

Cognition and learning - Secondary

By Helen Bownes

Peter is in Year 9. He does not have a specific diagnosis. However, he has a significant delay in his cognitive ability – his thinking skills and thought processes - and this translates as a major barrier to his learning on a daily basis. Peter learns at a significantly slower pace than his peers, despite robust quality first teaching. As such, he requires interventions, above and beyond that which is provided to his peers.

The barriers Peter faces with his cognition and learning difficulties encompass the entire curriculum, including literacy and numeracy delay, difficulties with his working memory and his processing ability is impaired. Specifically, Peter struggles with the speed in which he can process information, difficulties with manipulating information using his working memory and global barriers relating to his literacy delays. It means in real terms accessing any part of the curriculum can be difficult for Peter.

Secondary to this, Peter often demonstrates associated issues with lacking engagement, attention and concentration and his frustrations with his difficulties often manifest themselves in behavioural concerns.

Peter continues to face challenges in his learning, despite receiving high-quality teaching. As a result, he requires additional strategies, or different provision, in order to meet his needs.

Assess

Judgements need to be made using all of the data we hold on that particular pupil. For Peter the data pointed to there being significant difficulties faced by Peter whenever language was the barrier to his learning. That means the language barrier needs to be addressed even in subjects like maths, where the barrier needs to be removed to allow him to 'see' the maths.

Judgements about the progress Peter makes alerts you to any barriers that may be getting in the way of them making comparable progress to their peers. At this stage Peter was referred, via the SENDCo, to the educational psychologist for further investigation as the gap between the progress he was making continued to widen, despite receiving interventions such as the Accelerated Reading Programme and having some literacy-focused in-class support from a teaching assistant.

Plan

This part of the cycle involves discussing, planning and agreeing what will be put in place as an outcome of the assessment information gathered. Planning should involve the pupil, parents and staff from the school who know the pupil well. Where other professionals are working with the child, they should also contribute to planning. The initial step of the planning process includes agreeing targets for the pupil in order to focus attention on key areas and give them a clear idea of what they need to do to improve their work.

Personalised support was planned for Peter to address his identified outcomes; specific teaching strategies were communicated to his teachers via his learning plan outlining the approaches and resources that must be used in his lessons to meet his needs. At this stage these included:

- Teaching material in small chunks and providing memory joggers and visual checklists
- Providing additional scaffolding banks for extended writing
- Pre-teaching of new vocabulary
- Using a laptop for extended writing tasks
- Using a multi-sensory approach to literacy

Do

The Code of Practice makes it clear that it is the responsibility of class and subject teachers to implement the plan on a day-to-day basis.

Review

A timescale for reviewing the plan, and details of how progress will be monitored, also needs to be identified. When the review meeting between the pupil, parents and any relevant professionals takes place, it is helpful to consider the following questions:

- What progress has the pupil made? Have they achieved their agreed targets and what is the evidence for this?
- What impact has the support/interventions had on progress?
- What are the pupil's, parents' and professionals' views on the support/intervention?
- What changes need to be made to targets or provision next term?

The assess, plan, do, review process is a cycle – the idea being that this process is continual. If the review shows a pupil has made really good progress, this may mean they no longer require the additional provision made through SEN support. If this is the case, the pupil is likely to be taken off the SEN record and, instead, will be monitored to ensure progress is sustained through inclusive high-quality teaching. This is a continual process unless the pupil narrows the progress gap between them and their peers sufficiently.