

‘Seeking input from pupils, parents and specialist professionals – how do schools make it work?’

Churchill Special Free School is for children aged 8-18 with Speech, Language and Communication difficulties including those with Autism or who are on the Autistic Spectrum. All pupils have significant barriers to their learning and many have previously had very negative experiences at school.

Many of the students who attend Churchill come to the school after many months of very limited education due to long histories of low attendance, underachievement and exclusions.

In addition, their difficulties with language and communication skills mean that many students arrive at the school without the necessary basic skills for them to begin engaging with the learning process. This is evident in the students’ limited concentration spans, their inability to cope with change, their low tolerance levels and their struggle to take turns.

At Churchill, it is essential that all staff build an ongoing, holistic understanding of their pupils’ needs and acknowledge that these may change rapidly or slowly over time.

All staff recognise that they need to be reactive and responsive. They use formal and informal assessments to plan new strategies and interventions that are understood by all and reviewed as needed.

One particularly effective strategy has been the introduction of Emergency Room or ‘ER sessions.’ Named to reflect the need individuals may have for immediate support, these sessions are an opportunity for staff to discuss their concerns.

Led by a facilitator, the session is time limited. One member of staff starts by explaining what the issue or concern is. The team present, which consists of anyone who feels they can contribute, then work to draw up a solution or plan. The plan is recorded, usually in a series of bullets, and shared with the whole staff. Consistent implementation is key.

Deputy Head Mrs Richards said:

During a particularly effective ER session, strategies were developed to support staff to consistently role model positive language for an individual pupil. As a result, staff were able to modify their language when giving instructions and reduce demands, thereby reducing pupil anxiety in the classroom, allowing him to participate with confidence.

ER sessions have become an integral part of the way in which Churchill staff understand and support pupils consistently.

By working together to find solutions, staff are able to collaborate, make plans and evaluate how they support pupils and each other. Meetings have been held across the school and have shown positive impacts on pupil behaviour and self-regulation.

Questions for reflection:

- How does your school interpret (implement) the graduated approach of assess, plan, do, review? How is this communicated between the pupil and their families and teachers in school?
- How is support from specialist professionals accessed? What is the impact?