

COMPLEX COMMUNICATION BASE – OLDHAM

Improved expressive language with teenagers

Profiles: Autistic spectrum disorder Down syndrome

I am using the Stern programme at Counthill School with 2 pupils:

Thomas (year 10) who is 15, has autistic spectrum disorder which includes a severe expressive/receptive language disorder (1st centile language function) and is working at the low end of level 1 in Maths. He is completely disapplied from the GCSE Maths curriculum. We do 35 minutes of Stern 3 times a week.

James (year 9) who is 14 and has Down Syndrome. He is working at the higher end of P levels and is completely disapplied from the KS3 Maths curriculum. We do 35 minutes of Stern 3 times a week. Thomas began in June 06 and James in Sept 06.

Since starting, their expressive language has noticeably improved. They are enjoying the role play where they are the 'teacher'. The very small-step approach with built-in repetition means they are secure in one skill before moving onto the next. Both students have fine motor difficulties and the size of the equipment is enables better manipulation when placing cubes and blocks into the devices.

We did not have a structured scheme to use before and this is ideal. The main strengths of the Stern programme are its structure, visual and concrete cues, use of repetition and the emphasis on developing fine-motor skills. In particular the number formation exercises in the Book 2 teaching points and workbook about number formation, have made a noticeable improvement in the legibility of James' written numbers. The sensori-motor exercise suggestions at the end of lessons are also useful. Just doing the workbook exercises in isolation would not be enough for pupils with SEN - it is good that the teacher's manual contains these extra exercises. The teaching (from Book 2) is vital - we use the book constantly as the language is already modelled there - this would be excellent for staff not familiar with the receptive language difficulties associated with the autistic spectrum.

We have used a wide variety of materials with Thomas before we had Stern, and in hindsight the language we used was too varied and the tasks did not follow on from each other in a structured enough way. The fact that the Stern workbooks and the equipment look the same has made a positive difference

It is often very difficult to teach children with autism how to count, and we do not think these pupils would have come so far without the blocks and the workbooks. We have worked to the end of Experimenting with Numbers-Book 1 but are revisiting Level 3 to reinforce addition and subtraction.

Thomas is ahead of James but the tasks can be done together and differentiated to take account of James' slightly lower ability. A welcome side-effect of the scheme has been the growing friendship and verbal interaction between the participants. Thomas has definitely been producing more speech and what he does say is less echolalic. The boys tease each other (and the teacher!) and love the games where they compete against each other!

The SENCO is looking at extending it to other pupils with statements.

Lead Teacher

The Complex Communication Difficulties Resource Base