

Developing school-led SEND provision: A developing model of school-to-school support

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Developing a school-led system for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) provision

OVER THE LAST DECADE there has been a significant momentum towards increased school autonomy and, more recently, a 'school-led system' (Pope, 2015). An example of a notable success, the Greater Manchester Challenge, was underpinned by a strong moral purpose which recognised that schools have a responsibility to work together, share expertise and support each other (and particularly the most vulnerable) in order to build capacity in the system and ensure the best possible outcomes for all children (Education Committee, 2013). A natural extension of this school-led system, particularly in light of diminishing central Local Authority services, is direct service level support for schools, delivered by schools. In this article we consider our well-established provision as part of a school-led SEND support model.

Speech and language therapy (SALT)

We have employed a Speech and Language Therapist for the last three years and, in September 2015, appointed a second therapist to our team. This development was driven primarily by the need for speech and language therapy for our students at Priestnall School,

but also through the desire to provide a different service-delivery model (Morewood & Drews, 2015) for our primary schools and, in four cases, through separate Service Level Agreements for individual therapy.

Our now well-established SALT provision provides a range of services for schools, individual families and through bespoke agreements. Most of the work undertaken involves:

- Communicating with parents/carers, teachers and other professionals.
- Spending time with students and monitoring their communications, interactions and behaviour.
- Informal assessment/activities – such as looking at books and pictures with students.
- Using formal assessment to look at how well their speech and language skills are developing in line with their peers.
- Undertaking Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Needs Assessments.
- Giving advice and information to staff working with students regarding speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Setting detailed individual therapy plans for schools to deliver.
- Providing regular therapy sessions with individual students.
- Providing therapy sessions with groups of children to focus on developing speech sounds, language development or social communication skills.
- Providing training for staff and parents/carers.

The school speech therapy service currently maintains a caseload of 46 young people with a range of speech, language and communication needs. The service has also been instrumental in providing additional support to feeder primary settings and supporting Local Authority contracts in other mainstream educational settings. There are currently an additional 39 students engaged with the external caseload, receiving direct/indirect support, assessment or intervention.

The service has become an integral provision within Priestnall School and other supportive settings, allowing for interventions and initiatives to be embedded into the whole school context. Developing a service within the school supports the evidence-based approach that school-based programmes have positive impacts on social and emotional competencies, in addition to educational outcomes (Clarke et al., 2015). Due to the increasing focus on child-led interventions, it is becoming more apparent that no one single service delivery model works best for every child (Meline & Kauffman, 2010). Therefore, this flexible school-led service allows for a tailored approach to suit the diverse and individual needs of a range of young people.

During a recent review of the Priestnall School Speech and Language Therapy service, parents, staff and service-user feedback all indicated positive impacts with regards to the social, emotional and specific speech and language needs of the young people attending Priestnall School or accessing the service within the wider community. The most powerful evaluation has been the views of the young people who commented that *'I have improved my communication'*, *'I have learned how to retain friendships and how to start conversations'* and *'It's fun and it helps a lot to know what's going on'*. Additionally, there have been positive comments from our parents/carers, including *'Jack can have a conversation, sometimes start a conversation'*, *'he responds well with the therapist, he feels so confident when he has a session, this reflects how far he has come'* and *'I am delighted he has the input. I've said I would like him to do some work on learning about his friends' interests'*.

Educational psychology

Since September 2012, Priestnall School has worked collaboratively with the University of Manchester in supporting Trainee Educational Psychology placements (Morewood & Rumble, 2013). The Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) role based at Priestnall School is used to directly support the wider school aims and objectives in relation to the young people and their families, to apply psychological knowledge creatively, and to promote inclusion and positive change for children, young people and their families. This provision is additional to statutory LA EP provision and is delivered through a partnership model with six of our feeder primary schools and nursery provision.

As part of the school-based Educational Psychology service, the TEP supports students with a diverse range of needs by:

- Promoting the development of child-centred, solution-focused approaches and strategies.
- Working closely with parents/carers, school staff and a variety of multi-agency professionals to support children, young people and their families.
- Engaging flexibly with children, young people and their carers/families to promote and develop constructive, positive relationships.
- Where appropriate, undertaking assessments using a range of tools and approaches and producing reports as required in an appropriate format.
- Providing emotional well-being and therapeutic intervention and advice.
- Providing practical and emotional support for teaching and other school staff.
- Providing support, guidance, interpretation and knowledge to carers, families and school staff.
- Supporting, where appropriate, the work of other staff working with children and young people through consultation and supervision.
- Carrying out training and systemic work with school staff and other groups.

The TEP works as part of our multi-disciplinary team, including two speech and language therapists, a psychotherapist, a drama therapist and other school staff including a specific learning difficulties specialist teacher, providing a range of direct specialist support across our educational community.

As a part of this unique school-led approach, a range of assessment techniques can be used, including parent/carer, teacher/other professional consultations, contextual observation, questionnaires and assessment materials to look at a broad range of needs such as:

- View of current situation and environment.
- Self-image and development of self.
- Cognitive skills – verbal, non-verbal and spatial reasoning.
- Curricular skills – literacy and numeracy.
- Executive functioning – memory and information processing.
- Behaviour – social/emotional skills, attachment and resiliency.
- Support for children and young people with neurodevelopmental difficulties, for example ADHD and ASC .
- Mental health – such as anxiety and low mood.

When more extensive involvement is required, other therapeutic models are used, such as therapeutic play, cognitive behaviour therapy, personal construct psychology and positive psychology.

There is a growing trend of educational psychology services being commissioned directly by schools (Truong & Ellam, 2014). This is partly in response to budget cuts and the Children and Families Act (2014) in relation to statutory functions. This is having a direct impact on the capacity of Local Authority services, resulting in an increase in traded services and other independent provision.

Conclusion

The delivery of our educational psychology and speech and language therapy provision, in addition to statutory LA allocation, allows Priestnall School and the partner primary schools to consider more specific local need and deliver a more flexible service. Our service delivery is centred on our community and the families that our schools serve. Parents/carers and family life are considered to be a crucial part of our involvement, with interactions and relationships considered key to a young person's development and the home-school dynamic being of particular importance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The development of school-to-school support systems and a school-led model are much heralded; consideration should also be given to direct service provision, as our initial evidence with regard to impact is significant.

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