SENDCO
SERVICES

THE SENDCO SPOTLIGHT #2

AUTUMN TERM 2024

Supporting SENDCO's in schools and colleges

AUTUMN STRATEGIES FOR A STRONG START TO THE YEAR

As we embark on another academic year, we understand the challenges and opportunities that arise, especially as you work to support students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This newsletter is designed to provide you with practical advice, resources, and updates to help you in your role as a SENDCO. This term, we focus on the critical transition from Year 6 to 7, quality assurance processes, understanding EHCPs, and strategic deployment of TA support.

Welcoming New Year 7 SEND Students: Essential Guidance for SENDCOs

As the new academic year begins, it's crucial to provide Year 7 SEND students with a supportive and welcoming environment that eases their transition to secondary school. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you establish strong foundations for your new students:

TO ENSURE A SEAMLESS TRANSITION:

Begin by gathering comprehensive information about each SEND student. Develop a personalized profile that includes:

- **Strengths and Interests**: Highlight what the student enjoys and excels at, whether it's academic subjects, sports, arts, or hobbies.
- **Learning Preferences**: Note any specific learning styles or preferences, such as visual aids, hands-on activities, or verbal instructions.
- **Support Needs**: Clearly outline the student's support needs, including any adjustments required in the classroom, communication preferences, and assistive technologies used.

These profiles should be shared with all relevant staff to ensure that every teacher understands how best to support each student.

Establish Clear Communication Channels

Effective communication is the cornerstone of a successful transition for SEND students moving from Year 6 to Year 7. During this pivotal time, clear and consistent communication ensures that everyone involved—students, parents, teachers, and support staff—is aligned and informed. It helps to identify potential challenges early, provides reassurance to anxious students and families, and fosters a collaborative approach to supporting each student's unique needs. By establishing strong communication channels from the outset, you lay the foundation for a smooth transition and set the stage for continued success throughout their secondary education.

Schedule meetings with parents or carers early in the term to discuss their child's needs, expectations, and any concerns they may have.

INITIAL MEETINGS

Regularly touch base with the students themselves, especially during the first few weeks. Ask how they are settling in, and if they feel supported.

STUDENT CHECK-INS

Encourage communication between SEND staff and teachers. Share information from student profiles to ensure classroom strategies align with student's needs.

TEACHER COLLABORATION

IMPLEMENT TAILORED TRANSITION SUPPORT

The start of Year 7 can be overwhelming for SEND students, so it's essential to provide tailored support:

- **Buddy Systems:** Pair new students with older peers who can help them navigate the school environment, routines, and social aspects.
- **Gradual Integration:** If necessary, consider a phased introduction to the full timetable, allowing students to gradually adjust to the new demands of secondary school.
- **Safe Spaces:** Ensure that students know where they can go if they need a quiet space or someone to talk to during the school day.

MONITOR AND REVIEW PROGRESS REGULARLY

EARLY ASSESSMENTS

Conduct baseline assessments to gauge the academic and social-emotional starting points of each student. This can help in setting realistic goals and identifying areas that may need immediate attention.

ONGOING OBSERVATION

Keep track of how students are adapting to the new environment. Look for signs of stress, disengagement, or behavioral changes that may indicate a need for additional support.

TERMLY REVIEWS

Schedule formal reviews of each student's progress at the end of the first term. This provides an opportunity to adjust support strategies, update profiles, and ensure that students are on the right path.

FOSTER INDEPENDENCE AND CONFIDENCE

One of the key goals for Year 7 is to help students become more independent:

- *Encourage Self-Advocacy*: Teach students to express their needs and preferences. This can be done through structured activities or informal discussions.
- *Promote Problem-Solving Skills*: Provide opportunities for students to tackle challenges on their own, with guidance available as needed. This builds resilience and confidence.
- *Celebrate Successes*: Regularly acknowledge and celebrate achievements, no matter how small. Positive reinforcement helps to build self-esteem and encourages students to continue striving for success.

The Strategic Deployment of Teaching Assistants: Making Informed Decisions

Teaching Assistants (TAs) are an invaluable resource in supporting students with SEND, but their impact is maximized when their deployment is carefully planned and aligned with the needs of both students and the wider school environment. As a SENDCO, your role in making strategic decisions about TA deployment is crucial to ensure that support is effective, targeted, and sustainable. Here's a guide to help you navigate these decisions:

Align TA Support with Students Needs

The primary consideration in deploying TAs should always be the specific needs of the students. Here's how to ensure alignment:

- *Assess Individual Needs:* Thoroughly understand each student's EHCP, IEP, or other relevant documentation. Identify where direct TA support is essential, such as in managing complex learning needs, behaviour, or medical requirements.
- *Prioritise High-Impact Areas:* Focus TA support where it will have the most significant impact on student progress and independence. E.g. 1:1 support for high-needs students, small group interventions, or in-class assistance with differentiated instruction.

Promote Independence and Avoid Over-Reliance

While TAs provide crucial support, it's important to avoid creating dependency, which can hinder the development of student independence:

- *Gradual Withdrawal of Support:* Where possible, plan for the gradual reduction of TA support as students develop skills and confidence. E.g. shifting from 1:1 support to group work or encouraging students to tackle tasks independently with TA oversight.
- *Empower Students:* Encourage TAs to focus on enabling students to find their own solutions and make decisions, rather than providing immediate answers or completing tasks for them. This helps build resilience and problem-solving skills.

Integrate TAs into the Wider Teaching Team

Effective TA deployment requires close collaboration between TAs, teachers, and the SEND team:

- **Regular Communication:** Ensure that TAs are included in planning meetings and receive regular updates on lesson plans, learning objectives, and student progress. This enables TAs to provide targeted support that aligns with the teacher's goals.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Promote a team approach where TAs and teachers share responsibility for student outcomes. This can involve co-planning lessons, sharing strategies for differentiation, and jointly reviewing student progress.

Provide Targeted Training and Development

Ongoing professional development is key to ensuring that TAs are equipped to meet the diverse needs of SEND students:

- **Tailored Training:** Offer training sessions that focus on specific areas such as behavior management, literacy and numeracy interventions, or the use of assistive technology. Training should be directly relevant to the tasks TAs will be performing.
- **Coaching and Mentoring:** Consider implementing a mentoring system where more experienced TAs support newer staff. This can also involve shadowing opportunities or regular feedback sessions to refine practice.

Monitor and Evaluate the Impact of TA Support

Regular monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure that TA deployment is effective and that students are making progress:

- *Data-Driven Decisions:* Use data from student assessments, progress reports, and behaviour logs to evaluate the impact of TA support. Are students meeting their targets? Are there improvements in their engagement and independence?
- *Flexible Deployment:* Be prepared to adjust TA deployment based on ongoing evaluations. If a particular strategy isn't working, or if student needs change, reallocate resources to where they are most needed.

Foster Positive Relationships

The success of TA deployment also depends on the quality of relationships between TAs, students, and staff:

- *Building Trust:* Encourage TAs to build positive, trusting relationships with the students they support. This can be achieved through consistency, empathy, and a clear understanding of each student's needs and personality.
- *Collaboration and Respect:* Ensure that TAs feel valued as integral members of the educational team. Recognise their contributions, and provide opportunities for them to share their insights and suggestions.

Strategic TA deployment is about making informed, flexible decisions that prioritise student outcomes while fostering independence and collaboration. By focusing on targeted support, integrating TAs into the teaching team, and continually evaluating the impact, you can ensure that your TAs are used effectively to enhance the learning and development of SEND students across the school. Remember, the goal is not just to provide support but to empower students to achieve their full potential with the appropriate level of assistance.

Empower Your TA's with Our Self-Paced eLearning Resource!

Ready to take your TA support to the next level?

Introducing Empowering Teaching Assistants, our comprehensive online training resource. This self-paced eLearning course will deepen your TAs' understanding of the graduated approach, equipping them with practical, real-world examples to effectively support students in your setting.

With flexible access and engaging content, this resource empowers your TAs to become even more confident and capable in their roles, ultimately enhancing the support provided to your SEND students.

Contact us for more information.