

# Developing Individual Education Plan Targets within Whole School Assessment Procedures

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## Aim

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To investigate the nature of the demands arising from the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCO) involvement in setting, communicating and reviewing Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets in a High School, and to consider possible ways in which effective target setting for students with IEPs in a High School can help to maximise achievement through becoming an integral part of school assessment procedures.

## Dimensions of this Case Study

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The study was conducted in three comprehensive high schools in Harrow: two large mixed 12-16 schools and one smaller boys' 12-16 school. A total of twenty-five teachers, students, SENCOs, supporting adults, parents and an Assessment Co-ordinator were involved in a combination of interviews and questionnaire surveys.

## Summary of Findings for this Case Study

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- Some of the difficulties of setting IEP targets identified by SENCOs were: lack of time available to meet and liaise with colleagues and the administration associated with a large number of students with IEPs.
- IEP targets can be set most effectively when students are involved at the early planning stages. There are a number of existing procedures in schools where targets are set and which could form part of an IEP.
- In order for IEP targets to be regularly updated, opportunities should be provided within the curriculum for students to be involved in setting and reviewing their IEP targets.
- Target setting was being developed within whole school initiatives in the three schools involved. Some subject teachers indicated that the monitoring, reviewing and updating of targets was part of their teaching practice for all students.
- In schools where assessment policies had been implemented which involved target setting for all students, there was a greater involvement of parents, teachers, students and supporting adults in reviewing IEP targets.
- A range of assessment procedures which included target setting were found in the three schools. These could incorporate IEP targets as features of a whole school assessment procedure.

## Background

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While teachers in the past have set targets for students as part of their teaching practice this was often on an informal basis. The Code of Practice (1994) raised the status and formality of target setting for students with Special Educational Needs as a feature of the IEP. At the same time target setting, in a much wider context, has received much attention and has become an aspect of recent education policy and planning.

Our own experience in relation to the demands of target setting emerges from working with 261 students with Special Educational Needs in a High School setting. Since 1994 our aim has been to implement the recommendations, regarding IEPs, of the Code of Practice (1994). The challenge of setting, communicating and reviewing IEPs has been ongoing. It has been recognised that in the High School setting, implementing IEPs is more complex and an appropriate model is not straightforward. One of our early principles was to develop a process which built upon existing good assessment procedures within the department and the school, whilst avoiding the creation of an additional separate system. We were also concerned that in order to be effective all staff should share responsibility for monitoring, implementing and reviewing IEPs and the role of the SENCO should focus upon the co-ordination of this process.

During this period of developing and implementing IEPs we have tried a variety of approaches to achieve this aim. Partial success has been experienced in developing IEP targets that are effective. However, as assessment is not static but continually evolving in response to demands that are internal and external to the school, it has been necessary to continually re-evaluate our approaches in order to reach a position which would meet the needs of all concerned. Not the least, those of the student, whose position is the central focus.

Our aim has become to see how far IEP targets can be set, communicated and reviewed as part of a whole school assessment procedure, thus moving towards an approach that involves the commitment, knowledge and expertise of all the staff in the school and where the SENCO is able to co-ordinate in a way that will maximise student achievement.

It is our belief that any model of IEP management in the High School setting should incorporate and build

upon assessment procedures and target setting strategies. This should be an integral part of a whole school assessment policy in order to be fully effective.

This background provided the stimulus for this project. We were keen to build upon the successes we had achieved; we wanted to sample other colleagues' experiences within our Local Education Authority (LEA); we wanted to review the relevant literature to gain a perspective of what commentators were portraying as the current situation. The Teacher Training Agency enabled us to undertake the necessary research.

## The Research

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Our study was undertaken in Harrow LEA. Three comprehensive High Schools were involved in our research, two large mixed 12-16 schools with over 1000 students each, one of which was our own, and one smaller boys' 12-16 school. In all of the schools the SENCOs and their teams were responsible for the overall co-ordination of setting, communicating and reviewing IEP targets.

Our research questions indicated the need to elicit views and opinions:-

- What are some of the difficulties of setting effective IEP targets?
- How can students be involved most effectively in setting IEP targets?
- How can IEP targets be regularly updated, in order to remain effective?
- How can the SENCO effectively involve parents, students, teachers and supporting adults in reviewing targets?
- What assessment procedures occur in school where targets are written?

For this reason we chose the two methods of interviews and questionnaires to carry out the research. It was our intention to include direct reference to literature in our analysis and discussion of the inquiry findings.

In our school we carried out interviews with two teachers, two students and the Assessment Co-ordinator. Questionnaires were issued to two teachers, two supporting adults, three sets of parents and three students. In the two other schools interviews were carried out with the SENCOs, two teachers and two students.

## Explanation of Main Findings

*Some of the difficulties of setting IEP targets identified by SENCOs were: lack of time available to meet and liaise with colleagues and the administration associated with a large number of students with IEPs.*

SENCOs identified a number of difficulties with setting effective IEP targets. They reported that they had to gather information from subject teachers which, in a High School setting, presents a particular challenge. Feeding back information and communicating the IEP targets to individual subject teachers again presented difficulties. SENCOs highlighted the high number of IEPs which are in place in High Schools. The diversity of students' needs and how they are manifested in different curricular areas also needed addressing when setting effective targets.

*IEP targets can be set most effectively when students are involved at the early planning stages.*

Our research showed a clear link between student involvement and positive attitudes towards IEPs. The students interviewed who were aware of their IEP targets and were involved in the planning stages placed a higher value on them. Examples of student involvement in planning IEP targets were in the classroom through teachers marking a student's work and setting individual targets and where support staff were involved in helping students to plan targets.

*There are a number of existing procedures in schools where targets are set and which could form part of an IEP.*

Many subject teachers demonstrated in their responses that the monitoring, reviewing and updating of targets was part of their teaching practice for all students. All teachers involved in the research described formal situations that occurred as part of normal school routines where they were engaged in target setting with the aim of raising achievement. An example was given of a Year 8 'settling in' interview where targets were set for newly arrived students. This was a system in place for all students joining the school; a further benefit was that parents were also involved in this.

*In order for IEP targets to be regularly updated, opportunities should be provided within the curriculum for students to be involved in setting and reviewing their IEP targets.*

All teachers involved in the research described situations in the classroom where target setting occurred but was not related to IEP targets. However, all identified how reviewing IEP targets could become an integral part of the process. In two schools there were set times during the year where targets were reviewed. During the review process both students and teachers would discuss progress made with reference to the targets and the opportunity would be provided to set new ones if appropriate. In these schools the target setting was linked in a formal way to report writing. There was evidence to show that these opportunities could be used to review IEP targets.

*Target setting was being developed within whole school initiatives in the three schools involved. Some subject teachers indicated that the monitoring, reviewing and updating of targets was part of their teaching practice for all students.*

There was clear evidence from all schools that target setting had become a priority on School Development Plans. The development of target setting was reflected in some classroom practice. Some teachers used IEP targets which were set for individual students to set their own subject specific targets. In the school where this practice was evident, the SENCO found that subject teachers readily fed back information to form part of the IEP review.

*In schools where assessment policies had been implemented which involved target setting for all students there was a greater involvement of parents, teachers, students and supporting adults in reviewing IEP targets.*

Parents included in the research clearly expressed their desire for regular involvement when reviewing IEPs. They suggested there should be an active partnership between home and school, throughout the IEP process. Using existing meetings with parents

to include setting IEP targets has been both a practical and effective approach which one school has been particularly developing. Year Group Parents' Evenings have also provided opportunities for discussing IEP targets. The school that had piloted this approach was now planning to formalise the system using specific documentation.

*A range of assessment procedures which included target setting were found in the three schools. These could incorporate IEP targets as features of a whole school assessment procedure.*

Where target setting was being developed as a general principle within assessment policies SENCOs in the research project could see scope for setting, monitoring and reviewing IEP targets becoming part of the practice. In this way the assessment process could be the vehicle for involving subject teachers in a more active way and raising their awareness of the needs of all students and their responsibilities as subject teachers for meeting them. Within the whole school context we found that the setting of targets as part of a formal assessment policy was essentially underpinned by a process of less formal assessment that teachers practised within their routine duties. All involved in the research recognised the value of marking work regularly and writing comments/targets for students to work towards. By keeping records of students' progress, teachers were able to develop appropriate targets in their subjects and pass these on to the SENCO when required to do so.

## Recommendations

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- Target setting for all students should be an integral part of whole school assessment procedure
- A whole school ethos should encourage all teachers and support staff to have an involvement in IEP for students with Special Educational Needs in their classes.
- Within the school assessment policy there should be an agreed procedure for target setting and this should include a section on setting IEP targets.
- Students with IEPs should have broad generic targets set by the SENCO which are given to all subject teachers to adapt and incorporate as appropriate within their own teaching.
- Students should be encouraged to set targets themselves in discussion with their teachers and should feel ownership of them.
- Close liaison with parents is desirable. Opportunities occur as part of regular school procedures; e.g. parents' evenings, and these should be used to discuss IEP targets with all subject teachers.
- The reviewing of IEPs should be a regular part of student/teacher interaction. Meeting with parents to discuss outcomes and future targets should normally be part of the school's scheduled meetings.
- A future development should be to consider ways of reducing the number of students who receive IEPs. This may require reconsidering criteria but may have the effect of raising the status of the IEP.

In order to bring about the recommendations above it would be necessary to identify staff training needs regarding effective target setting on the School Development Plan.



## Further Reading

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## Footnote

The full research project was completed in the Summer Term 1998. A more detailed analysis of data that supports the findings outlined here plus a comprehensive literature is included in the Report.

## Contact

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