



Jenny Dockerty



Demands of co-ordination

Interview **John Holt and Stephanie Sparrow** Photographs **Jim Varney**

Assessment is built into every hour for teacher and special educational needs co-ordinator Jenny Dockerty



My name is Jenny Dockerty and I work at Kelvin Grove Community Primary School in Gateshead, where I teach a class of 32 year 5 children. I'm also a special educational needs co-ordinator (Senco), monitoring and assessing the needs of children from nursery to year 6.

There are 380 children in 11 classes at the school, around 70-80 of whom are on the special needs register at any time. Ninety of our children are English as second language learners.

My working day begins at 8.30am when I meet the head teacher to discuss the latest assessment results from class teachers throughout the school. We monitor the results regularly to ensure that I have picked up all the children who have not achieved

the national average in the National Curriculum Tests.

We also discuss behavioural issues and share any concerns about any children who are having difficulties. The head may have had potential problems brought to her attention by other class teachers or supervisory staff in the playground; we talk about the actions and strategies that could be necessary. For example, we might discuss whether to put a behavioural programme in place or, if we think it necessary, we would call a meeting with a class teacher and put an individual education programme (IEP) together, with behavioural targets to be monitored over a period of time.

Between 9.30am and midday I am class teaching, but this is punctuated by a break at 10.45am when the educational psychologist seeks me out. She has been observing a child in another class and we will talk about bringing in parents to discuss the results of her written report, to explain her assessments and to discuss potential action with them.

I also talk to the Special Education Needs Support Service about working with some of the children with dyslexia. This is an informal brief meeting during breaktime in which we discuss further assessments.

This might include cognitive assessment such as the British Picture Vocabulary Scale, which tells us about a child's understanding of receptive language, and a wide range intelligence test, which assesses their non-verbal abilities and expressive language.

Then it's back to the classroom. After initial literacy and numeracy sessions, we have a science lesson and learn about the water cycle.

The children create large puddles out in the playground and measure them throughout the day to see how much water has evaporated and then we discuss how this happens.

At lunchtime, I spend time with the children who are supported by St Chad's, an outreach programme run by Barnardo's. Two support staff come in to provide some adult supervision as they play because this group of children finds it difficult to

manage their behaviour during unstructured sessions. There is no paperwork for this but accessing the club is often part of a pupil's IEP and I'm in frequent conversation with the St Chad's team.

Then I'll make some phone calls, including one to ask a physiotherapist to make a school visit to see a child with cerebral palsy who uses a standing frame for an hour every lunchtime. He said that the

frame was hurting him and so we need the physio to adjust it.

I'm not teaching in class this afternoon. At around 1.10pm, I meet the learning support teacher (or LSS) who works with children who are on the School Action Plus programme. This offers support over and above what can be provided in an everyday classroom environment.

The LSS provides children with interventions such as phonological support programmes, reading and spelling of high-frequency words from the literacy strategy, and maths skills such as number bonds.

She works with special needs children across the school from reception to year 6 and we discuss their progress, as well as the involvement of parents and a wide variety of external agencies. To do this we compare notes on matters such as children who need to be referred to external agencies and progress reports from performance indicators for value added target setting (Pivats), and we assess the children there

Then I'll pop back into a classroom

"I'm always around as a teacher, so I can be a safety net for children as they progress through school"

Working two roles

Being a class teacher and a special educational needs co-ordinator (Senco) in a large inner city primary school is a huge responsibility. In some schools, the heads carry out the Senco role and others bring in someone to carry out the work. I enjoy the challenge and I'm given time out of class should I need it.

Part of my role is to liaise with the many external agencies. Along with those I meet during a normal day, there will be the support teams for children with disabilities and liaison teachers for children with autism, hospitals and family support units, emotional wellbeing teams and, occasionally, social services.

There is an advantage to carrying out both roles. I'm always around as a teacher, in and out of different classes and working closely with the staff, so I can act as a safety net for the children as they progress through school.

The disadvantage is that people always see me with my Senco hat on; I can turn a corner in school and someone approaches me to discuss a child. That can be really demanding as I'm also trying to manage a class and sometimes I don't get a break!

CV

Name: Jenny Dockerty
Lives: Whickham, Gateshead
Job: Combines classroom teaching with role of special educational needs co-ordinator at a primary school in Gateshead
Reason for becoming a teacher/ assessor: Always wanted to work in education



Assessment tools

It's not always easy to measure the progress of special needs children in one band, such as a child moving from level 1 to level 2. So we break them down into smaller steps, called performance indicators for value added target setting (Pivats), and we assess the children three times a year.

In numeracy, for example, that might mean seeing whether a child could count to 50, count in steps of 2, 5 or 10, or whether they can recognise coins and handle money up to the value of 50p.

These are assessed using the value-added targets in Pivats and written into their electronic individual education programmes (IEP), which can be printed and shared with professionals and parents.

Each Pivat helps us find out what the child can do; it's better than trying to measure the whole, which can take a lot longer for a special needs child.

Younger children are assessed for learning on entry into the nursery because the code of practice asks us to intervene as early as possible with children who might require support.

They are also subject to performance indicators in primary schools (Pips) in reception. Pips are assessments of a child's understanding, performed with a computer, showing the value added over a year. They are conducted at the beginning and the end of the year.

We look at children achieving below the average in these two assessments to see whether they have special needs and whether we should then be monitoring them through the Pivats.

for observation. There's one child who's causing a little concern regarding behaviour and learning styles. This child wants to take part and enjoys visual stimulation but is very easily distracted and needs a lot of support to concentrate.

After the lesson, I talk to the class teacher about strategies that might be relevant and helpful. We consider monitored interventions and whether to write an IEP.

If we take the latter route we will of course involve the parents and inform them that our success criteria would be improved behaviour and concentration and how we can measure them.

I then prepare a request for statutory assessment for another child from the local education authority. There's a lot of form-filling in this process with all the case notes, describing what the school has done since the child was recognised as having special needs; which external agencies have been brought in – for example, when the psychologist and speech therapist were involved with the child; detailed descriptions of the support provided by the class teacher and LSS; what programmes of study have been put in place; and what support the child might need on top of all that.

In this instance, the child requires three periods of 45 minutes with the learning support teacher, as well as two hour-long sessions with a special needs assistant.

A programme of support is being put in place to help the pupil develop expressive language skills, receptive language skills, and comprehension to interpret social

situations and story writing with the use of storyboard techniques.

After that, there's a review for a child who already has a statement for special needs. A parent attends along with the learning support teacher, speech and language therapist, special educational needs assistant, the class teacher and the educational psychologist.

The professionals give out their written reports, parents and children give their views, class teacher assessments are discussed and linked to targets set previously, and then we go through the statement of special needs to see if the observations and recommendations are necessary or whether they have changed. We finish by looking at assessments from the Pivats and identify targets as well as the need for further action (such as accessing a mainstream support base).

I then write letters to parents who have imminent reviews with their children, do any photocopying from the afternoon's sessions and return to my own class to prepare the lessons for the following day.

This means I work long days. Sometimes I can be finished by 6pm but often I'll take a lot of work home and won't finish it before 10 or 11pm.

