

Planning in a special school setting.

There is often a wide age range, a huge variety of learning difficulties and individual needs to be taken into account within a special school setting. This makes it more difficult to treat pupils with any homogeneity.

The school featured caters for students from age 2 to 19 yrs old with a range of complex needs — autism, sensory impairments, physical difficulties — and all have an additional learning difficulty. The range of ability within the school stretches from a student last year achieving a maths GCSE, through to pupils working at p-scales.

Planning for the right environment is a primary consideration. Pupils with more complex physical needs require space for their specialised equipment and ceilings may need to be fitted with acoustic tiles for example, for students with hearing loss in order for them to maximise their residual hearing or with ceiling hoists for those pupils unable to bear their own weight.

Some pupils with complex needs who are physically unable to be independent at the present time will need considerable adult support to access a curriculum. This means planning for additional adults within a class and co-ordinating the other professionals who may therefore become involved to support that pupil's learning and care needs, such as the physiotherapist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist and the school nurse.

When pupils have complex needs assessing and monitoring progress is critical to ensure that the appropriate educational and therapeutic experiences are being made available to the individuals. Planning and allowing for time for assessment and moderation of pupil's work is therefore necessary, as it will impact hugely on the teaching and learning that takes place.

Adapted curriculum planning, long, medium and short term lesson planning also need to be in place to ensure that pupils receive the best education possible and that requires dedication and commitment from staff with knowledge of the impact on learning of the individuals learning difficulties.

So, planning in a special school needs to look at Whole School, Class room and Individual requirements as does planning in mainstream. The key difference lies with the complexity of the population served and the consideration and emphasis that needs to be given to the individual needs of each pupil.

Where would you start?