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## Strengthening SEND provision in a primary school through Peer Mentoring

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

**Embedding SEND as a Whole-School  
priority through a peer mentoring approach**

## School: All Through

### Overview of Focus of Peer Mentoring Support

This Peer-to-Peer project was undertaken to support a mainstream school, The School, graded as Requires Improvement (RI) to improve the quality of SEND provision and was undertaken by a Whole School SEND (WSS) Regional Lead.

The Whole School SEND (WSS) lead made a half day visit to the school to understand their context, meet the senior leadership team (SLT) and narrow down the foci of the Peer Mentoring project. The school had been graded Requires Improvement (RI) and Ofsted had identified that improvements in terms of SEND provision needed to focus upon:

- Teachers lack knowledge of how to adapt lessons to meet needs of SEND learners.
- Leaders need to ensure that all teachers understand the reasons for the additional needs of pupils in their classes and adapt their teaching accordingly when required.

### Background

The school is part of a small Trust (two schools) situated in a deprived neighborhood; Pupil Premium is 30.6%. Ofsted inspected in 2022 and identified that teachers lacked the knowledge of how to adapt their lessons. The school's own SEND evaluation identified the following areas for focused school improvement work:

- More effectively monitor and evaluate the quality of SEND provision in school
- Deliver training for staff so that they better understand students' individual learning needs
- Deliver sessions to their staff about how to adapt their lessons to meet the needs of their SEND learners

## Implementation

The WSS lead visited the school to understand the context that the school works in and to discuss the Head's vision for how she wanted to drive forward improvements in provision for learners with SEND in the school. After meeting with members of the team (Head, Assistant Head and SENCO) it was agreed to focus upon the following areas:

- Upskilling the Leadership (senior & middle) team to support them to evaluate the quality of SEND provision within their area of responsibility. WSS leaders to deliver Every leader a leader of SEND and Every teacher a teacher of SEND training to leaders and teachers.
- Closing the gaps in understanding needs – WSS lead to deliver a session for SLT to better understand ADHD & consider how to get their staff to better meet their students' needs & how to adapt their teaching to make the learning tangible – working with SLT to explore how to develop the capacity of staff to break down conceptual concepts using tangible props.
- Student independence – WSS lead to deliver a session on how to work with teachers and TAs to avoid Learned Helplessness
- WSS lead to work with the new SENCO to support her understanding of the role and how to support and challenge teaching colleagues as well as a close focus on identification and monitoring the impact of interventions.

The first session was face to face, but subsequent sessions were virtual. In the sessions, the lead has introduced the staff to many WSS resources but specifically The Teachers' Handbook; the Condition Specific videos, range of webinars – Autism & ADHD; partner organisations on the WSS website & their resources.

## Building Expertise

The focus of the Peer Mentoring project has been upon developing the SLT's knowledge and confidence to lead their learning community to become effective in understanding the needs of their learners and to then adapt their lessons accordingly.

Headteacher *'Thank you so much for both your time yesterday and these materials. We really enjoyed the session and found it very valuable. We are looking forward to planning our CPD session!'*

## Reviewing and Refining Implementation

SEND systems have been reviewed following discussions with the team about:

- Measuring the impact of interventions
- Ensuring that staff prioritise tangible teaching approaches in at least 1 lesson across a unit of work
- Developing new staff members' knowledge of SEND
- A member of the senior leadership team is now supporting, and line managing the SENCO and will be trained themselves as a SENCO

## Outcome and Anticipated Impact

The focus for the Peer Mentoring Project was on upskilling the senior leadership team to deliver training for the staff and developing their ability to monitor and evaluate the quality of SEND provision.

### We wanted to see:

1. teachers understanding SEND needs and subsequently adapting their lessons to meet the needs of those students with greater confidence.
2. whether, if we could review how TAs worked, a greater investment could be made into their workforce because they were impacting upon progress.
3. the SLT being more confident and knowledgeable in their journey towards a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating SEND

### As a result of the project:

- The school has reviewed how the SLT supports SEND as a key leadership priority. This has resulted in the Assistant Head having greater oversight of SEND and she is due to start the NPQ SEND in September to more knowledgeably line manage and support the SENCO.
- There has been a greater investment in TA support with 4 new posts being created because of an increase in confidence that TAs can impact on progress rather than developing a culture of learned helplessness.
- The school calendar has been revised to add key dates where all staff review pupils on the SEND register.
- Homework for SEND students has been reviewed, a new approach developed that is proving popular with all stakeholders.
- Following Staff training attended by 70 staff, there is now an expectation that at least 1 lesson per unit of work has a practical, tangible focus. In learning walks, the SLT are observing staff making the learning tangible – for example, in a History lesson, giant Jenga blocks were being used to demonstrate the Roman Testudo and students have reported in their Pupil Voice activities that they are familiar with practical activities being used in a wide range of subjects.
- In the most recent MAT SEND review, the School Improvement Partners reported that across the range of lessons, staff were routinely implementing appropriate strategies to adapt their learning activities, pointing specifically to chunking the work to make it accessible, use of key words to support students' literacy skills and dyslexia friendly approaches were used effectively.
- All new staff are signposted to the Condition Specific videos as part of their induction with a requirement to watch them.
- The Headteacher reported in the final PM review that she now feels "in a far more confident place in her knowledge about SEND to enable me to more effectively challenge my team" She feels that, in leading the CPD sessions, she is now recognised as an 'Advocate' for SEND and that this has positioned SEND as a whole school, whole staff priority – a very real emphasis upon 'Every Teacher a Teacher of SEND'

## Next Steps to Support sustainability

The Head reports that SEND provision has moved forwards in the school. Engagement with the school suggests that this is because of the hard work of the team and their openness to mentoring and support, from the Trust and WSS. As a result: -

The Trust have supported the school to re-structure SEND support.

There will be a new PLC – Pastoral Learning Centre where the link between behaviours and SEND are specifically addressed with the aim of returning the students into the classroom.

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## Re-inspection February 2025

The school was re-inspected in February 2025. The overall rating was 'Good'. SEND was removed from the section 'What does the school need to improve?' The following statements on SEND were made:

*'Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils, achieve well. Staff use the school's clearly identified needs of pupils with SEND very well. For instance, they make suitable adjustments to tasks for these pupils to access learning. Regular training helps staff improve these adaptations. As a result, these pupils achieve well.'*