

THE GREENSIDE PROJECT ON PROFOUND AND MULTIPLE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

2007 - 2008



Contents	
Introduction	3
Background to the Project	5
Literature Review	6
Method	
1. Qualitative Purpose Statement	10
2. Central Question	10
3. Sampling	10
4. Study Design	10
5. Procedure	11
Data Analysis Procedure	13
6. Ensuring quality in the focus group data and analysis	15
Findings	15
Interpretation	35
Limitations	38
Conclusion and Future Directions	39

Introduction

One commonly held definition of the term profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) refers to individuals functioning below the age of two years often below one year while having one or more additional physical or actual perceptual sensory impairment (Ware 1996). It is well acknowledged that pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties present an ongoing challenge to practitioners (Maskell, Watkins and Haworth 2001). The challenge faced by practitioners lies in ensuring that these pupils can access a broad and balanced curriculum that is relevant to their individual needs. This necessitates regularly reviewing:

- the content of the curriculum;
- teaching approaches;
- classroom management
- resources(physical equipment and adult resources);
- the criteria for planning and delivering teaching.

One commonly used tool for assessment and planning for pupils with PMLD are the Performance Levels (P levels). The P Levels (DfES 1998, 2001, 2004) provide a description of attainment levels below the National Curriculum for all subjects. The P Levels are intended to provide:

- A common framework for measuring the progress of a pupil for whom the early levels of the National Curriculum are inappropriate;
- A framework against which pupil progress can be measured using a school's own assessment scheme;
- A means of mapping pupil attainment.

P levels, P1.i and P3.ii provide descriptions of pupil attainment that are generic and do not indicate subject differentiation. They thus provide a commonality of the early developmental stages across the curriculum. Not all P Levels have equivalent early learning goals as stated in 'The Curriculum Guidance for Foundation Stage' (QCA/DfEE 2000) and the Foundation Stage Profile (2003) as well as the recently published Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook (QCA, 2008). Similarly, not all the early learning goals have direct equivalent P levels.

Learning as related to the acquisition of skills for pupils with PMLD frequently does not follow a steady progression and usually occurs in very small steps. So attempting to predict progress within the P levels which are quite broad can lead to a degree of unreliability. P Levels are used by many special schools as summative assessments but these are not fit for the purposes of assessing learners with PMLD as they do not enable the detection of very subtle changes in behaviour. Progress for pupils with PMLD may well be characterised by a pattern of gaining, maintaining and losing skills and is not always linear. Male (2000) argues that for such pupils:

.....progress may best be achieved by the maintenance of skills, knowledge and awareness while for others it may mean minimising regression.

In recognition that for pupils with PMLD the steps between the P levels are not small enough, some schools have developed their own 'small steps' approaches or used programmes such as PIVATS to support them further with assessment and target setting. There are also examples by individual special schools (Mordaunt School, Southampton) to develop their own baseline and target setting (BATS) documents specific to their pupil population. Greenside school has also recently developed a baseline for Foundation stage pupils based on the Greenside Foundation Stage Curriculum document (2007).

The quality of education provided to pupils with PMLD is also dependent on staff keeping abreast of latest developments and knowledge on the teaching and learning of pupils with PMLD. This also involves keeping abreast of improved communication systems and of exploring new and imaginative ways of harnessing partnership and support. (Cartwright and Wind-Cowe, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact on staff understanding and practice in supporting pupils with PMLD following training on PMLD undertaken over a school year.

Background to the Project

Greenside School is a school for pupils aged two to nineteen with severe as well as profound and multiple learning difficulties. An increasing number of pupils present with Autism. The school also caters for some pupils with moderate learning difficulties although these are in the increasing minority. There are thirty pupils in the school working on P-levels 1 to 3. This accounts for approximately thirty percent of the school pupil population that is identified as presenting with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD).

The designated whole school focus for the academic year 2007 to 2008 was on supporting pupils with PMLD across the school. This arose due to a growing awareness by staff that the existing statutory P-level assessments were not sensitive enough to reflect the progress of pupils working within P levels 1 to 3. For many of these pupils setting and writing SMART targets for their individual educational plans (IEPs) was proving somewhat difficult because it was not easy to predict what some of these pupils would respond to. School Staff wished to have some exemplification through the assessment process with clearer descriptions of what the responses of pupils at the different P levels would be like.

The Greenside Curriculum Schemes of work were seen by staff as very useful in providing a subject focus and suggested resources for designing appropriate learning activities for pupils working at these very early P levels. However, they were seen as lacking information about the kind of detailed support that staff needed to provide effective learning experiences and activities for these particular pupils.

There was also a growing realisation by staff that the existing documentation was failing to provide them with the relevant information to support them with devising appropriate targets for these pupils' IEPs. Not all staff felt they had the necessary understanding, and therefore the confidence, to always interpret behaviours that could support them with effective planning and teaching at these very early levels, or even within a level. This therefore had an impact on assessment, planning and teaching of pupils working within and between P levels 1 to 3.

The School Improvement Plan accordingly prioritised the reviewing of the curriculum for pupils working at P level 1 to 3 across the school and developing a Curriculum Support Document that would assist staff with:

- Understanding of these early levels;
- Becoming more confident at discerning the small and very subtle stages pupils move through within and between a level ;
- Implementing activities that could help enhance teaching and learning;
- The kind of responses to look for to indicate success and progress.

Work on the Curriculum Support Document for pupils working at P levels 1 to 3 was undertaken by members of the Staff, notably the Assistant Head and the Teacher in charge of Multi and Sensory Impairment. Linked to work on this document was a rolling programme of training for staff, delivered by staff within school, as well as a number of external professionals. Some of the training from external professionals (such as training on Alternative Communication e.g. switches and the use of sensory stories) also involved working with individual pupils or whole classes alongside school staff. The school formed a working steering group for supporting pupils with PMLD and a series of training activities were planned for the year.

The educational psychologist supporting the school was approached at the beginning of the year to provide some support with evaluating the effectiveness of the impact of the training on extending staff understanding of PMLD and their views on how it had impacted on their practice.

Literature Review

A search of various electronic data bases for articles published on profound and multiple learning difficulties in the last ten years (1998 to 2008) enabled the researcher to group the articles under broad headings. The search was narrowed to the last ten years to allow for recency and relevancy in the light of changes to curriculum guidelines (e.g. QCA [2003] White Paper 14 – 19 education and skills which takes into account the needs of pupils with significant learning difficulties). Research on pupils with PMLD was grouped under the following headings:

- Research focusing on Assessment;

- Research on the content of Curriculum and teaching strategies;
- Research on the impact of medical conditions and emotional well being;
- Research on Training and perceptions of teachers of pupils with PMLD;

Research on Assessment

- McNicholas (2000) undertook a survey on PMLD focusing on assessment practices, the curriculum, teaching approaches, the use of IEPs and professional development of staff. One hundred and fourteen special schools in seventy two Local Authorities participated in the survey. The findings from the survey indicated that assessments were largely informal and were geared to inform achievements while recording was largely related to summative achievements. There was a variation in practice in relation to curriculum delivery which was informed by different attitudes to which subjects were important, the breadth of the curriculum and how inclusive the practice was. A mixture of teaching approaches were used with IEPs lacking detail and not applied to all subjects. McNicholas also noted that about one-third of teachers had no specialist qualification. Based on his findings he proposed a model of assessment for pupils with PMLD.
- Following research on the validity of support profiles for pupils with PMLD, support profiles have been recommended as an assessment tool to inform teaching and learning (Tadema, Vlaskamp and Ruijssenaars, 2007).

Research on Content of Curriculum and Teaching strategies

- Byers(1999) challenges the teaching of subjects to pupils with PMLD advocating recognition of innovative and school-centred practices in the curriculum and exploring the role of experience and achievement.
- Goss (2006) argues for greater focus on emotional factors and what is meaningful to pupils with PMLD as a means of enhancing learning and teaching for these pupils. Using the results from a case study approach he suggests ways in which access to learning can be enhanced by adopting a meaning-led approach.

- A case study approach has also been used by Porter, Ouvry, Morgan and Downs (2001) to highlight issues of interpreting the communication behaviours of pupils with PMLD in relation to inference and intention.
- Nind, Kellett and Hopkins (2001) undertook a small – scale study of teachers’ talk styles in interaction with pupils with PMLD where all the teachers had received training on intensive interaction. They compared this with ‘motherese’ linguistic style used with infants and found that engagement in the communication process was achieved with intensive interaction style of talk.
- The use of multi – sensory rooms for pupils with PMLD was explored in a study undertaken by Ayer (1998). Critical issues were raised in terms of assessing and evaluating the impact of multi – sensory rooms with pupils with PMLD.
- Drawing on research carried out for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Lawson, Waite and Robertson (2005) discuss the challenges and opportunities in terms of the distinctiveness of curriculum provision at 14 to 16 for pupils with PMLD. They advocate a pupil led curricula but not at the expense of access to a broad and balanced curriculum. They also recommend exemplification of what personalised learning might look like for a group of pupils to inform teaching in terms of a coherent approach to learning leading to the development of an integrated approach to personalised learning. Waite, Lawson and Robertson (2006) relate their study on developing curriculum guidelines for 14 to 16 year olds and its relevance to work related or vocational learning for pupils with PMLD.
- Hewett (2007) advocates touch and intensive interaction (based on research on the importance of touch for all) to be included in teaching programmes for pupils with PMLD to support the building of relationships and ‘open’ early communication channels

Research on the Impact of Medical Conditions and Emotional Well being

- Research on the impact of medical conditions on children with PMLD concludes that children experience the risk of many ‘*empty hours*’ in spite of the presence of highly specialized staff. The research reports that staff often

decide not to carry out actions that they had planned or may fail to offer the pupil an alternative programme (Zijstra and Vlaskamp 2005).

- Promoting the emotional well being of people with PMLD through the use of intensive interaction is advocated. Nind (2008) bases this on the accounts of intensive interaction practitioners of the progress made by individuals with PMLD and how this approach makes them feel good.

Research on Training and perceptions of teachers of pupils with PMLD

- Based on previous research on the attitudes of trainee teachers to pupils with disabilities, Aird (2000) promotes the case for specialist training for learning support assistants working with pupils with PMLD. He describes the development of such a course at the University of Worcester.
- Jones (2007) researched teachers' views of their pupils with PMLD and concluded that there was a need for teacher educators to support professional development experiences. Such experiences needed to assist teachers with integrating the distinct perspective of parents and the more recent theories of disability so as to assist them with including expectations of parents and society.
- Simmons and Bayliss' (2007) research on provision of pupils with PMLD in a special school in the south west of England discuss their finding in the light of the need for improved staff development opportunities to enhance staff levels of skills and knowledge. This they contend will assist with providing appropriate learning experiences in terms of provision for pupils with PMLD. They debate the commonly held assumption that special schools provide the best learning environment for these pupils.

An overview of the research indicates:

1. Continued professional development and training of staff to extend understanding and effectiveness in supporting pupils with PMLD.
2. A pupil led curricula and a personalised learning approach but not at the expense of access to a broad and balanced curriculum.
3. Promoting the emotional well being of pupils with PMLD through the use of touch and meaning led approaches.

4. The use of talk styles by staff that promote communication skills in relation to inference and intention to interpret communicative behaviours of children.
5. The use of evidence based research models for assessment to inform teaching and planning.

Number one, two, four and five of the cited research areas relate to the scope of this project.

Method

Qualitative Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate the impact on staff of the PMLD training received over the year in terms of extending their understanding of and confidence with assessing, planning and teaching of pupils working within P levels 1 to 3.

Central Question (overreaching questions explored in the study)

1. What support has assisted staff in extending their understanding and confidence with supporting pupils with PMLD?
2. What impact has this support had on their practice?

Sampling

Questionnaires were given to the majority of teachers (thirteen in all out of a possible fifteen) pre and post training. This was a purposeful sample based on the availability of the teachers. The composition of the two focus groups (eight in each group) was made up of teachers in one group and support staff in the other. This reflected staff supporting pupils across the age range. It therefore involved purposeful sampling to ensure a representation of staff across the school.

Study design

A qualitative approach was used based primarily on a constructivist perspective. The setting of the study was the school, the participants included teachers and support staff and the training was delivered within school. Information was collected through an initial questionnaire (Appendix 1) that was designed jointly by the educational psychologist and the Assistant Head. This was piloted with two members of teaching

staff before being given to teachers to complete in October 2007. The questionnaire used a rating scale with the descriptive statements ‘Excellent’ at one end of the scale and ‘Poor’ at the other end. The questionnaire contained seven questions. Six questions used the rating scale with boxes provided for additional comments while one question used a ‘tick the relevant boxes’ format. The questions were designed to explore four areas:

- Understanding of PMLD;
- Assessment of pupils with PMLD;
- Planning for pupils with PMLD;
- Delivery of learning activities for pupils with PMLD.

The same questionnaire was administered post training in June 2008.

Two focus group discussions were conducted. One targeted only teaching staff while the other consisted solely of support staff (Teaching Assistants). The reason for this was that both groups had not received the same amount of training experiences. The questions for the two focus groups were jointly designed by the educational psychologist and the Assistant Head (Appendix 2). The group discussions were facilitated by the educational psychologist towards the end of June 2008 at the school. The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist for Autism supported the groups as the Assistant Moderator.

Procedure

The pre training questionnaire was given to all teachers. Thirteen out of a possible fifteen responses were received from full time teaching staff. During the course of the year teaching staff received the following training

Date of Training	Nature of Training
15/11/2007	What is Communication? Training delivered by the Speech & Language Therapist and the ICT/PMLD Consultant.
29/11/2007	Early communication: ‘Normal’ Development. Communication with pupils P-levels 1 -3 . Training delivered by the Speech & Language Therapist and the ICT/PMLD Consultant
10/01/2008	Early interaction. Practical activities. Switch access development. Training delivered by the Speech & Language

Date of Training	Nature of Training
17/01/2008	Therapist and the ICT/PMLD Consultant P Levels 1 to 3. Exploring communication at these levels. Training delivered by the Speech & Language Therapist and the ICT/PMLD Consultant
24/01/2008 , 20/05/2008 & 10/06/2008	Positioning for Access. Training delivered by the Physiotherapist and the Occupational Therapist.
21/02/2008	New Curriculum Support Document for pupils working at P Levels 1 to 3. Introduction to the document delivered by the Assistant Head and Teacher in charge of Multi –sensory impairment.
28/02/2008	Practice in assessing early P – levels using New Curriculum Support Document and planning appropriate activities. Training delivered by Assistant Head and Teacher in charge of Multi – sensory impairment and the ICT/PMLD Consultant.
13/03/2008	Review of all training sessions. Discussion on future outcomes of training. Training delivered by Speech & Language Therapist and the ICT/PMLD Consultant, Assistant Head and Teacher in charge of Multi –sensory impairment.

In addition to the above staff also received training and support during the course of the year from:

- The Drama Specialist who wrote and trialled sensory stories for pupils working within P Levels 1 to 3 across many classes in the school (but not post 16).
- Training on Visual and Hearing Impairment delivered by the Advisory teacher for Multi-sensory impairment.
- Meeting with staff to discuss the link between the new support document and writing Annual Review Focuses and IEP goals for pupils with PMLD.
- Work undertaken with pupils by an ICT Consultant who assessed pupils for appropriate switches for communication, access to computer programmes and environmental controls. This also included development of, and advice on, appropriate motivating software.

- Work undertaken by an external Consultant, who worked with staff in looking at the curriculum for pupils with PMLD working at P Levels 1 to 3.

Support staff received the following training over the course of the year:

- Training from the Advisory teacher on Multi-sensory impairment.
- Training from the Senior Speech and Language therapist and the ICT consultant.
- Working in class alongside the ICT Consultant.
- Working with the Drama Specialist on sensory stories.
- A selection of staff received feedback from the external consultant on the curriculum and organisation for pupils with PMLD.
- Training on Positioning for Access had yet to be delivered by the Physiotherapist and the Occupational Therapist.

The post training questionnaires were given to teaching staff in June 2008. The response rate was thirteen out of a possible fifteen. Staff were invited to participate in the focus groups by the Assistant Head who ensured that potential participants knew what was involved in participating in the focus group. Consent was sought to audio - tape the discussion and participants were assured of confidentiality and erasing of the taped discussions on completion of the analysis of the data.

Data Analysis procedures

The data from the questionnaires was analysed separately. The mean ratings were calculated pre and post training for questions one, three five, six and seven as a means of comparing how staff rated their success with planning and delivery of learning activities. Since some staff reported that they had yet to see the new curriculum support materials and therefore had not given a rating for this both pre and post training, the data was not included for analysis. Only information from the focus group discussions was used in relation to the new curriculum support documents.

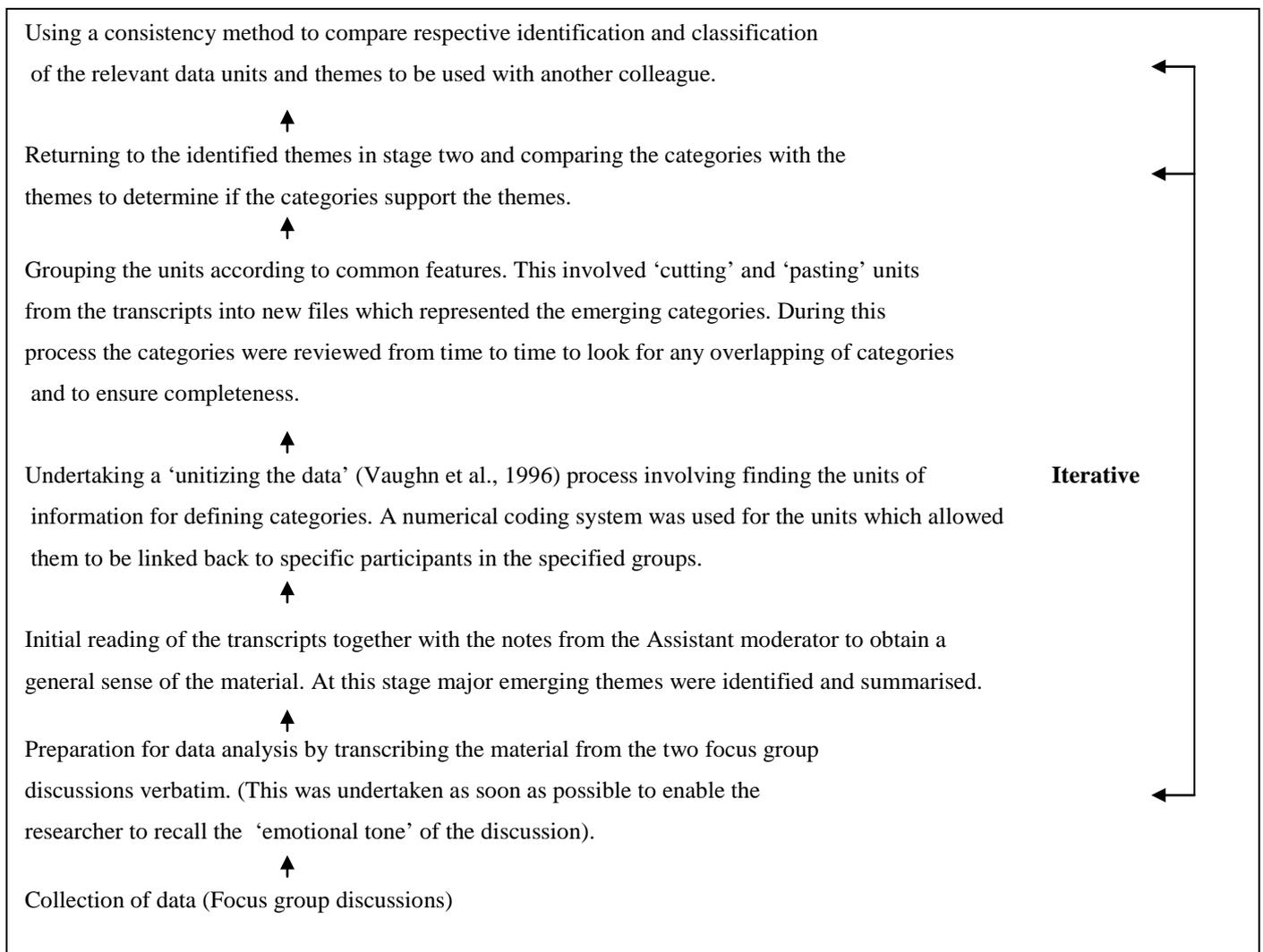
Question two was analysed in terms of reported use of assessment tools pre and post training and depicted graphically.

The method chosen for analysing the focus group discussions was one that reflected the nature and purposes of this research. The focus group discussions for the teaching staff and the support staff were analysed separately. The rationale for this was:

- a) The difference in training and support the two groups had received during the year in the light of their responsibilities and remits particularly in relation to assessment and planning for pupils with PMLD.
- b) The questions used in the two groups to foster discussion were somewhat different.

The steps outlined below are based on suggestions from sources such as Krueger (1994), Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) and Cresswell (2003). The stages adopted for analysing the focus group data are listed below. The data analysis involved an iterative approach which involved revisiting the data collected and the analysis.

Figure 1. The Qualitative Process used for the analysis of the focus group data



Ensuring quality in the focus group data and analysis

Since qualitative procedures were employed, checks of coding consistency or inter-rater reliability were used by the researcher to establish credibility. A consensus method (Morningstar, Turnbull and Turnbull, 1995) was used by the researcher and an educational psychologist unfamiliar with the project to compare their respective identification and classification of the relevant data units. Where disagreements occurred, perspectives were discussed until a consensus was reached.

Internal validity was established to determine whether the findings were accurate from the standpoint of those undertaking the research by using the strategy of member-checking and participatory modes of research (Cresswell 2003). The former involved taking the final themes back to the participants to determine whether the participants felt they were accurate. The latter involved the participants being involved in those phases of the study that involved the checking of interpretations and conclusions.

Findings

The results from the analysis of the data from the questionnaires administered pre and post training are reported below.

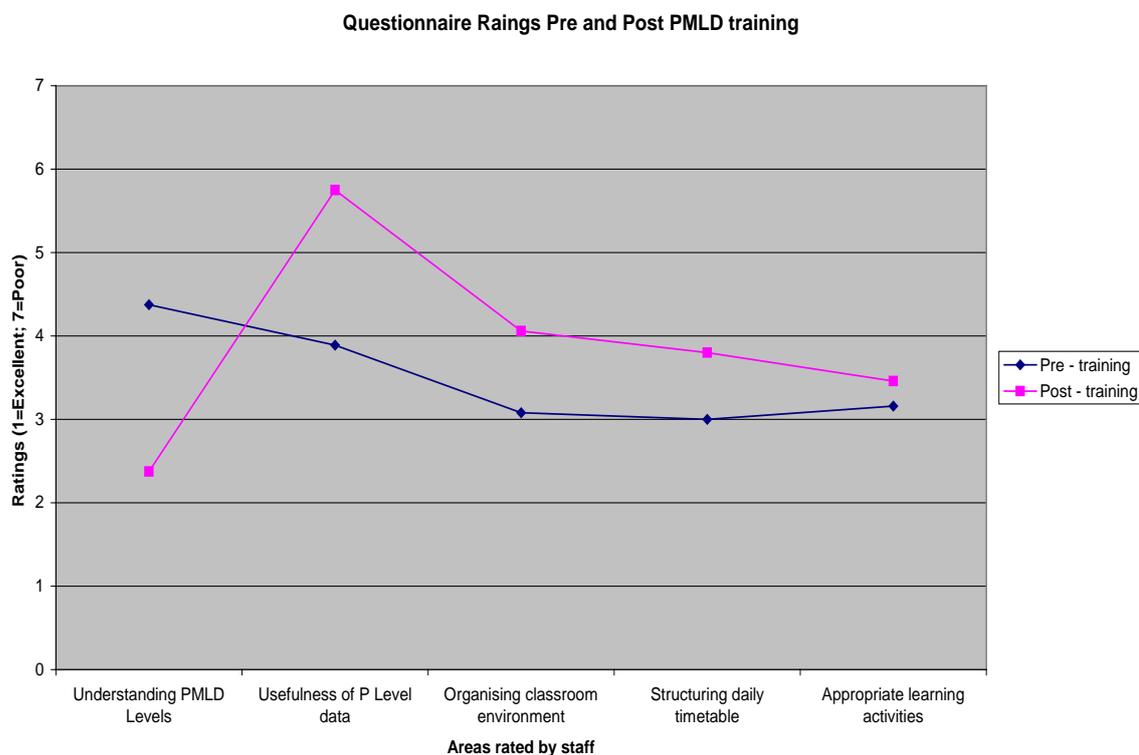
Understanding of the developmental levels of Pupils with PMLD

The mean rating given by staff on their understanding of the developmental levels of pupils with PMLD showed an increase in their understanding following post training. Prior to training the overall mean rating was 4.3 which was towards the lower end of the rating scale signifying weaker understanding. However post training the overall mean rating was 2.3 indicating a marked increase in staff understanding of the developmental levels of pupils with PMLD (Figure 2).

Planning for Pupils with PMLD

Staff were asked to rate the usefulness of the P level data analysis in informing the progress of pupils with PMLD. Prior to training staff ratings indicate that they found these quite useful. However post –training staff ratings indicated that they found these less useful

Figure 2



There are many explanations for this. Data from the focus group interviews indicates that the new curriculum support documentation was seen as far more useful by staff. Additional comments by staff appeared to crystallise their views post training in relation to the utility of P level data analysis.

“I have found P levels to be inadequate as progress descriptors whatever the level of attainment when discussing our pupils”.

“Data Analysis comparing ‘P’ Level progress over time makes you question what has been done in the classroom to improve (the pupils progress) / not the P Levels” [that is P levels are not sensitive enough to reflect pupil progress].

The usefulness of P level assessments to staff decreased from twenty percent pre training to sixteen percent post training. This suggests that post training staff appeared to find the P level assessments less useful. It would appear that Staff have regarded the P level assessments supported by the new documentation as separate rather than supportive in terms of usefulness. This might explain why the mean ratings pre and

post training indicate a fall in usefulness of the P level assessments. A truer picture was reflected in the focus group discussions where staff expressed the new support curriculum document as being supportive of their understanding of the lower P levels.

Delivery of learning activities for pupils with PMLD

Staff were asked to rate how successful they perceived themselves in terms of organising the classroom environment to maximise learning opportunities; individualising learning opportunities and providing pupils with PMLD with the most appropriate learning activities. Prior to training staff ratings as expressed as the overall mean for the respondents for organising the classroom environment, and individualising learning opportunities was lower than post training. This suggests that pre-training staff felt more successful than they did post training. One explanation for this could be the increase in staff understanding of the developmental levels of pupils with PMLD and also the reported increase in professional reflectiveness post training.

Staff reported limited success with organising the classroom to maximise learning opportunities for pupils with PMLD due to external constraints such as post 16 accreditation. Lack of space and mixed ability classes were also often cited as a constraining factors in successfully organising the learning environment to maximise learning opportunities

“Different needs of pupils clash”.

There was only a slight difference in ratings pre and post training on staff perceptions of their success in providing pupils with PMLD the most appropriate learning activities.

Assessments used to inform planning and intervention

Staff usage of pupil observation, therapy assessment reports and Educational Psychology reports were higher post training as shown in Figures 3a and 3b. Staff reported less usage of Alternative communication such as switches post training. This can be accounted for by staff explanations particularly in the focus group discussions of their increased understanding following training of which pupils it was appropriate to use switches for and when it was inappropriate.

“The ICT training was useful It made you think about what P level they are at before you can start to use a switch whereas a lot of people were using a switch because that’s the thing to do you know”.

There was a one percent drop in staff using IEPs as an assessment tool. The use of the new curriculum support documentation to assess for planning and intervention remained the same at three percent pre and post intervention. This could be accounted for by the fact that not all staff had time to use the document. However those that had seen and used it responded very positively on its utility as a tool to inform assessment and planning for targeted intervention.

“The materials have been incredibly useful and helped to plan differentiated lessons within mixed classes”.

Figure 3a

Assessment Tools used Pre- training to inform Planning and Intervention For PMLD Pupils

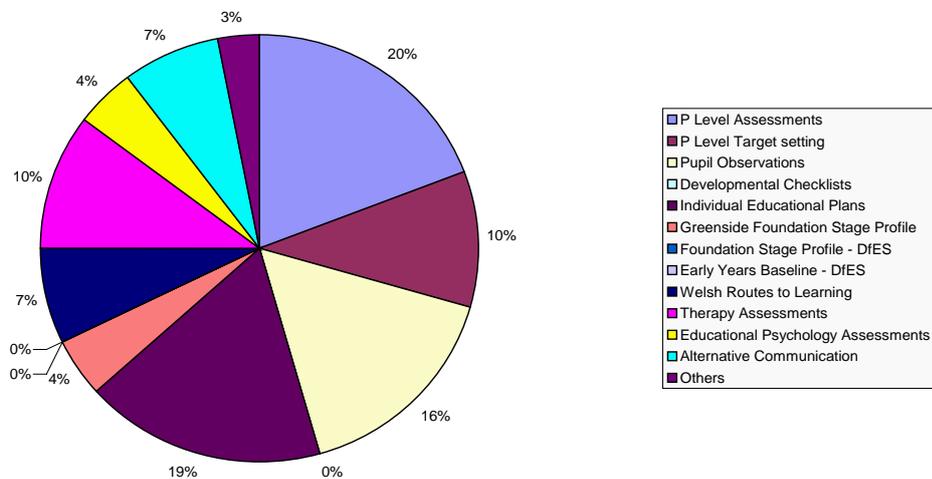
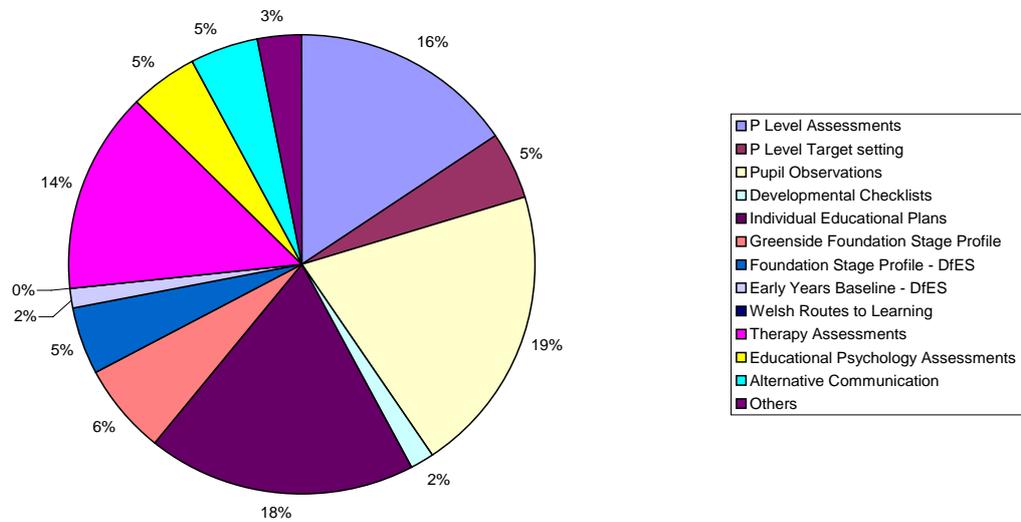


Figure 3b

Assessment tools used Post training to inform Planning and Intervention for PMLD Pupils



Focus group data analysis

Through the analysis of the Focus group data the following themes were identified. These have been underlined and dialogues and quotations have been included to provide support for the themes. A visual image in the form of a comparison table (Spradley, 1980) has been used to compare the two groups on the theme of the impact of the training. The statements from both groups have been included in a comparison table to show points of similarity in the views on the impact of the training.

Table 1: A Sample Comparison Table Used to Represent Information on the Impact of the Training for Teachers and Support Staff.

Teachers’ statements about impact of training	Support staff’s statements about impact of training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would say its [Curriculum support documentation] focused me on the responses that I need to be looking for because I’m not used to be working with PMLD children. • I was going to say the document helps you to move on with a P level, so from P1.i to P1.ii. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s good to see it from their [pupils’] perspective. • It makes you think to take time to wait for them [pupils] to communicate. • I found it [ICT training] handy. • I was amazed at the range of switches available.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's [document] been useful because you've been able to see very, very small steps of progress. • The ICT training was useful. It made you think what P level they are at before you can start to use a switch. • It stops you feeling guilty. You get to understand that not everybody's got the understanding to use it [switch]. • Training (on ICT) helped me to understand what they were expected to do first. That was very helpful. • So its [sensory stories] not just a wonderful time that everybody can have but we can back it up by showing we are meeting this [need] and we are meeting that. • I think it made me think about the importance behind it rather than just saying it [referring to training on positioning]. • Its [practical training by Physiotherapist and OT] made me realise how hard it is for them [pupils] to do it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a lot of factors against using a switch in the classroom environment. • The one he [drama specialist] did last year, we liked it so much we adapted it to our Christmas Play. I think they [the pupils] are getting an awful lot out of them [sensory stories].
--	--

Support Staff

Five themes were identified from the analysis of the focus group data from support staff. These were:

1. Impact of Training and opportunities for working with external professionals
2. Consistency and timing of training for Support staff
3. Communication of information
4. Time constraints and the flexibility of the curriculum
5. Environment

1. Impact of Training and opportunities for working with external professionals

Staff reported the practical aspects of the training as having had a huge impact on them in terms of raising their understanding and their awareness of the daily difficulties faced by PMLD pupils within school. Staff reported that experiencing the practical aspects such as being in a wheelchair, trying to sit on a physiotherapy ball, being temporarily blinded etc. heightened their ability to empathise with aspects of the day to day difficulties that pupils' with PMLD face, which staff might have easily overlooked.

D: "The day we had with 'R' and 'K' and the thing for me was the practical bit and not being talked at. I switch off if I'm being talked at 'cause I'm like that [laughs]. We took part in small groups and went to all the different areas and once you start being in a position of being in a wheelchair and all that it makes you think. For me to look at areas you might not actually look at until you are actually put in that position for that day".

L: "Yes, you think you're aware but once you have it done to you its totally different".

M: "You do [um] think like when you can only do a certain gesture and that made me think how am I going to get my message across?"

Although support staff did not have training on the use of switches those that had the external consultant come into their classes and work with specific children reported a big increase in their understanding and expectations of what could be achieved by some PMLD pupils.

D: "R took two children I didn't think would benefit with switches. He asked, "Can I take one of your members of staff?" And I was fortunate that it was me. And I was standing near the door and he said, "Come in, come in". And I couldn't believe it. R had got the young man doing what he does with the switch and now he's using it every single day. I wouldn't have thought a PMLD child could do it as freely as he does and now his mum has spoken to R and bought things for home".

Staff reported the usefulness of being able to tap into the technical expertise of the external consultant and of being able to have the necessary switches being made available for them to use very quickly. Staff also reported an increase in their understanding of the range of switches that could be used with pupils with PMLD.

S: "I was amazed at the range of switches that were available. I didn't know apart from the round normal ones. I'd no idea about things like that".

Staff reported that the training had led to greater awareness of allowing children with PMLD more time to communicate and being aware of even the briefest attempt on their part to do so in the context of a busy class room.

D: "Of course their gestures maybe so small Maybe an eye movement or a head gesture or a hand movement and I think when you are in a busy classroom there isn't time to look back and it makes you think to take time to wait for them to gesture which is so important for them to communicate and you can miss it. And I think we all need that, I mean teachers and staff across the board need a constant reminder of that".

L: "It reminded me how slow the process can be [pause] the thought process. You have to be so patient and how the environment has to be appropriate and all the physical factors. That's what I got out of R's training".

There was a general consensus by the support staff on the positive impact of the sensory stories on all children and not just on the children with PMLD. Staff felt they were for everybody and should be undertaken across the board.

D: "I don't think it should be an age thing because I'm an adult and I love them [laughs]. It should be open across the board".

L: "In our class the youngest kid is eleven and the older one is 13 and we are on our third one".

D: It's not just the PMLD children it's the whole class and they all benefit from it. They all have a brilliant time".

K: “.....all of our kids enjoy them, really, really enjoy it. And you know it involves you going outside and then going back in again and then it’s dark, then light and the noises and you know the stories and all that. We’re doing the Enchanted Garden at the moment and some of the noises are scary [imitates noise leading to general laughter from others] you get all those elements when it’s scary”.

Staff felt that sensory stories had provided both the pupils with PMLD and the more able pupils a more inclusive experience. The format of how the stories took place (e.g. putting on cloaks) helped to cue in the pupils about what they were going to do. Staff said that it also provided children with learning opportunities that took them outside the classroom.

D: “.....And it’s a nice way for the PMLD students and the more able students to mix as well and to be a part of the same thing, you know to be involved”.

L: “We use the whole of the school. In our one [sensory story] we use our classroom, our quiet room, our play area and the sensory garden. We go to like all four areas so it’s taking you out of the classroom as well”.

Staff did report that the success of the sensory stories rested on who did them and that previous demonstrations by other external professionals had led to the children getting very little from them. One member of staff reported adapting the sensory story to their Christmas Play and again reiterated how much the children enjoyed it. Some staff reported that they found it difficult to make the story last half an hour like the drama specialist did but the overall message from staff was that the sensory stories had been a great success for staff and pupils alike and that they should be used throughout the school.

2. Consistency and timing of training for Support staff

There was strength of feeling expressed by staff of the lack of common core training for working with pupils with PMLD for all support staff. Staff felt this would facilitate both their understanding and their practice. For example some staff reported

that as trained interveners they had received a lot of training on supporting pupils with PMLD. Even though they were no longer interveners, they reported that it gave them an increased understanding and focus in terms of why they were doing the things they did when supporting pupils with PMLD.

D: “..... Sometimes when you are in a class as interveners or ex-interveners we might do something and other members of staff are saying why are you doing that? And it’s your intervener training kicking in and before other members of class had this training they might be thinking why is she doing that? Isn’t she being fussy or over protective?”

L: “You don’t lose that focus. The other day, I got a blind boy in my class and they came at him [Visitor?] and just went, ‘helloooo’ [said in a loud, long drawn out manner] and said his name and went and I thought, I wanted to stay, ‘STOP COME BACK AND DON’T DO THAT’!! [Said in a very loud voice] But I didn’t but I felt like I wanted to but it would have caused friction. But I did pass on to the teacher that it was wrong”.

LL: “It’s [referring to the training] something you don’t lose.”

There was overall agreement that it would be useful for staff that had not had the intervener training to be able to do so since all staff worked with children with PMLD in the classroom. It was felt this would be useful when staff had to assist in another class to provide cover for staff that was absent.

The timing of training and a lack of sufficient training were also issues that arose during the discussion.

D: “I really feel we don’t get enough training and I feel the training is so spaced out that when we do get it as a refresher it’s a case of I’ve forgotten that because it hasn’t sunk in and when you’re looking back and saying it, that’s such a waste of any training.”

The overall view was that all support staff needed common, core training in terms of working with pupils with PMLD and that training needed to be accessed more regularly.

3. Communication of information

Communication of information in connection with pupils with PMLD was discussed in relation to training opportunities for staff and communication of information about the needs of pupils' with PMLD. One member of staff felt that there was good team work within her class and she had the opportunity to raise issues with the teacher. However, this was not the experience reported by other staff. Staff reported that information from external professionals was not always shared with them and that they were sometimes asked to do things without knowing the reason for it.

LM: "I think sometimes (um) the teachers get to talk to the Physios and the teachers get to talk to the professionals and the information doesn't always get followed down the line. Sometimes you are the last to hear and often you are working with that child more so than the teacher. So it's just as important that the assistants know".

L: "...[uh] maybe you are asked to do something that you don't always know or why".
[nods and murmurs of agreement from others in the group].

Communication in terms of access to relevant information as well as frequent updating of information on pupils with PMLD was seen by support staff as critical to supporting the pupils. This was reported to be crucial particularly in terms of communication between staff when students moved to another class. Staff also reported the element of timing in terms of information being communicated to all staff at the same time to prevent staff getting "het up" at the end of the term, because the students ended up suffering in the end.

S: "Can I just say about communication between staff especially at the moment when we are going to be changing students? The hand over - it happens every year doesn't it and we don't always get the information we need".

N: "So you'd like that information in advance?"

L: “ ...Next year for instance we are going to get ‘J’ I know nothing about him. Even now he’s coming in but nobody has said he fits or something. There’s no that side of the information”.

It was felt that this information should also be available to dinner ladies and other relevant staff, such as those running play schemes for pupils with PMLD. This was seen as a way of preventing the needs of pupils with PMLD being overlooked and of giving these pupils a voice.

La: “ Every PMLD child should have a passport made by someone who works with them all the time so that everybody in that class can read that information and knows so that when you have staff meetings and that, you can work on that passport and you can update it”.

Lb: “ I think in a school like this as well the PMLD children are very left out and there is nobody who is given the time to make those passports. And they spend a lot of time getting nothing and all their little signals and that are missed and overlooked”.

La: “ Yeh. They [PMLD pupils] are entitled to as much as everybody else but because they’re in a wheel chair they can’t go anywhere, they can’t hurt anyone or run away and in some respects don’t really move on I mean they’re not going to read or things like that, they get left behind they get left out and overlooked”.

Communication about training opportunities in terms of availability of courses and opportunities for attending them was discussed by staff in terms of a lack of transparency and a mechanism for information being communicated to all staff.

D: “I think sometimes you hear about it [training course] afterwards and you feel why wasn’t that open across the board and was it because of the money, because of the finances”.

S: “I’m not afraid to say I want to go on that course. I’d like to go on that course”.

La: "Yeh, but you need to know about it before you say you want to go".

Staff showed an awareness of budgetary constraints on accessing external training courses in terms of supply cover and some staff talked about not wanting to leave their team short of a member of staff.

Communication about profiles of pupils with PMLD, as well as communication about training opportunities, was seen as ways of ensuring more effective support for pupils with PMLD.

4. Time constraints and the flexibility of the curriculum

Staff expressed that the very nature of the difficulties experienced by children with PMLD made providing them with the appropriate learning opportunities within the school day a challenge. This was discussed in terms of the time constraints and the lack of flexibility within the curriculum. The severity and complexity of the medical needs of many children with PMLD were felt to limit the time available, for example, for using switches. The fact that many of these pupils were in and out of class to access therapy, for example, was seen by support staff as limiting time available to work with pupils.

Staff reported that balancing time was hard. Changing and tube feeding could take up a chunk of the afternoon in school. Activities like swimming could take up the whole morning. There wasn't enough time when pupils were in a group or on their own because of their complex needs both when the class had mainly pupils with PMLD and when there was a mixed class. This led to feelings of guilt and an acknowledgement that the needs of the children with PMLD were sometimes being sacrificed to meet the needs of the whole class.

K: "... We have like a teacher and five staff in there but we don't get the time because they're all quite severe like with medical needs. Because they are young adults they all need to be changed each time and we do like twelve changes a day. And so each time you just get something set up its time and you have got to clear it all away. Also a) there's not the room in class and b) although it sounds like there's a lot of staff you

can't really go and work with one or two because it takes you know all the people like when you're tube feeding".

Lb: "Time is a big issue" [nods of agreement and murmurs of assent from others].

La: "You feel quite guilty as well because if you give the time to the PMLDs you are leaving your class understaffed with lots of other children. And then the behaviour starts off. You might put the telly on you know and if you deal with the class as you should be dealing with them then the PMLDs get left behind".

One member of staff saw additional staffing as a key solution to meeting the needs of pupils with PMLD as a way of providing parity for "dealing with" children and ensuring that the other children didn't lose out. However this was not the generally expressed view.

The complex needs of children with PMLD tied in with staff's views of the lack of flexibility within the curriculum which was at times felt to be too constrained.

D: "You've got to teach them Geography. Give them the sensory experience of these things but don't say you're doing RE or a Geography lesson. I'm sorry but they can't time their motions by the curriculum. I feel very strongly about this. Sometimes when the teacher is teaching a lesson you just want to scream and say they're not getting anything out of it. It's so frustrating".

However staff did feel that all children with PMLD got a lot out of activities such as swimming and one staff member reported how much a little boy with PMLD got out of his horse riding. The fact that time was built in for this was seen as something very positive and staff voiced the view that more time should be built in for activities pupils with PMLD could do.

5. Environment

Staff discussed the availability of space and the appropriateness of the equipment available for pupils with PMLD. Changing the flooring of the playground 'down the bottom' by making it more spongy and updating the Barn were cited as examples.

Some staff mentioned that available space to use switches in the classroom was a constraining factor.

Staff felt that not enough thought was always given to play equipment in terms of it being used by children with PMLD.

D: “..... you are in your wheelchair and there’s stuff on your tray which is all very nice coming out of a box.....but X can’t use her tray and can’t use her hands”.

The removal of equipment such as the PMLD swing was seen as limiting access to equipment that had been used with some enjoyment by some children with PMLD in the past. Staff generally were of the view that more equipment and a ‘*proper sensory area and a play area*’ specifically for children with PMLD would be beneficial.

Teaching Staff

The following four themes were identified from the discussion with the teaching staff:

1. Extending understanding and confidence with assessment and planning within P1 to P3
2. Informing understanding and practice
3. On going support with assessing, planning and teaching
4. Realities of working with pupils with PMLD

1. Extending understanding and confidence with assessment and planning within P1 to P3

All staff present reported the usefulness of the video clips in making the differences between the P levels very explicit for staff. The video clips also served to remind staff of the length of time it can take pupils with PMLD to respond and for staff to build up a relationship with the pupil in terms of their acceptance of the supporting adult.

Staff in post 16 and other staff reported that the new curriculum support document was useful in focusing on clarifying terminology and highlighting subtle differences within a level such as between P1.i and P1.ii. These differences were considered to be very significant to most PMLD pupils. Staff also reported that the document assisted

in exemplifying the kind of responses staff should be looking for within and between a P level and linking them to teaching activities.

S: “The (uh) document that L and J have written helps you to see the sorts of things that you are looking for that will get from P1.i up to the next stage. Also explaining what the different words mean like ‘participating’. So you know more information about that so you know whether the children are accepting an activity or actively engaged in the activity and clarifying this”

Staff also reported the usefulness of discussions with colleagues working with different age groups in terms of where pupils were in terms of at or within a P level. This was also a part of the training and took the form of a moderating exercise which further assisted with extending confidence with assessment of pupils with PMLD.

Staff reported that although it was early days in terms of familiarity with the document they could see that it would eventually become another tool in their assessment repertoire by providing them with another way of working. Staff felt this would give them more breadth in terms of the kind of activities to do at a certain level. Although staff acknowledged that the document was relatively new and needed embedding they felt it would be useful in being able to identify very, very small steps of progress. Currently progress or regression was sometime difficult with pupils with multi-sensory problems but staff generally felt that the document could be used to identify very, very small steps of progress.

Staff also felt that the document provided a more long term view.

M: “you can check ahead which bits they have and pull out which bits they’ve got and if they’re ready to move on”.

Staff viewed that in the future the document could be used to support curriculum planning since schemes of work were already in place for pupils with PMLD.

The training on switches and work undertaken with individual pupils with PMLD by the ICT consultant was seen as very useful in writing IEP targets.

S: "R came and worked for a long time with a particular child in my class and did a report and that helped me to plan what I was going to do next, which actually led to an Individual Educational Plan target coming from the report that R wrote. That was really useful".

Likewise the training on sensory stories was seen as a possible way of 'marrying up the wonderful ideas' with, if not, P level targets then certainly individual goals for pupils. Staff reported that having the opportunity to observe how tools, like power point, and props could be harnessed to support pupils, made a big difference to practice and worked really well.

2. Informing understanding and practice

Staff reported that the training particularly on switches, had extended their understanding in terms of pupils' readiness to use switches, and also given them the freedom to use switches with pupils, simply as a way of providing them with the experience. Staff also felt reassured following training that it was all right for pupils with PMLD not to be doing things all the time. This had assisted them with their practice.

C: " ...I think its better to understand that it's no good to set pupils up with a switch because that's not very meaningful which I think we were probably doing at certain times instead of waiting for a response. So I'm still going to use switches but only with certain pupils".

As a result of having external professionals work with pupils in their classes, staff had developed a better understanding of interspersing learning that involved short active involvement and learning that involved longer experiential sessions. It also made staff feel it was good practice to repeat activities several times.

S: "It stops you feeling guilty. I used to feel everybody should be doing something but actually for some pupils to be experiencing using it, is their work. They don't have to be turning it on and off. It's fine to be saying 'that's fine and they don't need to be doing that. The experience is what the work is; you know that's the work for them".

The training on positioning was also seen by staff, as very helpful as was providing individualised motivating resources for pupils who had only one or two things they liked. Staff felt the training on positioning by the physiotherapist had not only provided staff with a greater understanding of the rationale for why positioning was important, but also enabled them to share this with support staff and cascade this information. The practical activities had also enabled staff to ‘see’ and experience activities from the perspective of a young person with PMLD.

J: “You can explain to your staff that yes they [pupil] might keep sliding themselves down the chair but it is quite uncomfortable. So you need to make sure they are sitting properly”.

S: “...you’re not just nagging them [support staff]. You can explain the reason and because in the training we experienced it quite a lot ourselves and I’ve been in a standing frame and a wheel chair and I can say that for me that I found that experience very uncomfortable”.

Staff also reported that the training led to greater questioning of one’s practice as well as provided staff with the freedom to explore what directions to take.

P: “.....I’ve got one student who I’m going to look at in relation to his choice making. I don’t know how much he’s making a choice or just pressing a button to get shot of me”.

J: “... I mean it’s [the training] given us a lot more choices of what directions to go in. It’s opened up more choices for the pupils as well, because we’re aware and understand more of the different things that we can be doing more”.

Staff were very enthusiastic about the impact of the training on sensory stories both on their practice and on the pupils. Their understanding about using smells as objects for a bag of items and ensuring that the items included actually felt like what they were supposed to represent, had all been facilitated by the training. One staff member

shared her experience of how the sensory stories had impacted on a pupil with PMLD in her class who had never responded to anything previously.

S: "It was on a magic carpet ride to India and there were some spices and (um) he had his eyes shut and his head down I think and the spices were offered to him to smell and he lifted his head and opened his eyes. And that was something quite different to what we actually see".

The sensory stories were also seen by staff as a way of checking what pupils knew by putting in a deliberate mistake, since the repetition of the story week after week allowed for this. Staff discussed the usefulness of the sensory stories in terms of using a format that worked for the pupils, thereby enabling staff to incorporate more learning experiences and visiting other areas of the curriculum. Staff spoke very positively about the pupils' responses.

J: "With our group it's been lovely to see some of the responses and actually some of the progress in responses such as reaching out".

All staff felt this would be something they would be carrying on. Staff also shared aspects that had impacted on their practice as a result of the training from the external consultants such as starting the day as a group in class and then branching out to undertake individualised work.

Generally staff were very positive of the impact of the training over the year in terms of extending their understanding, and practice with supporting pupils with PMLD. Staff also reported that the training had led to their becoming more reflective practitioners.

3. On going support with assessing, planning and teaching

Staff discussed and shared several ideas to assist with assessing, planning and teaching pupils with PMLD. One of these was the time and opportunity to observe colleagues in other classes and that, if this was not always possible, then reading plans of what others were doing could perhaps provide a snapshot of planning and teaching

activities. Observing someone who had been on a different training course was also discussed, as a way of providing additional support particularly for colleagues with limited experience of teaching pupils with PMLD. It was also felt that if everyone undertook it, then newer and less experienced members of staff would find it less threatening. It was generally felt that there was a lot of expertise within the school which could be tapped into and could be tailored to meet staff's needs.

M: "We have lots of knowledge here so training needs to be tailored to us".

J: ".....there's so much good practice going on. So many people have got so many lovely and different ideas. As a person who has been here forever to go to see somebody whose got a different idea of how to do something with an umbrella or you know whatever, is really useful".

P: "I went on a course at [unclear]. And I found the training here far more useful than anything we had on the course".

Staff also discussed the use of video clips to support the new curriculum support document. The video clips exemplifying the different P levels were seen as a useful way of enabling support staff to access information without bombarding them with too much information. Staff felt that allowing colleagues to see practice in other classes in the form of video clips on the shared drive was one way of overcoming the time constraint of physically observing colleagues in class.

Staff also discussed the usefulness of having a quiet room somewhere where they could work with a pupil. This was in response to constraints imposed by the space, time or noise.

J: "....sometimes you don't have the same sort of time [to use switches] or the space or they're singing next door".

Support from external professionals was seen to be more valuable in terms of them popping back every so often to demonstrate equipment. It would also serve as a

reminder to staff of what they should be doing as well as suggesting a different way of doing things. A rolling programme of training was seen as more useful than isolated training events.

J: “.....We need a rolling programme that doesn’t get pushed aside and then we suddenly realise that the last time we did anything on signing was three years ago.”

4. Realities of working with pupils with PMLD

Staff were keen to discuss the difficulties that could arise when teaching pupils with PMLD. Time constraints imposed by their medical needs was seen as a constraining factor.

J: “One thing we haven’t talked about is their medical needs. And they do take over a huge amount of the day”.

The mix of children in a class was also seen at times as a constraining factor.

M: “I think having a class that has got some children with PMLD and some children that are more able, just sort of differentiating groups you know. You haven’t always got the space or time. You feel constantly torn between the two and sometimes it works and its really good and other times you feel, ‘Aaaargh’. But it’s just persevering with it and trying different strategies to make sure everybody is achieving what they can do and not feeling like a failure because it’s not gone according to plan”.

Sometimes the time it took to get the right equipment (e.g. the right switch) was also seen as not enabling staff to fully support pupils with PMLD.

Interpretation

The central question explored was the impact of the PMLD focus during the year on support for staff working with pupils with PMLD. Of interest also was the impact this had had on their practice.

The findings indicate that:

- There was a reported increase by staff in their understanding of the developmental levels of pupils with PMLD. This increase in understanding was attributed by staff to the training by a range of external professionals as well as access by teachers to the new curriculum support materials and observing external professionals working with individual pupils in their class. This is supported by research literature that professional development and training assists staff to extend their understanding and effectiveness in supporting pupils with PMLD (Aird, 2000, Jones, 2005).
- The knock on effect of this increased understanding led to a re-evaluation of practice in class particularly, in relation to confidence in providing a rationale for the learning activity, or for the manner of engaging in the learning activity, in terms of responsive versus experiential learning activities. Staff reported increased confidence in being able to offer and share the reason for positioning a pupil, for example, in a certain way.
- Another aspect of the increased understanding was seen in the comments of both teachers and support staff of the raised awareness of how difficult it was for many pupils with PMLD to undertake activities. For example staff recognised that for some pupils standing in a standing frame was a sufficient activity in itself. This had led to more reflective practice.
- Staff reported that the training, such as that on the use of sensory stories, was something they would incorporate into their practice, because of the positive impact and enjoyment demonstrated, not just by pupils with PMLD, but other pupils as well. Again this is in line with research advocating innovative and school-centred practices in the curriculum (Byres, 1999).
- Those staff that had used the new curriculum support materials such as the video clips perceived this as a very useful tool to inform assessment, planning and intervention as well as a means of moderating where pupils were in relation to the P- levels.

Future training needs were identified by staff based on whether the member of staff was a teacher or a teaching assistant. The latter felt that there was a need for all support staff to receive a core, basic training on working with pupils with PMLD. Same teaching staff working in post 16 felt the need for more training, but most

teaching staff felt there was a range of expertise within school which could be tapped into for continuing professional development.

Observing practice of colleagues, and the use of ICT to address time constraints, was mentioned as one way of achieving this. A rolling programme of training that included revisiting areas was seen by both teachers and support staff as more useful in embedding understanding and knowledge. This it was felt would have a greater impact on practice than training that was 'spaced out'.

Although teaching staff felt the new curriculum support documents and supporting video clips were '*excellent*', there were staff who had not seen them as yet. Most staff felt that the use of the document needed to be embedded into practice to be of use in informing assessment, planning and intervention for pupils with PMLD.

Communication was highlighted as a big issue by support staff. This was in relation to:

- Transparency of information about training courses,
- Cascading of information by teachers about pupils with PMLD following work by external professionals;
- Sharing and updating information about pupils with PMLD particularly when they were moving to another class.

The use of pupil passports that were updated regularly and shared with dinner ladies was seen as a way forward. Support staff also expressed a wish for a forum to come together as a group and discuss concerns and share practice without the teaching staff.

Time and environmental constraints in terms of space were seen by both teachers and support staff as constraining factors to supporting pupils with PMLD effectively. The time constraints were linked to the complex, medical needs of many pupils with PMLD. Environmental constraints were linked to space within classes.

Having pupils with mixed ability was seen by some staff as presenting a challenge in terms of differentiating learning activities, particularly when the pupils came together

for group activities. However, one staff member reported that having a high proportion of pupils with PMLD in one class could also act as a constraining factor in terms of providing all of them with appropriate learning experiences, as time had to be set aside for changing and tube feeding.

Overall staff were very positive about many aspects of the training in terms of extending their understanding and confidence with assessment planning and supporting the needs of pupils with PMLD. This was also seen in terms of the impact on their practice and the pupils' responses e.g. sensory stories and the use of switches. Pupils that staff might have underestimated in the past were able to demonstrate greater awareness to these experiences by their responses. As one teacher put it:

“One thing is they [pupils with PMLD] always surprise you”.

Limitations

Some limitations of this project are briefly addressed below:

- The information obtained from the focus groups was ‘filtered’ through the views of the participants and the purposeful sample might not have reflected the views of other staff.
- The researcher’s role in facilitating the group may have affected responses. The researcher’s own assumptions and biases such as insufficient experiences of working in a class with pupils with PMLD would have at times perhaps led to a lack of objectivity. The researcher’s biases would also have shaped the way the data was viewed, understood and interpreted.
- Participants in the focus groups may not have necessarily been equally articulate or perceptive.
- The questionnaires were perhaps not sensitive enough to elicit the information the researchers were trying to obtain. For example, some staff reported following training, that they had ‘not seen’, the new curriculum support documents. Their experiences were therefore not the same as those who had done so. The lack of equality of experience would have impacted on their responses to the question in the questionnaire.

Conclusion and Future Directions

There is no doubt that in spite of the limitations of the project, the information collated, indicates that the focus on PMLD has benefited staff and some pupils alike. This can be seen in the greater levels of understanding of the developmental levels of pupils with PMLD. The new curriculum support materials particularly, the supporting video clips of examples of pupils working at a level, and within a level have been seen by teaching staff as extremely useful. This in turn has impacted on the kind of assessment tools used and perhaps provided staff with a more informed view of organising and structuring the school day and providing the most appropriate leaning activities for pupils with PMLD.

Future directions might include exploring, and where possible incorporating, suggestions by staff. These could include:

- Facilitating sharing of information about pupils with PMLD through providing pupil passports and time for staff to update these termly. This should ideally also involve input from parents or carers, such as respite staff.
- Opportunities for all teaching staff to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum support documents and video clips, so that they become embedded as a working document that can be used to inform assessment, planning and intervention.
- A rolling programme of training including opportunities to observe colleagues and share practice within school. This could also include a mechanism whereby all support staff know what training courses are available.
- A forum for support staff to meet twice a term or termly that is chaired by a member of the Senior Management Team so that they can share good practice and discuss and address any concerns.
- Since the IEP has been cited by many staff as an assessment tool to inform their assessment and planning, it might be useful to explore its use as a collaborative tool for the education of pupils with PMLD. IEPs are more effective when designed and implemented by a multidisciplinary team (Yota

2006). This could involve introducing broad goals, which could be shared between all those working around the pupil, accompanied by less frequent but better quality evaluations of IEPs

The focus on supporting pupils with PMLD during the academic year 2007 to 2008 has been very beneficial to staff and pupils. Implementing some of the suggestions from staff will help to further extend support for both staff and pupils alike.

Naina Cowell – Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist

Lorna Leslie – Assistant Head, Greenside School

References:

Aird, R. (2000). The case for specialist training for Learning Support Assistants employed in Schools for Children with Severe, Profound and Multiple learning Difficulties. *Support for Learning*, Vol. 15 (3), pp 106 – 110.

Ayer, S. (1998). Use of multi-sensory rooms for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*. Vol. 2 (2), pp 89 -97.

Byers, R. (1999). Experience and Achievement Initiatives in curriculum Development for Pupils with Severe and Profound and Multiple Learning difficulties. *British Journal of Special Education.*, Vol. 26(4), pp 184-188.

Cartwright, C. and Wind –Cove, S (2005). Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, Continuum International Publishing Group, London.

Cresswell, J.W (2003). Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (second edition). Sage Publications.

DfEE. *Planning, teaching and Assessing the Curriculum for pupils with Learning Difficulties.*

Greenside School. (2007). Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation stage P levels 1 – 3.

Gross, P. (2006). Meaning - led learning for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 33,(4), pp210-219.

Hewett, D., (2007). Do touch: physical contact and people who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. *Support for Learning*, Vol. 22, (3), pp 112-123.

Jones, P., (2005). Teachers' views of their pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, Vol. 20, (4).

Krueger, R.A. (1994). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research. London:Sage.

Lawson, H., Waite, S., and Robertson, C. (2005). Distinctiveness of curriculum provision at 14 to 16 for students with learning difficulties: opportunities and challenges. *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 32, (1).

Lawson, H., Waite, S., and Robertson, C. (2006). Work-related learning for students with significant learning difficulties: relevance and reality. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 36 (4), pp 579 -595.

Male, D. (2000). Target setting in Schools for Children with severe Learning difficulties: Headteachers' Perceptions'. *The British Journal of Special Education* 27, pp 6-12.

Maskell, S., Watkins, F., and Haworth, E (2001). Baseline Assessment, Curriculum and Target Setting for pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. David Fulton Publishers.

Morningstar,M.E., Turnbull, A.),and Turnbull, H.R. (1995).What do students with disabilities tell us about the importance of family involvement in the transition from school to adult life? *Exceptional Children*, 62, 249-260.

Nind, M. (2008). Promoting the emotional well-being of people with profound and multiple learning difficulties: a holistic approach through intensive interaction. In, Pawlyn, Jillian and Carnaby, Steven (eds.) *Profound and Multiple Intellectual Disabilities: Nursing Complex Needs*. Oxford, UK Blackwell. Article assessed on 17 /07/2008 from e-Prints Soton.

Nind, M., Kellett, M., Hopkins, V. (2001). Teachers' talk styles: communicating with learners with severe and complex learning difficulties. *Child Language teaching and therapy*, Vol 17, 2, pp 143-159.

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (1998). *Supporting the Target Setting Process*. . London. QCA Publications.

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (2000) *Investigating in Our Future: Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*. . London. QCA

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (2003) *Designing a Learner-Centred Curriculum for 16 to 24 – year – olds with Learning Difficulties* [online at [http:// www.qca.org.uk/ca/inclusion/p16_Id/index.asp](http://www.qca.org.uk/ca/inclusion/p16_Id/index.asp)]. London:QCA

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) (2008). Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook. London: QCA

Porter, J., Ouvry, C., Morgan, M., Downs, C (2001). Interpreting the communication of people with profound and multiple learning difficulties. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Vol 29, 1, pp 12-16.

Spradley, J.P. (1980). *The ethnographic interview*. Ft. Worth, TX. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publications.

Vaughn, S., Schumm, J.S., and Sinagub, J (1996). Focus group interviews in education and psychology. London: Sage.

Ware, J. (1996) Creating a responsive Environment. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Yota, X. (2006). Collaborative IEPs for the education of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. *European Journal of Special Educational Needs*, Vol 21, (3).

Zijlstra, H.P., and Vlaskamp, C., (2005). The Impact of Medical conditions on the support of children with Profound Intellectual and multiple Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research on Intellectual disabilities*. Vol 18 (20), pp 151-161.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Appendix 2

Focus group questions for teachers

Appendix 3

Focus group questions for support staff

Appendix 4

Greenside Curriculum support Document
for P levels 1 to 3

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Supporting young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties

This questionnaire has been designed to enable the senior management team to identify the a) knowledge b) assessment procedures c) planning and d) confidence of school staff in providing the most appropriate learning activities for pupils with profound and multiple learning activities.

The questionnaire items are derived from a content analysis of the key issues raised by the senior management team as part of the school development plan. The focus is to extend the understanding of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties within the school, by providing INSET, implementing advice from visiting professionals, providing improved curriculum and planning support, implementing robust assessment measures to inform planning and intervention and devise appropriate measures of reflecting progress.

When completing your questionnaire please answer from your experiences at the start of the academic year, September 2007 prior to any training.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Section 1 – Understanding of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

Q1 How would you rate your understanding of the developmental levels of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties? **Please put a √ on this scale**

Excellent Poor



Additional comments

Section 2 – Assessment of pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

Q2 Which forms of assessment/s do you currently use (that is your own and other professionals' assessments) to inform your planning and your intervention for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties? **Please put a √ in the appropriate box or boxes.**

P Level Scales

Pupil P level Target setting

Pupil Observations

Developmental Checklists

Individual Educational Plan Targets

Greenside Foundation Stage Profile

Foundation Stage Profile – DfES

Early Years Baseline - DfES

Welsh Routes to Learning

Therapy Assessments
(Occupational, Physiotherapy & Speech & Language therapy assessments)

Educational Psychology Assessments

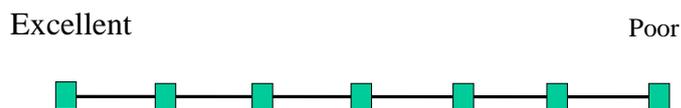
Alternative communication
(E.g. VOCA, Switch Assessments etc)

Others

Additional comments

Section 3 – Planning for pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

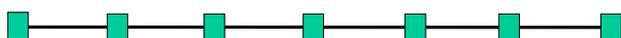
Q3 How would you rate the usefulness of the P Level data analysis in informing the progress of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties? **Please put a ✓ on this scale**



Additional comments

Q 4 How would you rate the usefulness of the new curriculum support materials in assisting you with planning the learning for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in your class? **Please put a ✓ on this scale**

Excellent Poor



Additional comments

Section 4 – Delivery of learning activities for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties

Q 5 How would you rate your success with organising the school day on a daily basis to maximise the learning opportunities for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in your class? **Please put a ✓ on this scale**

Excellent Poor



Additional comments

Q 6 How would you rate your success with structuring the daily timetable (that is individualising learning opportunities) for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in your class? **Please put a ✓ on this scale**

Excellent Poor

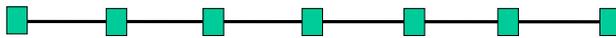


Additional comments

Q 7 How would you rate yourself in terms of providing the most appropriate learning activities for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in your class? **Please put a ✓ on this scale**

Excellent

Poor



Additional comments

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix 2

Focus group schedule

Focus group 1

Teachers' experiences of supporting PMLD pupils following focus on PMLD (academic year 2007-2008)

Introduction (recap on purpose of project, procedure, ground rules as outlined under 'Beginning of session')

Questions (used with group comprising teachers)

1. How do you feel that the focus on PMLD this year has extended your understanding of the different developmental levels between pupils within the P1 to P3 range?
2. What support has extended your confidence with assessing where pupils are at
 - a. Within the P1 to P3 range?
 - b. Within a P level phase?
3. What support in particular has assisted you with planning for the pupils within the P1 to P3 range?
 - a. Training/ curriculum support document/support from colleagues/ external agencies/other
4. What kind of effect has the assessment and training on switches had on your practice?
 - a. On planning for different learning situations?
 - b. On your competence with controlling equipment e.g. lights, fans, music, ICT use etc to facilitate choice making and interactive work for pupils with PMLD?
5. What has changed in your practice to develop and extend early interactive and communication skills of pupils with PMLD?
 - a. On monitoring sensory environment?
 - b. On positioning?

Supplementary questions (when time)

6. How have the following assisted/not assisted you with communicating the progress that pupils make within P levels 1 to 3?
 - a. Statutory P level assessments?
 - b. Greenside School Curriculum Support for pupils working within P- levels 1 to 3?
7. Is there any further support that would help you to assess, plan and teach pupils working within P levels 1 to 3?

8. Is there anything else you would like to say about:
 - a. Your experience of supporting pupils working within P –levels 1 to 3?
 - b. Or about this research project?

Conclusion (summary, thanks and debriefing)

Appendix 3

Focus group with Support Assistants

Support Staffs' experience of supporting PMLD pupils following focus on PMLD (academic year 2007-2008)

Introduction (recap on purpose of project, procedure, ground rules as outlined under 'Beginning of session')

Questions (used with group comprising Support Staff)

1. How do you feel that the focus on PMLD this year has extended your understanding of the different developmental levels between pupils working within the P1 to P3 range?
2. What support has extended your confidence with understanding where pupils are working within the P1 to P3 range?
3. What support in particular has assisted with your understanding of the reason for doing certain activities for pupils working within the P1 to P3 range?
 - a. Training/ curriculum support document/support from staff/ colleagues/ external agencies/other
4. What kind of effect has the assessment and training on switches and ICT had on your practice?
 - a. On understanding the planning for different learning situations?
 - b. On your competence with controlling equipment e.g. lights, fans, music, ICT use etc to facilitate choice making and interactive work for pupils with PMLD?
4. What has changed in your practice in working with pupils with PMLD?
 - On early interactive and communicative skills
 - On monitoring sensory environment?
 - On positioning?

Supplementary questions (when time)

6. Is there any other support that would aid your understanding and working practice with pupils with PMLD?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about:
 - a. Your experience of supporting pupils working within P –levels 1 to 3?
 - b. Or about this research project?

Conclusion (summary, thanks and debriefing)

Appendix 4

Greenside Curriculum Support Document for Pupils working within P levels 1 to 3.