

No: P50
Title: Aiming To Make Furze Infants' School A Centre Of Excellence For Children With Special Educational Needs With The Support Of The ICT Test Bed Project
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How we were:

When we originally wrote the ICT Test Bed Project Development Plan there were nine strands identified. One of these focused on special educational needs (SEN) and we thought we would try to use the opportunities provided by the project to make the school into a centre of excellence for SEN. As a school we were already promoting an active ethos of inclusion and have not excluded pupils in the last ten years. In our OFSTED (2000) inspection SEN had been identified as a strength of the school. Under the heading 'What the School does well', it stated,

'The help and support given to children with special educational needs is well targeted and develops their skills so that they can progress alongside others in their class.'
(p6)

We decided we wanted to use the ICT we had gained from ICT Test Bed to support and develop the good practice we already had. At the start of the project we identified ICT as having minimal use for those with SEN. Although small groups used the ICT suite, software was severely limited.

Individual children's SEN information was stored by their class teacher in a large SEN lever file in their classroom and by me, as SENCO, in my filing cabinet. In addition, when we started the project the correct terminology was 'special educational needs'. As we near the end of the project this has changed to 'Learning Difficulties and Disabilities', as referred to in our latest OFSTED report.

What we did and why:

We identified four areas of development for SEN through the ICT Test Bed Plan:

- We wanted to computerise all SEN paperwork. This included termly and annual SEN reviews, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Group Education Plans (GEPs), Special Support Assistants' (SSA) weekly notes (assessments for the children they support).
- Specific work in maths and English was to be identified by the adults working with the SEN children and this would be customised into ICT programs by Barking College for us. This was to be available centrally so the children could access them from anywhere in the school.
- We wanted to develop the use of voice-activated computer software to aid and support the children's learning.
- We wanted to integrate the SEN assessments with the class planning in order to encourage greater communication between support staff and class teachers.

As the project was coming near to its conclusion we decided to undertake the Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM). Initially we thought it may prove useful in helping us to establish whether we could consider ourselves as an SEN centre of excellence, as judged by an outside agency. The IQM identified ten areas to be assessed. Of the ten, one element specifically focused on 'Resources and ICT'. An external assessor spent two days at the school carrying out classroom and group

observations, talking to the children and staff and reading the documentation. Sources of data included the school's PANDA and OFSTED reports, the latest Self Evaluation Form (SEF) and ICT Test Bed documentation.

What we wanted to achieve:

We wanted to expand on the good SEN practice we already had in the school (OFSTED 2000) by making information more easily accessible to staff through a centrally computerised system. In this way we hoped to increase staff (teaching and non-teaching) awareness of the children's needs, strengths and support needed. We hoped that this would also help to cut back on the storage of paperwork. We wanted to improve SATs results for the children with SEN, in maths and English. We hoped this would also impact on their confidence and self esteem.

What we did achieve:

We have put in place a centrally computerised system for SEN. I believe this has provided a more efficient way of storing and retrieving information. It is also available to all staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

Eight of our staff (a combination of senior managers, teachers and support assistants) have undertaken action research as a result of the ICT Test Bed project. This has had a considerable impact on the teaching of children with SEN as some of the research has focused on

- the development of maths and English support programmes
- a child with Asperger's Syndrome making his own video
- encouraging the use of language through the use of moving and still photography for an autistic child
- developing a speech and language support programme that can be accessed throughout the school.

When looking back at the SATs results for 2003, our attainment levels for children with SEN achieving level 2 and above was, reading 87%, writing 83% and mathematics 87%. The results for 2006 were, reading 97%, writing 97% and mathematics 100%. Although results can vary considerably according to the child's area of difficulty, this year's results are comparable to last year's (reading 97%, writing 97%, maths 99%`). It would appear that results in general for children with SEN have risen considerably since the introduction of the ICT Test Bed project.

The Inclusion Quality Mark identified the following strengths of 'Resources and ICT' (Element 7):

- The ICT Test Bed Project Manager
- ICT Test Bed status has provided superb resources such as the Community Room, screen visualisers and active slates in all classes and other key rooms.
- The staff all contribute to 'e-files' which can be accessed through the computer system. These include digital photographs with written context and shared observations on pupils.
- General resources are good.

Our areas for development were:

- Continue to formulate post-ICT Test Bed strategy to ensure continuity of development and innovation in ICT.

In the verbal feedback to the SMT following our recent OFSTED (2006) inspection this was also raised as an issue of significance to be included in the updated school development plan. In addition several references were made to the ICT Test Bed project and ICT throughout the report:

- Teachers....make effective use of a wide range of resources, including ICT, to make lessons fun and interesting (p3).
- Participation in the ICT Test Bed project has led to a substantial increase in the number of computers. These are also used well to improve pupils' skills in other subjects such as art and English (p4).
- The school provides outstanding support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and these pupils' are given the confidence to play their full part in the life of the school (p4).
- The school has made effective use of extra funding available through the ICT Test Bed project over the last four years to improve resources, facilities for the use of the community and extra staff. As a result, standards have improved in the school at a much faster rate than the average for other schools.
- The school.....has an excellent website that is kept up-to-date and contains a wealth of information about the school including teachers' weekly lesson plans (p5)
- Tracking of pupils' progress is thorough throughout the school and has enabled effective support to be given to pupils when needed.

One of the OFSTED inspectors commented on their arrival at Furze, that it was the first time she had been welcomed by a 'Printsign' proclaiming a welcome to the team.

What we have learnt:

Making appropriate use of electronic recording processes

I am not sure we have necessarily cut back on the storage of paper yet. At SEN reviews I have tried using the screen and writing the notes during an SEN review to save time writing it up from the hard copy later. However, this seems to stem the flow of dialogue whilst 'removing' me from the conversation, so I have gone back to writing notes to type up later. A fellow SENCO I was working with has tried using a PDA in these situations but, at one of the SEN meetings in which I was present, the parent's perception was that he had not been listening as his eye contact and verbal responses were reduced so much.

Improved staff confidence to adopt strategies that use new technology

Towards the end of the ICT Test Bed project one of our autistic children had a specialised ICT assessment to ascertain the appropriate software to aid his learning. When the report arrived responses by staff were a marked contrast to four years ago when we had an ICT assessment carried out for a visually impaired pupil. At that time everyone concerned demonstrated a high level of anxiety and no-one, myself included, knew quite where to start with it. This time round we have a technician to advise on suppliers, a more ICT literate staff and a

generally more positive attitude to the whole process and it's benefits by all concerned staff.

Raising awareness of SEN and technology through professional study

I believe the action research has made a major impact on the school. Six of the pieces of research have focused on SEN and this has increased awareness of SEN issues and made increasingly reflective practitioners within the school.

Access to better forms of representation

One member of staff commented that she felt the most effective part of the ICT Test Bed initiative had been the introduction of visualisers,

'because you can make everything visual and this has proved to be a really powerful tool with all the children including those who are visual learners, like children with autism. So, for example, if you are talking about snails you can put an actual snail on the visualiser for the children to observe'

The benefits of shared IEP practices

From my perspective as SENCO I have noticed that the standard of Individual Education Plan (IEP) writing has definitely improved. Teachers have always written IEPs for the children with SEN in their class. Initially, some of the staff found this, 'another thing to worry about'. Now, because they are stored centrally all staff have access to all the IEPs in the school. This has helped in providing good models of IEP writing, it has improved time management in the sense that the previous IEP need only be amended and the IEP itself looks far more professional.

What next?

The LSA's weekly notes are word-processed but given to me in a hard copy every week, to monitor. They could be sent to me electronically and then stored in the child's class SEN e-folder. It would also be beneficial to me if outside agencies could send reports electronically as they could then be stored electronically too which would ensure all information on specific children was stored together.

As the years have passed we have done a considerable amount of SEN INSET and initially all staff had files to keep the notes together. However, as staff have moved it has been increasingly difficult to monitor who has attended which courses. I plan to put an electronic SEN INSET folder, for all staff to access. This will give all staff the opportunity to access past courses and will help us build up a bank of knowledge specifically around SEN.

I believe the ICT Test Bed project has been an integral part in Furze achieving recognition as a centre of excellence for children with special educational needs, as verified externally by OFSTED and the IQM. It has complemented the work we do with numerous outside agencies, in school support (both academic and pastoral, such as art therapy, behavioural nurture groups, the sensory room) and the trust and support we have built between in the relationships between parents, their children and school staff.