

A whole school approach to personal care at a secondary SLD/PMLD School

Approximately four years ago, SMT made the decision to appoint a dedicated team of Level 1 Support Assistants to deal with the personal care needs of those students requiring intimate personal care in school. This was a consequence of a study within school that had identified a reduction in 'teaching time' and hence 'learning' when class staff left the classroom to carry out personal care routines. For this period, the staff:student ratio was diminished so teaching was interrupted and opportunities for learning reduced. By employing dedicated staff who are specifically trained in the role, students can be discreetly removed from class groups leaving the class staff intact and the 'teaching' to continue uninterrupted.

In the present system, Level 1 staff are paired up and, within the PMLD Department, allocated to a specific class. For ASD and SLD students who require personal care, one pair of Level 1 staff is allocated to each of the departments. In this way, the staff become very familiar with the students and the students have continuity of care for a very personal aspect of their daily life. Staff not only deal with the practical aspects of the personal care but also learn how to physically manage the students and how to communicate effectively with them. In this way, communication and physical management targets can continue to be worked on within the hygiene rooms and even en route to them. Objects of reference or Makaton signs are used to alert students to the activity and staff are expected to be familiar with and learn the appropriate signs.

The Level 1 team currently starts work at 9.30 a.m. and finishes at 2.30 p.m. This means that they are also available as extra staff during lunchtimes. The Personal Care aspect of their role is the priority but, once this has been completed, staff are then available for a range of duties; for example, where applicable for their allocated group/students, they may assist with changing for hydrotherapy and /or physical management programmes or they may join a class to increase the staff ratio within that class for a period. In this way the staff also have the opportunity to interact with their allocated students in a different activity and thus learn more about their needs and abilities.

The Level 1 Team have a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) line manager and ultimately are responsible to the assistant headteacher with responsibility for student welfare. Weekly meetings are held with these managers.

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