**11. Working with SEND Students**

**This Best Practice Guide provides a detailed framework to effectively plan, deliver, and review a range of sessions that involve students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).**

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| **PLAN** |
| **Understand the Needs**:* **Gather Information**: Before planning any type of session, obtain detailed information on the specific needs of the students who will be participating. This might include Individual Education Plans (IEPs), reports from SENCOs, or consultations with support staff. Understand each student's strengths, challenges, and triggers to tailor your approach effectively. Planning is the key.
* **Communicate Early**: Engage with SENCOs or relevant staff early in the planning process to identify any students with SEND. Discuss their specific requirements and how these might impact your session. This could include understanding students' sensory sensitivities, preferred learning styles, or mobility issues.
* **Plan for Diversity**: Consider the full range of SEND, including physical disabilities, learning difficulties, sensory impairments, and neurodiverse conditions like autism or ADHD. Ensure your plan accommodates these diverse needs.

**Adapt Resources**:* **Accessible Materials**: Prepare materials in accessible formats. Use buff-colored paper to reduce glare, which can be beneficial for students with dyslexia or visual stress. Choose clear, sans-serif fonts like Arial or Verdana, and keep text large and uncluttered. Simplify content where necessary, breaking down complex information into manageable chunks.
* **Scaffolding Strategies**: Design your session with scaffolding in mind—providing temporary supports that help students complete tasks independently. This could include visual aids, such as diagrams or charts, sentence starters for written tasks, or step-by-step instructions. Scaffolded supports should be tailored to the specific needs of the students and can be gradually reduced as they become more confident.
* **Alternative Formats**: Prepare to provide materials in multiple formats (e.g., audio, large print, or Braille) if needed. Ensure that digital content is compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies.

**Consider Environment**:* **Accessibility**: If required select a venue that is fully accessible to all students. Ensure that the location is wheelchair-friendly and that there are no physical barriers that could impede access. Check that there are appropriate facilities, such as accessible toilets.
* **Sensory Considerations**: Ensure the environment is free from sensory triggers that could cause discomfort or distress to students with sensory sensitivities. Avoid harsh lighting, loud noises, or strong smells. Consider the use of calming colours and low-stimulus areas where students can take a break if needed.
* **Inclusive Layout**: If possible and where required arrange the room in a way that promotes inclusion, with clear sightlines for all students and seating arrangements that facilitate easy movement and communication.
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| **DO** |
| **Deliver with Flexibility**:* + **Clear Instructions**: Begin the session with clear, concise instructions. Use simple language and avoid jargon. Provide an overview of what the session will cover, what the students are expected to do, and what support will be available. Regularly check for understanding by asking questions or encouraging students to paraphrase key points.
	+ **Interactive Scaffolding**: Implement scaffolding strategies during the session. This could include using visual aids to explain concepts, providing written prompts to guide students' thinking, or breaking tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. Be prepared to provide additional support as needed, and gradually reduce scaffolding as students gain confidence.
	+ **Real-Time Adaptation**: Stay flexible and be ready to adjust your approach based on students’ reactions. If certain activities are not working for some students, be prepared to adapt them on the spot. For example, if a group activity proves too challenging for a student with social anxiety, provide an alternative way for them to participate.

**Engage All Students**:* **Inclusive Participation**: Encourage participation by adapting activities to accommodate different abilities and needs. This could involve providing alternative ways for students to engage with the content, such as through drawing, role-play, or using assistive technology. Make sure that all students feel valued and included, regardless of their abilities.
* **Use of Inclusive Language**: Be mindful of the language you use. Avoid terms that might be exclusionary or stigmatizing. Use examples and scenarios that reflect the diversity of the student population, including different abilities, races, and backgrounds. This helps create a sense of belonging for all students.
* **Peer Support**: Where appropriate, encourage peer support. Pair students with different strengths so they can help each other. This not only supports learning but also fosters a sense of community and cooperation.

**Monitor and Support**:* **Ongoing Observation**: Continuously monitor students throughout the session to identify those who may need additional help. Watch for signs of disengagement, frustration, or distress, and intervene early to provide support. This might involve offering additional explanations, modifying tasks, or providing a brief break.
* **Responsive Support**: Be proactive in providing support, but also encourage students to ask for help when they need it. Create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their needs and asking for assistance without fear of judgment.
* **Adaptation in Action**: If you notice that a particular strategy isn’t working, don’t hesitate to change it. For example, if a student with ADHD is struggling to stay focussed, you might introduce a movement break or use more interactive elements to keep them engaged.
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| **REVIEW**  |
| **Gather Feedback**:* **Student and Staff Feedback**: After the session, gather feedback from both students and staff. Use a variety of methods, such as surveys, informal discussions, or observation notes. Pay special attention to feedback from those directly supporting SEND students, as they can provide insights into what worked well and what could be improved.
* **Inclusive Feedback Collection**: Ensure that the feedback process is accessible to all students. This might involve providing feedback forms in different formats, allowing verbal feedback, or offering one-on-one feedback sessions for students who need additional support.
* **Analyzing Feedback**: Look for patterns in the feedback that indicate which strategies were most effective. Identify any common challenges or areas where students struggled, and consider how these could be addressed in future sessions.

**Reflect on Success**:* **Successes and Challenges**: Reflect on the session to identify what worked well and what could be improved. Consider how effective the scaffolding and adaptations were in supporting students with SEND. Document these reflections for future reference and share them with colleagues to build collective knowledge and improve practice.
* **Case Studies and Examples**: Where possible, document specific examples or case studies of success. These could be shared with other staff members as examples of best practice or used in training sessions to illustrate effective strategies.
* **Future Planning**: Use the insights gained from reflection to inform future planning. Adjust your approach to better meet the needs of SEND students in future sessions, incorporating new strategies or resources as needed.

**Plan for Future Improvements**:* **Continuous Improvement**: Make a plan to address any areas for improvement identified in the review process. This could involve seeking out additional training, investing in new resources, or collaborating with colleagues to develop new strategies.
* **Ongoing Training**: Stay informed about the latest best practices in working with SEND students. Attend relevant training sessions, read up-to-date literature, and engage in professional development opportunities that focus on inclusive education.
* **Sharing Best Practices**: Share the lessons learned from your session with colleagues. This could be through formal debriefs, staff meetings, or informal discussions. Encourage a culture of continuous improvement where staff are always looking for ways to better support SEND students.

*Credit and Thanks to Sophie Chance, Associate Vice Principal, Grace Academy Darlaston.* |