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School improvement for learners with SEND through WSS peer mentoring

Peer Mentoring

School: Primary

Introduction

The school in this case study was rated as Requires Improvement (RI), with provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) identified as a key area for development. Located in a rural part of the Southeast, it is part of a smaller multi-academy trust of primary schools. The headteacher describes the prevailing culture as one of low aspirations, leading to poor learner outcomes. The school faced high mobility, with a turnover rate of 43%, and was often not a preferred choice for families, resulting in early withdrawals for schools closer to urban areas. Attendance was also a significant challenge. Nevertheless, staffing stabilised after a turbulent period, with most of the original staff having departed.

Implementation

Six peer mentoring sessions were conducted with WSS Regional SEND Lead (RSL), with the Headteacher as the key contact attending each one. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) also joined for some sessions. The school initially requested that the support focus on adaptive teaching in Foundation subjects, however discussions with the RSL revealed that the SEND data was not robust. This raised concerns about the effectiveness of class-based support strategies, as there was uncertainty regarding the SEND register. Hence, the RSL recommended the following:

1. To begin the program with a focus on SEND data and its importance as a strategic tool for school improvement.
2. To explore the role of distributed leadership in SEND, including the strategic use of the SENCo, monitoring systems, effective application of the Graduated Approach, clarification of the school's Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP), early identification and EHCP processes.

The WSS RSL guided the Headteacher and SENCo through a presentation on a SEND data "Nutshell" document, which significantly enhanced the Headteacher's understanding of how to strategically address SEND issues. This led to the creation of a school-focused version of the document.

Implementation (continued)

The immediate value of this document became apparent as the school's compiled data was analysed, raising further questions to gain a deeper insight into SEND and its role in ongoing school improvement efforts. Subsequent discussions focused on several key areas:

- Verifying the accuracy of the SEND register.
- Utilising data drops to assess provision, which could inform updates to the SEND register.
- Involving core subject leaders in generating SEND data.
- Examining SEND in relation to ethnicity, particularly for learners identified as Gypsy/Roma/Traveller.
- Implementing a systematic approach to the Graduated Approach and employing a Graduated Approach Tool to support need monitoring, provision development, and teacher workload.
- Creating an Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) document through a staff meeting that engaged teachers and fostered ownership.
- Integrating the OAP document into routine monitoring activities.
- Addressing attendance challenges and their impact on learners with SEND, with strategies for detailed monitoring.
- Ensuring robust and accurate teacher assessments and transitioning to the use of Pre-Key Stage Outcomes as a tracking tool for improved accuracy in assessment and the SEND register.
- Reviewing EHCP submissions and the number of EHCPs at the school.
- Conducting baseline assessments in Reception and assessments for new arrivals.
- Utilising the Nutshell document as a core report for Governors.
- Remodelling the teaching assistant (TA) team to be more strategically responsive to learner needs.
- Engaging in solution-focused discussions for complex SEND cases.

Outcomes and Impact

The Headteacher has developed a comprehensive understanding of the school's SEND data. They noted that the "Nutshell" document has *"opened my eyes and enabled me to ask the right questions. My understanding of strategic SEND leadership has improved immensely, and the opportunity to focus on this aspect has been highly beneficial. The Nutshell document is easy to update and serves as an excellent starting point for discussions with teachers."* Several areas of concern regarding SEND data have been identified, and arrangements for careful monitoring of attendance for learners with SEND are now in place.

Collaboratively creating the OAP document has increased teachers' awareness of the measures needed to support all learners, fostering shared understanding and accountability. This has created an environment where teachers are able to meet learners' needs more effectively, improving their engagement in school.

Outcomes and Impact (continued)

The school has produced its OAP document and a Teacher Handbook outlining expectations. Routine monitoring activities, including learning walks, observations, and data drops, now incorporate a clear SEND focus and allow leaders to track provision effectively. Systems for tracking pupil progress have been reviewed, and the SEND register has also undergone a thorough review. Hence there is now more accurate identification of SEND, and the ability to track progress and identify provision that is effective.

Next Steps

The next steps involve incorporating the following initiatives into the revised summer term School Development Plan (SDP) as well as the new SDP for the next academic year:

1. Implement the Study Bugs monitoring system to track the attendance of learners with SEND, enabling the SENCo to take timely action as needed.
2. Develop alternative methods for learners to record their learning, integrating these practices into the daily curriculum to promote independent use.
3. Enhance the assessment and monitoring of learners with SEND to ensure robust and accurate identification of targets and next steps for learning that align with the needs of the school population.
4. Embed the revised school monitoring systems to ensure they are securely integrated into the daily operations of the school, including pupil progress data drops, learning walks, planning monitoring, and performance management.
5. Further develop adaptive teaching skills, with a specific emphasis on Foundation subjects.
6. Review personalised plans to ensure they are fit for purpose and effectively support learner needs.

Key Learning

Using the peer mentoring system has been highly beneficial in improving SEND due to three key factors:

- Improved Understanding of SEND Data: The presentation on the SEND data “Nutshell” document significantly improved the Headteacher’s comprehension of strategic SEND leadership, facilitating deeper insights into SEND issues and fostering the creation of a school-focused version of the document.
- Collaborative Development and Accountability: The joint effort in creating the Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) document has increased teachers’ awareness of their responsibilities in supporting all learners, promoting shared understanding and accountability across the school.
- Structured Monitoring and Improvement Initiatives: The school has identified key areas for improvement, including the verification of the SEND register, systematic monitoring of attendance for learners with SEND, and the enhancement of assessment processes. Next steps involve implementing specific initiatives in the School Development Plan to further support SEND provision and learner outcomes.