Additional support for learning act

Since the introduction of the new Support for Learning Act (Additional Support for Learning Act) (Scotland) in November 2004, the concept of what encompasses additional support needs has been extended considerably. The term additional support needs, however, had already been proposed in the report ' Moving forward! Additional Support for Learning' in 2003 in order to move away for the term ' special educational needs' which many believed had negative connotations. Chapter 2 of the Code of Practice (Scottish Executive, 2005) discusses the factors which may give rise to additional support needs and categorises these into four main areas: learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health need, and social and emotional factors. Importantly, including the learning environment as a factor in giving rise to additional support needs puts the onus on the school and the individual teacher to take responsibility and how they might contribute, even inadvertently, to additional support needs. Hopefully, in time all teachers will become aware that pupils' additional support needs may also originate from school ethos, relationships, inflexible curricular arrangements and inappropriate approaches to learning and teaching. Additionally, that schools which are not inclusive may actually give rise to additional support needs by excluding certain groups of pupils.

The ' Count us in' report by the HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE, 2002) identified the characteristics of inclusive schools, highlighting indicators of successful schools and advocates key approaches to inclusive schooling. These include the following features: an ethos of achievement for all pupils, to value a broad range of talents and abilities, to promote success and self-esteem by removing barriers to learning, to counter discrimination and

finally to promote an understanding of diversity. These factors, in not enforced, were highlighted by Hamill and Clark (2005) to contribute to additional support needs. The Code of Practice further acknowledges that certain family circumstances such as homelessness, parental substance abuse, caring for parents or siblings and other factors may cause additional support needs but it may not apply to all pupils in similar situations. The category of disability and health needs includes factor which can be regarded as the more traditional factors which may give rise to additional support needs. The final category considers social and emotional factors and clearly highlights that pupils are considered as a whole person and not only in terms of educational issues.

Factors include being bullied, low self esteems and child protection issues. I have been working as a part-time support for learning teacher in Support for Learning in a state secondary school X. School X is a non-denominational, coeducational, comprehensive school that caters for pupils aged 11 to 18. The School X has accommodation for 1455 pupils and is acknowledged for its excellent record of academic achievement. So far, there has been no pupil who has been assessed as having Additional Support Needs as seen under the wider umbrella of the new Act. I think there still needs a lot more work to be done in raising the awareness of teachers and pupils so that not only pupils who were traditionally being assessed as having ' special educational needs' are included but also pupils who can be considered as having additional support needs' under the new Act.

InvestigationI decided to select pupil Y as he/she is the pupil I work with most frequently every week giving me the best opportunity to assess his/her

additional support needs. Additionally, most of pupil Y's teachers expressed concern about how little progress pupil Y had been making over the last year and in some subjects his/her behaviour started to deteriorate again and he/she also seemed to get into troubles/fights with older pupils. His/her lack of progress was not only observed in the discrete subject areas but also evident in areas of personal and social development, e. g. not using his homework planner, never doing his homework and coming to school without any materials.

My initial thoughts from reading the IEP written by the principal teacher of Learning support was that pupil Y was a pleasant pupil with difficulties with literacy and numeracy in addition to concentration difficulties. He/she had been diagnosed with dyspraxia. As I had some experience with pupils with dyspraxia last year, I naively anticipated similar kinds of difficulties. My first few encounters in a classroom setting showed that pupil Y was good with oral tasks but also revealed that he/she was, at times, not very amenable to the support he was given and did not want a particular support teacher or assistant near him in certain settings.

I knew, however, that he/she accepted the support from a learning support teacher in Maths. In terms of collecting data to get a better overview of pupil Y's support needs I wanted to explore the following four areas into which additional support needs can be categorised as outlined in the Code of Practise (Scottish Executive, 2005): 1. Learning environment2. Disability or health needs3. Family circumstances4. Social and emotional factors.

To assess which of the above factors contribute to pupil Y's support needs my plan was as follows: 1. Learning environment: In order to assess how import the ethos, relationships, inflexible curricular arrangements, inappropriate approaches to learning and teaching, and disrupted learning are, I intended to observe pupil Y in different subjects as an observer visiting the classroom using the observation schedule Table 1 in the Appendix. I decided to amend the observation schedule – Special Educational Needs from the National Training Project slightly to include where pupil Y was seated in the classroom as I think this will have had some effect and to include a way of recording the pupil-teacher interaction as personal relationships appear to be important to pupil Y. I decided against a timed interval observation, e. g. every 15 seconds as I thought it might be too difficult as I expected quite an unsettled pupil.

Observation of pupil Y in different settings should not only reveal his support needs but it should also be possible to identify if teaching strategies and attitude towards pupil Y affected the extent of his/her learning. Last year the Support for Learning PT issued a questionnaire to all the subject teachers to assess his progress (Table 2 in the Appendix). I would read over the response and evaluate the general outcome of this exercise. Prior to this study, I had suggested to provide pupil Y with tutorial lessons focussing on basic skills instead of him/her attending French lessons as he/she had major difficulties with French and had made any significant progress over the two proceeding years. During the tutorial lesson I would ask pupil Y to do some concentration exercise while observing his/her behaviour. Following the listening exercise, pupil Y would answer questions to check his comprehension of the story.

2. Disability or health needs: Again the personal pupil record (PPR) should provide information on pupil Y's health and both the individual educational plan (IEP) and PPR should give further details about any disability which has been diagnosed. 3. Family circumstances: I would read the PPR, speak to the learning support principal teacher and her/his guidance teacher to investigate if his/her family circumstances are a contributory factor.

I would use the overview table Table 3 in the Appendices as suggested in the lecture on 07. 11. 2006 by Mrs F. Ross-Watt on ' Information gathering including classroom observation' to generate a general overview. I also would get the information about his attendance record.

4. Social and emotional factors: if any of these are contributory to his/her additionally support needs should be evident from reading the PPR and talking to his/her guidance teacher. Data analysisLearning environment1. Classroom observationDuring the observation, I changed the layout of the observation schedule as pupil Y showed different types of behaviour to that which was initially anticipated.

I also reverted back to choosing observational intervals of 15 seconds for 10 minutes as the pupil showed continuing off-task behaviour by talking to others. This lasted for quite some time and I thought I might end up with only a few counts of the intended observational period of 10 minutes. Figure 1 shows the observational data in a simple form to get an overview of the pupil's behaviour within the classroom in different subjects (the filled in observation schedules are in Tables 4 to 7, respectively in the Appendices). Apart from Mathematics and Home Economics, working with a classroom

assistant on a practical task, the pupil exhibited more off-task behaviour than on-task behaviour in all other observed subjects over the observed period. The reason for the high percentage of off task behaviour in English could be attributed to the following factors:* Friendship grouping which encouraged off task talk* Pupil faced away from teacher so no eye contact could be made – Pupil Y would forget that teacher is present* Material focussed on writing summaries of book chapters and identifying verbs* General atmosphere of the classroom was quite chatty. In Home Economics the graph only covers the period in which initial instructions were given as the majority of pupils observed to be off-taks (as a result of the excitement of making muffins).

Once the practical started and a classroom assistant came into the class to assist pupil Y in carrying out the task, his/her behaviour and concentration were excellent. Pupil Y, when motivated and interested in a task is very capable of working on his own even when the classroom assistant moved away from pupil Y. In Geography, his/her behaviour was often off task, in spite of a support for learning teacher being present. Pupil Y has not got a good personal relationship with the support teacher and this was evident from his behaviour by facing away from the teacher, hiding his work and pretending he/she is quite capable of doing it by him/herself.

The off-task behaviour during this lesson was not mainly by keeping himself busy rather than talking to others but. In contrast, pupil Y was for the majority of the observed time interval on task in Maths and in Home Economics when carrying out a practical task with the assistance of a classroom auxiliary. The reason for this increased on-task behaviour is,

however, quite different. In Maths, pupil Y sits at the front of the classroom at a single desk within a class of only 10 pupils. This means the pupils are considerably spread out, therefore, he/she cannot talk easily to others.

Additionally, the task set was appropriate to his level in Maths hence the task, although challenging was manageable and pupil Y was aware of this (I spoke to him/her and this was confirmed during a tutorial). The teacher was also able to help pupils when needed as there was a 10: 1 pupil to teacher ratio. In Home Economics, pupil Y really enjoyed the task as could be easily observed from his body language and he/she also enjoyed working with the classroom assistant and his/her partner providing intrinsic motivation for him. In Figure 2 the various off-task behaviours pupil Y engaged in are shown depending on the circumstances. Given the opportunity and being with his/her friends, pupil Y will choose to talk to others instead of engaging him/herself with a difficult task.

However, if this is not possible he/she is creative in finding other means of masking not being on task. In summary, apart from Maths, pupil Y demonstrated very little interaction with teachers; this is, however not so unusual as it is probably the same for a lot of the pupils in the classes I observed. The majority of responses within a class were made by a relatively small proportion of between five to eight pupils. 2. Pupil progress as assessed by classroom teachersA series of 11 questions about his/her general conduct were asked and the class teacher also had an opportunity to comment on areas of difficulties and concerns.

Unfortunately, there was no room for writing down strength and needs and hence it makes rather depressing reading with almost all the teacher suggesting that all his/her difficulties are his/her personal fault. It seems a shame that the opportunity was missed to investigate the factors that enable pupil Y to learn successfully. The list of areas of difficulty and concerns voiced by teachers are attached as Table 8 in the Appendix. At the time of the questionnaire pupil Y was in S1 and a year later a lot of the same issues still arise. Teachers seem, however, to have given up on him/her as none of the teachers expects him/her to carry any of the materials with him/her or do any assigned homework. 3.

Tutorial lessonsDuring one of the tutorial lessons pupil Y listened to a 10-minute concentration thriller while I was observing his/her behaviour. Pupil Y demonstrated a series of off-task behaviour like fidgeting, playing with furniture and the cassette recorder, and day-dreaming which accounted for 48% of the observed time interval. Surprisingly, pupil Y answered all the questions with ease demonstrating he/she had listening very carefully and was quite capable of concentrating for 10 minutes without losing track of the story. Hence, care should be taken to interpret observational data.

Pupil Y, although superficially of task, still remained focused in listening. Pupil Y really enjoys listening to these stories, so his intrinsic motivation to stay focused on the task is high. During the tutorial, pupil Y works very hard and puts a lot of effort into completing various tasks, such as mathematics or working on basic literacy. At the end of the tutorial we carry out a fun science experiment that pupil Y enjoys – this might provide the extrinsic motivation that pupil Y requires to carry out tasks that are not of his/her

choosing and that he/she finds difficult. Family circumstancesReading the pupil Y's PPR made for rather depressing reading and the main points are summarised in Table 9.

It is not really the pupil I have got to know while working with him/her during the tutorials. There was very little information about family circumstances in the PPR so I assume that the family is not a contributory factor to his/her learning needs. From reading the minutes of an IEP review meeting, his/her mother comes across as supportive in general; however, from some of the occupational therapist correspondence and some other documents it appears that his/her mother gets a times frustrated about his/her behaviour and about his/her inability to do certain tasks such as washing himself when he was at Primary School. Reading his S1 reports and a summary report collated by the Support for Learning Department, it becomes clear that pupil Y never uses his/her planner and hence never completes homework and comes unprepared to lessons, e. g.

forgets his PE kit and home economics equipment frequently. From a mother's point of view, I am surprised that his/her mother does not assist him/her in taking the appropriate material to school but she may have the opinion that he/she is old enough and should take responsibility to do it him/herself. Social and emotional factorsThere are no major concerns about his emotional well-being. Pupil Y, however, does seem to get at times to get into fights as he/she has at times problems controlling his/her temper with certain people. On the whole, pupil Y is very pleasant and so called out of control behaviour might be caused by being still quite immature.