

Special Children

Meeting Children's Additional Educational Needs

Helping you...

- Keep up to date
- Improve outcomes
- Support professional development
- Identify and assess pupils with SEN
- Discover new resources

“Very useful. Keeps me informed of current issues and easy to read and use”

Mrs Chris Graham, Inclusion Manager, St John's (CE) Academy, Clifton

Harnessing technology to improve provision

Chris Dyson explains how technology helped him halve his speech and language therapy bill

In one of the most deprived areas of Leeds, Parklands Primary School has 380 children on roll, of whom 33% are on the SEN register and 72% are in receipt of the pupil premium.

Many pupils join us in Reception with no experience of nursery schooling and 85% of them start at well below age-expected language levels. We aim to pick up difficulties early so that, by the time they reach Key Stage 2, those with speech, language and communication delay will have caught up with their peers. Consequently, speech and language provision is crucial.

Until recently, this provision was met by NHS speech and language therapists (SLTs). Unfortunately, it was no longer providing value for money. For example, in the last three years, we've had six different SLTs, fracturing the quality of service and destroying continuity for everyone concerned.

The service cost the school £42,000, a

sizeable sum at a time when school and SEN budgets are falling in real terms. So I started to investigate alternatives.

A new way of working

Among the providers I researched was Mable Therapy, which offers a technology-driven solution. Instead of an SLT coming into school, children have one-to-one sessions with a therapist online where they play interactive games targeting the specific skills they need to develop. If a Mable SLT is off sick, one of their colleagues steps in, unlike the NHS provision where no replacements were provided in cases of illness.

With 38 children needing specialist support, we decided to try out Mable's more flexible offer. Once the necessary hardware was installed, the children were assessed to determine which programme was appropriate for their needs, then embarked on twice-weekly therapy sessions via an online face-to-face connection. Lasting 20-25 minutes,

these sessions are supervised in school by a trained TA, Aysha Arian, who also facilitates follow-up sessions using work supplied by Mable.

The only children who don't work this way are the 12 pupils from our resource provision for children with severe learning difficulties. The demands of the system would be too much for children with their high level of need, so a Mable therapist comes into school for half a day a week to work with them individually, face to face.

Professional development

Professional development is an important part of the Mable Therapy service. Its Learning Zone, which is directly linked to the needs of the children the staff member is working with, provides an assessment at the end of each module to check the child's learning and a certificate to acknowledge professional development.

Miss Arian has also received two days' training at Mable headquarters, where the SLTs took her through the various



Miss Arian observes as a pupil interacts with the speech and language therapist

programmes they use and taught her how to support children effectively in the follow-up sessions.

All follow-up work is done on a tablet and every time Miss Arian runs a session, the system credits her with points, which she trades in for additional training – an incentive she finds very motivating. Another advantage of having the children's programmes on her tablet is that she can do follow-up work anywhere, including in class.

At present, Miss Arian is solely responsible for provision supervision, but eventually we hope to have other staff trained too.

Practicalities

We introduced Mable in the summer term of 2017. There were a few minor technical hitches at the start, but within a couple of weeks everything was running smoothly.

Sessions are organised on a rolling timetable. Every morning, Miss Arian checks who is absent and reallocates their slot so that no session is wasted. She then

“Mable Therapy trained the TA in how to support children effectively in follow-up sessions”

spends half an hour familiarising herself with what each child will be working on and planning the follow-up sessions for the previous day's children. Meanwhile, Mable's system automatically generates an email to class teachers to let them know which children will be called out of lessons and when.

Therapy sessions are scheduled for the morning, with follow-ups taking place the following afternoon. To minimise disruption to children's learning, Miss Arian alters the timetable each week so that they are not missing the same lessons every time.

Managing the day-to-day logistics is

simple: the child who has just finished fetches the next child, which takes them three to four minutes. The Mable SLT uses this time to upload the next child's programme onto the computer.

Parents can also access activities online to reinforce their child's learning at home.

Monitoring impact

Children's progress is tracked by the software and an end-of-week report shows which sounds each child has mastered, which ones they are working on and which ones they still have to learn, providing teachers with very specific feedback to inform their lesson planning.

Meanwhile, the senior leadership team has an overview of the progress being made across the whole cohort and can clearly see how much funding has been allocated and the impact it is having.

Outcomes

The children love the way speech and language therapy is now delivered. Many of them do not have access to computers at home, so they find the online sessions novel and exciting. The material is all age appropriate – for example, younger children will see balloons flying around on screen and they have to find the matching sound.

We can see from the children's responses in class that they have become more confident speakers and communicators. This is confirmed by our data, which evidences accelerated progress in 90% of the participants, a much greater improvement than we had anticipated. As a result, 20% of the pupils have been discharged as they are now working at an age-appropriate level.

Meanwhile, this innovative, online approach is saving us £20,000, literally halving the cost of our SLCN provision. To other schools, I say, look closely at value for money. Don't stick with a supplier just because you've been with them forever. Consider all the options available.



Chris Dyson is headteacher at Parklands Primary School, Leeds. He welcomes staff from other schools to come and observe the school's SCLN

provision

FIND OUT MORE

- Mable Technology in Leeds was joint-winner of the 2017 Shine a Light Award for innovation in SLCN. <https://mabletherapy.com>