

The COMPLEX LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES Research Project: Developing meaningful pathways to personalised learning

The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has been awarded funding by the Department for Education to research ways to improve the Every Child Matters outcomes for children with the most complex educational needs and disabilities through the development of evidence-based teaching and learning strategies, and to share the research outcomes with schools and the wider education network so that they become common practice.

Children with complex learning difficulties and disabilities (CLDD) include those with co-existing conditions (e.g. Autism and ADHD), or profound and multiple learning disabilities. However, they also include children who have newly begun to populate our schools – among them those with difficulties arising from premature birth who have survived infancy due to medical advances; those with disabilities arising from substance and alcohol abuse; and those with rare chromosomal disorders. Many may also be affected by compounding factors such as multisensory impairment or mental ill-health, or require invasive procedures, such as supported nutrition, assisted ventilation, and rescue medication. While the concept of CLDD is widely recognised, an official definition has yet to be adopted.

Children with CLDD are a unique group of learners with a distinctive profile of learning need. We have to equip teaching professionals to offer high quality education to these children so that they do not become disenfranchised from the school system. The causal base of their difficulties demands that we remodel our pedagogy and that we generate teaching strategies which will embrace these children as learners. The debate around personalised learning, fuelled by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (www.ssatrust.org.uk), informs this.

The programme of research brings together a multidisciplinary team of researchers and advisors with specialisms across education, health, psychology, therapies and neuroscience. The researchers are working with 12 special schools and staff, 60 children, and their parents/carers, to develop an educational framework which will enable practitioners to formulate an effective teaching and learning package for the children with complex needs in their classrooms. The project will build on and synthesise existing national and international expertise in the field, as well as drawing upon practitioner experience to develop and trial modified and new approaches for these children. The resulting educational framework will then be rolled out to 50 further schools during the course of the project.

The outcomes of the project will support educators of children with complex needs through:

- A series of information sheets on CLDD
- A screening procedure focused on student engagement
- Information on effective educational strategies linked to particular disabilities
- A flexible educational practice framework, inclusive of multidisciplinary involvement and linked to the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters*

- A resource 'tool box' linked to the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* as a framework for curriculum planning
- Downloadable training materials and opportunities.

The research project is led by Professor Barry Carpenter OBE, Associate Director (SEN) at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Research Schools

Abbey Hill School and Technology College, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland
 Arbour Vale School, Slough, Berkshire
 Chads Grove School and Specialist Sports College, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire
 Dawn House School, Rainworth, Nottinghamshire
 Firwood School, Bolton, Lancashire
 Holly Bank School, Mirfield, West Yorkshire
 New Rush Hall School, Hainault, Essex
 Riverside School, Orpington, Kent
 St Nicholas School, Canterbury, Kent
 The Milestone School, Longlevens, Gloucestershire
 Tor View Community Special School, Haslingden, Lancashire
 William Henry Smith School, Brighouse, West Yorkshire

Think Pieces (<http://blog.ssatrust.org.uk/thinkpiece>)

Contribute your thoughts on line in response to these Think Pieces on Complex Learning Disabilities

- Think Piece 1 – A vision for the 21st century special school
- Think Piece 2 – The child/student population
- Think Piece 3 – Pedagogy for the 21st century special school
- Think Piece 4 – The curriculum challenge (posting February)
- Think Piece 5 – Removing barrier s to learning: the contribution of new technologies (posting March)
- Think Piece 6 – Mental health and emotional well-being (posting April)
- Think Piece 7 – Building a wider workforce/transdisciplinary practice (posting May)
- Think Piece 8 – Professional learning (posting June)
- Think Piece 9 – The family context (posting June)
- Think Piece 10 – Community and society (posting July)

Research Team Contacts

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust – Wolverhampton Office
 Technology House, Glaiser Drive, Wolverhampton Science Park, Wolverhampton
 West Midlands, WV10 9RU

Tel. no.: 01902 796067; email. Jayne.Cole@ssatrust.org.uk

Project Director: Professor Barry Carpenter OBE,
 Associate Director (SEN), SSAT

Project Research Officer: Jo Egerton

Research Assistants: Tamara Brooks
 Beverley Cockbill
 Jodie Fotheringham
 Hollie Rawson

Administrator: Jayne Cole