Case study: SEN Progression Guidance, Firwood (SLD/PMLD) School, Bolton
Firwood (SLD/PMLD) School, Bolton

Contact name: Dr Jonathan Steele (headteacher)

Background

This case study demonstrates:

• Systematic and purposeful use of data to inform the triangulated evaluation of a specific aspect of provision.
• Careful balancing of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcome measures.

It also exemplifies the following Key Principles:

• High expectations are key to securing good progress.
• Accurate assessment is essential to securing and measuring pupil progress.
• Age and prior attainment are the starting points for developing expectations of pupil progress.

School context

Firwood School caters for students who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and students with autistic spectrum disorder. Some students also have significant behavioural difficulties. The majority of students are from white British backgrounds. One quarter of students are from minority ethnic groups. A significant number of students are at the early stages of English language acquisition. Many students take free school meals. The school has specialist status in learning and cognition and has gained the Sportmark and Healthy Schools Award.

Approach

During 2005 the inclusion work at Firwood was extended by creating a Firwood Class Base (‘9BB’) within Withins Secondary School (an 11–16 mainstream school). The students spent some time working within 9BB, but a range of other inclusive provision was developed, including:

• Working in mainstream lessons with Teaching Assistant support. The number of mainstream lessons attended and the subjects attended was dependent on the individual 9BB student’s needs, creating a personalised curriculum approach.
• Working with an identified mainstream ‘buddy’ in a weekly food technology lesson, and a module of a citizenship course. This was taught by the Firwood teacher.
• Working with their own class in a specialist area (for example, technology), where the lessons were taught by specialist mainstream staff supported by Firwood Staff.
• Choosing and purchasing lunch from the canteen and mixing with other students at that time.
• Spending time socially at break and after lunch with mainstream students.

All 9BB students attended Firwood’s ‘Achievement Assembly’ on Friday mornings and then went swimming with Firwood Students, hence retaining links with the special school.
In order to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of this development, the school used a commercial small steps assessment scheme developed by Lancashire County Council to determine P scales and subgroups of P scales (for example, P5a, P5b, P5c, P5d, P5e) in the three areas of:

- Mathematics
- English
- Personal and Social Development (PSD).

A single average points score was calculated for each student in the school (using all strands of English, mathematics and PSD as a basis). This score was then converted back to sub-groups of P scales to provide an overall P-scale measurement for each student.

This was done in June 2005 and again in June 2006. During the 2005-06 academic year, much work was done on moderation of assessed levels across the school. In addition, 9BB assessment levels in June 2006 were specifically moderated by the deputy headteacher, working alongside the class teacher to check the results.

The subjects included all nine students who were in 9BB for the 2005-06 academic year. Each of these individual students would be assigned a control group who had a similar attainment score at June 2005.

The subjects’ progress was then compared to their own individual control group in two ways:

**Method 1:**
The number or fraction of P scales moved over the year for the individual and the average of the control group. Comparisons were then made between subjects and their control groups. The average of the subject group and the 24 controls as a single group were also compared.

**Method 2:**
The percentage increase in ‘small steps’ scores from June 2005 to June 2006 was calculated and comparisons made between subjects and their control groups. The average of the subject group and the 24 controls as a single group were also compared.

To bias the study against 9BB students getting better comparative results, the following students were excluded from the potential control group:

- Students with missing scores for either years.
- Any students with a high absence rate.
- Any students whose average P Level score had not increased enough to move them up one sub-level over the year.

The outcomes from this performance data analysis were then triangulated with evidence of impact gathered from both students and their parent/carers. Students’ views were sought through both informal interviewing and discussion, some of which was captured on video, as well as through the more formal Annual Review process. In the latter case, students were asked to complete a form with written and/or symbolic information, with an adult as an advocate to assist with understanding where necessary. They then attended the Annual Review meeting where they were helped to present their report and were able to make further comments if they wished.

Parents’ views were sought through the Annual Review process, both through the formal written Parental Advice and verbally at the Review Meeting. A Parental Questionnaire was also sent to all 9BB parents, asking them to respond “Agree”, “Strongly Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly Disagree”, or “Don’t Know” to a series of statements (see Appendix A). 9BB staff were interviewed on video about their feelings about the project and the students’ progress. No other formal processes were used to seek either 9BB or the Mainstream Staffs’ views. However, comments made during informal discussions were recorded.
The school's analysis, using the two methods mentioned above, revealed the following patterns:

![Comparison of P-Scales Increased over Year - Av. En/Ma/PSD](image1)

![Percentage increase in P Level score](image2)

According to the charts, the 9BB students made significantly greater gains over the course of the year than did students in the control group. This finding about the benefits of the programme was confirmed by evidence from other sources of information:

- The Firwood students were all positive about the mainstream students and the new friends they had made. Several Firwood students named particular friends they had made; one young man being keen to say how he particularly liked the girls!
- Parents were very pleased with the progress their children had made at Withins.
Questionnaire returns included comments about improvements in speech, understanding and social skills; specifically starting to mix more. Particular lessons taken with mainstream peers were also singled out by the parents as having been enjoyed by their child.

No suggestions to improve the project were made. All parents wanted their child to continue at Withins the next year.

All the staff who had worked with 9BB fully supported all the positive comments made. They felt that each pupil has benefited from being at Withins.

Outcomes

The school’s outcomes are generally very good, and according to the 2007 Ofsted inspection report:

“This outstanding school is particularly effective. Representative views from parents include, “you couldn’t wish for a more caring school, staff have brought out the best in my child and given her the confidence to learn very well, despite her difficulties”. Though standards are low, achievement is outstanding given the severity of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Achievement is excellent across the school because the quality of teaching is outstanding. All students of school leaving age successfully complete a range of external accreditations. Accreditation includes areas such as communication, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT)...’

The school’s own evaluation of the 9BB programme concluded:

‘While the temptation is to link the mainstream contact causally with the greater progress, it is clearly not proven in a study of this size and nature. Many other differences between the experiences of 9BB and Firwood-based students need to be considered, including:

- 9BB being taught in larger, newly refurbished, less cramped conditions.
- Availability of 1:1 computer stations within the 9BB classroom.
- A particular focus on ensuring 9BB’s needs are met, as they were in a new ‘experimental’ situation and Firwood felt a particular responsibility toward them.
- The students were not randomly selected to join 9BB.
- Control group students are not age-matched; this was not possible due to the size of the school.
- Moderation of ‘small steps’ levels may continue to be an issue, in spite of work done.

What does seem to be indisputable is that 9BB students made greater progress as measured by the small steps scheme than their control groups. If this is linked with their mainstream experience, then issues involved may include:

- Higher social/academic expectations by mainstream staff and/or students.
- These higher expectations being linked with focused and skilled teaching by staff experienced in SLD work.
- Greater exposure, in terms of time, to mainstream student interactions and their social/language expectations.
- The highly supportive nature of staff, including headteacher and governors, to the presence of our students around Withins School.
- The availability of more specialist equipment providing greater stimulation, promoting better general progress.
- The very positive attitude of Withins students. There were only two significant negative incidents throughout the year.
In addition to the possible effect on the members of 9BB, there were numerous reports from mainstream staff about the positive effect of the presence of our students on the mainstream students. Parents of the students in 9BB were also very positive about the venture, even when they had expressed concerns at the start of the year.

These results show no evidence of special school classes being part of a mainstream school having any deleterious effect on student progress. There are initial indications that the reverse could be the case and such arrangements may lead to better progress in those special school students based within a mainstream school.

Given that:

- special school students generally will find life difficult in any community that does not know and understand them;
- many positive reports were received about the presence of our students in Withins community;
- and there was no loss of progress and a possible improvement in progress,

it would seem appropriate to work hard towards providing these opportunities for all students at Firwood, through the co-location of the whole school in a way that is physically as well as educationally part of the proposed Withins Academy.

**Implications**

The school’s self-evaluation processes show evidence of a fine balance between the use of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes, and between different measures of pupil attainment and progress within core subjects. The reflective nature of the conclusions shows that the complexity of classroom and school processes is understood and respected – and the results of the programme speak clearly of its effectiveness.

SIPs working with schools who have not yet begun to explore these aspects of careful, reflective evaluation may wish to ask what their school is planning to do in future and may also wish to suggest that they consider the approach used at Firwood as part of their evaluation activities.

**Contact email address (for further information):**

steelej@firwood.bolton.sch.uk.
### Appendix A: Parent Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child likes Withins School.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child was helped to settle in well when he/she started.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child is making progress:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to mainstream peers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching is good in the class base.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching is good in the lessons which are shared with Withins students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The support provided to help my child access mainstream lessons is good.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child likes their uniform and feels proud of it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child enjoys lunchtime at Withins.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child has not experienced bullying or name calling at Withins as far as I am aware.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child has made friends with Withins pupils.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable about approaching 9BB staff with questions, suggestions or a problem, or approaching the headteacher or deputy headteacher at Firwood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like my child to remain at Withins next year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to make the following suggestions as ways in which school can further help my child at Withins next year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

The National Strategies would like to thank Firwood School for their contribution to this case study. Any data sets contained within remain the copyright of Bolton Local Authority and have been used with their kind permission.
Disclaimer

The Department for Children, Schools and Families wishes to make it clear that the Department and its agents accept no responsibility for the actual content of any materials suggested as information sources in this publication, whether these are in the form of printed publications or on a website.

In these materials, icons, logos, software products and websites are used for contextual and practical reasons. Their use should not be interpreted as an endorsement of particular companies or their products.

The websites referred to in these materials existed at the time of going to print.

Please check all website references carefully to see if they have changed and substitute other references where appropriate.

Audience: Headteachers, practitioners, SIPCo
Date of issue: 06-2009
Ref: 00079-2009EPD-EN-01

Copies of this publication may be available from:
www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

You can download this publication and obtain further information at:
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2009
Published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial research, education or training purposes on the condition that the source is acknowledged as Crown copyright, the publication title is specified, it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context.

The permission to reproduce Crown copyright protected material does not extend to any material in this publication which is identified as being the copyright of a third party.

For any other use please contact licensing@opsi.gov.uk
www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/index.htm