

Raising expectations for pupils on SEN support

How to make sure that pupils without EHCPs are thriving, not falling behind? **Natalie Packer outlines the seven pillars of effective SEN support**

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Just under 15 per cent of the school population in England has been identified as having a special need but less than three per cent of these pupils will have an EHCP. This means that the significant majority of children and young people with SEND will be having their needs met through SEN support, making it essential for teachers to find the most effective ways to work with these pupils.

The term 'SEN support' refers to provision that is 'additional or different' from the provision in place for the majority of pupils of the same age. Pupils receiving SEN support have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. In practical terms this might involve specialist programmes, a personalised curriculum, additional resources, extra support from an adult or peer or personal care support.

Coordinating provision across a school where there are wide and varied needs can be challenging, so how can schools ensure they do this effectively?

What makes effective SEN support?

The DfE has recently published a resource to help teachers and leaders reflect on their own practice. The guidance, 'SEN support: research evidence on effective approaches and examples of current practice in good and outstanding schools and colleges', summarises findings from published research alongside advice from those settings that are currently demonstrating good practice in SEN support.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to SEND, the guidance suggests there are seven key underpinning features of effective support that are consistently demonstrated in schools where there is good practice.

Culture, leadership and management

High quality teaching

Use of expertise

Personalisation

Flexible use of evidence-based strategies

Use of evidence to track progress

Communication and collaboration

These seven key features are particularly effective when developed within the context of a graduated approach to SEN support using the 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle.

1. Culture, leadership and management

The success of all these key features of effective SEN support hinges on the culture created by school leaders. To ensure the right provision is in place for pupils with SEND, leaders need to take an approach to developing their policy and practice that is based on a clear, shared vision. This means making the school a place where all learners have an equal right to the highest quality education.

Effective leaders make SEND a strategic priority, ensuring all areas of school activity have SEND provision built in from the start. They also model high expectations, increase the expertise of staff and keep the focus on the pupils in order to ensure positive outcomes for all.

Practical suggestions

Build in dedicated CPD time over the year for focusing on SEND, linking with whole school planning priorities.

Ensure the SEN information report reflects the inclusive nature of your school and is accessible to all.

2. High quality teaching

Inclusive high quality teaching (HQT) ensures that planning and implementation meets the needs of all pupils, and builds in high expectations for all pupils, including those with SEND. This is a basic entitlement for all children and young people and should be underpinned by effective whole school teaching and learning policies and frameworks.

HQT is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have SEND; additional intervention and support cannot compensate for a lack of good quality teaching. Teachers are responsible for the progress and development of all pupils, hence delivering high-quality teaching is key to ensuring good progress.

Teachers need to be knowledgeable and well informed about:

identifying SEND and potential barriers to learning

providing appropriate support

effectively monitoring and reviewing progress.

Practical suggestions

Incorporate SEND into teaching and learning as part of the whole-school development plan so it is not seen as an add-on.

Provide regular information to staff on key strategies for inclusive HQT, such as developing positive relationships, establishing an inclusive classroom, scaffolding and supporting language development.

3. Use of expertise

Effective SEN support cannot be built on the expertise of the SENCO alone. It is important to consider how knowledge, understanding and practice is developed across the school and beyond so that everyone takes responsibility and capacity is increased.

Teaching assistants (TAs), for example, form a significant part of the workforce and often work alongside pupils with SEND. Where TAs are supported through high quality induction, professional development, regular communication, monitoring and appraisal they can have a significant impact on pupil progress and independence.

Schools will also access external expertise, for example from educational psychologists, health workers, speech and language therapists, social workers and parents. There should be clear processes in place for staff working with other specialists and the school needs to work in partnership to monitor the impact of any external support on pupil outcomes.

Practical suggestions

Embed a model of 'specialist TAs', with support staff developing specialist knowledge in one of the broad areas of SEND (for example communication and interaction).

Provide information to staff on other professionals working with the school. Outline who they are, their role and any expectations around communication.

4. Personalisation

Personalising provision involves tailoring packages of high quality support to address the whole range of a pupil's needs. This is made possible by having a thorough understanding of the individual's strengths, experiences, needs and preferences.

It is important that everyone is working towards the same goal

Personalised approaches will focus on achieving the short and long-term outcomes agreed for, and by, the child or young person. These outcomes should support the pupil to achieve their best, become a confident individual living a fulfilling life, and make a successful transition into adulthood. It is important that everyone is working towards the same goal so young people and their families will be treated as partners, with their contribution to the development and implementation of support fully valued and included.

Practical suggestions

Provide useful information to all staff through one-page profiles or pupil passports developed with the child and family.

Consider using person-centred planning tools to facilitate full involvement of the child or young person and their family in the decision-making process.

5. Flexible use of evidence-based strategies

Additional or different provision for pupils accessing SEN support can often take the form of a well-structured programme delivered to a small group or on a one-to-one basis. There is a wide range of interventions available and it is important to consider the evidence into what works well when choosing interventions or strategies to use.

The Education Endowment Foundation's 'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants Guidance Report' outlines some of the common elements of effective interventions. Sessions are often brief, occur regularly and are maintained over a sustained period. Careful timetabling is in place to enable consistent delivery and the adult delivering the intervention receives training. Effective interventions often include structured supporting resources and lesson plans that are followed closely and connections are made between any out-of-class learning and classroom teaching.

A flexible approach to using any additional provision is important. Regular review of the effectiveness of an intervention or strategy through assessment of pupil progress will support schools to make decisions about its impact.

6. Use of evidence to track progress

Rigorous and reliable assessment, monitoring and tracking of pupil outcomes is key to determining appropriate SEN support. Effective assessment can facilitate early identification of an individual's needs, particularly where this involves a combination of formative, summative and diagnostic assessment. This information can then be used to underpin the development of appropriate SEN support for a pupil.

Include the achievement of pupils with SEND in pupil progress discussions

Good schools have robust systems in place for using data to identify, review and assess impact and progress, and to monitor strategies and interventions being used with pupils. These systems build in clear lines of accountability, from teaching and support staff through to middle and senior leaders, ensuring everyone takes responsibility for securing the progress of pupils with SEND.

Practical suggestions

Include the achievement of pupils with SEND in pupil progress discussions. If appropriate, involve the SENCO in pupil progress meetings.

Embed a holistic approach to assessment by including measures of progress in other key areas, such as social skills, communication skills and independence.

7. Communication and collaboration

A key principle of the SEND Code of Practice focuses on effective partnership working to ensure pupils with SEND are provided with the whole package of support they need. In practical terms, this means school staff, other professionals, the child and their family developing trusted and supportive relationships, sharing information and being open and transparent.

If staff have any elements of good practice or areas of development, it's important that they are encouraged to share these with colleagues. Effective communication

will result in everyone working towards the same goal and sharing an understanding of how to support the child or young person to achieve that goal.

Practical suggestions

Gather parents' views on provision for SEND in the school. This could be done through a parent forum, questionnaire or informal discussion.

Consider the benefits of collaboration on a wider scale, such as joining local SENCO groups to share good practice.

It is important to reiterate the message that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to providing effective SEN support. However, the evidence outlined above suggests that the seven key features are instrumental in providing a solid foundation for developing good practice.