

5. Recognising pupils who need more support to take part in learning



A common argument that needs challenging is:

'Only medical experts should identify children with disabilities. It is not the responsibility of teachers.'

Teachers often express this view about children with disabilities because they lack the confidence to take action themselves, but this can leave many children and young people excluded.

It is true that specialist medical knowledge may be needed to diagnose and plan how to respond to a particular condition. However, this can often take a long time or be difficult to arrange. But teachers can come in and do many things to recognise and support children, even though teachers may not have specialist knowledge of a child's condition.



In your role as a teacher what can you do?

Every day observe your pupils closely to see if any children seem to be finding the lesson difficult, and make changes to your teaching to help them.

Look out for...

- Pupils who concentrate and behave well, or those who find it hard to focus after a short time or disrupt the lesson
- Pupils who have friends, or those who seem to be alone
- Pupils who do not move around the class or the school grounds very much
- Pupils who are less co-ordinated or have trouble forming their writing

- Pupils who often join in and put up their hand, and those who are silent or reluctant to join in
- Pupils who do not listen or watch attentively
- Pupils who seem to struggle to speak

Some of the children that you identify as struggling may need specialist help that you are unable to provide, but you will still be able to think about things that you can do to help them before they receive a medical diagnosis.

In your role as a teacher:

Talk to other adults about pupils' situations

- Don't think of some pupils as 'good pupils' and 'well behaved', while others are 'disorganised' or 'disruptive'. Instead, describe the way they learn and behave without using words like 'good' and 'bad'. Many teachers find it helpful to write down these descriptions after they have observed pupils' behaviour.
- Talk about what you have observed to your head teacher, other teachers in the school and the pupils' parents or other family members. It is unlikely that you have the medical skills to diagnose a pupil's condition, but your colleagues may be able to offer advice or support, or to arrange for a pupil's behaviour to be looked at by a specialist.

Ask your pupils

- Ask pupils what they find easy and difficult about the classroom and being at school. A very effective idea can be to ask them to draw a picture of their perfect classroom and talk about their reasons for the design and the things in it.
- Ask groups of pupils whether some of them find anything about the classroom particularly difficult.
- Frequently ask whether anyone cannot see the blackboard easily, or hear what you are saying. Check that everyone has a comfortable place to sit, and can get to the toilet easily and use it safely.



Task: When you are familiar with all your pupils you can start to keep records on your pupils:

- Write down which pupils have difficulties with different aspects of the learning environment. This will help you remember what you have observed. It will help you to think about what changes you can make to help them feel comfortable in the classroom, and to make learning easier for them.
- Write down your observations in a factual way.
- Your observations might include:
 - Physical skills - such as walking, running, carrying/holding items, forming letters and numbers when writing, speaking clearly
 - Social skills – such as talking , listening, taking turns, sharing or playing together
 - Daily living skills – such as speaking in sentences, being able to draw a specific object, understanding the rules of a game.

Remember it is part of your job as a teacher to support the learning of all pupils. Helping pupils with disabilities is not an extra task.

Reference:

Adapted from: INEE (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies) (2010), *INEE Pocket Guide to Supporting Learners with Disabilities*, Geneva: INEE. http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1138/INEE_Pocket_Guide_Learners_w_Disabilities.pdf

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

Extract from INEE Pocket Guide to Supporting Learners with Disabilities: INEE (2010) INEE Pocket Guide to Supporting Learners with Disabilities. Published by INEE.

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