

# **MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

## **UNIT 13**

### **THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT- WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACHES**

In this unit you will be introduced to questions and ideas about how to create the most suitable learning environment for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. This covers expectations and provision at a whole school and interventions which can be made at class teaching level. These are the learning outcomes for this unit:

#### **Learning Objectives**

##### **Teachers will:**

- Read about overall standards for pupils and for those with SEND
- Review the current Inclusion/SEND policies in your school
- Find out how MLD pupils are identified, what provision is made for them and how their progress is monitored
- Discuss with a class teacher or form tutor how they make provision for pupils with MLD
- Discuss with a parent their views about their child with identified MLD and the relationship with the school

#### **ONLINE RESOURCES**

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: [www.education.gov.uk/lamb](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb)

The first resource for this unit can be found here:

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/intro](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/intro)

## **Briefing 1: What does the research tell us about pupil performance?**

### **Overall standards have risen**

Over recent years, school standards in England have risen steadily and substantially at all Key Stages and in all main subjects of the curriculum.

- a. In 2009, 80 per cent of 11 year-olds achieved at least level 4 (national expectations) in English, and 79 per cent in mathematics, whereas in 1997 these figures were 63 per cent and 62 per cent. This means that some 98,000 more 11 year-olds achieved the target level for their age in English, and a similar number in mathematics.
- b. There is a similar picture for secondary schools. In 1997, an estimated 43 per cent of pupils at the end of KS4 achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C (5AC), and an estimated 33 per cent achieved the tougher measure including both English and maths (5ACEM). By 2009, these figures had risen to 70 per cent and 51 per cent respectively, with the result that the numbers of pupils achieving these levels last year were 160,000 and 100,000 larger than in 1997.
- c. These improvements have been steady and constant; there has been no three-year period in the last two decades in which standards have not risen at both KS2 and KS4.

### **Standards have improved for children with special educational needs (SEN)**

These are the national averages of school attainment, measured across the whole cohort of over 600,000 young people every year. But it masks some uncomfortable truths about the relative underperformance of the very large proportion of school-aged children: 21 per cent, or 1.7 million – who are currently identified as having special educational needs.

These children have a wide range of needs, short and long term, severe and less so. Children identified with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) or severe learning difficulties (SLD) will find it difficult or maybe even impossible to reach the national expectations in school standards. Still, these children should expect that their identified learning difficulties will be met through special educational provision, and that this extra support will give them as good a chance as any other child of fulfilling their potential. This may not mean 5ACEM, but it should mean good progress relative to their starting point, which can then be celebrated.

But for other children with particular impairments or difficulties e.g. hearing or visual impairments, the interventions put in place should minimise any impact on attainment. Learning difficulties can be mitigated with adaptations – perhaps the use of physical devices or suitable teaching styles – to ensure that a child is not unfairly hampered in their learning. Some children may have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) that when well managed, do not have an adverse effect on attainment. Many children with different types of SEN are able to achieve well and high expectations will ensure that SEN identification is not a barrier to success

### **The evidence**

The good news is that outcomes for children with SEN at age 16 have improved. In particular the proportions of children with SEN achieving the national benchmarks of 5 AC and 5 ACEM have both doubled, even within the short period between 2006 and 2009. This means that in 2009 some 30,000 more children in England with identified SEN achieved 5AC, and 13,000 more achieved 5 ACEM, than did so just three years earlier. These children have considerably better chances of going on to complete courses of further and higher education, getting higher level training opportunities and securing good long-term employment. Relative gaps are beginning to narrow

But these large rises for children with SEN were from a low base. There remain large gaps in the outcomes achieved by children with SEN compared to the cohort as a whole. Whereas in 2009, 50.7 per cent of all eligible pupils achieved 5 ACEM, only

16.5 per cent of those with SEN did so. And at age 11, whereas the great majority of children without SEN nowadays achieve national expectations, only about one third of those with SEN do so.

The attainment gaps for children with SEN are not yet narrowing as much as some other gaps – notably the gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, the SEN gap at KS4 (5 ACEM) widened over the last three years, from 43.3 to 45.6 percentage points. However, the good news is that at KS2 the gap has started to narrow, from 53.3 to 51.0 percentage points.<sup>1</sup>

## **Briefing 2: Data analysis - What pupil performance data is available?**

Collecting information about types of Special Educational Need.

The submission of a Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) return is a statutory requirement under section 537A of the Education Act 1996. This return should be authorised by the head teacher before being sent to the local authorities (LA).

Since January 2004 we have collected information about the numbers of pupils in the country with different types of special educational need (SEN) as part of PLASC. The data is used to help with planning, to study trends and to monitor the outcomes of initiatives and interventions for pupils with different types of SEN.

The guidance provided in June 2003 and September 2003 has been amended in the light of two years experience of collection and all the queries and comments we have received.

The descriptions set out below should help schools and LAs prepare for and record the data accurately.

### **Areas of need**

The main areas of difficulty or need are set out in the SEN Code of Practice, Chapter 7<sup>2</sup>. They are Cognition and Learning; Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development; Communication and Interaction; Sensory and/or Physical Needs. To give us more detailed information we have sub-divided some of the broad areas into the categories used by Ofsted. These are:

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<sup>1</sup> Breaking the link between SEN and low attainment — DFE 2010

<sup>2</sup> DfES (2001) SEN Code of Practice. DfES/581/2001

**A. Cognition and Learning Needs**

- Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)
- Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD)
- Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)
- Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD)

**B. Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development Needs**

- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulty (BESD)

**C. Communication and Interaction Needs**

- Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

**D. Sensory and/or Physical Needs**

- Visual Impairment (VI)
- Hearing Impairment (HI)
- Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI)
- Physical Disability (PD)

There is also a category of Other (OTH), which only applies to pupils at *School Action Plus* where there is no clearly identified special educational need.

**Briefing 3: Why is the attainment of children with SEN lower than their peers?**

Consider some of the reasons for low attainment for pupils with SEND and the possible solutions as outlined in the table below.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> DFE (2010) Breaking the link between SEN and low attainment.DFE.

**Task 1:**

Think about a pupil with MLD whom you teach. Do you think any of the issues and possible solutions apply to him/her? Use the template below to record your analysis

**Table to represent your analysis of a pupil with MLD**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Solutions/ ways forward</b>

<b>Why is the attainment of children with SEN lower than their peers?</b>	
<b>Some symptoms and issues</b>	<b>Possible school and LA responses</b>
Inconsistent approaches to identification	Need for strategic local planning that includes parents and schools; Early intervention; use of children's centres to ensure that professionals work together in the early years; Clear focus on progress relative to age and starting point of the child.
Gaps are too often an 'invisible issue'	Need for all involved (Leaders – e.g. local authority officers, early years consultants, school governors and head teachers) to raise awareness and understanding of SEN and inclusion.
Assumptions and low aspirations	Data is used to set aspirational targets that drive improvement.
Confidence and skills of teaching staff and other professionals	CPD opportunities provided; targeted deployment of specialist and support staff; strong links between early years practitioners, school teachers, SENCOs and senior leaders.
Low prior attainment at Early Years Foundation Stage or Key Stages	Early identification and progress monitoring from an early age; data analysis and assessment informs teaching and learning; targeted support programmes focused on good progress, such as one-to-one tuition.
Parental engagement	Support for the home learning environment from the early years through all key stages; use of technology to support home learning; listening to parental needs; provision of parenting support; providing clear information and working closely with local and national parent services;
Poorer wellbeing and wider outcomes	Anti-bullying work embedded as part of whole-school strategy; exclusions of children with SEN reduced; behavior and attendance partnerships and strategies such as SEAL/ TAHMs; extended services suitable for children with SEN.
Access to qualifications	SENCOs working with teachers, exam officers and other local professionals; new flexible qualifications with accredited learning available for young people with SEN.


## **Task 2: Interview the SENCO**

An interview with the SENCO will provide you with valuable information about the Inclusion / SEN policies in your school. In addition, you will find out how pupils are identified as having MLD, the provision designed for them, the progress they make and what more can be done to ensure they make maximum progress.

**You could use the questions outlined below to structure your discussion.**

Key Task	Questions	Comments
Inclusion /SEN Policy	<p>Who is involved in writing the school policy on Inclusion/SEND?</p> <p>How often is it reviewed and by whom?</p> <p>Are Governors fully involved in the process?</p>	

Identification of pupils with SEND	<p>What is the percentage of pupils in the school identified as having SEND?</p> <p>Of those how many have Statements and how many are at School Action and School Action Plus?</p> <p>How many are identified as having MLD?</p> <p>By what criteria are they identified as having MLD?</p> <p>Are there pupils identified as having MLD who also have other SENs?</p> <p>Who are these pupils and what are their additional SENs?</p> <p>Are there other pupils who have MLD identified as a secondary need and what is their primary special need?</p> <p>What are the issues around identifying pupils with MLD and do you receive advice from outside the school? Are there any uncertainties about the criteria (please explain)</p> <p>Is there outside moderation of your assessments and judgments?</p> <p>Is there a provision map indicating provision for all SEND pupils? Where do pupils with MLD appear on this map?</p>	
Judging	Together look at the data on pupils' attainment, identifying those pupils with	



standards	<p>SEN who made no progress across the key stage and those who made one, two or three levels in core subjects.</p> <p>How many of these pupils have been identified as having MLD and what are the outcomes for them?</p> <p>Review with the SENCO the progress of 2 pupils identified as having MLD whom you teach. (The following questions relate to these 2 pupils)</p> <p>Are there samples of their work in subjects other than your own available for you to analyse?</p> <p>Are you clear about the levels of attainment for these pupils and are the targets set both challenging and achievable and related to increased progress across the key stage?</p>	
Evaluating T&L	<p>What is the provision in mainstream classes and in targeted interventions for pupils with MLD?</p> <p>Does planning have explicit links between key objectives, achievable learning outcomes and teaching and learning design?</p> <p>Do the curricular targets that are set meet the pupils' needs?</p> <p>How do the IEP targets and curricular targets relate to each other?</p> <p>Is short-term planning annotated to meet the needs of pupils with MLD?</p> <p>Are you involved in peer observation with subject leaders and teachers to monitor and evaluate planning and</p>	

	<p>teaching and learning for pupils with MLD?</p> <p>Do you give feedback to colleagues following observations?</p> <p>Are there clear links with learning across subjects and from specific interventions?</p> <p>Do you observe and provide feedback on the quality of support given by TAs/LSAs to individuals and groups of pupils?</p> <p>Do you monitor the impact of TAs/LSAs on the progress of pupils with MLD and on their levels of independence?</p> <p>What action do you take as a result of this monitoring?</p>	
Taking action to secure improvement	<p>Do you provide CPD for subject leaders and teachers on how to maximise rates of progress for individuals and groups of pupils with MLD? What form does this take?</p> <p>Do you review the use of Assessment for Learning approaches in supporting pupils with MLD? How do you do this?</p> <p>How often do you discuss work, progress and attitudes with pupils (and parents)?</p> <p>Does the school use performance reviews to identify strengths and weaknesses in current practice?</p>	

### Task 3: Interview a class teacher

In order to establish how involved class teachers are with policy implementation, it would be useful to discuss with a colleague the extent of their knowledge.

You could also use the questions below to assess your own knowledge and involvement.

Key area	Actions	Comments
Policy Implementation	How aware are you of the Inclusion/SEN policies for the school and have you been consulted about it at any stage?  Do you know how often it is reviewed and by whom?	
Identification of pupils with MLD	Do you teach any pupils with MLD?  Who are they and what are the features of their special needs?  Do you know how they were identified as having MLD?	
Planning and teaching pupils with MLD	Can we look together at a recent lesson plan - how did you differentiate your plan to address the needs of a pupil with MLD ?  What additional resources did you employ : <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Differentiated questioning ?</li><li>. Specific worksheets</li><li>. TA/LSA</li><li>. Other</li></ul>	
Monitoring Progress	How do you monitor the	

	<p>progress of pupils with MLD? Do you regularly review their targets?</p> <p>Are you aware of additional interventions that they are involved in and how successful are they?</p> <p>What type of feedback do you provide for them: oral or written and how do they respond?</p>	
Communication with parents	<p>How often do you either meet with or communicate with the parents?</p> <p>Do you think this is enough?</p> <p>Are there any other strategies you think would be useful?</p>	

**See online resource:**

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/interviewing-colleagues](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/interviewing-colleagues)

**Briefing 4: Interview a parent**

A recent study commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (Harris and Goodall, 2007) found that the engagement of parents with the process of learning is critical. The involvement of parents in the activities and life of the school is not sufficient in itself. Parents who are engaged with their child's learning become a part of the educational process. They support learning at home, have higher aspirations and expectations and facilitate opportunities for further learning and wider experience. Harris and Goodall also noted that parents described as 'hard to reach' often felt that communication with schools was one way. These parents were often unable to respond, and felt that the views they have of how their child's learning might be improved held little weight.

Evidence presented for a recent national enquiry into the confidence of parents of children and young people with SEND (Lamb Report, 2010)<sup>4</sup> has shown that dialogue between home and school relating to expectations, progress and outcomes is often limited. In a recent letter to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Brian Lamb wrote:

*“In our discussions, parents have been very willing to talk about what would really make a difference for their child and what their longer-term aspirations are for their child. What has struck us quite forcibly is that it seems that no one has had a discussion with parents about the outcomes they aspire to for their child. ...There needs to be a much clearer focus on both attainment and wider outcomes for disabled children and children with SEN at every level of the system.”*

The new Ofsted framework 2009 also gives greater priority to gathering and analysing the views of parents and pupils, including:

- . Higher expectations and a new judgment about the effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents;
- . Parents' views helping to inform inspection selection;
- . Surveys introduced between inspections to gather parents' and pupils' views about the school and about the wider outcomes.

#### **Task 4: Interview a Parent**

Have a discussion with the parent of a pupil with MLD whom you teach (such a meeting is likely to be conducted by the class teacher or form tutor).

First, it will be necessary to gather together all the information about the pupil, their attainment levels, their attitudes and interests. Next you will need to consult with other teachers before meeting the parent(s).

You may wish to use the questions below to structure this discussion.

Questions	Answers
Introductory questions: You will need to set the scene for a positive, relaxed meeting before going on to discuss specific areas.	
What do you see as the needs of your child or young person?	
What do you believe is attainable for your	

<sup>4</sup> DCSF (2010) Lamb Enquiry report.

child/young person given the best possible circumstances?	
Can we discuss their current targets (numerical and curriculum) and agree new ones if appropriate	
Do you know exactly what provision is currently in place for them? Are you happy with this provision? If not, what can we do about it?	
What do you think has worked well in the past?	
What has not worked so well? What do you think are the reasons for this?	
Can we summarise exactly what we decided?	
Are you happy with these Progress Review meetings? Do they take place at the right times for you? Can we agree when we are next meeting and ways to keep in touch in between?	

**See online resource:**

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/interviewing-parents](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/interviewing-parents)

Further information about the structured conversation can be found in the 'Achievement for All' documentation.<sup>5</sup>

### **Briefing 5- Thinking about teaching**

There is no evidence to suggest that pupils with MLD need a separate pedagogy. Because of the space that MLD pupils occupy between those with severe learning difficulties and pupils who are simply low attainers, teachers tend to rely on strategies and approaches that have been developed out of their general work on inclusion and

<sup>5</sup> Achievement for All' DCSF-00782-2009

differentiation. The national curriculum order on inclusion outlines three general principles to provide effective learning opportunities for all pupils:

- Setting suitable learning challenges
- Responding to pupil's diverse learning needs
- Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment

The full Inclusion Statement can be found on pages 30- 36 of the national curriculum handbook which can be found at this link:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/QCA/99/457>

You will also notice how many aspects of Quality First Teaching are embraced. Listen to the Audio clip : MLD - Quality first teaching.

**Listen to this clip:**

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/quality-first-audio](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/quality-first-audio)

Note in your learning log how the principles of personalized learning referred to in unit 5 (also key principles of Quality First teaching) could support learners with MLD in your setting. More details of personalized learning can be found here at this link:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/dcsf-00844-2008>

The following tasks are based around video clips. They can be adapted to be used as a tool to facilitate discussion and reflection with colleagues.

When thinking about providing effective learning opportunities for pupils with general learning difficulties the teachers in the MLD video clips below focus on:

- Group interaction
- Targeted language and literacy development
- Numeracy development
- Support for pupil's use of or difficulties with working memory.
- Aspects of peer assessment and assessment for learning

## Video task 1

### Story telling.

Watch the following video clip “Story telling” and then watch the video “A Lesson Study”.

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/storytelling-video](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/storytelling-video)

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/lesson-study-video](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/lesson-study-video)

You will notice that this secondary college Art lesson is structured around a story too, that of the detective, and relies on role play to engage the students in an imaginary task with a specific purpose.

In your learning log, write down the benefits of using stories or narrative with the classes you work with in terms of:

- Motivation
- Literacy and/or language development
- Facilitating group work
- Supporting memory
- Developing a conceptual understanding of the application of skills and knowledge.

Bernstein, a sociologist and educationalist, argued that the traditional academic curriculum automatically failed working class children because of the way it was taught. Schools relied on cultural understandings amongst middle class children to piece together both the meaning and the value of what was presented as remote and disconnected pieces of knowledge. Working class children were unlikely to be able to do this in the same way so had little conceptual framework to understand the significance or otherwise of what schools wanted to teach them. He argued that narrative could help bridge this gap, providing the process of understanding was made explicit to the children.

Make a list of the benefits you feel this approach may offer to children with SEN alongside any specific techniques, such as repetition or revisiting previous learning, that may need to be considered- several of these can be seen in the video.

Finally, look at your list from the above. If possible work with a subject colleague to identify how could you develop story telling or narrative in say a Maths or a PE lesson,



which may not traditionally rely on narrative? Remember the story should focus on the learning objective, not detract from it.

## **Video task 2**

### **“Inclusion and differentiation in the Maths classroom”**

Watch the Video clip ‘Inclusion and differentiation in the Maths classroom’.

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/maths-video](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/maths-video)

Now listen to the following Audio clips – “Assessment for learning – classroom examples” and “Assessment for learning explained”.

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/afl-examples-audio](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/afl-examples-audio)

[www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/afl-audio](http://www.education.gov.uk/lamb/mld/learning-environment/afl-audio)

In your learning log, note down the features of assessment for learning that you see reflected in the video clip. With your colleagues discuss how you could enhance your use of assessment for learning to promote numeracy skills for MLD pupils.

Note how the teachers in the clip incorporate discussion amongst the pupils to solve mathematical problems. How could this discussion between groups or pairs of pupils be used as a part of the feed back loop to the teacher?

### **Further reading:**

Bernstein, Basil (2000). Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity : theory, research, critique Hosei UP

Bernstein, Basil (1975) Class and pedagogies : visible and invisible. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Grove, N (2005) Ways into literature: Stories, Plays and Poems for Pupils with SEN (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Johnston J (2008) Narratives. Topics in Language Disorders 28 93-98