




#InclusiveEducation

 Down Syndrome
International



How can we
best work
with
peripatetic
staff?



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Schools and families often rely heavily on the expertise and experience of external staff and agencies, who are not directly employed by the school itself. Families of (and schools with) children with special educational needs & disabilities are often routinely visited by peripatetic staff such as: speech & language therapists (SALT), occupational therapists (OT), and educational psychologists (EP) among many more. This is commonly due to specific requirements in a child's individual education programme or education health and care plan; legal requirements based on the child's special educational needs and/or disabilities, and/or health and social care needs.

Read on for tips (for schools) on how to work most effectively with external professionals...



Have a plan

Set aside time (easier said than done, but essential) to meet the professional and discuss the child in question, go through their plan/programme to decide which areas apply to the professional, and which ones to prioritise. Listen to the requests of the professional and try to facilitate observations, meetings with parents and teachers as soon as possible. When a plan of action is written and decided, discuss desired outcomes with the expert, and agree a timescale for meetings/therapies to begin.

Embrace the opportunity for development

Liaise with all staff involved with the child in question, explain the plan of action and desired outcomes, and give them a copy of it for their reference (if appropriate). If, for example, a child is receiving SALT, ensure that the child's teacher, or more probably, their 1:1/additional adult, can attend these valuable sessions for professional development. Too often, due to time restraints and lack of staff, support staff miss out on hugely beneficial opportunities for learning new skills, that can be applied on a daily basis, rather than only when the expert provides the service. More often than not, the professional will be happy to involve the support staff in sessions, to upskill them for the future. Ask if they would mind being recorded, so you can share snippets at staff meetings. In my experience, if pressed, peripatetic staff will offer (paid) whole-school twilight training sessions to any staff interested in learning more about their discipline. This can only serve to improve the school's inclusive/SEND offer.





Review regularly

Be sure to hold external agencies and professionals to account so they provide what they said they will, when they say they will, for the amount of time they are paid for.

Chatting about other issues, doing additional observations, and having general conversations with staff must all take place outside of the time allocated to the child. Review progress and targets termly and ask for a brief report against these that align with the child's individual education programme or education health and care plan. Double check that the professional is sending a copy of this report home to parents – if not, forward one yourself to keep things transparent and so not too much is presented to them during formal meetings. If you can, regularly talk to the child about how the sessions are going to gather their feelings and feedback, and/or join in so you can talk about the service with first-hand experience.

Listen and ask

Squeeze as much as you can from the professional. Ask for their professional opinion and thoughts on the offer you are providing for the child, and any recommendations for whole-school, or whole-class improvements. As challenges arise, send over questions to the professional to discuss when they are next about, or ask for email answers & ideas. Utilise their broad experience of a large number of schools, settings, and individuals and try to apply to your setting and context. If you can build an informal rapport with them, they may be available for virtual troubleshooting outside of their allocated time with you.

Finally, see if the external professional will talk to the whole class, or cohort, to explain what they do, what it's for, and why they are needed. This can serve to assuage questions or thoughts from other children as to why some children receive 'extra' help. A short Q&A session like this can work wonders when educating children about the benefits of the effective inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities. As far as I can see, this isn't on any curriculum, but it is one more way of helping children to develop and show empathy.

