Our effective alternative to IEPs

What are the alternatives to using IEPs? Gareth D Morewood, Director of Curriculum Support & Specialist Leader of Education at Priestnall School Stockport, explains why he thinks there are better ways of supporting engagement and enhance progress.

Introduction

The whole of my SENCO career (sine die) has been continually high on the agendas for debate. It is no secret that I passionately believe there must be better ways of supporting engagement and enhancing progress for our most vulnerable learners, as part of an inclusive whole-school approach (Morewood, 2012), as opposed to (in the worst examples) imposing targets for young people simply as part of a bureaucratic process to satisfy ‘criteria’. It is important to note that any system is only as good as the environment in which it operates. In some settings, particularly primary schools, IEPs form an important part of provision. However, I would encourage colleagues to think differently and consider how new ways of working can support the whole school inclusive agenda.

IEPs and teacher skills

To start it is useful to consider the current school landscape specifically in relation to a key phrase from the 2011 Code: ‘the IEP is a planning, teaching and learning tool’. IEPs were intended to ‘trigger teaching and learning processes’ (Roberson and Tord, 2012). The article by Roberson and Tord (now updated: http://bit.ly/IEPtool) set out the arguments for and against the use of IEPs in the current climate; however, my interest is the advancement of the professional skills of teachers in relation to students with SEND.

Use of IEPs in schools

It is now tacitly understood that IEPs in England with Individual Educational Programmes, in the USA for example. While the idea of a student-centered programme of support and intervention may be more akin to a provision and access map, even in the USA studies found that learners evaluated their programmes (IEPs) with ‘few opinions and lack of ownership’ (Savin et al., 1998).

‘The more schools have been able to respond to pupils’ diversity the less need there might have been for IEP’ (Roberson and Tord, 2012).

Changes to Teachers’ Standards

The rapid development in the use of data in schools is a significant additional factor; now maths, English, science, Year 3 teachers, etc. know their pupils well and set appropriate targets in line with individual need. The ‘Teachers’ Standards’ (2012) highlights this part of their professional duty and the Code also highlights the need for all teachers to be lead professionals for all learners, especially those with SEND.

Whole school systems as part of an inclusive approach

While the historical context is well documented and the delays well aired, it is essential to clarify that any system for individual students is more effective when part of a whole school approach. It is vital that any provision be an IEP or alternative, doesn’t fall foul of genericising provision, or is seen as a central to the whole school agenda, as some poorly targeted provision maps approach have been. Each child and every person with additional needs is an individual, and for that purpose we need some mechanism that provides support ‘additional to’ what is, in effect, the Local Offer for the school.

Our alternative: Student Passports

In moving away from IEPs, which I think were too separate from the child-centred approach I was achieving, I developed our Student Passport from examples used by SENCOs, strategies used around England, which I发展模式 while delivering 23 regional sessions on the DfE’s funded Whole School Approach project (http://bit.ly/mypassport).

A break down of the content of the Passports and how they work can be found on the opposite page.

Accountability

As with any system there needs to be accountability, and our Student Passport works as part of a whole school system that ensures all students are valued equally, irrespective of their age or starting point. The strength of our Passports is that there is an expectation for teachers to have regard to the information and use it in conjunction with their subject expertise in delivering learning opportunities that are inclusive for all of our students.

Governing body reporting

Governors must be the last of the hierarchy to ensure that the essential provision is made for any pupil within Education Act 1996 (amended by SENDA 2001) S10(4).

In reporting to the governing body I am able to demonstrate and evidence a student-centred learning discourse in using the Passport. An IEP may have had a quote from the student and parent/council, but the Passport is written collaboratively with the student central to that process.

Impact of the Passports

Our policy has reinforced the use of Passports as part of our whole school approach and the outcomes of our young people have, at times, been phenomenal. There is no doubt that the whole school approach is the key element. However, reporting highlights the effectiveness of our Passports for day-to-day engagement and learning is significant.

The shift away from the SENCO generating targets across the whole school is a document that supports teachers with their assessments, planning, teaching and reviewing of a pupil’s progress has been already powerful. I have little doubt that our Passports have added a great deal of value to our ‘outstanding’ provision, but as with all systems, they are only as effective as the whole school desire to make them truly part of the shared aims of the community.

References and further information:


Further information:

Students passports and supporting materials can be found at www.gdmorewood.com

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**Teaching hard to reach students: successful specialist provision**


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**Student Passports**

**Contents of the Passports**

- [Student Passport](#) contains the following key areas and is divided along one side of A4 paper

  - [Student information and photograph](#) this includes a personal approach to the photograph

  - Would like you to know that... (the young person’s ‘story’)

  - The things that... (age, gender, background, interests, worries)

  - I feel difficult to... (key areas that are difficult, agreed after discussion)

  - If I need help from... (practical strategies and tips to support the identified needs)

- [Access arrangements](#) (shown in dark blue)

  - Contact details

  - Data/information... (key data information, as required – summarised for ease of reference)

**How the Passports are used**

In using the Student Passport as a tool for engaging the student in real discussions about learning, needs and strategies, we allow for an opportunity to activate metacognitive discussions and thinking. This is considered to have high impact for low cost, based on extensive evidence.

(learning Education Foundation) and an educational psychologist is a valuable opportunity for positive discussions with students, parents, teachers and other professionals. It provides a single document to support learning and teaching and access to the curriculum.

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