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Strengthening adaptive teaching practice through coaching

Improving writing outcomes for pupils with cognition and learning needs

School/Background Context

Small, one-form entry primary school. 23 pupils on the SEND register (10.6% of school). Greatest area of need is communication and interaction (74% of SEND pupils having this as a primary and/ or secondary area of need), however cognition and learning pupils (70% of SEND pupils having this as a primary and/ or secondary area of need) have historically showed the least amount of progress (measured in qualitative and quantitative data) in relation to need.

The Challenge

Historically, teaching and learning had adopted a 'middle of the road' approach in regards as to how the curriculum was pitched. Little to no adaptation was made to accommodate varying pupil needs. This resulted in children, including pupils with Cognition and Learning (C&L) needs, working significantly behind age-related expectations. Gaps evident for these children were particularly prevalent within their transcription skills in writing and becoming wider as they moved through school. This was observed the most in pupil's transcription knowledge and skills across school.

Staff articulated they did not feel confident or have the 'authority' or skillset to make curriculum adaptations despite stating that some pupils 'couldn't manage' age-related tasks or acknowledging that age-related tasks needed overly scaffolded for pupils to complete it. Staff voiced that this was particularly prevalent within the writing curriculum, the mapping of which lacked detail.

One example of this was taken from a book scrutiny which showed a pupil with SEND (primary area of need of C&L) requiring 1:1 teacher-led scaffolding to complete a task around use of inverted commas in narrative writing, however the child demonstrated inconsistent letter formation, and misconceptions around the use of capital letters and full stops.

Staff had already engaged within professional learning around the EEF's 'Five-a-Day' principles and adaptive practice. These were delivered during staff meeting sessions over the course of previous terms. Although the engagement of staff within these sessions was good, there was little evidence of staff consistently embedding this pedagogical learning into daily classroom practice, therefore the impact of the professional learning had limited impact on pupil outcomes, particularly around the area of transcription within the writing curriculum.

What They Did

A specific cohort was selected as a focus for the project due to the nature of its SEND cohort (included four pupils who had C&L needs as their primary area of need).

All children were baselined by the two class teachers and SENDCO against previous year group writing transcription national curriculum objectives to identify gaps in skills and knowledge. Significant gaps were identified against handwriting, punctuation and spelling objectives across the key stage one curriculum.

Using this assessment, a coaching approach was implemented by the SENDCO on a fortnightly basis. This involved the SENDCO working alongside the two class teachers at the planning and assessment point of teaching and learning with a specific focus on strengthening provision for the pupils with SEND.

Opportunities for the SENDCO to team teach alongside the class teachers was incorporated into the project implementation with a view to modelling effective adaptive practice at the point of delivering teaching and learning.

Adaptations were made to the curriculum to meet the needs of these pupils within writing sessions at the planning stage and at the point of delivery through developing better assessment for learning practice.

Outcomes and Anticipated Impact

The project did not run long enough to provide a quantitative data set, however regular book looks demonstrated that these pupils were progressively making fewer errors with capital letters and full stops within writing and were making significant improvement with the formation of some letters and fluency of their handwriting.

Pupil and staff voice was also sought. One class teacher stated, "The children are doing less, but better... revisiting misconceptions from previous year groups is boosting the children's confidence while also securing their basic skills on which to further build their learning." One pupil also reported that they were 'Doing better in English' and another saying that they did not find writing 'as hard anymore'.

Coaching has been recognised as an effective development tool model for a significant period (Lofthouse, Leat, and Towler, 2010). This was further evidenced in this project as utilising this approach provided tailored professional learning for those involved, which in turn had a positive impact upon pupil outcomes.

Although significant gains were observed for both pupil outcomes and within teaching practice, the deployment of the coaching model was time and resource intensive. This will be a barrier to rolling out the model used at school-wide level.

Moving forward, a hybrid approach towards future professional learning could be implemented: with the most appropriate elements of the coaching model used where and when required, changing in relation to emerging needs of the school. Another potential route moving forward, could be to develop staff to coach one another. This could strengthen expertise across the setting and support the development of collaborative relationships between staff, however this would require a robust implementation if it were to prove effective in changing whole-school culture.



More inclusive high-quality teaching



More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting



Better outcomes for learners with SEND