



**“Successful outcomes: sustainability over time”**

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This Independent Study has been completed on behalf of the Southampton Advisory Outreach Service for SEND and Southampton Inclusion Partnership.

*This short piece of action research seeks to identify the characteristics that ensure impact from external interventions delivered by Southampton Advisory Outreach Service for SEND can be sustained over time. It considers how the service can work with schools to establish self sustaining systems that reduce dependency, thereby freeing the service to focus resources where there is greatest need. The research suggests that sustainable progress is dependent on the continued setting of specific targets that allow progress to be measured and evidenced over time. However, it also suggests that schools need to consider the wider progress made by pupils that cannot be captured by narrow progress measures. Furthermore, the research identifies some key factors that ensure pupils continue to make progress once external support is withdrawn. These include consistency in how support is delivered and effective communication systems that help to maintain consistent approaches to support and allow for adaptation as part of the cycle of ‘assess, plan, do and review’. Furthermore, the research considers how schools retain motivation to continue with recommendations once external support is withdrawn and the conditions that are needed to foster ongoing commitment.*

**Key words:** *sustainability, target setting, consistency, communication, motivation, adaptation, commitment.*

This paper builds on previous research carried out by Southampton Advisory Outreach Service (SAOS) into the challenges of measuring the impact of short term interventions for pupils with special educational needs (Belli, 2016). The research sought to identify the factors that contribute to successful intervention and highlight considerations for enhanced partnership working between the service and city schools, in order to ensure that pupils with special educational needs achieve the best positive outcomes. A significant finding from this research related to sustainability, the continued progress of the pupil once intervention has finished and the school’s capacity to maintain this over time. Indeed, the strength and success

of an intervention is not simply whether outcomes for the pupil have been achieved, but whether or not outcomes can be retained in the long term (Parkinson and Humphrey, 2008).

### **Research on progress and sustainability**

There is much research in relation to the effectiveness of setting targets as a means of measuring progress (Locke & Latham, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Parkinson and Humphrey, 2008). Hattie & Timperley (2007) highlight research that suggests specific goals generally make success criteria more evident and identify how the gap between current and intended learning may be reduced (p. 86-89). Locke and Latham (2006) also identify the importance of specificity in relation to goal setting, suggesting that specific and challenging goals lead to a higher level of performance than vague, easy to achieve goals (p. 265). Furthermore, Parkinson and Humphrey (2008) argue that any measure of success needs to be based on “visibly robust, replicable and definitively measurable” outcomes, demonstrated through the meeting of targets (p.4). In this respect, the capacity of schools to define and subsequently evaluate measurable outcomes for these pupils is key to sustaining progress long term.

However, whilst some would argue the importance of measuring pupil progress against specific targets, others would suggest that progress needs to be measured using more holistic methods. Rix *et al* (2009) argue that indicators of progress should be rich and varied, not simply indicators that can be readily measured (p. 92). Indeed, the measurement of the impact of an intervention cannot be seen simply in relation to whether or not a specific target has been achieved. Such narrow measures fail to take into account the impact on the whole child, their effect on other associated skills and their generalisation across different contexts.

Research suggests that there are a number of factors that impact on whether or not progress made by a pupil as a result of intervention can be sustained over time, with communication being a key factor (Dunsmuir *et al*, 2009; Locke and Latham, 2006). Dunsmuir *et al* (2009) point out that the identification and negotiation of outcomes takes place within a complex environment, requiring effective communication between all parties involved. They highlight

the need for agreement between professionals about which targets to set and clarity about how these can be achieved. They suggest that dialogue in relation to target setting can also motivate participation and ensure coherence and continuity between all interested parties (p.57). Furthermore, Locke and Latham (2006) argue that effective dialogue between those involved is necessary to securing shared commitment and responsibility for positive outcomes. This is vital to prevent simultaneous adherence to conflicting or competing goals, to enable key parties to track progress and keep the importance of the goal in sight (p.265).

Sustaining progress over time also requires motivation from all parties involved, both the pupil and supporting adults (Atkinson *et al*, 2006; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Scott and Nowlis, 2013; Koo & Fishbach, 2012; Brandt *et al*, 2014; Dunsmuir *et al*, 2009). Research by Atkinson *et al* (2006) raises the importance of goal setting in terms of the pupil and the promotion of self-efficacy. They suggest that a pupil's belief in their own ability and motivation to succeed is dependent on their ability to see themselves progress towards a goal. In this respect, targets need to be broken down into small steps so that they can more easily assess their progress towards completion (p.34). Furthermore, Hattie & Timperley (2007) suggest there is a greater commitment to securing a specific goal when there is belief that the goal is achievable (p. 86-89). Indeed, when goals are well defined, it is clear how the gap between current and intended learning may be reduced.

Sustaining motivation is also significant for schools providing support and securing their commitment to continue with an intervention once the service provider withdraws support. Research carried out by Scott and Nowlis (2013) suggest that goal specificity, which offers attainability and challenge, leads to a greater feeling of accomplishment (p.444) and therefore a greater chance of schools continuing to engage with the strategy. Furthermore, how service providers and schools monitor progress towards defined goals can also have an impact on the success of the intervention. Koo and Fishbach (2012) suggest that motivation to bring goals to completion is influenced by how progress is monitored. They argue that people prefer actions that increase the perceived pace of progress, the 'quick wins'. Moreover, they suggest that the closer people are to a goal, the more resources they invest in reaching it (p.493).

As already suggested, motivation is also closely linked to commitment. Brandt *et al* (2014) identify the need for whole school culture that expects commitment from all staff involved in a programme, ensuring that systems are directly and continuously reinforced (p.229). Furthermore, Dunsmuir *et al* (2009) point out that public commitment is a powerful tool in maximizing commitment and developing intrinsic motivation. For this reason, it is important that the person with prime responsibility for implementing the intervention should be involved in the action planning process in order to increase a sense of ownership and accountability (p.65).

Research also identifies consistency as a contributing factor in maintaining progress long term and the importance of monitoring systems and evaluation systems to secure that consistency. Becker and Domitrovich (2011) identify three elements related to consistency that help to sustain the positive benefits of interventions long term. Firstly, they suggest that the consistent use of shared language and skills across the workforce helps to reduce variability in implementation. This requires coordinated support systems to ensure that all staff receive appropriate training and feedback on performance. Furthermore, they identify the need for members of staff to “capitalize on naturally occurring learning opportunities” in order that pupils may practise newly learned skills and increase their ability to generalise these skills across different contexts. In this respect, a more integrated approach to intervention with reinforcement in a range of contexts could have greater impact than any individual programme. In addition, their research suggests that the quality and impact of an intervention is enhanced when progress is monitored whilst the intervention is in progress, rather than when it is completed. This ensures that opportunities to adapt the intervention and promote progress are not missed (p.582-586).

Finally, a further key factor in sustaining progress is the need to adapt interventions over time, as a result of the ‘assess, plan, do, review’ cycle (DfE & DoH, 2015). Parkinson and Humphrey (2008) suggest that intervention needs to be seen as a dynamic process which will necessarily require ongoing refinement in order to meet the changing needs of the child (p.4). Furthermore, Timmins and Miller (2007) highlight the need for schools to understand how and why their efforts to achieve particular outcomes work and why they do not (p.16). They highlight the importance for evaluators in identifying which contexts are most effective in

triggering the mechanisms that result in desired intervention outcomes (p.9-10). In this respect, it is important for schools to be able to specify which aspects of an intervention worked and which did not, as well as to identify contextual characteristics that may have exerted an influence on the intervention's success or failure.

### **Aims of this research**

The following research therefore seeks to identify the characteristics that ensure impact from interventions is sustained over time. It considers how the outreach service can work with schools to establish self sustaining systems that reduce dependency, thereby freeing the service to focus resources where there is greatest need. The following key questions will be explored:

1. Do pupils who met or exceeded their targets continue to make progress once outreach intervention is concluded? It will be necessary to explore how progress is measured and evidenced and how this is monitored over time.
2. What are the factors that impact on sustainability? It will be necessary to explore how schools continue to implement recommendations once SAOS support is withdrawn and how this is monitored and evaluated.

### **Methods**

The service carried out five case studies on pupils who met or exceeded targets as measured by the Target Monitoring and Evaluation System (Dunsmuir *et al*, 2009). Each mainstream school received a follow up visit by an Outreach Advisory Teacher six months after the conclusion of the outreach intervention. A mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative data was used to reduce bias and provide a range of perspectives to the enquiry. Data was collected as follows:

- An observation of the pupil in class (qualitative)
- Staff questionnaire (quantitative)
- Structured interview (qualitative)

## Ethical Considerations

In order to comply with guidelines for ethical research (BERA, 2011) an Ethics Statement was completed. This used a checklist to highlight ethical considerations and support the drawing up of specific procedures to handle the collection and dissemination of data.

Permission to use the data was gathered from schools and parents. Due to the complex learning needs of pupil participants, parents gave permission to use the data on behalf of their children. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pupil participants were allocated a reference number for the purposes of data collection.

## Findings

### Staff Questionnaire

Staff were asked to provide yes or no responses to a series of questions. These served firstly to identify whether the pupil had continued to make progress since SAOS support had been withdrawn and secondly, whether there had been any changes to the pupil's circumstances that could impact on progress, such as changes at home or within school. Furthermore, responses from the questionnaire sought to explore whether schools were continuing to use strategies previously recommended by the service.

*Table i Responses to staff questionnaire*

Have there been any staff changes to pupil support?	2 out of 5 cases Class Teacher and TA remained the same 2 out of 5 cases TA remained the same In only 1 case did both CT and TA change
Has the pupil remained at the same school?	100% remained
Has there been a change in home circumstances?	100% no change Although 2 reported some difficulties in the home
Has the level of support for the pupil continued?	4 out of 5 support has continued
Has the level of support for the pupil been increased?	In 1 case support was increased
Has the level of support for the pupil been reduced?	4 out of 5 no reduction In one case pupil began to receive less 1:1 support and more group work
Have any other professionals/agencies supported the pupil?	Only one pupil has needed support from other agencies

Has the pupil continued to make overall progress?	100% all pupils continued to make overall progress
Are systems/approaches recommended by SAOS still in place?	100% strategies recommended continue to be in use
Has the school continued to use the Target Monitoring and Evaluation system to set targets?	In 2 cases schools have continued to use TME to set targets
Are systems and approaches being used with other pupils with similar needs?	100% yes

A number of consistencies were identified across all five case studies. Firstly, all pupils continued to make overall progress six months after SAOS support had ceased, although there were discrepancies in relation to specific targets which will be discussed later. Each pupil remained at the same school and there had been no changes in home circumstances. In all cases, strategies previously recommended by SAOS continued to be in use and these systems and approaches were also being applied to other pupils with similar needs. In addition, in 4 out of 5 cases the level of support provided by the school was being continued and the pupil was still supported by either the same class teacher or teaching assistant. After six months, in only one case had the level of support been increased or support been required from another agency. Furthermore, one pupil had made sufficient progress for the school to reduce levels of 1:1 support. This data would suggest a correlation between maintenance of levels and systems of support and pupils' continued progress.

### **Progress against specific targets**

All pupils selected for the research had either met or exceeded expected targets set at the beginning of their intervention. Their progress against specific targets 6 months after intervention was completed, are as follows:

*Table i.. Targets set at the beginning of the intervention with outcomes 6 weeks later and 6 months later*

Pupil	Targets set at the beginning of the intervention	Outcome Review of targets 6 weeks later	Outcome Review of targets 6 months later
1A	-To complete a short task independently  -To recognise and use some vowel digraphs when reading and writing	-exceeded  -exceeded  -exceeded	-exceeding  -exceeding  -exceeding

	-To recognise numbers from 1 to 10		
2B	-To interact positively with peers -To use a self help strategy before asking for help from an adult	-exceeded -met	-meeting -no longer meeting
3C	-To retain and recall 2 pieces of information. -To retain a sentence on the line independently, using appropriate pressure and spacing. -To complete 3 short tasks/processes independently.	-exceeded -met -exceeded	-exceeding -exceeding -exceeding
4D	-To reduce incidents of inappropriate touch behaviour -To complete 3 tasks independently without adult prompting -To calm quickly using sensory activities	-exceeded -exceeded -exceeded	-no longer meeting -meeting -exceeding
5E	-To complete short simple tasks independently -To recognise and name 4 different emotions -To recall and retain 2 pieces of information.	-exceeded -met -met	-exceeding -exceeding -exceeding

Whilst staff reported that pupils continued to make overall progress, there were discrepancies identified in relation to progress against specific targets. 3 out of 5 pupils (60%) were exceeding targets 6 months after intervention had been concluded. Two of these pupils had made further progress and had moved from meeting to exceeding. However, 2 out of 5 pupils (40%) had lost some progress gains towards specific targets, falling to ‘meeting’ or ‘not meeting’. Investigation into why these pupils were no longer making progress against these targets revealed two factors. Firstly, there was a lack of specificity in the target itself, particularly in relation to measures, which led to difficulties in identifying and agreeing whether the target had been met. Secondly, discussion with staff revealed that due to the child’s changing and complex needs, the original target was no longer appropriate.

### **Pupil Observations**

Pupils were observed in class for a short period of time. The following table summarises behaviours presented by both pupils and adults during the observation.



Table ii. Pupil and staff behaviours identified during lesson observations.

Pupil Code	Pupil behaviours	Staff behaviours
1A	<p>Works independently</p> <p>Uses resources independently</p> <p>Engages in practical activity</p> <p>Uses phonic knowledge to decode</p>	<p>Allows pupil periods of independence</p> <p>Provides some targeted intervention</p> <p>Provides specific modelling</p> <p>Varies support structure with turn taking</p> <p>Provides opportunities for oral rehearsal</p> <p>Provides opportunities for practice</p> <p>Reminds pupil of resources that support independence</p>
2B	<p>Follows routines</p> <p>Follows instructions</p> <p>Listens to information</p> <p>Engages in class discussion e.g. hand up</p> <p>Maintains focus during practical input</p> <p><i>Offers an inappropriate suggestion to make a joke</i></p> <p>Works in a small group</p> <p>Shares ideas in a group</p>	<p>Sits in close proximity to pupil</p> <p>Provides verbal prompts</p> <p>Reminds about appropriate learning behaviour</p>
3C	<p>Works in a small group</p> <p><i>Slow to follow instructions</i></p> <p><i>Sits awkwardly in chair, chewing pencil case</i></p> <p><i>Does not respond to questions in large group</i></p> <p>Maintains attention and focus</p> <p>Makes use of visual cues, key words and scaffolds</p> <p>Responds to questioning in small group</p>	<p>Class teacher sits in close proximity</p> <p>Allows time for processing</p> <p>Allows time to finish task</p> <p>Allows extra time to transition</p> <p>Allows pupil to have sensory feedback e.g. chewing</p> <p>Provides support for talk with peers</p>

4D	<p><b><i>Sits on table</i></b></p> <p>Responds to instructions</p> <p>Interacts with peers</p> <p>Accepts unfamiliar adult</p> <p>Listens to and engages with story</p>	<p>Allows pupil to eat snack away from class</p> <p>Allows pupil to stand</p> <p>Reminds pupil about appropriate behaviour</p> <p>Allows pupil to sit on cushion</p>
5E	<p>Works in a small group</p> <p>Responds to interaction from adults</p> <p>Shows courtesy e.g. thank you, good afternoon</p> <p>Begins task</p> <p><b><i>Becomes distracted</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Complains about chair</i></b></p>	<p>Models social behaviour</p> <p>Provides encouragement</p> <p>Supports access to the task</p>

Behaviours displayed by pupils can be seen in three categories: attention, cooperation and application. Firstly, pupils demonstrate attention skills through listening to adults, responding to questions and sustaining focus. Pupils also demonstrate cooperation skills through participating in small group activities, interacting with peers, responding to instructions and sharing ideas. There is some evidence of pupils applying taught skills, such as using phonics to decode unfamiliar words. Where less appropriate behaviours are observed, such as becoming off task, staff re-direct pupils with reminders and prompts.

Staff support pupils in three main ways. Firstly, they use strategies that enable pupils to access learning and therefore achieve success. These include explicit modelling of new skills and providing opportunities to rehearse and practise. Secondly, staff support pupils' emotional well being by ensuring their physical and sensory needs are met. This can include providing reassurance through physical proximity or allowing pupils contact with sensory objects. Finally, staff promote independence by providing reminders and making decisions about when to intervene with targeted support.

Observations of pupils in their classes suggest that these five pupils have continued to make progress since support from SAOS ended. This is evidenced in the way pupils have

developed attention skills, can cooperate with others and apply newly learned skills in different contexts. Data collected also suggests that staff have continued to employ strategies developed with the support of SAOS. This would include using strategies to enable pupils to access learning, ensuring that the pupil’s emotional needs are met and promoting independent skills.

### Structured Interviews

Structured interviews were carried out with SENCOs to explore whether progress made during the period of SAOS intervention was sustained six months later. Questions served to identify how progress was identified and evidenced and whether previously recommended approaches had been applied to other pupils with similar needs. In addition, questions sought to identify strategies being used by schools to maintain, monitor and review pupil support and provision. Responses provided by schools was grouped and coded to identify emerging themes. The following tables present key themes expressed as a percentage of total responses for each question.

*Table iii Percentage of responses in relation to how pupil progress is evidenced*

<i>Has the pupil continued to make progress? How do you know?</i>	Aspect	Number of responses	% of responses
	Progress evidenced in recorded work	2	11%
	Progress evidenced in observations of behaviour	5	28%
	Progress evidenced in assessment data	5	28%
	Progress evidenced in relation to targets set	6	33%

A range of data was identified by schools as evidence for pupils’ continued progress following the cessation of SAOS support. Schools evidenced progress through qualitative analysis of pupils’ work and behaviour, as well as quantitative data demonstrated through assessment and tracking systems. This would suggest the importance schools place on a wider, more holistic view of progress, that goes beyond the quantitative data evidenced by whole school assessment systems. Indeed, wider progress

referred to by schools included an improvement in pupils’ attention, concentration and engagement, greater independence and productivity and reduced incidents of challenging behaviour. However, a majority of responses related specifically to target setting, including use of the Target, Monitoring and Evaluation System. It seems that schools felt that the setting of specific, short term targets enabled both staff and pupils to recognise and celebrate small steps of progress over time. This was reinforced in one school where the SENCo spoke of the implementation of a ‘learning log’ for pupils in which evidence against targets was collated:

*“We have put in place a Learning Log which has narrowed down the number of targets a pupil with SEN is working on at one time and pulled them together in one place. We add the pupil’s work to show evidence of meeting targets which is dated. The Teaching Assistant makes comments in relation to progress towards targets and this is shared with the pupil. We think of it as the child’s ‘story’...It is also a way of holding staff to account for the pupil’s progress.”*

*Table iv Percentage of responses in relation to approaches applied to other pupils with similar needs*

<i>Has the school successfully applied strategies and approaches to other pupils with similar needs? Can you give any examples?</i>	Aspect	Number of responses	% of responses
	Structured systems	15	75%
	Activities and resources	3	15%
	Reward and motivation	1	5%
	Peer support	1	5%

Schools also provided examples of how approaches recommended by SAOS had been used for other pupils with similar needs. A significant number of responses related to the implementation of systems that offered a clear visual structure for the pupil. These included strategies such as schedules, task boards, choose boards, timers and independent work tasks, providing visual cues with a clear start and finish point. One school spoke of how the use of task boards to chunk tasks into smaller, more manageable steps, had led to a reduction in the pupil’s dependence on adult support. Another school talked about how SAOS support had increased the school’s repertoire of strategies that could be tried immediately, before needing to seek advice from external professionals:

*“Many of the strategies are becoming our ‘bread and butter’. We are asking for outreach support only when we have tried lots of strategies first. It’s really helpful to us to access support from experts. They help to back up the advice we give to staff and enable us to develop strategies at a deeper level.”*

Table v Percentage of responses in relation to strategies used to ensure consistency

<i>How have you sought to ensure that language and strategies suggested by SAOS continue to be used consistently?</i>	Aspect	Number of responses	% of responses
	Communication systems	8	57%
	Training and support	3	21%
	Monitoring	3	21%

Staff were asked to identify strategies used to ensure that recommendations made by SAOS continued to be used consistently once support had been withdrawn. Responses highlighted three key areas in which consistency was maintained; through effective communication systems between those involved, ongoing training for those delivering support and through regular monitoring to quality assure for consistency. Responses suggested that schools identified communication as a significant factor in maintaining consistency and found a range of ways to facilitate communication. A number of schools cited the use of language with pupils as a specific barrier to consistency and described how the implementation of verbal scripts for all staff to follow, including lunchtime supervisors, helped to secure staff confidence:

*“The verbal script suggested by SAOS worked effectively. This gave confidence to the classroom staff and continuity when interacting with the pupil.”*

Table vi Percentage of responses in relation to strategies for maintaining staff motivation

<i>How have you sought to ensure that staff remain motivated to continue with strategies previously recommended by SAOS?</i>	Aspect	Number of responses	% of responses
	Identifying impact	5	42%
	Ongoing training	5	42%
	Monitoring	2	16%

Schools were questioned about how they ensured staff remained motivated to continue with recommendations, once regular supervision visits from SAOS had been withdrawn. Responses suggested that schools found ways of replacing the external support provided by SAOS with internal support systems. This included continued training for staff through coaching and modeling, provided by senior staff such as the SENCo or from within teams.

Furthermore, schools felt a significant factor in maintaining staff motivation was ensuring that staff understood the value of the intervention, by highlighting its impact on pupil progress, as well as on wider groups of pupils. Indeed, staff felt motivated when they could see that strategies used for one pupil benefited other pupils. For example, in one school, calming strategies used for an individual pupil were adopted for the whole class. Schools also described how setting short term, specific targets helped to highlight the impact of support by measuring progress:

*“The Target Monitoring and Evaluation System identifies small steps of progress over a short period and this is motivating for staff.”*

Table vii Percentage of responses in relation to strategies for applying learning across different contexts

<i>How have you sought to ensure that learning from interventions is applied across different contexts?</i>	Aspect	Number of responses	% of responses
	Communication between staff and with parents	4	57%
	Use of resources across different contexts	1	14%
	Delivery by Class Teacher	2	29%

Interviews with staff also explored how pupils were encouraged to apply learning from within specific interventions across different contexts. Responses from schools further highlighted the importance of effective communication systems between staff and parents, ensuring that targets were shared and reinforced by all adults supporting the pupil. Schools also described the use of portable resources across different contexts, providing pupils with a visual reminder to apply newly learned skills. For example, in one school, a task board was used in a range of lessons to support memory and promote independent working. Another school identified ways in which they had broadened the range of adults providing support, securing opportunities for the pupil to be reminded of new learning in different situations:

*“We also get the Class Teacher to deliver interventions e.g. the Teaching Assistant does the first session of precision teaching, then the Class Teacher does it on another day during registration. The Class Teacher is involved! We even involve Office Staff. It’s very powerful! The whole school is involved.”*

Table viii Percentage of responses in relation to how interventions are adapted over time

<i>How have you ensured that the intervention is adapted to meet the changing needs of the pupil?</i>	Aspect	Number of responses	% of responses
	Built-in review systems	6	50%
	Listening to voice of pupil	5	42%
	Communicating with parents	1	8%

Further discussion with schools identified the need to adapt interventions and strategies recommended by SAOS over time, in order to meet the changing needs of the pupil. Key to this process was establishing both informal and formal review systems to ensure that strategies remained appropriate to the pupil’s stage of development. These included regular class meetings with support staff, formal reviews of targets and Individual Education Plans as well as pupil progress meetings led by senior staff. In one school the SENCo set aside fixed times when staff could come and discuss pupils:

*“As SENCo I also have set times when staff can come and see me about pupils. I am available at some lunchtimes and after school. Staff sign up for half an hour appointments throughout the week.”*

Schools also emphasised the importance of listening to the views of the pupils in order to evaluate the appropriateness of current strategies. Responses indicated the need to provide more discrete resources and tools for older pupils that supported independence using less public methods:

*“Reward systems need to be updated. Older children want more autonomy and more discrete systems. We need to ensure there is progression in the resources we use.”*

### **Analysis and discussion**

The findings described above serve to demonstrate to what extent pupils continue to make progress once outreach support is withdrawn and highlight some of the factors that impact on sustainability.

*Do pupils continue to make progress once outreach intervention is concluded?*

Staff questionnaires and pupil observations demonstrate that pupils continued to make overall progress six months after SAOS support had ceased, although there was some regression against specific targets for two pupils. Progress was evidenced by pupil behaviour particularly in terms of attention skills, cooperation with others and the ability to apply newly learned skills in different contexts (Becker & Domitrovich, 2011). Structured interviews with staff highlighted that a wide range of sources were drawn on to evidence progress and that schools valued the importance of a much wider, holistic view of progress, reaching beyond attainment data (Rix *et al*, 2009). Furthermore, schools valued the use of specific short term target setting as a means to identifying and celebrating progress (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Locke & Latham, 2006; Parkinson & Humphrey, 2008). Where targets were not specific, this led to difficulties in identifying and agreeing progress. The research therefore indicates that setting pupils specific targets enables schools to not only identify and measure small steps of progress that may otherwise go unnoticed, but also provide evidence of progress. However, it is clear that specific target setting alone does not capture the progress of the whole child and a much wider definition of progress needs to be considered.

*What are the factors that impact on sustainability?*

The case studies highlight five key factors that contribute to the sustained progress of pupils following the conclusion of a SAOS intervention: consistency, communication, support, motivation and adaptation.

Firstly, data suggests that consistency is a key factor in sustaining progress (Becker & Domitrovich, 2011). In all cases there was no significant change to the child's school or home circumstances during the period between the end of SAOS intervention and the six months follow up. Furthermore, strategies and systems continued to be in place and were being delivered using a consistent approach. In addition, resources were consistently used across different contexts so that pupils could apply newly learned skills. In this respect schools need to identify systems that ensure consistent approaches are maintained. This would include finding ways to reduce instability for pupils at key transition points and using formal and informal monitoring and observation to quality assure consistency.



Schools also highlighted the importance of effective communication between supporting adults to ensure systems were maintained and delivered consistently, describing a range of ways in which communication could be facilitated (Dunsmuir *et al*, 2009; Locke & Latham, 2006). This included sharing targets with all supporting adults, including parents, and securing systems for evaluation and review. In this respect, schools need to consider their systems for communication at all levels in order to maximise opportunities.

Thirdly, pupil observations suggest that how staff support pupils also appears to be a factor in sustaining progress. Indeed, observations revealed that staff enabled pupils to access learning, ensured that pupils' emotional needs were met and promoted independent skills. This would suggest that the pupil's sustained progress is dependent on schools providing skilled staff with access to ongoing feedback, training and development opportunities (Becker and Domitrovich, 2011)

Furthermore, structured interviews highlighted the importance of motivating staff to continue with strategies once external support had been withdrawn (Scott & Nowlis, 2013; Koo & Fishbach, 2012). Schools identified the need for ongoing training, ensuring that staff continued to recognise the value of the intervention both on the pupils and on other pupils with similar needs. Staff described how specific target setting, allowing for small steps of progress to be measured, helped to motivate staff. In this respect, schools need to consider levels of motivation, the factors that motivate staff and support mechanisms to ensure motivation is maintained.

Finally, schools highlighted the importance of adapting recommended strategies over time, in order to meet the changing needs of the pupil (Parkinson & Humphrey, 2008; Timmins & Miller, 2008). This included listening to the views of pupils to ensure that resources and tools remained appropriate and matched to the pupil's emotional needs. Furthermore, targets need to remain appropriate and matched to the changing needs of the pupil. This requires schools to ensure that the 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle is firmly embedded within their approaches to intervention.

## **Conclusions and implications for future practice**

This research begins from the premise that Southampton Advisory Outreach Service for SEND works with schools to build long term capacity, ensuring pupils achieve positive outcomes that are sustainable over time. It aims to identify the factors that contribute to sustainability and to consider how the service can work with schools to establish self sustaining systems that reduce dependency. The research raises a number of implications for future practice in relation to target setting, approaches to intervention delivery and conditions needed to foster ongoing engagement.

Firstly, the research suggests that sustainable progress is dependent on the setting of specific targets that allow progress to be measured and evidenced over time. As such, targets need to be monitored and reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate, challenging and achievable. This has implications for schools in ensuring that staff who are responsible for setting targets have appropriate training and support. Furthermore, robust systems need to be put in place to ensure that target setting is integral to an ongoing cycle of ‘assess, plan, do and review’ and firmly embedded in school systems such as Individual Education Plans and provision mapping that are monitored on an ongoing basis (DfE & DoH, 2015). However, the research also indicates that whilst data derived from target setting is crucial to evaluating progress and impact, schools need to be aware of the wider progress that is made by pupils which reaches beyond the narrow parameters of clearly defined targets. In this respect, schools need to ensure that assessment systems also capture the progress of the whole child, so that wider progress can be identified and celebrated. With new government guidance on assessment, advocating that all forms of progress should be recognised and valued (*Standards and Testing Agency*, 2016), it seems an opportune time for schools to consider how achievement can be celebrated in its wider sense, including impact on associated skills and generalisation across different contexts (Rix *et al*, 2009).

Secondly, the research demonstrates that two key factors in ensuring pupils continue to make progress once service intervention is withdrawn, relate to the consistency in which support continues to be delivered (Becker & Domitrovich, 2011) and effective communication systems that help to maintain consistent approaches in the long term (Dunsmuir *et al*, 2009; Locke & Latham, 2006). This has implications for schools in terms of how support for pupils is monitored on an ongoing basis and how consistency is quality assured. Furthermore,

monitoring, evaluation and review may identify the need for further training to ensure that staff continue to remain appropriately skilled and changes to staff deployment are addressed in a timely fashion. In this respect, monitoring and management tools should clarify when monitoring visits will take place and who will be responsible. It will be useful to consider these aspects of ongoing provision before intervention is concluded so that the service can offer support and advice. In addition, schools may wish to consider additional follow up visits from the service, to quality assure ongoing provision and recommend necessary adjustments.

Finally, the research suggests that key to sustainability is the motivation of staff to continue with recommendations once external support is withdrawn (Scott & Nowlis, 2013; Brandt et al, 2014)). This has implications for how schools and leadership teams develop systems that help to foster the conditions for ongoing commitment. Whilst continued target setting can help to ensure staff recognise the value and impact of the intervention on pupils' progress, monitoring systems can help to remind staff of their accountability for the regular and consistent delivery of support. Furthermore, schools need to consider how training opportunities or follow up visits by the service can re-energise and refresh strategies that may need modification.

In conclusion, this research set out to identify the characteristics that ensure impact from interventions is sustained over time, thereby reducing dependency and freeing the service to focus resources where there is greatest need. The author recognises the small scale nature of the research, centred on a limited number of case studies. However, it does identify some of the factors that lead to sustainability, including approaches to target setting, intervention delivery and systems for monitoring and evaluation. Schools will benefit from auditing current practice to examine how systems support and promote sustainability to secure pupil progress and build capacity over time. In addition, the research suggests that continued access to outreach support would provide an effective mechanism for quality assuring provision and making appropriate adjustments, thereby securing positive outcomes for pupils in the long term.

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