profile and the working knowledge of staff in scaffolding, reading instruction, in simple, efficient methods of reducing cognitive load and building warm, positive relationships with students and safe, comfortable, academic classroom spaces. This led to clear pedagogical guidance of best practice through the model of teaching so that classrooms were inclusive alongside accurate and well-selected CPD sessions, both at departmental, whole school and bespoke levels.

We also designed simpler, more accessible and more streamlined student support plans, this time with really accurate and simple “dos” and “don’ts” of the classroom that are tailored to each individual student. This has been informed by meetings with parents and by ‘book looks at KS3 and KS4 with teachers and teaching assistants, forming a powerful step in the ‘assess, plan, do, review’ cycle that we subscribe to and ask all staff to contribute to. This implementation has been the responsibility of all staff and, with a more established SEND team and with staff confidence growing, has been effective, as recognised in the peer mentor’s implementation report and in some of the feedback and attainment we have from students.

Building Expertise

Many CPD and training activities have been undertaken in the short space of time and these are detailed below:

The SENCO is currently studying for the National SEND Award and will qualify in July 2024.

As a MAT, the school is also involved in other SEND programmes and takes an active role in cross-MAT activities, meeting with Directors and the other SENCOs in our organisation to share and discuss best practice and successful approaches.

The SENCO has been very active in the Graduated Approach Working Group with the LA and the LA EHCP Quality Assurance team.

The quality-first inclusive practices that have been recommended to and installed in the working skill set of teachers have been addressed through whole school and bespoke CPD sessions, following the whole-school SEND departmental review, to ensure that staff working knowledge, confidence and expertise has been enhanced and improved.

There has been a real focus too with CPD on reading Instruction, vocabulary instruction and scaffolding techniques such as “I,we,you” to allow all students and the weakest readers to access our curriculum.



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Building Expertise (continued)

The SENCO has used online platforms to enhance the expertise and knowledge of the teaching assistant team, focusing on a range of SEND specific areas and tracking and monitoring their progress. This has resulted in an TA 'Code of Practice' being developed and with TAs being far more confident in working skilfully within and around this framework and its parameters. An example of this is the "helicopter methods", which aims to build resilience and independence in our students. Leaders have used The National College and NASEN webinars alongside other partners such as the NT Speech and Communication Team, to provide external and fresh ideas through CPD to staff. CPD was also used to share the best practice that exists around the school to ensure that a deficit model isn't always used and that we stop and consider the expertise that we have 'in-house' that allows all students to flourish in lessons and beyond. This is especially important in our 'whole school' book looks at KS3 and 4, which allowed staff to look at a range of books from a range of subjects from individual students and then check them against the student's support plans. This not only raised the profile of these plans but also allowed staff to share successful approaches with one another and see what was possible in terms of student flourishing. The school's 'focus 5' has also been launched, with teachers having 5 students to focus on in each class- students who aren't flourishing in the way others are. The simple art of 'checking in' on them and circulating and live marking has had its profile raised across the school. This has dovetailed well with each teacher being given a presentation pen, so that they can circulate even while presenting their lessons on PowerPoint.

Reviewing and Refining Implementation

Our practice has been reviewed and monitored regularly through robust and regular link meetings both in terms of SEND and in curriculum areas, regular learning walks, WSS SEND reviews, book scrutiny, attendance meetings, assessment and data meetings with the Principal and Assistant Principal and SEND departmental meetings. The SENCO is using this evidence to inform her review meetings with parents looking at improving and updating IEPs as part of the graduated approach. This then informs the support plans that have been streamlined to help teachers to process what is needed through simple "dos" and "don'ts". These have been positively received by all staff and are used more effectively and positively than ever. This has had a significant impact on students, with one telling us that "All of a sudden, lessons are clearer and easier to follow."

The Academy Way is now in its second iteration following discussion, reflection, observation, staff and student voice and CPD with professional specialists such as the speech and communication team and partners to make it more inclusive. This has led to The Way 2.0, which is more visual, reduces cognitive load, reduces unnecessary information still further and enhances the ability of teachers to scaffold and instruct even more effectively. It also provides resources such as key routine and task bookmarks and checklists to allow students to understand key routines that help establish a positive learning culture around school. Once more, this has been positively received by staff and students alike. We have developed a vocabulary and reading instruction toolkit too which focuses on the use of reading scaffolds such as Reciprocal Reading and the effective pre-teaching, dual coding and simplification of key vocabulary to improve engagement and understanding of concepts and topics in the classroom for the benefit of students and reducing cognitive load as learning tasks are introduced.

Outcome and Anticipated Impact

Staff student relationships- and especially the working relationships between key support staff and students- have improved greatly and this in turn has led to improved attendance and to exclusions being reduced as well.

Students report through student voice the improvement in the situation, feeling safe, respected and like they are making progress through quality-first, inclusive teaching. This was recognised in the peer mentor's implementation report. This has also been found in improving student work in books, with staff finding that many of our students are making a great deal of progress day-to-day in their books.

We have also implemented the 'Focus 5' initiative in classrooms, where teachers have 5 students in lessons who they are concerned about in terms of their attainment and flourishing and whom they spend extra time in lessons with, 'checking in' on them and providing extra support where necessary. This feeds into the integrated assessment system which tracks and monitors the attainment for all students but one which the SENCO, is still involved with, meeting heads of core and other curriculum leaders to establish SEND students who are struggling and using this to inform accurate intervention and extra support where necessary. The SENCO is currently developing a whole school document that will serve as a tracker of students against key learning end points and milestones, ensuring that those not making progress are getting the support that they need to flourish.

Next Steps to Support Sustainability

1. The consolidation of key developments and improvements seen across the school, resolving small areas of inconsistency to ensure best practice is implemented in every single minute of classroom teaching.
2. Further staff development, induction and ways of working together. Further develop the paperwork to include goals:
 - SEND Support outcomes
 - Short term goals as SMART targets
 - Strategies/provision evaluations.
3. In CPD, make greater connections between need and pupils. When accessing SEND CPD, or reviewing adaptive teaching practices such as scaffolding, memory, cognitive overload, make specific reference to key pupils and their support plans to enable teachers/staff to make the connection between CPD (Theory) and their T&L with pupils.
4. Teachers to reflect on the use of thinking time, pausing and allowing pupils to process questions/ information. Use of modelling then doing.

Other Information

We have really enjoyed working with you – thanks for your time and long may our partnership continue.



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Re-inspection November 2024

The school was re-inspected in November 2025. The overall rating was 'RI'. SEND was removed from the section 'What does the school need to improve?'

The following statements on SEND were made:

'The curriculum is broad and ambitious. The school is determined that all pupils should access the same high-quality learning. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are well trained to support pupils with SEND and others who may struggle. Support plans identify the help pupils need precisely. However, pupils with SEND do not achieve the best possible outcomes at the end of their school journey. This is also the case for other pupils. The improved curriculum is showing some signs of impact, but this is not consistent.'



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