

A New Curriculum: Assessing the impact of the EQUALS curriculum on low ability children with special needs.

**Below a brief explanation and discussion of my research project which will continue into the current academic year.**

The National Curriculum and in turn its assessment through the use of P scales and Pivats has been the dominant approach when assessing the attainment and progress of lower ability children in both mainstream and special needs schools for several years. The frustrating aspect is that the children may well have made excellent social and emotional development but this is not picked up on by the traditional method of assessing.

In response to this, during the past academic year, Priory Woods School has started to phase in a new curriculum which is instead focused on providing its children with life skills and a greater amount of independence. The impact on this is then reflected by the use of MAPP assessment and by using Evidence for Learning to record the evidence.

The research project has been centred on four children who are currently in Year 4 and all attend Priory Woods school. The children were selected due to their lack of academic progress and lack of confidence in an academic setting. The four children were also in the same class for the past three years and work in the same group when doing small group activities.

At the end of the 2017 academic year, the four children had faced another year of repetitive numeracy and literacy activities. The pressing issue was - is this fair on the children? Could their time in school in be better spent focusing on life skills and developing independence rather than trying to count to 5 for the third consecutive year?

The EQUALS curriculum was a vehicle for change. EQUALS itself presents the curriculum into several areas of learning rather than individual subjects. An example of this is the change of Maths to Problem Solving. In a conventional mainstream curriculum model, cognition (thinking and understanding), problem solving (acting upon understanding) and even metacognition (thinking about thinking) would be placed within the general framework and context of everyday lessons. However, with the EQUALS approach, more thought is put into strategies such as Bloom's Taxonomy (of learning objectives) (Bloom et al, 1956) so that the pupil is constantly steered towards deep and meaningful learning, as opposed to a shallow and superficial memory for facts.

The impact of the change is perhaps most evident in the classrooms. The planning method and in turn the timetable was changed. With the EQUALS areas of study, replacing the traditional lessons of old, for example, literacy becomes communication, creates greater scope for teacher flexibility and progression. The impact and effectiveness of the new approach and its introduction has been closely monitored through regular middle leader to evaluate, alter and to share teacher feedback along with lesson observations by Senior Leaders and Middle Leaders and staff meetings to share impact and any concerns.

Alongside the new curriculum, a new way to assess progress has been introduced with focus on the use of MAPP. The evidence of progress is also primarily recorded using iPads and the Evidence for Learning app.

Following the first year of implementation of personalised targets and the adaption of our curriculum, all of the four children have made clear progress. It has also proved beneficial NOT only in terms of hard data but also socially and emotionally. As the MAPP targets have enabled Priory Woods to reflect on the social and emotional elements of development through our targets. One

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year is not enough to judge the ultimate success of EQUALS and in turn the MAPP targets. We will need to evaluate if the progress we have seen is sustained in the years ahead.