Special educational needs and disability
training resources for PGCE programmes

Framework for
personalised learning

tda
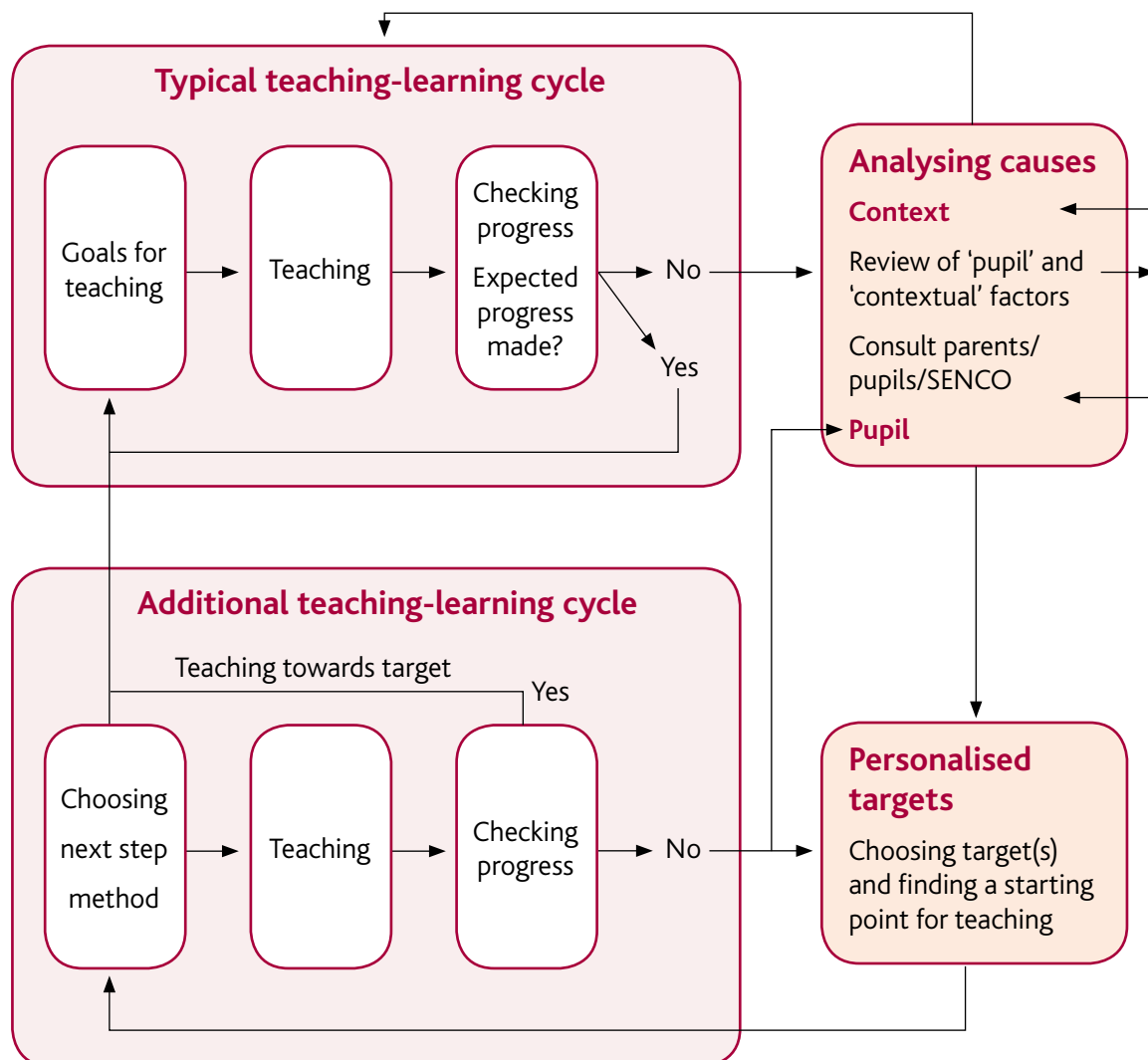
developing people, improving young lives

Contents

Framework for personalised learning
Special educational needs and disability training resources for PGCE programmes

38

Introduction

This framework is intended to help you prepare for your school-based task. We suggest you read it through and then come back to it when you need to focus on its different sections in more detail.

The framework described here is based on one originated by Professor Klaus Wedell, which has been revised and updated in the light of the move towards more personalised teaching and learning. It describes the cycle of assessment, decision-making, teaching and review involved in meeting pupils' needs, which has become part of every school's practice and is set out in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Framework for personalised learning
Special educational needs and disability training resources for PGCE programmes

39

The framework for personalised learning

Typical teaching-learning cycle

Goals for teaching → Teaching → Checking progress — Expected progress made? → No / Yes

Additional teaching-learning cycle

Teaching towards target — Yes

Choosing next step method → Teaching → Checking progress → No

Analysing causes

Context

Review of 'pupil' and 'contextual' factors

Consult parents/pupils/SENCO

Pupil

Personalised targets

Choosing target(s) and finding a starting point for teaching

What is personalised learning?

Personalised learning is about tailoring the curriculum and teaching methods to the needs of pupils so that all can progress, achieve and participate. It strengthens the link between teaching and learning by engaging pupils, and their parents/carers, in learning. Personalisation is relevant to all pupils, with and without SEN. This framework describes how to assess individual needs and plan the best teaching approaches to meet them. Although it focuses on pupils with learning difficulties, the process of planning to meet the needs of these pupils is, in essence, the same as planning to meet the needs of other pupils. The difference is that, for pupils with learning difficulties, personalisation will involve extra or different provision from that given to most other pupils of the same age.

The framework – personalising provision for pupils with SEN

The sections will help you to think through the process of personalisation for pupils with learning difficulties. Although teachers will more usually meet pupils whose learning needs are already recognised and who are already receiving a personalised curriculum, this framework starts right at the beginning of the process, when concerns begin to be raised that a pupil is not making the kind of progress that would be expected for his or her age.

Having a concern

A teacher's concern about a pupil having a 'learning difficulty' grows from the awareness that the usual teaching approaches are not enabling the pupil to make the progress expected. The teacher identifies a discrepancy between the pupil's level of attainment or progress in one or more aspects of the curriculum and the achievement expected for pupils of his/her age and stage of development.

The term 'learning difficulty' is complex. Firstly, it does not just refer to a cognitive difficulty. It can include sensory, motor or other factors, or a combination of these. Secondly, the sources of the 'learning difficulty' may not lie only or primarily 'within the pupil'. It could be a product of factors in the pupil's environment, including aspects of the curriculum. These factors are sometimes referred to as 'barriers to learning'. Most often a learning difficulty is the result of the combination of the way that factors within the pupil (sensory, motor, cognitive and/or other factors) interact with factors in the pupil's environment.

For example, the literacy difficulties experienced by a pupil with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia) can be seen as the result of the pupil's difficulty in processing information combined with the demands of a curriculum that relies on text-based learning methods. With appropriately personalised methods of teaching and learning (eg using a multi-sensory approach), however, such pupils can achieve their full academic potential. The pupil will still have 'learning difficulties' but they are minimised by modifying the 'environmental' aspect of those difficulties through a personalised approach. To take another example, for those with difficulties in learning related to behavioural, emotional and social needs, personalised teaching might involve strategies to help the pupil to develop their social skills in class and manage their behaviour, develop resilience, and/or improve their study skills (eg using the National Strategies' resources: 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning').

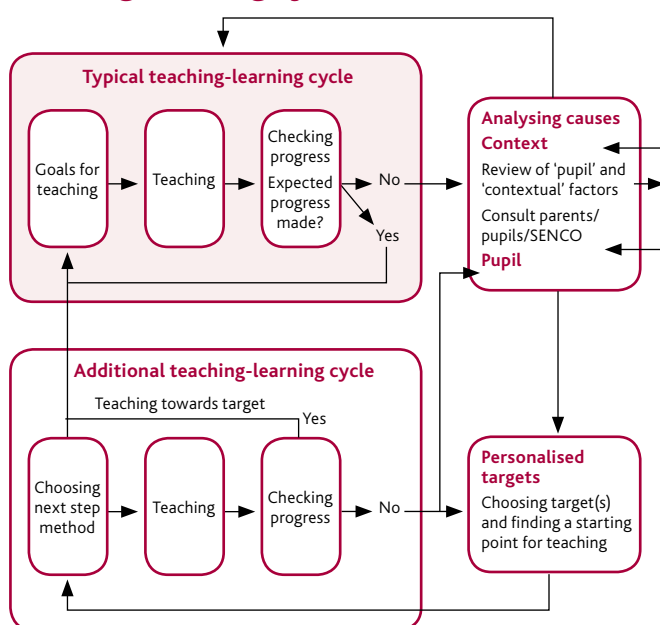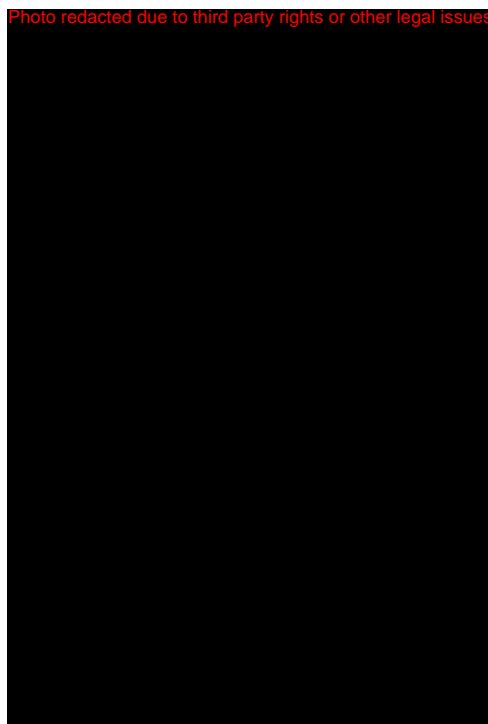## Position within the framework: typical teaching-learning cycle

Looking at patterns of progress

Individuals or the majority of pupils?

When a teacher notices that a particular pupil is not making the expected progress, the next step is to consider whether the majority of pupils in the class are not making the expected progress or if it is just one or a few pupils. If the answer is the majority, then the cause probably lies in the teaching methods or approaches and should be addressed at a curriculum planning level with the subject team. If, however, the answer is only one or a few pupils, it is more likely that those pupils are experiencing learning difficulties and will need different or additional teaching approaches.

Temporary or longer term?

There are times, of course, where pupils may temporarily fall behind their peers, for example, through missing school through illness. In this case, it is likely that the usual differentiated teaching approaches will be insufficient to meet the pupil's needs and he or she may need additional, time-limited interventions that will allow them to catch up. The National Strategies wave two 'booster classes' are examples of this.

Across the whole curriculum/subject or only in certain areas?

Teachers need to be clear about the aspect of achievement they are assessing. Sometimes, individual pupils might show an uneven pattern of achievement in relation to their peers in specific areas only, while the rest of their achievement is average or above average. For example, a pupil may answer questions with intelligence and enthusiasm but be unable to write an intelligible sentence. This is known as a specific learning difficulty (SPLD), and most often involves difficulties with a specific area of the curriculum, such as language or literacy or mathematics.

Position within the framework: analysing causes
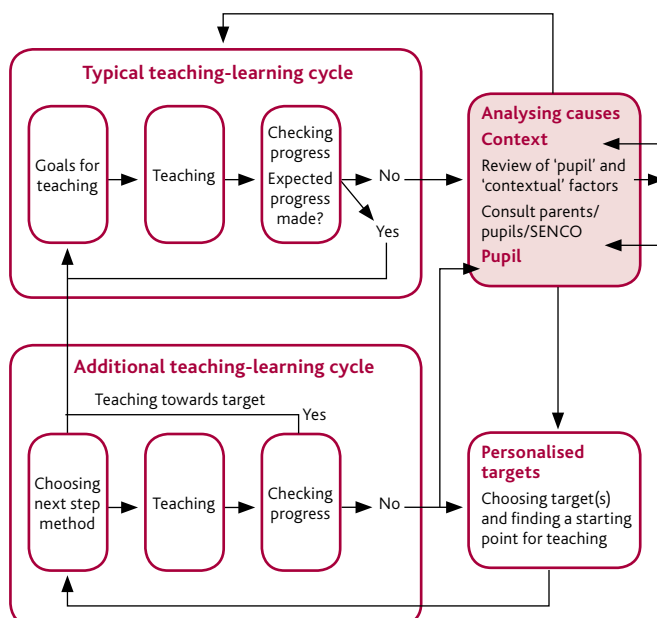
Deciding on the correct course of action

When teachers identify patterns of progress for individual pupils or groups of pupils that cause them concern, then they must decide what action to take. This might be:

Reviewing the curriculum for the whole class

As mentioned above, if all or the majority of pupils are achieving at a level below that expected for their age, then the correct action would be to review the way the curriculum is being delivered, identify problems, eg in pedagogy or relationships, and remedy them.

Greater personalisation for classes/groups

Both the SEN Code of Practice (Early Years/School Action) and the National Strategies three-wave model recognise that most pupils will learn and make progress within a curriculum where the teacher differentiates the curriculum to make sure that all pupils are included effectively. A continuous cycle of planning, teaching and assessing, which takes account of the wide range of abilities, aptitudes and interests of pupils, will normally enable most pupils to learn and make progress. For example, using multi-sensory approaches as part of normal teaching and learning to minimise the barriers to learning for dyslexic pupils will normally enable such pupils to make good progress and will probably benefit others in the class too.

A different kind of personalisation may be suitable for pupils who need to catch up with their peers. For example, as mentioned above, the National Strategies wave two interventions provide additional, time-limited group intervention to accelerate progress and enable pupils to work at age-related expectations.

Increasingly individualised programmes

If, after appropriate intervention, a pupil is still not making the expected progress the teacher may recognise that he or she has run out of ideas or doesn't have the skills to meet this pupil's needs. At this point, the school's support system needs to come into play. Schools will set their own criteria for intervention and the lines of communication should be clear to staff. There may be a special form for registering concern, or the approach may be informal. Some schools have set up support teams among staff to offer advice and support to colleagues or to observe each other in class and try new approaches.

Both the SEN Code of Practice (Early Years/School Action Plus) and the National Strategies three-wave approach (wave three interventions) recognise that some pupils will need an increasingly individualised programme involving advice and support from people outside the school. Most of these pupils' needs can be met in this way. In a few cases, the local authority will have to make an assessment of a pupil's educational needs, based on specialist advice. If the local authority then decides that the pupil needs special help, they must write a statement of SEN. This describes all the special help the pupil needs. The school and the local authority provide this help and the local authority is responsible for making sure it is delivered. Table 1 on the next page summarises the National Strategies wave model and the graduated approach in the SEN Code of Practice.

Table 1: National Strategies wave model and the graduated approach in the SEN Code of Practice	
National Strategies – wave model	**SEN Code of Practice – graduated approach**
Wave one: high-quality differentiated provision; typical teaching/learning cycle	Differentiated provision generally made by class teachers for all/some pupils
Wave two: wave one and additional time-limited, tailored intervention support programmes ('booster classes') for children expected to 'catch up'	School Action: class teacher and SENCO identify additional needs and devise interventions that are additional to or different from general differentiated provision
Wave three: wave one and increasingly individualised programmes involving specialist/ external advice	School Action Plus: class teacher and SENCO with parents and external support devise further interventions
	Statement: statutory assessment (involving advice from teachers, educational psychologist, health professionals, social services and parents) – decision by local authority to determine additional provision through statement of SEN

Helping individual pupils: a cyclical process

The search for causes of a pupil's learning difficulties develops over successive cycles of applying the processes in this framework, as the teacher discovers whether selected interventions do or do not work. Initially, teachers will look at the most 'obviously' relevant factors that may cause difficulties in learning; they will only look wider and deeper than these when previously selected interventions do not work.

Position within the framework: analysing causes
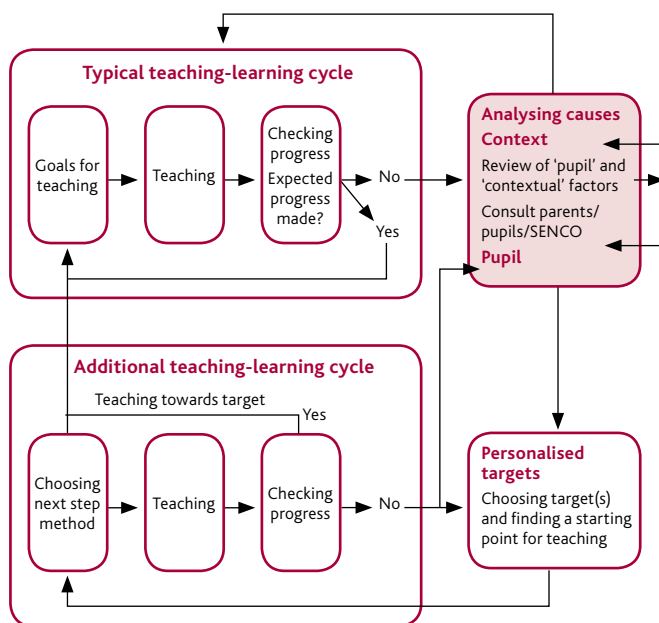
Analysing causes

Once a teacher recognises that a pupil is experiencing learning difficulties he or she should look for the reasons why that pupil is not making progress towards a particular goal. This involves looking at the pupil's educational needs and those aspects of the learning environment that might prevent learning happening (barriers) and identifying the pupil's strengths and those aspects of the learning environment that might promote learning and which can be harnessed to help overcome the difficulty.

Table 2: Checklist of environmental and pupil factors					
Environmental factors			**Pupil factors**		
Appropriateness of school:	**Strengths**	**Barriers**		**Strengths**	**Difficulties/ needs**
Curriculum			Sensory and motor functioning		
Teaching methods			Health/ conditions		
Class management and relationships			Emotional state, self-image		
			Motivation and interests		

Table 2: Checklist of environmental and pupil factors continued					
Environmental factors			**Pupil factors**		
Home relationships with:	**Strengths**	**Barriers**		**Strengths**	**Difficulties/ needs**
Immediate family			Cognitive and intellectual functioning		
Extended family			Expressive and receptive communication and language competence		
Community			Basic educational skills (literacy, numeracy etc)		
History of schooling, changes of school etc			Approaches and styles of learning		
			Social skills and interaction with others		

Gathering this sort of information can be very time-consuming so teachers should only collect information that is most relevant at a level of detail that is appropriate to the decisions to be made. It is important to look for factors that are current and not to become too absorbed in interesting background, which is no longer likely to have an impact on the current goals. On the other hand, it is important not to miss any important items of information, for example checking that pupils can see and hear properly in class, ie that they are wearing their glasses or sitting where they can see the teacher's face.

Some issues may need to be investigated further, for example social, physical or learning difficulties that have been apparent in other settings, at home or in other subject areas, or strengths in particular areas which may be a source of help to the pupil.

Table 2 contains a checklist of 'within child' and 'environmental' factors to consider.

Because learning difficulties are the result of a complex interaction between the pupil's strengths and needs and a range of positive and negative factors in the learning environment, their causes can be very complex.

Initially, teachers can only address what appear to be the most likely causes and intervene appropriately. While some of these causes may be ones that the teacher can tackle, eg those relating to modifying teaching approaches, others, eg those requiring specialist intervention or concerning the pupil's home life, will have to be referred to colleagues or the appropriate outside agency.

The process of planning for pupils experiencing learning difficulties described in this section is not one that teachers normally carry out alone. In middle schools and secondary schools it is likely to include the SENCO (who may collate relevant information and track the types and effectiveness of the interventions made to support particular pupils), form tutors and subject teachers. Pupils and their parents/carers should also be involved at each stage.

Evaluating interventions

Teachers/schools should evaluate the interventions/modifications they make in terms of the impact they have on the pupil's progress. If they seem to have had little impact on progress, the teacher can reassess the causes and try new strategies to address them. This cyclical process of identifying causes, trying intervening to address them and evaluating the impact of such interventions, forms a normal part of the practice of effective teachers.

Setting and achieving personalised learning outcomes/targets

For most pupils with learning difficulties it is likely that what is needed for them to make progress towards the learning objectives is adaptations to teaching styles and the use of access strategies, rather than different learning objectives. However, even with additional or different strategies, some pupils with learning difficulties will be unable to reach the learning objectives set for the majority of the class. For these pupils, the teacher may choose alternative learning objectives, linked to the topic on which the whole class is working but earlier in the learning progression, derived perhaps from having broken a particular learning objective into smaller increments (see the national curriculum inclusion statement). They can then plan how to address these objectives/targets through differentiated questioning and demonstration etc during whole-class teaching, through the work they plan for individuals and groups and the support that pupils receive.

Finding the pupil's starting point for achieving an objective/target

Finding a starting point for achieving a personalised objective/target means assessing what a pupil with learning difficulties can and cannot do in relation to the objective/target. Teachers should try to see the demands of the target through the eyes of the pupil so that they can find a way of teaching that is relevant to the way that pupil learns.

Teachers will have a good idea about what it takes to achieve particular objectives/targets and can begin to determine the appropriate starting point for an individual pupil by checking out their knowledge, understanding and skills at levels nearest to the objective/target before 'tracking back' to lower levels.

Systematically tracking what the pupil can and cannot do back from the target makes it more likely that the teacher's assessment will lead to an understanding of what the pupil can do and less likely they will track back further than is necessary.

Tracking back to the point where a pupil succeeds is called 'finding a baseline for the pupil's learning'. A baseline assumes that the pupil does not have any further difficulty below this point. Such an assumption, of course, needs to be checked. The usual method of checking is to give the pupil some brief teaching in order to find out how much support he or she needs to progress to the next step. This may show that the pupil, in fact, does not have a firm grasp of what the teacher thought was the baseline. Alternatively, the pupil may master the next step so quickly that the teacher can conclude that the assumed baseline is too low.

Helping pupils to achieve personalised objectives

Once the objective/target and the baseline have been established, teachers can plan how to address these objectives/targets. They might do this through differentiated questioning, demonstration and acknowledging of different learning styles during whole-class teaching; through the work they plan for individuals and groups; and/or through the way that work is supported, eg using a teaching assistant.

Personalised objectives/targets do not necessarily imply a need for individual one-to-one teaching. Much support can be given within the mainstream class, for example, by careful preparation for whole-class working, through sensitive grouping of pupils, peer tutoring and/or interactive group learning. Pupils will typically have more than one target and those targets need to complement one another. Targets can also be achievable over varying time periods.

With the move towards more personalised learning for all pupils, the difference between setting targets for pupils with SEN and the teacher's normal planning is one mostly of degree and involves a sharper awareness of a particular pupil's needs and more intensive interventions for meeting those needs.

Assessing progress

For pupils with learning difficulties, personalised learning outcomes/targets also provide information for the teacher to decide:

• whether the teaching methods used have enabled the pupil to make progress, or

• whether these approaches need to be modified further.

Assessing pupils' progress frequently and regularly helps to ensure that neither the pupil's nor the teacher's time is wasted through persisting with ineffective approaches.

Moving towards longer-term targets/objectives

If monitoring shows that the pupil is making progress towards his or her personalised objectives/targets then the process of selecting the next step (objective/target) – teaching and then monitoring progress – can proceed, through successive cycles until the pupil can manage with the support of ordinary class teaching. A major aim of this kind of provision should be that the pupil is able to carry over his or her achievements into ordinary classroom activity.

If, despite the personalised programme, the pupil still does not make progress, the teacher can consider five possibilities:

• the baseline was wrongly assessed

• the size of the step between the baseline and the objective/target was inappropriate

• the action taken (teaching, support etc) did not match the pupil's strengths and needs

• a combination of the above, or

• the chosen target was inappropriate.

In this case, to get the pupil back on track, the teacher will need to repeat the whole cycle – gathering additional information, reassessing the interactions between the pupil's strengths and needs and the learning environment, identifying causes and addressing them.