

On the Road with RAP (Reasonable Adjustments Project)

Richard Rieser, Director of Disability Equality in Education (DEE), reports on some of the early experiences of carrying out the Reasonable Adjustment Project for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

DEE has been commissioned by the DfES to find out how schools are meeting the Reasonable Adjustment Duty towards disabled pupils. The project is described in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES Feb 2004) in the following terms-“ Draw on effective practice to provide a resource bank of practical ideas, strategies and training materials for schools to help them make reasonable adjustments to their policies and practices to prevent discrimination against disabled pupils.”

We asked schools to nominate themselves for the project: 9000 schools were sent a written nomination form; the form was also posted on the web. LEAs were asked to nominate schools in their area. We have been pleasantly surprised by the interest in the project. Over 400 schools and nurseries have put themselves forward as exemplars of good practice. All five Teacher Associations are supporting it, as is NASEN. We are still taking nominations up until Easter on www.teachernet.gov.uk/accessibleschools

From the 400 nominated schools, we are selecting and visiting a range of up to 50 nursery, primary and secondary schools and special schools [with effective outreach] in which to film and observe. Redweather Films are coming with us on the visits and are filming what we find. The whole project will be published as a written report and linked DVDs early in 2005 by the Department for Education and Skills. So far we have been to 21 schools and what follows are some ‘snap shots’ of the good practice we have found.

What seems common to all the schools we have visited, who are making reasonable adjustments, is strong leadership and a ‘can do’ attitude. What the schools demonstrate is a willingness to enrol disabled pupils, as a matter of course and as part of the local community, and then make the adjustments that are necessary for them to participate, as fully as possible, in everything that happens in and around school. As schools have developed their experience of including disabled pupils, they codify their practice in policies which explicitly include the necessary reasonable adjustments. Schools appear to be matter of fact about making adjustments and regard the adjustments as just part of their normal practice.

We want to give some early insights into some of the practice and reasonable



adjustments we have encountered in our first round of filming. At Coteford Juniors, Hillingdon, we found a school trips policy where pre-visits are made by staff to ensure that there is full access for all disabled pupils. No disabled pupil has missed a school trip because of an access issue. A data base of accessible venues is kept by the school. The playground has a quiet and board games areas as well as a football/ball area to accommodate the range of children at the school.

Administering drugs has been a particularly thorny problem in schools. However, we have found schools where all staff are prepared to administer rectal valium, in emergencies, to children with epileptic seizures, and all staff are trained in the use of epipens for acute allergies. Staff receive training and the training is repeated annually. In St Bridget's RC Primary in West Cumbria we found twins in Year 1 who had 30-40 seizures a day, but were fully included, with adjustments to allow them to have a sleep after lunch on bean bags in the medical room. With parents' permission, all the children with medical needs had their photo and a description of their needs located in the staff room. This enabled all staff, including supply staff, to know what needed to be done for these pupils.



Twins Year 1 St. Bridgets

In the same school three sisters with brittle bones were taking part in PE. They were running round in the centre of the hall so that they didn't bump into other children. They also avoided jumping. Their father, who had the same condition, told us he had chosen the school because of its ethos and strong anti-bullying policy.



St.Bridgets Cumbria Guided Reading Groups made possible by resources for inclusion.

In a Year 5 class with two children with learning difficulties (Downs Syndrome) the teacher organised a circle of friends to support the children at break and lunchtime. The additional staff allocated through pupil's statements were used to permit a very effective guided reading session that supported the development of pupils' comprehension. The class could be split into four groups each with an adult discussing the meaning of the text. Such adjustments benefit all pupils.



At Bowness Primary School in Bolton, the whole school now does Brain Gym. This had initially been introduced by physiotherapists to support Stephanie, a girl with Downs Syndrome and cerebral palsy. Connecting the right and left side of the brain by doing particular physical activities (e.g. to the song the Macarena), accelerates learning and has had a marked effect on the learning of children with dyspraxia and dyslexia. Here we also saw a PE lesson in Reception which featured floor work to include a child with Cerebral Palsy.

At Billesley Primary, Birmingham, Brain Gym was used as an opening activity for Year 6 Science lessons. Pupils were divided in groups by learning style and learnt about electricity using song, drama and drawing.



Glossopdale College in Derbyshire has nearly 2000 students and 80 disabled students. They also have 140 teaching staff, with Support Teachers linked to each year and faculty, and 28 Education Care Officers (ECOs). At the school, the last lesson on a Friday has been dropped to allow for timetabled planning time for this team of staff and all staff.



Yr 8 Science Glossopdale College.

William de Ferrers in Essex is a 1800 pupil community comprehensive school. The Sixth Formers and year 10 students are trained in mentoring to address bullying. Three trained counsellors also work with the pupils to help them with emotional problems. Pupils on the Autistic Spectrum carry yellow and red cards which they hold up when they need a short time out or to go to Learning Support Centre. Staff are trained on this procedure and it works well. One such pupil had had a cleaners cupboard adapted for a one-one space for chill-out.

At Harrogate Granby High School a homework club, computer club and games club run at lunchtime in the Learning Support Department. They are very popular and give great support to all pupils especially those with learning difficulties who feel no stigma in attending.



Home work club Granby High School



At Harrogate Granby High School, Chris is completing his A2 double technology. With some repositioning of equipment Chris can access the equipment he needs to complete his A2 D&T course work.

Information Technology provides efficient and cost effective adjustments for disabled pupils and students that would have not been contemplated ten years ago. With the aid of his laptop, which he uses with voice activated software, and an unusual use of paintbrushes to touch the keys Chris can access the curriculum. Chris has restricted fine motor control due to his Muscular Dystrophy.



Chris with Dragon Dictate and paint brushes

Voice activated software needs time to tutor to recognise the particular voice as Chris from Birmingham points out. However with Dragon Dictate Naturally, it is getting easier. At Hall Green the Computer Services manager assesses and supports many of the 40+ disabled students in getting the right switching, mice and software which enables them to do their coursework in a similar way to their peers. Here they also run thriving teams of Zone Hockey and Wheelchair basket ball in which both disabled and non-disabled students equally keenly participate.



At Billesley Primary School, Birmingham, Dean who is registered blind, is in Year 4 and accesses the whole curriculum with a CCTV to enlarge print and pictures, an adapted key board with large keys, and a zoom screen that blows up images on his adapted PC. Peer support with his friends means they also benefit from his technology while supporting Dean in the things he can't see in the classroom. As Dean's teacher says " In preparing for Dean there is no extra work involved other than planning and letting the SENCO and Visual Impairment Service know in good time what will need adapting."



At Langdon Secondary School in Newham, East London there are 1900 pupils and 80 with statements. There is a resource base for visual impairment and part of the Borough Visual Impairment Team is based on site with a Teacher and 4 LSAs who work with subject teachers to support 10 pupils. Booma is blind and in a top science set in Year 11. The teacher needs to plan well in advance to ensure the team make the necessary adaptations - Braille, raised diagrams etc. In lessons LSAs & peer support and some adjustments allow him to fully participate.



Langdon also have 15 pupils with 'severe communication problems' many working on P-scales and skills based accreditation courses. To develop these and other pupils fine and gross motor skills and self confidence, there is a two period special sports session every week with a range of activities. We visited a trampolining and circuit session in the sports hall. The students take part in PE and Games with their tutor group and the additional special sport has had a big impact on their achievement and



confidence when working with their non-disabled peers. Langdon has a large number of children with behaviour difficulties, but has, through a consistently applied behaviour policy [which has taken many years to develop and refine] managed to create a 'caring family atmosphere', which means there have been no permanent exclusions for the last 7 years and GCSE achievement has also steadily risen.

At Batheaston CE Primary School there are 13 statemented disabled pupils out of 215 pupils on roll. The school policy is to admit any pupil regardless of degree or type of impairment and then make the necessary adjustments. All pupils are encouraged to talk about their feelings, needs and problem solve together, as the staff do. The year 6 pupils are matched with Year 1 pupils as special friends in the playground they are timetabled to play together. The disabled pupils especially benefit but all pupils do.



At West Bridgford Junior school in Nottinghamshire the school has been using various inclusion tools for a number of years with great effect. PALS groups are



running involving over 200 of the 340 pupils in circles of friends to support particular children. The staff use Solution Circles to problem solve and the Head carries out a 'Making Action Plan' exercise with the parents of all new pupils with difficulties which is easily translated into an IEP. The School Council is highly developed providing peer mediation and peace buddies and most impressively hold



a weekly assembly of the whole school without adults to great effect. The minute taker is a girl with dyslexia who uses a Tablet PC.

At Eccleston Mere Primary School, St.Helens, they have developed an expertise for adjusting their practices to include a wide diversity of pupils. Thomas has a learning difficulties (Downs Syndrome). When he first came to the school his behaviour and communication were very difficult. The school brought in a practitioner in techniques of neuro-physiology to work with Thomas. As a result Thomas 5 years on is in the Disabled Gymnastics National Team and is able to work independently at Level 1 and with peer support in the computer suite. However, secondary schools in the area have not convinced Thomas's parents that they could effectively educate him and so Thomas will redo Year 6, while they search for a mainstream secondary school further afield, if necessary by moving home.



At Cottingley Primary School in Leeds, they are resourced for deaf children and are a bilingual school with British Sign Language interpreters, deaf instructors and all staff learn BSL. The children and choir in assembly also sign. The deaf children are

mainly taught in class with simultaneous BSL translation, but they are also withdrawn for small group work additional literacy and numeracy to develop their skills using sign.



Maths lesson Cottingley Primary

All this is in sharp contrast to the high profile cases that are coming through the SEN and Disability Tribunal. They are a salutary reminder of the positive experiences that many of our disabled pupils have in our nation's schools.

We are looking forward to gathering much more information and examples of schools ensuring disabled pupils are not discriminated against. If you want to take part in the project contact Linda Pryor 020 7359 2855, or you can submit a nomination form on the web.



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