

TRANSCRIPT: Research 2

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Being an outstanding school doesn't mean that we want to just sit still. It is very, very important that we keep abreast of all new developments and anything that is going to help the pupils learn is going to be beneficial to them.

We've been very lucky to be involved in several research projects, for example on engagement, to investigate what engages our children and what motivates them to learn because without motivation there can be no learning.

One of our biggest research projects has been the development of a new approach to teaching autistic children. It started off on the P.L.A.Y. approach, which is Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters. Staff here then developed this into, what is now known as the REACh approach, short for Relationship Education for the Autistic Child. We took a group of young people with autism and tested them to establish a baseline. We then introduced this very new innovative way of teaching autistic children and then were able to reassess them after six months or so, and for all the pupils interaction and communication had improved. We are working very closely with colleagues in further education to try and get some funding, so that we can carry on with that research and perhaps publish it and share it with other schools who are working with similar children.

As headteacher, you also have to be very mindful that your teachers are here to be in class. My job is to support those that are keen to do research and to ensure that they have the time and the resources that they need to fulfil that role. There's no point starting a project which is then going to suffer through lack of time or lack of commitment, and you need to be completely sure about why you want to do it - what are the outcomes, are those outcomes going to benefit your pupils in the long run?

Methodology is really important. You have to work through a very systematic approach and targets have to be set, baselines have to be established, and you need to be able to know where you're going and how you're going to prove that what you've been doing is worthwhile. Equally, a huge amount of time has to be given to the ethical side of the research.

I'm extremely fortunate that I've got such a motivated staff and several staff are doing additional qualifications and individual research themselves on multisensory impairment, on autism, on sensory needs and on engagement. A huge wealth of knowledge is being developed within the school.

Some of the teachers who are involved in the research are released from their class teaching time to disseminate what they've learnt to others, to see if it can be

delivered elsewhere across the school because everyone working with the child wants to learn how best to engage that child in their learning.

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