Setting targets for pupils with special educational needs
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Introduction

There has been a statutory requirement on all schools since 1998 to set performance targets in relation to national expectations for raising attainment.\(^1\) However, special schools which educate pupils with moderate, severe and profound learning difficulties have usually set zero-rated targets because their pupils would not be able to achieve the levels expected of the majority of pupils at the end of each key stage. In March 2001, guidance from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was issued to schools.\(^2\) This included ‘small steps’ criteria to support teacher assessment against National Curriculum levels. These have become known as ‘P scales’.\(^3\)

From December 2001, maintained special schools were no longer permitted to set zero-rated targets, and are now required to use P levels or other appropriate measures (in addition to National Curriculum levels and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades) to set school performance targets. There remains a tension between this duty to set school performance targets and the fact that there is no nationally agreed instrument of assessment. Independent special schools do not have a statutory duty to set performance targets.

The purpose of the report

Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) conducted a series of school visits between December 2002 and May 2003. The 68 schools included ten mainstream primary schools, eight mainstream secondary schools, and 42 maintained special schools (half of which were schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)). There were also eight independent special schools; four of which were for pupils with emotional, social or behavioural difficulties (EBSD) and four for pupils with complex physical, medical, communication and learning needs.

Ofsted reported recently on assessment issues – including target-setting – for pupils in mainstream secondary schools.\(^4\) This present survey complements the earlier work by reporting on progress made – mainly though not exclusively by special

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\(^1\) Target Setting in Schools (Circular 11/98): Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).


\(^3\) The P scales are a set of performance descriptors used for recording the attainment of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) working towards the first level of the National Curriculum. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the levels extend from P1 (lowest) to P8. Levels P1 to P3 are further broken down into two sub-levels, for example P1(i) to P1(ii). At this level they are not subject specific and the indicators relate to general skills at very early stages of development. Some strands of National Curriculum levels 1 and 2 are additionally broken down into three levels (1C to 1A, and 2C to 2A). There are also P levels for all National Curriculum foundation subjects, and these extend from P1 to P6, again with sub-divisions at P1 to P3. Some schools have successfully supplemented these descriptors with the use of commercially available schemes that sub-divide P levels into even smaller steps. Work has been done to allocate point scores to each P level, as in National Curriculum levels, and these can be used to measure progress and so contribute to value-added scores at both individual pupil and whole-school levels.

schools – in setting performance targets for pupils with SEN. The report identifies both innovative approaches as well as the difficulties schools face, and aims to clarify the extent to which target-setting for pupils with SEN is helping schools to improve.

The term ‘special educational needs’ includes pupils of all ability levels who may have needs in cognition and learning, communication and interaction, sensory or physical aspects, and/or behavioural, emotional and social development.

This report is essentially concerned with target-setting for pupils whose levels of ability and attainment are well below those expected for pupils of a similar age. Their attainment is below National Curriculum level 2 by the end of Key Stage 2, and below National Curriculum level 3 by the end of Key Stage 3. They are also likely to experience learning difficulties and be identified as requiring additional support from the school (school action), or external support (school action plus), or have a statement of SEN.5

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Main findings

- Target-setting has the greatest impact when it focuses on precise curriculum objectives for individuals and when it forms part of a whole-school improvement process.
- Eight out of ten of the maintained special schools visited set and published statutory performance targets.
- Almost all special schools use P levels to assess individual pupils and set their targets, although they face difficulties in setting targets realistically for attainment five terms ahead in order to meet statutory requirements. Schools for pupils with PMLD experience particular difficulties in this respect. Special schools need more support from LEAs if they are to set up effective information systems to track pupils’ progress and analyse data over time.
- Mainstream schools are not required to set performance targets for pupils who are unlikely to achieve national expectations. Many are in a position to do so because they may have developed expertise in tracking pupils’ progress and analysing school performance data, but they do not always do this for pupils with SEN.
- Although moderation of teacher assessment for the majority of pupils is satisfactory across most schools, it is underdeveloped in relation to the assessment of pupils with SEN. Special schools have increasing expertise in teacher assessment using P levels, and in some areas this is being shared effectively with mainstream schools and LEA officers.
- Many schools see the importance of setting individual targets and recording progress in terms of personal and social development, but not many do so systematically.
- Most schools use target-setting to inform performance management, though they do not always link teachers’ performance to evidence of improved pupil performance.
- The role of governors in overseeing target-setting, including for pupils with SEN, is underdeveloped.
- Comparing the performance of special schools is difficult and currently of limited value given the diversity of SEN within individual schools, the small numbers of pupils in year groups, the often wide age-range of some classes, and the great variety of assessment approaches in use. However, there is value in comparing the progress of pupils of similar ability at the same age and starting point in different schools. This would be more soundly based if there was greater general understanding of and agreement on criteria for assessment.

Recommendations

To improve the use of target-setting for pupils with SEN:

- **special schools** should:
• collate pupil assessment and achievement data over time at individual, cohort and whole-school levels
• develop their expertise in analysing assessment information to inform school improvement planning.

☐ mainstream schools should:
• incorporate assessment and recording arrangements for pupils with SEN into their whole-school arrangements for all pupils
• develop their expertise in setting targets and monitoring the progress of lower-attaining pupils
• set performance targets for all levels of pupil ability and publish these to governors.

☐ LEAs should:
• include pupils with SEN in the overall LEA system for collating and analysing pupil attainment and achievement data (including teacher assessments)
• increase the expertise they have in target-setting and data analysis for pupils with SEN, to support the school self-review process
• provide training for special school staff in the use of information systems for data collection and analysis.

☐ the DfES should:
• consider including P levels in the National Curriculum assessment framework which schools are required to use
• take further steps to recognise a wider range of achievements in national performance tables
• provide opportunities, in partnership with LEAs and relevant agencies, for further training in moderating teacher assessment for pupils with SEN, particularly those with learning difficulties
• provide guidance on expectations about rates and types of progress for lower-attaining pupils, on the basis of pupils of the same ability and age, and with similar starting-points
• provide guidance for special school staff and governors on how to analyse pupils’ progress data and use this to inform the setting of challenging school performance targets
• investigate how the present systems for benchmarking progress in mainstream schools could be extended to include pupils with SEN
• provide guidance on how schools might report progress against targets set for pupils with SEN to governors and parents.
Setting targets

Individual pupil targets

Target-setting at individual pupil level, while primarily designed to raise standards of attainment for the individual pupils concerned, is also central to whole-school improvement. Useful whole-school and cohort targets are based on detailed knowledge of individual pupils’ prior attainment, potential and achievements. The most effective schools ensure that individual targets are precisely based on accurate assessment information, are challenging and are linked to clear criteria in order to demonstrate progress over time. Where relevant standardised test data are not available, special schools can utilise teacher assessments and information from other professionals, such as educational psychologists, to help them establish each pupil’s level of ability and attainment.

Mainstream schools increasingly set individual learning targets for all pupils across all subject areas. In schools where the curriculum is planned to meet a wide range of ability, individual education plans (IEPs) are not needed for most pupils with SEN. In these circumstances, pupils who have statements of SEN or who are at the ‘school action plus’ stage, usually have IEPs which include targets related to other needs, for example in personal development, behaviour or mobility. The process of setting targets in these areas can help improve pupils’ personal, social and emotional development.

In some primary schools, confusion about IEPs and curriculum targets leads pupils to have two sets of targets for both literacy and numeracy. This causes difficulty in planning the pupils’ programmes effectively and the pupils themselves can become confused by this. Just over half of the primary schools visited are beginning to use P levels to refine the assessment and target-setting process for pupils working towards National Curriculum level 1, but most have yet to become confident in doing so.

The progress of pupils in secondary schools working at or below National Curriculum level 2 is usually measured against targets within IEPs. P levels are not generally in use in secondary schools. Commercially available programmes are sometimes used by secondary schools to provide a bank of targets from which to select literacy or numeracy targets for inclusion in IEPs. However, while these can be helpful in determining the next learning objective in a specific curriculum area, they do not necessarily serve to identify the learning needs of the pupils.

Special schools use P levels, National Curriculum levels and external accreditation at Key Stage 4 to set relevant targets for individual pupils. In residential schools, individual targets are often set across school and residential provision as a whole, recognising the importance of both settings in accounting for the progress of pupils. Due to the nature of pupils' needs it is important that schools are able to demonstrate achievements against targets relating to personal and social development as well as in academic subjects. Most special schools are using the P
scales originally introduced in December 1998, but since withdrawn from the revised version in 2001, as the basis for these assessments.

The monitoring of pupils’ progress against individual targets is satisfactory or better in nine out of ten maintained special schools, with over half being very good or excellent.

P levels are used mainly for those pupils working below National Curriculum level 1, but some schools are also using the small steps between National Curriculum levels 1 and 3 to show progress. For pupils with SLD or PMLD, there are concerns that the steps between the P levels are not small enough. In these circumstances, some schools have developed their own ‘small steps’ approaches, or are using additional commercial programmes to support them further with assessment and target-setting. The case study below describes developments in a special school which has been involved in a regional project over several years to develop an approach which enables schools to show pupil progress over time through more detailed curriculum planning and teacher assessment.

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**Kirkleatham Hall School**

Kirkleatham Hall is a day special school for pupils aged between 4 and 19 years of age with learning difficulties and other complex needs. Collaboration between local special and mainstream schools has produced a ‘small steps’ approach to early development in mathematics, English and behaviour. Strands of knowledge and skills below level 1 of the National Curriculum are broken down into smaller steps that (now) supplement P scales. A profile of assessment is maintained centrally and monitored regularly by the senior management team. Discrepancies in pupil performance relating to specific targets are soon picked up and appropriate action is then taken.

This has raised the profile of the special school giving ownership to all participants in a strategy to raise the achievements of all pupils. It has provided a system to track progress effectively, enabling thorough future planning to meet the individual needs of pupils with complex learning difficulties irrespective of their placement.

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Schools are increasingly involving pupils in setting and reviewing their own academic and personal targets with the result that many pupils are clear about what they need to do to succeed. This has a significant impact on the effectiveness of target-setting at all levels.

**Statutory target-setting in special schools**

Eight out of ten special schools visited meet their statutory obligations by setting school performance targets using a range of criteria.

There has been limited guidance available to special schools on the approaches to whole-school target-setting which are likely to be most effective in raising standards of achievement. Whole-school performance targets are normally based on a detailed knowledge of individual pupils’ needs and potential, and on teachers’ expectations.

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for their future attainment. However, this can lead to a simple aggregation of individual predictions, rather than a worthwhile whole-school improvement target.

Targets based on pupils making a notional improvement of ‘one P level’ are of questionable value because schools often do not have information about the progress pupils make in other schools to support their decisions. In the best practice, schools have wider information available and use it, alongside their knowledge of pupils in other cohorts or year groups, to convert predictions into challenging targets for the school.

Equally, whole-school targets based on individual pupils’ IEP targets are of limited value in contributing to school improvement unless they are directly related to whole-school priorities identified through detailed analysis of pupils’ performance. Unless special schools have accurate, reliable data on pupils’ progress, they are not able to carry out such analysis. The case studies which follow show how schools can use detailed data on pupils to help set demanding whole-school and cohort performance targets.

Some special schools have data on pupil progress going back to 1998, including P level data. Despite changes to the P scales and difficulties with moderation of teacher assessment, this can be helpful to inform self-evaluation by allowing schools to compare:

- the progress of pupils of similar prior attainment
- the performance of individual pupils across different subjects
- the progress of their pupils with those of similar prior attainment and other educational needs across an LEA
- subject performance across a school, identifying any underachievement.

The table below shows the tracking of progress of individual pupils within a typical mixed-ability cohort in a special school which makes provision for pupils with moderate, severe and complex learning difficulties and other educational needs.

Pupil progress – English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year 7 1999/00</th>
<th>Year 8 2000/01</th>
<th>Key Stage 3 prediction 2002</th>
<th>Year 9 2001/02</th>
<th>Year 10 2002/03</th>
<th>Year 11 prediction 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2B</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking/listening</td>
<td>2C</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2C</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td>2C</td>
<td>2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking/listening</td>
<td>P5</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td>2C</td>
<td>2B</td>
<td>2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking/listening</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking/listening</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking/listening</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td>2C</td>
<td>2C</td>
<td>2C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
<td>1C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The school was able to investigate, for example, why: five pupils achieved lower attainment levels in writing than in reading; and five pupils had significantly different levels of attainment in speaking and listening from those in reading or writing. Some pupils did not appear to have made progress over a year. However, pupil A, recorded as level 3 in reading, did actually make significant progress within aspects of reading, and the recent introduction of a commercially published small steps assessment scheme now enables the school to show those finer steps of progress.

The following case study illustrates the range of whole-school performance targets set by one special school, having tracked the progress of its pupils over time.

Rigby Hall School, Worcestershire, is an all-age special school for pupils with moderate (MLD) and severe (SLD) learning difficulties.

The school sets cohort targets for pupils at the end of each key stage. Targets are based on National Curriculum levels for pupils with MLD and P levels for those pupils with SLD. At Key Stage 4 the school uses externally accredited course results as the basis for its target-setting. For pupils with SLD, the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) unit award scheme is used and for pupils with MLD, the Certificate of Educational Achievement (CoEA) is used. This approach allows relevant targets to be set for a wide range of pupils, reflecting the changes in the nature of the cohorts from year to year.

The following targets were set in Year 7 for performance at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2003 – a cohort of 8 pupils with MLD:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Level 2 (8 pupils)</th>
<th>Level 3 (3 pupils)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interim progress review for Key Stage 3 was held with the LEA in 2002 and it was noted that the cohort size had reduced to seven pupils. Having reviewed the progress of pupils in the cohort, the target relating to the percentage of pupils expected to achieve level 2+ was revised from 100% to 85%, in line with the 20% best-performing schools (using a commercially produced database).
The LEA concerned has supported its special schools in setting statutory performance targets and has provided training for the schools in how to use the range of data available for comparative purposes to inform school self-evaluation.

### Target-setting in Worcestershire special schools

Special schools are encouraged to set targets for the same key stages as in mainstream schools. This has led the special schools to focus on outcomes for pupils supported by an LEA review cycle every two years, and has helped to create a common approach which supports benchmarking across schools.

The LEA provides guidance on making use of a variety of data to inform expectations about pupils’ performance and progress including: the special school Performance and Assessment Data report (PANDA); P level pupil progress data from the school; National Foundation for Educational Research/University of Durham analysis of P level data; Fischer Trust target information, at individual level; and LEA value-added data.

The process has led to the sharing of targets and good practice with other Worcestershire special schools. One aspect of funding for pupils in special schools is now linked to P level assessments and there are plans for collection of P level data from Autumn 2003.

During the link inspector’s autumn visit to each school, performance is reviewed and targets agreed. The review covers end-of-key-stage results in summer tests.
Among the schools visited, those that have been able to strengthen their target-setting and self-review procedures through knowledge about practice in other schools tended to be more confident about how realistic and challenging their own targets were. However, most special schools are at an early stage of deciding how best to determine their whole-school performance targets and many said they would benefit from better guidance on using pupil progress data to do this.

A number of schools report that their LEAs either do not request their statutory targets or have not used the information given by schools to inform LEA targets, leading to some schools questioning the value of the process.

In two schools with secondary-aged pupils, statutory targets at end of Key Stage 3 were set in all subjects, except information and communication technology (ICT) for which target-setting is a recent requirement. In two other schools, for pupils with PMLD, each class consisted of a small number of pupils covering a wide age-range (for example eight pupils aged between 7 and 11 years). Cohort targets set by the school related to each pupil in the class making an estimated amount of progress in a particular area of development, for example speaking and listening, over a year. These special schools also experience difficulty in setting targets for attainment five terms ahead for pupils working at P levels whose learning difficulties are such that their progress cannot be judged against an expectation that their attainment will improve year on year. A balance needs to be struck between striving for continual improvement in pupils’ achievements and recognising that this cannot always be linear. Efforts in all these schools reflected a sincere attempt to set useful school performance targets.

Those schools which did not meet statutory requirements gave a number of reasons for this, including:

- high levels of pupil turnover
- changes to the assessment instruments being used by the school, leading to a lack of reliable pupil progress data over time
- lack of clarity about what exactly is required and the means of setting whole-school targets
- and, sometimes, a lack of conviction among senior management about the value of setting such targets.

In the seven out of eight schools which did not formally set statutory performance targets, the progress of individual pupils and the challenge of individual pupil targets was nevertheless of at least a satisfactory standard, indicating that many special
schools lacked the knowledge or expertise to use such information to support whole-
school improvement.

**Additional performance targets**

Some primary schools set cohort targets in English and mathematics for the whole 
ability range of pupils, as in the example below. At present, such additional targets 
are not required to be published or forwarded to the LEA.

*Moor Nook* is a large primary school (266 pupils) serving a community of unusually 
high levels of social and economic deprivation.

Children are assessed on entry to Reception class using a commercially available 
assessment and data analysis service. The standardised scores are sent to the 
school around the end of October and it is through analysing the standardised scores 
in mathematics and reading, in conjunction with the teacher’s assessment, that 
predictions for the end of Key Stage 1 are made. High standardised scores (well 
above 50) in both subjects have usually resulted in the pupil getting National 
Curriculum level 2B to level 3 at the end of Key Stage 1. Children who have achieved 
lower scores are typically predicted to attain between National Curriculum level W 
(working towards level 1) to level 2C. Using the P levels, it is possible to identify the 
exact level within ‘W’ and the school is currently developing this area of its work and 
will be using this to inform future targets. The school is able to set targets at individual 
pupil level and cohort level for all pupils, as shown below, for the 2003 cohort. Of the 
23 pupils, over half have a range of communication, learning, physical or 
emotional/behavioural difficulties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>4 pupils (17%)</td>
<td>4 pupils (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 pupils (9%)</td>
<td>2 pupils (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C</td>
<td>7 pupils (30%)</td>
<td>8 pupils (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>5 pupils (22%)</td>
<td>3 pupils (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>3 pupils (13%)</td>
<td>3 pupils (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 pupils (9%)</td>
<td>3 pupils (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the data enables the teacher to plan a curriculum related to individual and/or 
group needs. It also highlights the need for additional support for those children with 
SEN. As the children move through the key stage, the amount of data increases and 
the targets are refined. This target-setting process has evolved so that the pupils are 
involved in agreeing their own targets and reviewing their progress. As a result of this 
inclusive approach, the school is confident that it has high expectations for pupils at 
all levels of ability and can more reliably make judgements about their progress over 
time.
Within the schools visited in this survey, the percentage of pupils recorded as having SEN ranged from 5% to 34% in secondary schools and 10% to 60% in primary schools. This wide range was sometimes justified, but by no means always so, reinforcing the findings of the Audit Commission report published in 2002. Variations in the interpretation of the criteria in the SEN Code of Practice were often related to judgements made with insufficient reference to objective factors and comparisons with other schools and judgements about whether lower-attaining pupils were making ‘reasonable progress’ generally lacked context.

**Curriculum development and teacher assessment**

Effective schools use target-setting to inform curriculum and other organisational development. For example, some schools are:

- planning increased flexibility in provision at Key Stage 4 for lower-attaining and/or disaffected pupils through work-related learning programmes, GCSEs in vocational fields and links with further education colleges
- identifying pupil focus groups for additional support or specific programmes – for example, those who require additional intensive reading programmes because their progress and levels of attainment are below those expected for their age at the start of Year 7
- recognising the difficulties some pupils have in socialising with others and responding to this by introducing specific personal and social education programmes
- using individual behaviour targets to inform pupil groupings, teaching styles, individual targeted support and the appropriate range of resources needed
- identifying that pupils have poorly developed independence skills, in relation to problem solving, and prioritising this area for development.

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In such schools, curriculum co-ordinators are becoming more skilled at analysing data and identifying pupils’ strengths and weaknesses in their subjects. Through this, school development targets may be agreed. In one special school, for example, writing was identified as a weak area.

**Pear Tree School:** a special school for pupils aged 3–19 years with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties.

A three-year collation of pupil assessment data showed that there was underachievement in writing for all cohorts across the school. While most pupils worked between levels P4–P6, about 20 of the secondary pupils were working between level P7 and National Curriculum level 1. The reasons for this were not immediately clear. Did the pupils have insufficient time? Were teaching methods inappropriate or resources inadequate? Were expectations of pupils with poor fine-motor skills not high enough?

An audit was undertaken and a new policy and scheme of work written. Age-appropriate resources were provided, including ICT. Grouping arrangements were reconsidered. Lesson plans gave attention to writing in every lesson and were evaluated regularly. These plans were based on an approach to language development which used topics and themes to generalise the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Grouping and individual profiles were used to measure progress and identify future targets.

The impact of this development at individual pupil level is illustrated by the progress made by one pupil. In 2000, at Year 2, he was just beginning to understand that marks on a paper conveyed some meaning, for example, he could scribble alongside a picture. In 2002, at Year 4, he had progressed to differentiating between letters and symbols, copy-writing with some support, and was able to write his own name (as well as those of a few friends) legibly and with meaning. His most recent assessment indicates he can now correctly spell some high-frequency words.

In another school the co-ordinator effectively analysed pupil attainment data and identified underachievement in ICT.

**Beech Hill** is a special school for pupils aged 11–16 who have moderate or severe learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, or autistic spectrum disorder.

All pupils are set individual targets in ICT expressed in terms of National Curriculum levels or P levels. These are based on assessment carried out by the ICT co-ordinator and using information from other specialist subject teachers concerning the levels that pupils were attaining in ICT within their subjects.

Using a grid, and entering the levels from each subject against each pupil revealed that some teachers were underestimating pupils’ knowledge, skills and understanding in ICT and that pupils were sometimes being presented with ICT tasks which did not build on previous learning or extend it.

This exercise has enabled the school to evaluate and moderate its assessment of pupils, and so assist teachers to focus on what they can do to help pupils work towards their ICT targets.
Many special schools are currently refining their schemes of work to include P level descriptors and National Curriculum levels against all learning outcomes. These are also linked to the national strategies for literacy and numeracy. This helps teachers when planning for a diverse range of needs in the class, setting individual targets and monitoring pupils’ progress. The quality of teacher assessment is a key to the process. This applies equally to mainstream schools, where, in the best practice, assessment, recording and reporting procedures encompass all pupils.

**Bellingham Community Middle School**

This middle school faces the challenge of accommodating the needs of a diverse range of children from seven different first schools, many experiencing the difficulties of rural deprivation and social isolation. Successful school improvement is firmly embedded in the belief that a whole-school approach to assessment, planning, recording and reporting is essential. All pupils are seen as individuals and therefore have targets irrespective of their formally identified needs.

The school assessment policy is reflected securely at every planning stage.

Long-term planning ensures: coverage, balance and coherence between all subjects in each year and across the school; suitable allocation of time; appropriate links between subjects and continuity between key stages; elements of personal and social development are included across subjects.

Medium-term planning ensures: identification of all aspects of work to be covered in each curriculum area; level descriptors are in place to indicate expectations and progression; learning objectives and learning experiences are made clear; assessment opportunities are identified – for the range of learners; key resources and adaptations are highlighted.

The effective use of ICT makes these tasks manageable. Learning targets are set for each child in all subjects. Every child also has individual targets set in the areas of behaviour and attitudes, homework, punctuality, and attendance. These are linked to class targets and rewards.

**Whole-school improvement**

In the most effective schools visited, target-setting is an integral part of school improvement. Teachers and co-ordinators identify areas of underachievement and the actions to be taken. They are able to see standards rising and are clear that this is attributable to external accountability as well as more rigorous internal procedures for self-review. Pupils, parents and teachers are all involved in the process, as shown in the following case study.

**Tyne View Primary School** needed a clear strategy to raise the achievements of all pupils. The agreed strategy was not to distinguish between those with or without 'identified' SEN but to establish a common approach to teaching which meets a range of needs.

A system of target-setting was introduced whereby cohort and school targets were directly linked to individual pupil performance. This was based on the following principles:
• successful outcomes for as many as possible
• formative as well as summative assessment to raise achievement
• the building of self-confidence
• increasing pupils’ independence as learners
• help for pupils to understand and appreciate the contribution of short-term effort and progress towards the achievement of longer-term targets
• help for pupils to identify achievement through use of their own preferred learning styles
• opportunities for three-way discussion between teacher, pupil and parent to promote understanding
• the use of evidence and observations which are accurate and believable
• regular feedback, review and evaluation as a structural part of life in the classroom.

The school has a five-stage cycle of planning for individual pupil targets, with parents and carers involved wherever possible at each stage. The stages are defined as:
(1) How well am I doing? (2) How well should I be doing? (3) What more should I aim to do? (4) What must I do to make it happen? (5) How do I know if it has been effective?

There is a firm link between individual and whole-school target-setting. The individual pupil targets set and the action taken is monitored to see whether some types of targets and actions are more successful for some pupils than others. Successful approaches are then documented.

The following example shows how a special school has measured improvement in terms of raised standards, through incorporating target-setting into its wider school improvement cycle. Through its well-grounded action plan, the school has been able to ensure that progress is more consistent.

**The Loyne** is a special school for pupils aged 2–19 who have severe learning difficulties. It has used target-setting to focus on achievement in specific aspects of English, mathematics and personal and social development. This has improved pupil progress and raised standards. Discussion takes place with the LEA adviser to ensure that targets set are realistic and challenging.

The key elements of the school improvement cycle are as follows:
• baseline assessment is carried out for all pupils in English, mathematics, and personal and social development (PSD) and individual pupil targets are set (related to curriculum planning objectives)
• pupils are assessed against their targets. The data is collated and analysed by senior managers and co-ordinators to identify weaknesses across aspects of subjects, to establish curriculum development priorities, and to identify particular cohorts of pupils
• performance targets are set for raising standards in English, mathematics and PSD – independence and organisational skills
• an action plan is drawn up and implemented to enable the school to address those
identified weaknesses and move towards achieving its targets

- teachers and senior managers monitor progress against those targets at individual pupil, class and whole-school levels and reset them as appropriate at all levels, establishing a clear relationship between individual pupil and school targets.

An example of how the school used target-setting as part of school improvement is in relation to reading. Having assessed pupils’ attainment in English, the school set a target to increase the percentage of pupils achieving National Curriculum Level 1B in reading in the year 2001 from its baseline of 8.8% in the year 2000.

Actions taken to achieve this target included:

- assessment of pupils’ reading age and their ability to read National Literacy Strategy words, leading to setting of individual targets
- development of a reading policy
- in-service training for all staff, for example in a programme to develop progression in phonics
- establishment of a Better Reading Partners project
- inclusion of objectives related to whole-school reading targets within teachers’ performance management agreements.

Teachers, co-ordinators, and senior managers were involved in monitoring progress against these targets.

At individual pupil level, progress was shown in increased points scores* in reading as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>2000 point score</th>
<th>2001 point score</th>
<th>Progress in point score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil a</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil b</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil c</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school was successful in achieving an increase from 8.8% (4 pupils) in 2000 to 27.5% (14 pupils) who attained at least level 1B by 2001. The result was corroborated by other evidence sources and data collection, which showed significant improvement in the number of NLS high/medium frequency words which pupils were able to read out of context.

* Points scores are calculated using a commercially published assessment and data analysis. From 2003 the school was able to have access to the national database to help it review the progress and targets of its pupils in a wider context.

Despite the small numbers of pupils in special school cohorts, this shows that pupils’ learning targets can be linked with identified curriculum priorities and contribute to whole-school improvement.
Managing target-setting

Moderation of teacher assessment

Although moderation in general is satisfactory or better in all schools, there are inconsistencies, particularly in relation to the assessment of lower-attaining pupils where, in most schools, it is an internal activity involving discussion between staff about individual pupils. External moderation is negligible except at Key Stage 4, where all schools with pupils in that age group involve their staff in external moderation meetings, for example for GCSE, entry-level certificates, and unit award schemes. As a result, the quality of moderation is better at Key Stage 4 than at other key stages, particularly in special schools.

Teachers in special schools find it particularly difficult to moderate their assessments of pupils with PMLD. Teacher observation and professional judgement are seen as providing the only reliable basis for such judgements. More extensive use of video materials could support this process.

An illustration of work to improve the reliability and consistency of teacher assessment in relation to pupils working within P levels, is given in the following case study.

Glyne Gap is an all-age special school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school was involved in a five-school consortium using the P levels as an instrument to discuss progress, judge achievement and investigate the viability of comparing results.

Three cohorts, similar by age, were identified at each school at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. Pupils’ attainment in language, literacy, mathematics and personal and social development was assessed by their class teachers. Deputy heads from each school moderated the assessments which formed the baseline for later scrutiny. Two years later, the same pupils were assessed by the same ‘P level’ instruments. An average P level gain for each cohort was calculated.

This exercise revealed a number of issues. Firstly, P levels were initially considered by the staff to be too crude a measure to indicate progress for many pupils because it was felt that they were open to widely varying interpretation when used for assessment. Staff realised that much work was needed even to establish consensus about assessing attainment using the P levels, before fair comparisons could be made. Differences between the cohorts in each school, in levels of disability, meant that making comparisons based on an average P level gain was not valid.

As a response to concerns about lack of consistent approaches, staff produced informative ‘can do’ statements to underpin the level descriptions. Before a P level is credited, 80% of the statements need to be achieved. The work in developing these agreed criteria and in applying them consistently has been accompanied by a number of related developments to ensure challenge as well as consistency.
Some LEAs have encouraged all their schools to adopt a standard commercially published small steps assessment scheme which links directly to P levels and the National Curriculum. This aims to make it easier to share data between schools in the same LEA, and contribute to standardisation of assessment, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties. Some LEAs are also working with mainstream and special schools on the development of exemplar materials, for example video and interactive materials to support teacher assessment for pupils with SEN.

**Monitoring and analysis of data**

While special schools are beginning to record individual pupil attainment levels in each subject, reliable pupil performance data over time is not yet available and changes made to the P scales when they were revised in 2001 have adversely affected the reliability of schools’ value-added data. In addition, many schools lack the expertise or information systems needed to collate and analyse their data at the whole-school level. There is a general lack of support from LEAs in setting special school performance targets. The few special schools which have access to LEA data tracking and analysis are better equipped to analyse their attainment data and incorporate these into the school improvement process.

Half of the special schools visited analyse their pupil performance information in relation to gender and ethnicity. However, where schools do carry out such analysis, they find that individual needs are so diverse and numbers so small that no significant trends can be detected.

Many special schools express concerns that national performance tables do not report the often very good progress of pupils who may never reach national attainment expectations and who may have severe behaviour difficulties or other needs. In particular, accreditation which is publicly recognised at Key Stage 4 does not reflect the diverse range of relevant alternative provision schools are offering to meet pupils’ needs.
It is difficult to compare the performance of special schools because of the inconsistent assessment methods used, the diversity of need, and small numbers in cohorts. In addition, some special schools are very small (fewer than 50 pupils in a 2–19 age-range) with consequently a wide age-range in each class. These factors have a significant impact on the validity of any comparisons undertaken at whole-school level. The Ofsted PANDA report is used by some special schools to support them in comparing their performance with other schools, in particular MLD and EBSD schools. However, this report provides a very limited basis for comparison in schools where there is a wide range of needs. There is potentially more value in comparing the progress of pupils of similar ability at the same age and starting-point in different schools.

Mainstream schools generally have good systems in place for regularly monitoring progress against whole-school targets. These normally relate directly to the tracking of individual pupils’ progress against individual learning targets within subject areas. Subject co-ordinators then analyse performance data and inform class teachers of issues to be addressed in the curriculum. Some schools are also appropriately monitoring progress against whole-school targets which are not directly related to attainment, for example in behaviour, attendance and punctuality. However, the accuracy and reliability of the monitoring systems in relation to lower-attaining pupils are less clear because they usually depend on the quality of the targets set within IEPs, where there is little evidence of any external challenge.

Governors in the schools visited are generally not actively involved in target-setting. Even when governors in secondary schools are more confident and knowledgeable about, for example, GCSE targets and grades, they are less sure about those applying to Key Stage 3 and lower-attaining pupils. The involvement of governors in the target-setting process in the special schools visited was often limited.

The progress of pupils with SEN is usually reported to governors in general terms; for example a school may report that all pupils with SEN are making progress against targets in their IEPs. However, the value of such statements in helping governors to monitor the effectiveness of their provision is questionable. Where mainstream schools have set performance targets for pupils of all ability levels, they are able to report progress against those more specifically.

**Performance management**

Teachers in all schools are generally positive about the performance management process and feel well supported. Where this is directly related to professional development, it is making a significant contribution to school improvement.

Almost all schools use target-setting to inform performance management discussions and set objectives. These are appropriately related to curriculum developments, but are not always related to quantifiable pupil performance data.

In the best practice, teachers and support staff are involved in decisions about what is challenging and achievable for their pupils. For example, a curriculum development priority, such as writing is identified and action on it is related directly to individual pupil and cohort targets, and then to performance management targets and professional development. They can clearly demonstrate measurable
improvements in the standard of pupils’ achievements. The following case study shows this process at work:

**Cambridge Park** is a school for pupils aged 3–16 years, who experience moderate learning difficulties and/or autistic spectrum disorders. Performance management is linked to the school improvement cycle and raising standards of achievement for all groups of pupils. Performance management involves three stages of planning, monitoring and review.

Between April and June, every teacher meets annually with the headteacher to review their role and achievement of objectives, including pupil progress targets. Three objectives are agreed for the next year; one must include future targets for pupils in that class or subject across the key stage.

In June to July, the headteacher and leadership team provide a comparative analysis for the school which highlights strengths and weaknesses in curricular provision. This forms the basis for the following year’s school development plan. It is presented to the governing body and staff who can locate their own objectives within the plan.

From September to the following June, monitoring is undertaken through classroom observation and scrutiny of records. Line managers identify supportive action needed to keep targets on track. In December, all teachers report on progress so far against their targets.

The analysis last year showed a significant increase at Key Stages 3 and 4 in the number of pupils who achieved a lower assessment level in Attainment Target 1 (AT1) science, than in the previous two years. Possible reasons for this were discussed, for example:

- new grouping arrangements (mixed year groups had been introduced) might be shifting the emphasis of teaching away from AT1
- there may not be enough AT1 work planned into the curriculum
- the use of a revised version of the assessment programme may be showing an error in transfer of data.

It was agreed to review the science scheme of work and plan additional time into AT1.

Pupils are beginning to improve their attainment levels at AT1. Overall results will be analysed at the next cycle of pupil review and incorporated into the performance management cycle. The school expects to see the dip smooth out and pupil achievement to rise over the next two years in AT1.

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**Conclusion**

Many of the findings in this survey reflect those reported in the recent HMI report on *Good Assessment in Secondary Schools*. In particular the importance of connecting the elements of a school’s systems for analysing data, setting and reviewing targets, assessment in the classroom, marking and reporting to parents. Teachers are using target-setting in a positive way to support them in reflecting on their own practice and in reviewing the standards their pupils are achieving. The importance of involving all pupils in setting meaningful and achievable targets and reviewing their progress is brought to the fore.
Target-setting for individual pupils is of most value when it is central to school improvement. The best schools ensure that individual targets are specific and measurable. They are derived from accurate assessment information, related to curriculum objectives, and linked to clear criteria which can demonstrate progress over time. In these schools, analysis of data is more reliable and forms a sound basis for evaluating how well pupils are achieving and the overall effectiveness of the school.

Improving the reliability of teacher assessment, as it relates to lower-attaining pupils, is the key to ensuring that effective target-setting improves pupils’ achievements across the curriculum. Where there is external moderation, for example at Key Stage 4, teacher assessment is more reliable, notably in special schools. Aware of this issue, some LEAs and schools have been developing materials and establishing joint working arrangements which support teachers in achieving more consistency in their assessments across all key stages.

The majority of LEA-maintained special schools visited are meeting statutory requirements, using a range of performance measures to set whole-school and cohort performance targets. Some approaches are more effective than others in contributing to school improvement. Where special schools have pupil progress data over at least three years, using national performance criteria such as National Curriculum and P levels, they are able to analyse this information to identify their strengths and priorities for development and to inform target-setting at all levels. Access to LEA support has a significant impact on schools’ ability to ensure that those targets are both realistic and challenging. However, most special schools are still at early stages of collecting such data and developing the skills to analyse them, and have little external support.

Any comparative analysis of special school performance needs to be used with caution at this stage: the setting of realistic and challenging targets for schools with pupils with more severe learning difficulties is a complex matter due to the often small sizes of schools, wide age-ranges in classes, and very diverse range of individual needs. An approach which enables schools to compare the progress of pupils of similar ability at the same age and starting point across different schools is potentially of more value in contributing to school improvement. A few LEAs have been developing data sets which provide such a wider context and these are valued by the schools. To extend this good practice further, there needs to be national consistency in the assessment criteria used.

Mainstream schools have been involved in statutory target-setting since 1998 and are now confidently and effectively incorporating this into the school improvement cycle. Although there is no statutory requirement for mainstream schools to set performance targets for pupils with SEN other than those relating to national expectations, some are setting targets for a wider range of ability groups and demonstrating the value of this approach in raising standards for individual pupils. While this includes the majority of pupils with SEN, it does not always include pupils with learning difficulties who are likely to have statements of SEN.

Overall, a greater commitment is needed to share the good practice which is evident in schools and LEAs to enable more schools to take an inclusive approach to raising standards for all pupils through the target-setting process.