

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 to support engagement and enhance progress

Introduction

For the whole of my SENCO career to date, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have been continually high on the agenda 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 2001 Code: 'the IEP is a planning, teaching and learning tool'. IEPs were intended to 'trigger teaching and learning processes' (Robertson and Tod, 2012). The article by Robertson and Tod (now updated: <http://bit.ly/IEProle>) set out the arguments for and against the true value 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 easy to confuse IEPs in England with Individualized Educational Programs, in the USA for example. While the idea of a student-centred programme of support and intervention may be more akin to a provision and access map, even in the USA studies found that learners

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evaluated these programs (IEPs) with 'low opinions and lack of ownership' (Lovitt et al., 1994).

'The more schools have been able to respond to pupil diversity the less need there might have been for IEPs' (Robertson and Tod, 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 5 teachers, etc. know their pupils well and set appropriate targets in line with individual need. The Teachers' Standards (2012) highlight this as part of their professional duty and the draft 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 partnership

While the historical context is well documented and the debates well aired, I feel it important to clarify that any system for individual students is most effective when part of a whole school approach. It is vital that any provision, be it an IEP or alternative, doesn't fall foul of generalising provision, or is even at odds with the whole school agenda, as some poorly targeted provision map approaches have been. Each child or young 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 felt were too separated from the child-centred approach I was striving for, I developed our Student Passport from examples used by SENCO colleagues around England, which I discovered while delivering 22 regional sessions on the DfE-funded Whole School Approach project (<http://bit.ly/nasentraining>).

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 Passports work 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 use their best endeavors to ensure that the necessary provision is made for any pupil with SEN. (Education Act 1996 (amended by SENDA 2001) s317(1)(a)).

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/carer, 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 to a document that supports teachers with their assessment, planning, teaching and reviewing of progress has been really 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:

- ★ DfES (2001) *Inclusive Schooling: Children with special educational needs*. (Statutory Guidance DfES/0774/2001) Nottingham, DfES Publications.
- ★ Education Endowment Fund Toolkit. <http://bit.ly/EEFtoolkit>
- ★ Lovitt, T. C. et al. (1994) High School Students Rate Their IEPs: Low Opinions and Lack of Ownership. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, v30 n1 p.34-37 Sep 1994
- ★ Morewood, G. D. (2012) Is the 'Inclusive SENCOs' still a possibility? A personal perspective. *Support for Learning*, Vol. 27 No.2, p.73-76, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- ★ Robertson, C & Tod, J (2012) Are Individual Education Plans still useful? Optimus Education, SENCO Update, March, 133; p.6-8.

Further information:

- ★ More information and supporting materials can be found at www.gdmorewood.com

Student Passports

Contents of the Passports

Our Student Passport covers the following key areas and is always on one side of A4 paper.

- ★ **Student information and photograph...** (this provides a personalised approach to the document)
- ★ **I would like you to know that...** (the young person's 'first hand' description)
- ★ **This means that...** (again 'first hand' information for teachers from the student)
- ★ **I find it difficult to...** (key areas that are difficult, agreed after discussion)
- ★ **It would help me if you could...** (practical strategies and tips to support the identified areas)
- ★ **I will help myself by...** (agreed strategies and practical solutions for the young person)
- ★ **Additional support...** (noted additional support: SaLT, therapy sessions, TA support etc...)
- ★ **Access arrangements...** (clearly noted assessment needs – extra time, reader/scribe etc...)
- ★ **Data/information...** (key data/information, as required – summarised for ease of reference)

How the Passports work

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 as 'high impact for low cost, based on extensive evidence' (Education Endowment Foundation) and also provides a refreshing opportunity for positive discussions with students, parents/carers and other professionals, culminating in a single document to support learning and teaching and access to the curriculum.

Parents must be informed by the (maintained) school or PRU when their child begins receiving extra help on the school stages for SEN (Education Act 1996 s317A).

What better way to inform a parent/carer than to have a meeting and use the Student Passport as a 'discussion template'? Indeed, some of the most powerful discussions have been when parents/carers take the draft Passport home and have the discussions about learning away from school – empowering parents/carers to have a more sophisticated level of involvement.

Find out more

For more information and training materials to support the development of Student Passports in your school see my recent publication, *Successful Classroom Partnerships: Making the most of teaching assistants* (<http://bit.ly/tatrainingpack>).

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