



Target Setting for Pupils with SEND

Are Schools Using Targets Effectively?

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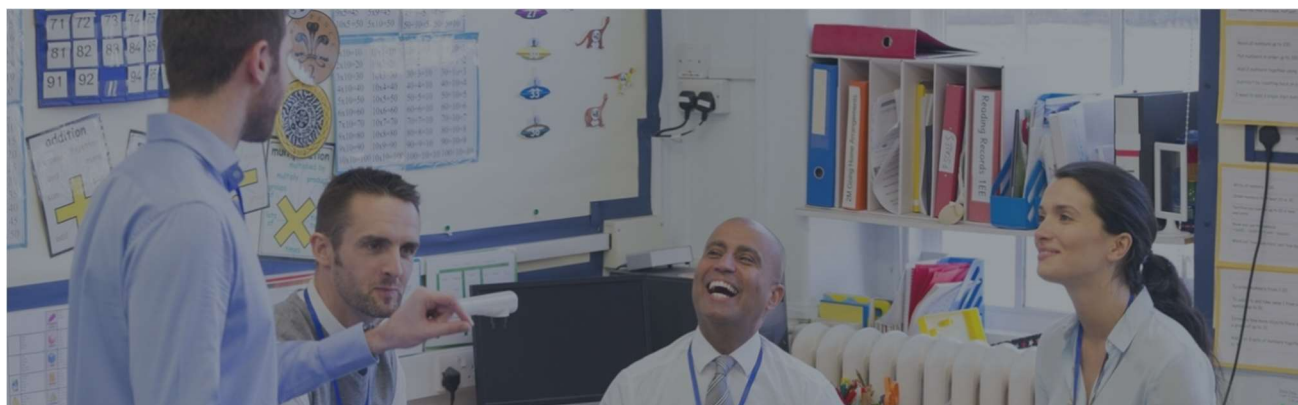


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Introduction

I have worked with schools for over 20 years and in that time the one issue I keep seeing again and again is target setting. For years schools have used linear numerical targets, they set an attainment point to reach at the end of the year or an amount of progress. These targets are often set by a spreadsheet or a piece of software. The targets were often meaningless and irrelevant. They reduce morale, they are a burden on schools. One of the reasons the P Levels were removed is how schools used their data.

The data and targets became more important than the pupils. So why do schools still set these targets? Are targets useful? What should they be doing? In this document I try to answer some of those questions. I look at the types of targets schools use and discuss if they have any benefit for the pupils. I also discuss what type of targets schools should be using.

The whole point of targets is to improve outcomes for pupils. To improve the provision and support for the pupils. They are not about accountability. The target is rarely about the pupils or the teachers, they are about the leadership of the school. You are measuring how well the leadership team are supporting their staff to achieve the leadership team's goals.

"It's the way we have always done it" is a phrase that is used too much in education. It should never be said and should always be questioned. If someone says it, ask them what is the benefit to the pupils? Schools will say they have always set targets, so they should continue to set targets. With all of these targets over all of these years, how is the school not outstanding?

When you are being asked to set targets, ask them what the benefit is, what is the reason for the target, what are they trying to change, what is the change they are trying to monitor the impact of? The target should not just be set, but something the school should be actively working to achieve. If they can't really give you a reason and you aren't actively working towards it as a school, don't set the target. There is no need to set termly or annual numerical targets.

I am not saying don't monitor progress and attainment, that is really important, I am asking what does setting a target achieve above simply monitoring progress and attainment?

Throughout this document I discuss many things that schools do that have absolutely no purpose and schools should have stopped doing a long time ago. This includes using standardised targets for all pupils, using a formula to set targets, adjusting targets once they have been set and then how they fail to use the data. So many schools simply use the targeting data to build a graph. The targeting data is not used to drive change or make any improvements.

If you don't have time to read this whole document, jump to page 22 to read my summary. The summary will tell you what to stop doing and what you should be doing instead. If you are curious about why, you can read the relevant section in the document.

What is Target Setting?

The Cambridge Dictionary says that target setting is “the practice of giving people targets to achieve and of deciding what these targets should be” and a target is “a level or situation that you intend to achieve”.

Target setting is the simple process of saying where you want to be, often at a specific time. We do this in lots of areas of our lives, on long journeys we say when we expect to arrive and with the couch to 5K, we aim to be running 5k in 9 weeks (a very aspirational target!!!). Sometimes we achieve our target, sometimes we don't, many of us are still stuck in week 2 of the couch to 5k.

We have lots of targets in schools, we have a whole school improvement plan that focuses on improving outcomes for pupils and should focus on quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management. All these areas are working towards improving outcomes for pupils. How do you judge if the changes have been successful? This is where schools will often set a target around pupil performance in academic areas.

Within mainstream schools there are standardised assessments – The Reception Baseline, Phonics, Times Tables, the SATs for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and GCSEs in Year 11. Schools have very little freedom with targets around these assessments. The targets are based on previous learners' outcomes.

But what about pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)? If pupils are not accessing the above assessments, then they don't have expectations given to them. These pupils do however have a negative impact on school data. The data being collected on pre-key stage standards are likely to inform future expectations, but for at least the next few years we do not have that worry. Whether or not the pupils access the standardised assessments, has no impact on the pupil, the assessments are about the school. The standardised assessments do not cover the skills/areas that are meaningful for a pupil, and they don't help identify next steps or areas of development.

Many special schools still set academic targets, setting expectations for the end of year. There is no legal obligation to set academic targets for pupils, so schools can stop doing this. If a pupil has an EHCP (IDP in Wales), then you will have an annual review and write a plan/target, focussing on the areas of development relevant for the child.

Have you heard of Campbell's law? It states that, *'The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor'* (Campbell, 1975). Although this is talking about social indicators, it applies to any process. At the Bryanston Education Summit back in 2018, Amanda Spielman, the Ofsted Chief Inspector, made a similar point:

“I have recently been reading 'The Tyranny of Metrics' by Jerry Muller. And while I don't agree with every line of argument, he delivers a powerful critique of a dependence on data at all costs—and especially in public services such as schools and medicine. He warns throughout about the dangers of neglecting human judgement. What I found most interesting was his discussion of Campbell's Law as it applies to education. For those of you who don't already know it, Campbell's Law is the idea that 'the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.'”

If a school or local authority set targets and there is any form of pressure from the school or authority to achieve the target, then the data will not be accurate. The data is likely to show that the targets have been achieved or as close as possible to being achieved, even if they haven't. The data might be massaged by individual teachers or leaders. It may involve the school providing support during tests, however it may be provided. It may involve the school trying to dissuade certain types of pupils joining a school or trying to persuade current pupils that the school is not a good fit for them if they are not performing academically. There can be pressure from the local authority and school leaders to achieve these targets, to make sure the school and therefore the local authority is "doing well". They want bragging rights, they want a big banner at the school entrance, they want to be at the top of the local authority league table and be given a big pat on the back. This isn't every high performing school, but I have had so many people relay their personal experiences that I know it is not a few isolated schools doing this, the pressure to perform by local authorities and league tables is real and schools feel this pressure.

The whole process was designed to improve schools, for schools to reflect on their performance and look at how to improve. There is no accommodation in the results for pupils with SEND or for pupils starting with low attainment. The score is simply a percentage of pupils in the current year who met the expected standard, excuses are not allowed. The process is not supportive, and it does not promote inclusion. It is a stick that is used to bash schools and teachers.

I am hugely pleased to see that the school's results in standardised assessments have been removed as a glass ceiling in Ofsted Inspections. It was hugely unfair for schools with higher numbers of SEN, pupil premium, EAL etc. where pupils were not meeting the expected standard at the end of the key stage, but had made good or outstanding progress.

The SEN Green Paper discussed "magnet schools", the schools that support pupils with SEND well and therefore attract more pupils with SEND. These exist due to the pressures mentioned above. They exist because some schools put their data ahead of their pupils.

If a school's focus is too narrow, only looking at progress data in reading, writing and maths, this will be the driving force behind their teaching and learning. This is likely to come at the expense of every other area of child development such as social, emotional, language, sensory, and physical development, not forgetting the other areas of the National Curriculum subjects. For learners with SEND, there are often a number of barriers to learning before we even get to reading, writing and maths. It is important that we are able to identify the cause and the effect. We don't want to put all our effort into the areas that are important to others, because that is where they see an effect.

There are different types of targets and targets for different reasons. I worry that a large number of special schools are using the least useful type of target setting for the worst reasons and they are doing it because they are pressured into setting these types of targets. The expectation is that special schools do the same as mainstream schools. This is wrong.

More Than One Type of Target

When we talk about targets, we generally think about the most common type of target, the school wide attainment/progress targets for end of year in Reading, Writing and Maths for each pupil. This is probably the least useful target for pupils with SEND. There is often no individualisation, all pupils have the same expectations, or they are on a flightpath.

We also have targets as part of the EHCP process (similar processes are available in other countries 😊). When you have the annual review, you are reviewing the previous year and setting targets for the future and where you would all like the pupil to be when you get to the next annual review. These are very different targets. Not only are they looking at areas other than Reading, Writing and Maths (they could be included if applicable), they are focussing on the pupil's barriers. The targets focus on the individual areas where the pupil needs support. The targets are not attainment levels or amounts of progress, they are identifying areas for development and the success criteria. Success criteria is where you want the pupil to be, how the pupil will demonstrate they have made progress in that area. The EHCP annual review process is the polar opposite of the attainment/progress targets most schools set for Reading, Writing and Maths.

Schools often use IEPs/IDPs/ILPs/IPs as a way to target barriers to learning for pupils, a way to focus on areas important for that pupil. They identify individual areas and identify the success criteria. These barriers could be in Reading, Writing or Maths, but they could also be around the pupil's communication, behaviour, executive function or other areas.

A lot of special schools do set school wide attainment/progress targets for each pupil, not in line with the national expectations, instead they are reduced and reflect the level of need of the pupils. The target is often an amount of progress from each pupil's starting point, not a set attainment point for all pupils. Some schools use one value for all pupils, others use a pathway system, with different groups having different expectations around progress and attainment and others set individual targets for pupils.

Lots of schools have targets around attendance and targets around reducing negative behaviour/incidents. There is often a school wide target, but with some reasonable adjustments for some pupils. They can be aspirational but recognise the challenges some pupils face.

Who Are Targets For?

There are often big data machines running in schools. Setting targets, reviewing results, adjusting targets and repeating every term, every year. This happens in secondary schools trying to predict their GCSE results and their progress 8 scores, primary schools predicting their SAT results, but the same process does happen in some special schools, creating targets and monitoring progress towards these targets. The question is, who are the targets for?

The most hopeful answer would be the targets are for the children, they are there for the children to achieve, to help improve the outcomes for the children. When you look at secondary schools targeting GCSE results, sharing predicted grades with pupils and parents, this is what they are generally doing. They are involving the parents and pupils in the process so that the parents and pupils can have an impact on the outcomes.

When we look at primary schools predicting SATs results, it shows a different picture in how they manage their targets. Primary schools don't typically share the SATs results target, as they are trying to reduce the stress levels of their pupils, they are protecting their pupils. The overall impact of the SATs results has a limited impact on the pupil's future life. Not achieving the expected standard won't directly impact future opportunities. Schools provide additional support to pupils within the school, but don't ask parents to support their children at home.

There is a big difference between these processes. The secondary targets are about the pupil, with everyone involved so they can achieve the outcomes. The primary targets are about the school, with just the staff in the school involved in achieving the outcomes. The primary schools understand that the importance of the results is for local authorities and league tables, not the pupils. You may argue that schools improving SATs their results has a benefit for the pupils, it might, it depends on how the improvement was achieved.

When it comes to setting targets in special schools or setting targets for pupils with SEND in mainstream, it is important to think about who these targets are for? One of the ways to identify this is to look at who the targets are being shared with, are they being shared with the parents and pupils? EHCPs are all about the pupils. The targets in the EHCP are shared with parents, pupils and everyone involved with the child. This enables everyone involved to use their best endeavours so the pupil can hopefully achieve what has been targeted.

When it comes to setting numerical targets for pupils, who is involved in the process of setting the targets? Who is informed of the targets? Who is updated after each review of the progress towards the targets? What is the impact if the targets are not achieved? Who does it impact? Identifying who the targets are for and what the impact is if they are achieved/not achieved will help you work out how important the targets really are.

The next question to ask is what would happen if you stopped setting these targets? Would there be any impact at all?

How Often Should You Review Targets?

In the Making Data Work report from the Workload Advisory Group, it says that data should only be collected 2 or 3 times a year. There is no point in collecting data before you can see if there has been an impact from the changes you have made since collecting and analysing the last set of data.

When setting targets, there should be at least one review point between the date the targets are set and when the targets are for, this allows schools to adjust the provision if possible or at least identify the cause for not achieving the target. Reviewing targets should be incorporated into the data analysis that happens throughout the year.

Annual IEPs/IDPs etc. will be reviewed throughout the year to assess the progress being made towards the target. This could happen termly or half-termly. The targets may be updated/replaced. With the numerical type targets around progress and attainment, it makes sense to review the progress at the end of each term. It is important to understand how learning progresses throughout the year. Is it linear - is progress relative to the number of weeks in the term or does most of the progress happen in the last term when it all comes together? EHCPs should be reviewed termly, this should involve the parents, but not the full range of professionals that are involved in the annual review.

When you get to the point the target should be achieved, whether this is the end of term or end of year, the result should not be a surprise. The review points help you monitor the progress towards targets and adjust provision to achieve the target. When you get to the end of the period, you should already know if the targets were achieved or not. They may have just missed, but it shouldn't be a big shock. Once you identify a target won't be met, you should look at how to adapt provision to meet future targets.

There is often a big annual review of data at the end of the school year. The final review of the targets set at the beginning of the year, then using the information help drive school improvement. Primary schools are likely to review end of key stage expectations for year groups. Are Year 4 on track to make the expected standard at the end of key stage 2? The annual data review in the summer term often has the most discussion as it informs the school improvement plan.

In the same way the annual data review looks back at the whole year and informs the plans for next year, the annual review does the same for pupils' EHCPs. What is discussed at an annual review should reflect the discussions had with parents throughout the year.

What Does Not Meeting a Target Mean?

The answer is anything and nothing. There are many reasons a pupil might not reach a target. You need to start with the process of setting the target. How was it set? Who was involved? Was it realistic? Often a pupil not achieving a target simply highlights how badly the target was set. If a pupil has made around 30% progress each year for the last 2 years and you have set a target of 50%, but there has been no change in the provision, the probability of achieving that target is extremely low. How will their rate of progress increase by two thirds with no change in how you are supporting the pupil?

The next place to look is in the provision that you are providing. At the start of the year you set what you feel are realistic targets. They are increased from the previous year because of the planned changes within the school and improvements in the provision. As you progress through the year you realise the targets will not be achieved. What does this mean? It probably means that the plan of improvements wasn't effective. Did you expect too much too soon? Were you able to follow the plan? Was everyone given time and support to implement the changes? Schools need to reflect on how well changes are implemented, do the changes have time to be embedded?

Both of these targets were probably not met because the provision was not effective. It will likely impact all pupils, or a large number of pupils within a school. The final place to look at is the pupil and the factors that impact the pupil; the support, the focus for the year, home life and so many more factors. These often cannot be accounted for when setting targets. This will have an impact on a individual pupil basis. If a pupil doesn't achieve a target due to external factors, what does it mean? For the coming year you will put things in place to support the pupil and you are likely to adjust expectations based on your knowledge of the pupil's needs.

Achieving or not achieving a target reflects many things and you cannot infer a judgement from this binary decision. This is especially the case if you set a school wide target, without any allowance for individual pupil's needs.

Target vs Judgement

Are they the same thing or are they different? The answer is it depends on the target and how it was set. This tells you who the target is for. A judgement should be based on a pupil's performance, how much of their potential did they achieve? If a pupil works extremely hard but doesn't achieve a target, do we judge them as failed or has not made good progress? If a pupil achieved the target, but wasn't really pushed and could have achieved more, do we judge them as making good progress? A pupil achieving a target and a pupil making good progress is often two different things, they may coincide, but people often mistake achieving a target as good progress.

If a target was set for multiple pupils, for example all pupils make 50% progress, if a pupil achieves the target, can you infer a judgement? Have they made good progress? They made the progress you wanted, but did they make the progress they are capable of? Could they have made more?

You set the same target for a pupil this year as last year, but you also changed the provision hugely as you realised it didn't work. What does achieving the target mean? If they didn't achieve it last year, but did this year, your changes have been effective. This is a reflection on what you have done to support the pupil, not the pupil. If they achieved the target last year and achieved it again this year, it hasn't told me anything apart from the new provision isn't any worse than last year's provision. Have either of these situations told me anything about the pupil?

If you are setting individual targets for pupils, with the teacher's input, looking at prior attainment, changes that have happened or will happen, then the target should be realistic and aspirational. These will typically be the SMART/Scruffy targets. If a pupil achieves a well designed target, then you can infer a judgement. You created a target based on what you feel they can achieve.

If you are setting targets across the whole school using formulas or something similar, setting individual targets, without getting input from teachers, then you cannot infer a judgement around progress. The target was for senior leaders to judge progress towards their own goal, not goals for the pupils.

Should Targets be Adjusted?

A target is something you are aiming for, a destination to reach by a certain time. When you review the target and progress towards the target, the target should not change. You might already know you cannot meet the target and a likely end point could be added, but the original target should remain.

If I was aiming to be in the Guinness Book of World Records next year with the world's longest high five, I would need to put some serious training in and also find someone else to do it with. For those interested the current world record is 6.44km. Two people ran towards each other with their respective arm raised ready to high five over a combined distance of 6.44km. I now have a target to aim for to set a new world record; 6.5km (3.25km each) and I want to do it next year. If I reviewed this 3 times a year, hopefully we should be able to run for around 1.25km each at the first review point. If we get to this review point and I haven't really made any progress and my arm gets tired after 100 metres, it really isn't looking good. Would bringing the target down at that point provide any benefit?

If we get to next year and when it comes to doing the high five, we only manage 500 metres, we have completely failed. What went wrong? Should I have adjusted the target? If I adjusted the target to 500 metres after the first review point, I would have achieved my target. What would that actually mean? I achieved a target, but I wouldn't be in the Guinness Book of World Records. By not adjusting my target, it looks like I failed. I made the same amount of progress, but I didn't reach my target. What is more important, the progress or meeting the target?

The main difference to me is what comes next. Do I learn from my previous over-confidence? When I go for my next world record attempt of eating the most After Eights in one minute without my hands (currently 10), am I going to bring my expectations down to something achievable? Am I going to give myself longer to achieve my target? Or am I going to set another unrealistic target that I cannot achieve? In the context of a school, what is more important? Is it that you meet the targets, or that you help your pupils to achieve? If you always achieve your targets, you won't ask what went wrong, it won't drive change.

Do you spend a week at the end of the first term reducing those very overly aspirational targets set by a system to something more realistic? Looking at the progress the pupils made in the autumn term, you realise the targets are completely unachievable. Doing it once is understandable but repeating the same mistake every year is wrong. Those targets really should have been agreed and set at the start of the school year. If they have been agreed and set, they are set for the year and shouldn't be adjusted. If you don't meet those targets, you will review the targets and the provision at the end of year. You will discuss what went wrong. Hopefully you will realise the targets were unrealistic, this should lead to setting more realistic targets next year.

Meeting targets boosts morale, not meeting targets is demoralising. Setting unachievable targets reduces staff morale. Bringing those targets down doesn't suddenly boost morale as they are now achievable, it highlights

that they were set wrong in the first place. It also highlights those teachers probably had no involvement in the target setting process.

Setting targets that can be achieved will boost staff morale as they can achieve what they set out to achieve. However, not chasing targets is probably the biggest morale boost, especially those targets with no real meaning.

Should All Pupils Achieve All of Their Targets?

No is the simple answer. You tell your pupils that part of learning is failing, about being in the learning pit, overcoming challenges. It is the same for all of us. Sometimes we fail, but generally we succeed. I personally like the quote “I haven’t failed, I have just found another way that won’t work”. If we tell our pupils it is ok to fail and that we can learn from failure, why do schools always like to achieve all their targets?

To motivate a donkey, you dangle the carrot in front of them, and they try to reach it, they never reach the target, but they keep trying. Put it too far away and they won’t try, put it too close and they will get the carrot and stop. Who are we dangling the carrot in front of? The children or the teachers? Is the carrot in front of you? Do the children even know about the carrot? Who gets the reward? Is there a reward? There is no reward, not for teachers and for pupils, the only one that has any real relevance is gaining their GCSEs.

If you feel that all pupils should achieve their targets and you inform teachers that their pupils need to meet their targets, then your data will become corrupt. The Campbells law I mentioned at the beginning of this document states that the more you use data for decision making, the more corrupt it will become. If you make teachers accountable for their data, then their data will show that the pupils have met their targets. You then head into a world that a number of schools are in, where their data does not reflect their pupils. Their data is not about their pupils, it is not about school improvement, it is about how much pressure teachers and leaders are under from outside of the school. At some point it will all unravel.

It is not about your pupils achieving their targets, it is about how well you set the targets. How close were the pupils to the targets you set? The idea of targets is about being aspirational. Running faster, running further, getting more spellings correct or getting my times tables, they are all about the next step, small incremental improvements. If I got 5 out of 10 in my spelling test last week and I aimed for 7 out of 10 this week and I got 6 out of 10, have I failed or was the target simply about trying to improve my result? If I aimed for 10 out of 10 for this week, how would I view that target? Would I see it as unachievable as I am so far away getting 5 out of 10 last week? Would the huge increase demotivate me as I know I won’t achieve it? If I got 6 out of 10 this week, would I feel happy? I did improve, but I am still miles away from getting my 10 out of 10.

Setting a realistic, but aspirational target that is shared with pupils is likely to improve outcomes. The pupil and staff must feel it could be achieved. The progress should be celebrated, it doesn’t really matter if they meet the target, it is the progress that is important.

The right amount of aspiration is really hard to achieve. I would say that it is not about achieving or not achieving a target, but how close the pupil was to the target. Did they just miss out or did they achieve more? If you set individual numerical targets for your pupils and they were all within 10% of the target (above or below), then you have probably set targets with the right amount of aspiration, with a good understanding of your pupils.

The question is, do you really need to set targets at an individual pupil level? Could you set a target for the whole school?

Targets vs Progress

Some people confuse achieving targets and making progress. I have been to schools who feel that if pupils achieve more targets than last year, they are making more progress. It will always be more important to look at progress than targets. Campbell's law comes into effect again as schools can set targets with less challenge to make the school appear more successful.

One school I visited claimed that they are closing the pupil premium gap as more of their pupil premium pupils achieved their targets compared to the non-pupil premium pupils. You could see in their data that there was a clear difference between the two groups. However, when we switched to looking at progress and attainment, the non-pupil premium made significantly more progress than the pupil premium pupils and the gap was widening at an alarming rate. They chose to ignore the progress comparison and focussed on the target comparison as it showed them the data they wanted to see. They saw their data as a way to celebrate their provision for the pupil premium pupils, I saw data that showed they were failing their pupil premium pupils and alarm bells started going off in my head as the school were unaware as they were chasing these targets and that is how they measured themselves.

The simple answer is the school was less aspirational for their pupil premium pupils. I did not see what the targets were or how they were set, I just saw the results at the end. It might have been a subconscious bias, setting less aspirational targets for the pupil premium pupils without realising. This meant the pupil premium pupils met their targets and this could be celebrated. They may have set a target that more pupil premium pupils need to meet their academic targets. They achieved their target, not by making more progress, but by being less aspirational. It was a bad target to set, the school were able to corrupt the target, instead of improving provision to achieve the target, they reduced their aspiration. The target shouldn't have been about achieving academic targets, it should have been about making more progress.

How progress changes over time will give an insight into the school and how they have adapted their provision to support their pupils. If you are seeing an increase in progress, the changes they are implementing are effective. If you are seeing a decrease in progress, then the changes aren't positive, and the school needs to identify what they need to change.

How many targets are achieved or how much of a target is achieved, especially when progress remains similar, does not give any information about the pupils. It gives an insight into how you set your targets and how aspirational you are. If they made the same amount of progress as last year, but this year they achieved their target, are you less aspirational or more realistic? Should you not have set the same level of aspiration again and made additional changes to the provision?

Do You Need to Set Academic Targets?

For non-SEND pupils, these are really set by the Government. For pupils with SEND, there is no need to set academic targets. This does not mean you forget about pupils with SEND, teachers should use their best endeavours for all pupils. Teachers need to be aspirational for pupils with SEND in the same way they are aspirational for their non-SEND peers. Setting targets is a process, you set the targets, you review progress throughout the year, and you analyse your data at the end. What does the data tell you that your progress and attainment data doesn't? Who needs the targets? What is the purpose? If I can look at progress at the end of the autumn term and see pupils have made less progress compared to the same period last year, I am going to ask questions and investigate. Adding targets on top of this doesn't really change anything.

You can support your teachers to be aspirational without chasing targets. What is the impact of having academic targets in your school? Is it a positive impact or is it a negative impact? Does having academic targets narrow down your curriculum? Are you focussing on English and Maths at the expense of the areas that an EHCP has identified is important to them?

Cause vs Effect

Lots of schools set targets for English and Maths, but not many other areas. For a pupil to make progress in English and Maths, many things need to come together. You can start with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or you can look at the four broad areas of need as areas to look at which need supporting before a pupil can make progress. There can be so many barriers for some pupils. If you don't remove the barriers for a pupil but increase the amount of English and Maths you teach, you are unlikely to see an improvement in their English and Maths. But, if you remove some of the barrier for a pupil, you are likely to see an improvement in their English and Maths. Why aren't schools setting targets around reducing barriers?

Some will say that if they remove the barriers, you see the impact in English and Maths. My problem is that if you talk about an improvement in English and Maths, it infers the focus was in English and Maths. It hides all the work that happened to achieve this in other areas. If it is hidden, it isn't rewarded or celebrated. Schools spend so much time supporting pupils with their SEMH, their Communication and Interaction and the Sensory and Physical. Yet it is not really celebrated outside of IEPs, the EHCP process and the annual reviews. So why are schools not setting targets about removing barriers for pupils? Is it because don't know how to monitor the impact or it doesn't turn into a single graph they can use in meetings? They could compare attendance to last year, look at behaviour points, use pupil voice, feedback from parents, data from annual reviews etc. to show the impact of the work they have been doing.

When looking at progress across your school are you able to identify a barrier that impacts a wider range of pupils? If you are able to identify the barrier, you should be able to identify when the impact of the barrier has been reduced. This is what should become the target, not removing the barrier and then looking for progress in English and Maths. Target the cause, not where you think you will see the effect.

If your target is to improve attendance for a pupil or group of pupils, that is the effect, not the cause. You should not target will improve attendance. You should be identifying the cause and setting a target around that. What are the barriers? Is it attachment and being away from parents? Is there a trigger in school? Targeting the cause will mean you are looking at where the barrier is and thinking about how to remove the barrier. If you are targeting improving attendance, your approach will be completely wrong, it will not be supportive and you won't really be thinking about the barriers

Should Expectations be Increased Each Year?

This is a very simple answer. If you have changed your provision by improving quality of teaching, increasing support across the four broad areas of need, listened to feedback and implemented changes, then you can reasonably increase your expectations. If you have not made any changes, then you cannot reasonably increase your expectations.

If you feel you have improved the provision, but the pupils didn't meet your new expectations, that is often going to be a bigger reflection on the provision than the pupils. You may find some pupils respond well, others do not. This will help generate the school improvement plan for the following year as you know where it isn't working

Don't be that person who thinks to improve outcomes you just need to set higher expectations. This will never, ever work. It just lowers morale and increases stress. Improving the provision is the key to improving outcomes.

EHCP Targets

Around 4% of pupils have an EHCP. They have end of key stage targets that are agreed and reviewed based on their individual needs, with the provision to support the pupils to achieve. These key stage targets should be broken down into a target for the coming year, what you want to achieve before the next annual review. For these pupils, the EHCP targets are probably the most important targets. All pupils with EHCPs will be accessing the national curriculum, but also have their own broader curriculum covering the four broad areas of need. Schools need to find the correct balance between academic progress and progress towards the EHCP outcomes.

I think that the majority of schools do not make the best use of the EHCP process to improve provision and therefore outcomes for pupils. They follow the annual review process each year, review last year's progress, set targets for the next year, hold termly meetings with parents to review progress and repeat. Do they really review the progress, think about changes that need to happen? How is the data collated centrally to improve the provision?

The whole target setting process is to improve outcomes, so why aren't schools collating data around EHCPs and the targets? As a school are you consistently working towards targets across all four broad areas of need? Are pupils with ASC not supported effectively with their SEMH needs? Are you aspirational across all four areas of need? How effective is your provision? For special schools, resource bases and in fact all schools with pupils with EHCPs, the information EHCPs could provide is the most useful data to help improve your provision and how you support pupils with SEND. Ask yourself, why are we not using this data?

Targeting Progress or Changes in Provision

If you realise a target is about improving the provision, should the target not reflect this instead of focussing on pupil progress? If you are trying to improve your Maths results, you could target progress, but this would be the effect, not the cause. It would be better to set a target around the cause, which is the provision. To improve Maths, you would be implementing several changes around the approach you are using, staff would be accessing training. You would be monitoring this through learning walks and looking at the quality of teaching. You could set a target of more teaching of Maths being Outstanding or Good and teachers feeling more confident and supported with Maths. You can review the target by looking at the number of staff accessing training, feedback from the learning walks, feedback from staff and through observations. We already know that high quality teaching leads to the best outcomes, so this is what you should focus on. Pupil progress is a by-product of improving the quality of teaching. You can look at the progress at the end of year in Maths and you may see an improvement in the progress across the school. You are more likely to see an improvement the following year as all the changes implemented that year fully embed.

So why don't schools do this more frequently? The answer is probably because it is not quick and simple to measure. It doesn't provide a graph at the end of year showing a distinct improvement. It does not provide a binary judgement of 'Was progress better this year compared to last year?'. The binary answer when answering this question is often wrong due to so several factors. It might be increased, but not due to any impact you have had, or it might have decreased for another reason. Targeting the provision is more complicated, but it does provide better answers that will drive further change. Targeting provision also isn't reliant on the impact being seen within that year, you are improving the provision and the impact will be felt for years to come.

How is Target-Setting Data Used?

When setting and monitoring targets, you are really monitoring one thing - how effective the provision is. They are not for judging the pupils or staff, but to look at how effective your provision is and how you can improve the provision. Some people still feel targets are about accountability and judgement of staff and pupils. Some of these people are the people setting the targets, using it to judge their staff and pupils. Often it is the staff themselves, feeling pressure to achieve these targets.

If a school does not reach its target, it is a reflection of the provision and the leadership, not pupil performance. The 4 areas Ofsted use for their inspections are quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management. If pupils aren't achieving, you might feel that the quality of education or behaviour and attitudes are the reason. These two areas are directly influenced by the senior leaders and the support they provide to staff.

Using data around targets is not simple. If you are looking for a simple judgement of whether you achieved the targets, you are missing the point of the target setting process. It is about setting what you want to achieve at the start and then reviewing where you got to at the end. There are a number of questions you can ask and patterns you can look for.

- Were the targets realistic? How close to achieving the target were the pupils?
- Is it a particular group? Why?
- Is it a particular subject/area? Why?
- Did you increase the target compared to last year? If you did, what was the reason? What changes have you implemented as a school to support pupils to be able to achieve this?
- How has the provision changed this year? What staffing changes have there been? What have we stopped doing and what have we started doing? Why?

You can ask these questions when looking at your end of year data and reviewing your academic targets, you can use the same questions when reviewing targets for EHCPs. Most of the questions you ask should be followed up with asking why. Why is it this cohort? What challenges were there? Why did we stop doing something? Why did we replace it? Does it simply take time to embed? A school is forever changing, forever evolving to meet the needs of the pupils and the need to follow buzzwords thrown at you by advisors, LAs and Ofsted. Are the questions you are asking the same as if you were looking at progress and attainment instead? If so, does the target offer any benefit?

When you look at your data, find the positives and the negatives. Positives are things to celebrate, negatives are either things to work on next or where we need to adjust our expectations. Remember “I haven’t failed, I have just found another way that won’t work”. Somethings simply won’t fit your school, it might be the latest approach that others recommend, it just doesn’t work in your school with all the other things you are already doing.

If you are looking at the data and you can see it is the Pupil Premium (PEF/PDG) pupils who haven’t met their targets, you can review how you are spending your Pupil Premium (PEF/PDG) funding, but if you do change how you spend the money, what is the impact elsewhere? It is always a balancing game.

If you are looking at the data and it looks like a particular class haven’t achieved a target, people will often jump to conclusions and look at the teacher and question their performance. You can triangulate your data; you can use your observations throughout the year to help decide. The class might not have made the progress you expected, but your observations show a teacher who is good with aspects of outstanding. So what other factors are there? Perhaps their teaching practice wasn’t good, how did you support them? You identified the teaching wasn’t up to the standard you expected earlier this year, what did you do? Have they recently changed to a different age range or ability level? There are so many questions to ask. Ask the questions without assigning blame.

Analysing your annual academic data around targets can be as complicated as analysing your data around progress and attainment. The questions and answers it gives you are probably going to be exactly the same.

And please remember, achieving a target or not often doesn't give a judgement around whether or not the progress was good enough. The amount of progress a pupil makes is not a judgement on its own.

"Clearly, learners in the fourth quartile have made better progress than those in the first quartile, but it is important to remember that, depending on individual circumstances, a learner could be performing in the upper quartile and not have made good-enough progress, or could be in the lower quartile but still have made good progress. Intelligent use of data, other sources of information and professional judgement allow schools to ask the right questions and find the right answers about whether progress is good enough."

Page 19, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

Individual Targets vs School Wide Targets

Most schools set individual targets. They have big spreadsheets with each individual pupil's target, across all the different areas they set targets for (typically Numeracy and Literacy). They review this throughout the year, adding data at the end of each term for each pupil and judging if the pupil is on track or not. Do you need targets that are this granular?

Instead of setting targets per pupils, what would the impact be of setting targets like:

- 80% of pupils across the school to make more progress in a subject compared to last year
- The progress in a subject to increase by an average of 10% across the school compared to last year
- Support a specific cohort to have an increased rate of progress compared to last year
- More pupils to achieve their outcomes within Communication and Interaction within their EHCP

There is an inferred target for each pupil, you would like their rate of progress to increase, but it is much simpler to manage. These targets have an allowance for those who may not achieve the target due to external factors or unforeseen challenges. By setting a whole school target, some pupils might exceed the target and others will not meet the target. We can still drilldown and identify which pupils or groups haven't met the expectations and ask questions, but the process is much simpler. There doesn't need to be a big spreadsheet with every pupil on, I can look at averages for the school and for different groups and look at individual data if need to.

It also allows for more vague targets in other areas like the four broad areas of need, reduction in incidents etc.

Progression Guidance 2010-2011

I have quoted the Progression Guidance 2010-2011 a few times in this document, I thought I would share some additional information for those who may not have seen it or have bad memories of the document. The document is now over 10 years old, but was a really good document that was misunderstood. The biggest issue with it is no one actually read it. They used the tables at the back or the spreadsheet template that was available and then panicked at the data it produced.

At the heart of the document are some tables giving likely progress over a key stage based on the pupil's starting point. It gives a lower quartile (bottom 25%) median (middle 50%) and upper quartile (top 25%). The document recognised pupils progress at different rates and this is understood and accepted. When looking at progress over a key stage, a good school would have around 25% of pupils in the lower quartile, 50% in the median and 25% in the upper quartile. This reflected the national data the report shared.

One of the problems with the document itself was the size and quality of the dataset, it was only a small data set. Some of the cohorts included a reasonable number of pupils, others did not. There were also a number of different assessments systems used by schools that had a big impact on the quality of the data.

The biggest problem is how the document was used by local authorities and schools. They used it extremely badly. They didn't really read the document and held schools to account using unrealistic expectations.

"This advice encourages schools to set targets in line with the highest-performing learners wherever possible."

Page 4, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

This was about being aspirational, aiming to achieve the upper quartile. The data within the document showed that only 25% of pupils achieved the upper quartile. Ofsted also confirmed that if your data had 25% in the lower quartile, 50% in the median and 25% in the upper quartile, then your data is what they expected to see. The target and the outcome were expected to be different. They wanted everyone to be aspirational, but they also understood that you are unlikely to reach that target for most of your pupils. One of the challenges the document was trying to solve was schools having low expectations for pupils with SEND.

The biggest problem with Progression Guidance is that a number of local authorities, School Improvement Partners (SIP) and schools themselves felt all pupils HAD to achieve the upper quartile and judged school performance based on this misunderstanding.

"Although age and prior attainment are the starting points for developing expectations, schools should take into account the nature of a learner's SEN and how effective provision has been in the past when setting targets and determining or commissioning provision."

Page 6, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

In the same way I am discussing targets being a measure of how effective your provision is, the Progression Guidance does the same. Are pupils not making progress as the provision is not effective?

"The data suggests that it is generally more difficult for older learners to make as much progress as younger learners over a key stage. For example, 79.8% of Key Stage 1 children make, on average, one or more P levels of progress across a key stage in English compared with 54.8% of Key Stage 2 children or 38.8% of Key Stage 3 pupils."

Page 17, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

80% of pupils made one or more P Levels of progress over key stage 2 (they are referring to the data at the end of key stage 1 to key stage 2), 55% of pupils did the same over key stage 3 and 39% in key stage 4. Yet at the time schools were targeting 50% of a P level each year and some wanted a whole P Level. The data in the document showed that these expectations were unrealistic.

“It also important to consider more holistic approaches to assessment for the small group of children working at very low levels of attainment where progress is not linear.”

Page 17, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

The government recognised 11 years ago that pupils made non-linear progress, yet many schools still stuck with a purely linear way of reporting and judging progress. We released our reports showing non-linear progress around 2 years later, to celebrate this progress.

“Clearly, learners in the fourth quartile have made better progress than those in the first quartile, but it is important to remember that, depending on individual circumstances, a learner could be performing in the upper quartile and not have made good-enough progress, or could be in the lower quartile but still have made good progress. Intelligent use of data, other sources of information and professional judgement allow schools to ask the right questions and find the right answers about whether progress is good enough.”

Page 19, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

This is probably the most important paragraph in the document, I knew it off by heart and pulled this page out in most meetings for a number of years. It highlights the amount of progress a pupil makes IS NOT a judgement! Judgements are created by humans using a basket of indicators, not spreadsheets or other systems.

“It is noted that some children do not learn in a linear way. They have uneven attainment profiles and will be making good progress even if they remain within the lower quartile. A few learners may not make any measurable progress or may regress across a key stage. High rates of absence can make it difficult for learners to progress. It is important to provide a more bespoke curriculum for these learners to meet their unique learning needs and to set small-stepped targets to enable them to generalise their skills in new contexts.”

Page 19, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

The document mentions non-linear progress, regression, high rates of absence, a more bespoke curriculum etc. The document recognised so many of the challenges faced by schools supporting pupils with SEND.

“Schools should use the progression data as one of a basket of indicators when evaluating past performance or setting meaningful, ambitious targets.”

Page 19, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

The document refers to data as part of the basket of indicators, you don't just use the data on its own. It talks about meaningful and ambitious targets. Are your targets meaningful?

If you are interested in reading the Progression Guidance 2010-2011, let me know and I will send over my copy with all my highlights.

Summary

I have looked at a lot of different aspects of the target setting process. There are lots of misconceptions and lots of misunderstandings that add to workload and increase stress. It is important to start with the basics of what the target is for and what it is measuring. The answer is - it is all about improving your provision, and measuring how well you are achieving this.

Stop Setting Standardised Numerical Targets

Over the last 15 years, we have seen many changes around data and targets. Schools have often chosen the quicker, simpler ways to set targets, yet these have not provided any benefit to the school or pupils. Tools like CASPA and the Progression Guidance gave schools a simple way to set targets, but the school's own pupils didn't perform well in the way they used the data sets. Pupils with SEND have a huge variety of needs, they learn in different ways and have several factors that impact their learning. A computer system or any system using data based on other pupils should not be used to set targets for pupils with SEND based.

As a company we have been asked to do this many times; schools have asked us to allow them to set targets using a data set from our schools or national data. We have always refused. It doesn't work, it sets schools up to feel like they have failed. Campbell's law would come into effect, schools wanting to look better than others and making sure their data did this for them.

Measure What You Value, Don't Value What You Measure

The whole reason we have targets and data is to improve outcomes for pupils and to increase the quality of the provision. What has happened in a number of schools is they are changing their provision to make their data look better and to show they are achieving their targets, not to improve pupil outcomes. The problem is the type of targets they are using and what their targets cover. The pupils and the outcomes need to come first. The breadth of the curriculum, the opportunities we give them and the support we provide are based on the pupils needs. The data and targets are there to support this. Schools should not be changing their curriculum, the opportunities and support they offer because their focus is targets in English and Maths and this is what they are told is important.

School Improvement Plan

At the end of the school year and the start of the next schools develop and finalise their School Improvement Plan. You will set out what you want to achieve and create your success criteria. This will become your target. Remember, this target is about the school, not your pupils, whether or not you achieve the target is NOT a judgement of the pupils. Write your targets in a way that you can monitor them quickly and easily, not targets that need to be monitored at an individual pupil level.

Target Provision, Not Pupils

If you are trying to improve pupil progress, you generally need to make your provision more effective. Improving your provision will affect pupil progress. Target the cause, not the effect. Target improving the teaching, a new approach, better support for staff, different resources, training, etc. You can measure the impact through observations, learning walks and feedback from teachers. You may see a change in progress, but this is not the target. The change in progress is not guaranteed due to other factors and may not happen till next year when it is full embedded.

Fewer Annual Targets

You should not need any additional whole school targets, other than what you have set out in your school improvement plan. There are many things you are working towards, like diminishing the difference/closing the gap between pupil premium and non-pupil premium -, do you really need to set an additional target? The target is close the gap and you can simply review the progress between the different groups throughout the year to see if you are achieving this.

You do not need to set annual targets for pupils for English and Maths. There is no requirement to do this. You would only need to set targets in English and Maths if they are part of your school improvement plan and you want to see an impact. When you do this, you can set a whole school target that can be monitored easily.

Track Progress Closely Not Targets

Spend your time looking at your progress data, not numerical academic targets. It is hard to ensure all of the targets have the same aspiration across all the pupils year on year. Progress and attainment are more consistent measures. You already analyse progress throughout the year anyway, you are removing the additional aspect of monitoring individual targets. Once you have analysed your progress, it should be quick to compare against well written targets.

Use Individual Data to set Realistic Ambitious Targets

Assessment and monitoring progress helps schools to improve pupil outcomes. Comparing progress to last year, looking for patterns of different cohorts and then changing provision is the best to improve outcomes.

“One of the most important purposes of assessment is to inform teaching and learning. Assessment enables schools to track pupil progress accurately, to design future learning, to adjust, commission new or decommission existing provision and to review expectations and learning trajectories.”

Page 5, Progression Guidance 2010-2011

I feel that a large number of schools use targets in an over complicated way, setting expectations at an individual pupil level, adding more complexity than required, costing schools time and increasing stress.

If you make a change around how you teach Maths, you will want to see an improvement in the progress within Maths. Do you;

1. Set a target of all pupils must make 10% more progress in Maths next year compared to last year which you then monitor on a pupil-by-pupil basis?
2. Set a target that on average you want to see an additional 10% progress compared to last year which can be monitored at a whole school level or by different cohorts?

The first option requires a system to set a target for each pupil from their starting point, using last year's progress value and adding 10%. You then need to come back each term, add the new data, RAG rate each pupil, then summarise the data. You will typically summarise the data to the second option. The second option is so much simpler. No big, complicated dataset to manage. Do I need to do any more than look at the average termly progress and compare to last year? I simply use the target from the school improvement plan and look at data at that level. At the end of the year I will have:

- Target – On average pupils make an additional 10% progress compared to last year.
- Result – On average pupils made an additional 10.5% progress compared to last year, we noticed that the EAL cohort had a big impact on this value, they only made an additional 4% progress, the reason for this is.....

To get my results, I simply looked at the progress of the different cohorts and the school as a whole. No targeting spreadsheet required.

The first option does not add any additional value. A simple change in how you write your targets can reduce workload and stress. Schools are already reviewing their progress and attainment data, this will show where pupils aren't making progress, adding individual targets on top will simply show the same information.

Make More Use of IEP & EHCP Data

IEPs and EHCP targets are based on each individual pupil's needs. To achieve the EHCP outcomes will involve a range of professionals across the Four Broad Areas of Need. Everyone involved with the pupil including parents should be aware of the outcomes and invested in achieving them. These are the most useful targets within a school, the targets are relevant, ambitious and will be trying to remove the barriers to progress. I am just going to repeat that, these targets are about removing the barriers to progress. Achieving these targets will have the biggest impact on a pupil's outcomes.

Schools should be trying to collate the data they are collecting as part of the EHCP process to design and enhance future provision. If you can see across the school that Communication and Interaction is still the biggest barrier for most pupils, what can you change? Are you working collaboratively? Are pupils being given opportunities to use the strategies they are given? Are parents included in what we are doing? You might identify that pupils with specific needs are more likely to not achieve their target. The information you gather will really help to identify areas to develop within the school.

Smart/Scruffy Targets

Use these in the classroom, part of IEPs, ILPs, IDPs, EHCPs, targets on the wall, in the book etc. These are the next steps, the 'what' is important and should be shared with everyone working with the pupil including parents and the pupil themselves. These are the small steps that will turn into big steps.

Support your staff to use these well, support your staff to develop the right level of aspiration. If these work well you will be removing barriers, targeting support in the right areas and the academic progress will follow. You can discuss these termly/half termly to identify what isn't working, what additional provision is needed. This ongoing reflective practice is the best way to support pupils.

Review Your Target Setting Approach

With all of the above information, have a look at your own targets that you use in school. Identify all your targets and ask the following questions about each type of target and each whole school target:

1. What is the reason for this target? What has informed this target? What issue are we trying to resolve?
2. What is the target based on? Individual pupils or is it using a dataset/flightpath?
3. How well designed is this target? Does it take into account individual needs?
4. Who was involved in setting the target?
5. Who knows about the target? Who is it shared with? Who is consciously working towards the target?
6. What is the positive impact of the target? By working towards the target and achieving the target, what is the impact?
7. What is the negative impact of the target? By working towards the target and not achieving the target, what is the impact? Is there a negative impact if we do achieve this target?
8. What changes have been made/will be made to support us to achieve this target?
9. Does this target take focus away from other areas? What is the impact on other areas?
10. What is the impact on the school's budget, not just in terms of purchasing resources, software or training, but also staff hours?
11. Could this target be written in a way that is less of a burden in terms of data management? (mainly looking at whole school targets)
12. Who is the target for? Is the target about pupil performance or the effectiveness of the provision?
13. When reviewing the target are you reviewing what the target was intended to improve?
14. When reviewing the target, what was the feedback around the impact? Did it make an improvement, but teachers felt it had a big impact on time? Did teachers feel they were chasing the target? Was it a positive change that impacted other areas as well?

Going through this process with your current targets will help you think about the relevance of each target, the wider impact around morale and workload and does it support making the provision more effective?

You will probably recognise that most of your targets are about your provision, not the pupils. If you are not achieving the targets, you are not implementing change effectively. Do you need to target 10% increase in progress in Maths this year or do you need to target improving the quality of teaching in Maths?

Ofsted Annual Report 2021- 2022

In this report, Ofsted continually talked about curriculum and subject knowledge and assessment.

“Schools have worked hard to respond to the challenges of the pandemic, and to help pupils catch up. Many schools are using effective strategies, such as:

- *Assessment – schools use regular, informal and targeted assessment to identify what pupils remember and to inform teaching. They assess pupils to identify those who need extra help. We see weaker practice when schools use standardised tests that are not as effective at identifying specific gaps in pupils’ knowledge.*
- *Catch-up – schools are giving pupils opportunities to revisit learning and consolidate their knowledge. Pupils who need extra help are being supported through one-to-one or small-group work.*
- *Curriculum – staff have a clear understanding of the curriculum and strong subject knowledge. Schools are focusing on helping pupils to catch up in core subjects.”*

Page 44, Ofsted Annual Report 2021-2022

Assessment is crucial to identify next steps and areas for improvement. Standardised tests identify an ability level, but not next steps as they often don’t identify the gaps in pupil knowledge.

The school’s knowledge around curriculum, with strong subject knowledge is crucial. This is where schools need to focus to support their pupils. As I have discussed previously in this document, schools should target improving staff’s knowledge and confidence. They should judge progress towards this target, not the pupils’ progress. All the evidence says that the progress will follow, there is no need to target progress.

“Schools that have done this best often had strong systems in place before the pandemic, aligned with a strong vision and clear intent for their curriculum. These schools helped pupils to catch up by identifying gaps in pupils’ knowledge and skills quickly, using interventions to target them, and avoiding inappropriate narrowing of the curriculum or reduced expectations.”

Page 59, Ofsted Annual Report 2021-2022

Again, using assessment to identify gaps and identify next steps. It also mentions a clear intent for the curriculum and avoiding narrowing the curriculum.

“Even the children who find learning most difficult do not learn in fundamentally different ways from other children. They require more expert, rigorous, evidence-based teaching, as well as an ambitious and well-designed curriculum that emphasises literacy, speech, language and communication.”

Page 59, Ofsted Annual Report 2021-2022

Ofsted talk about expert teaching and ambitious well-designed curriculum. These are the fundamentals for good progress and high expectations. If you start with good foundations in these two areas, the progress your pupils achieve will be good or outstanding. You don’t need to set targets for the amount of progress, target high quality teaching (or the next new buzzword), target your curriculum and target the gaps in pupils’ knowledge/skills. Fundamental to being able to target the gaps is a good assessment system, with the right level of detail.

Feedback

I welcome all feedback on this document and I enjoy discussing data, progress and targets with schools. My aim is to improve the use of data in schools so they can be more effective and see data as a useful tool, not a burden. Being able to get a wide range of opinions and experiences help us to develop our knowledge.

If you would like to discuss anything from this document, please send me an email – dale@bsquared.co.uk.

Appendix A: Creating Targets

For pupils in mainstream schools, creating targets for non-SEND pupils is straightforward. In primary schools all pupils need to achieve the expected standard in the reception baseline, the phonics screening, the multiplication table check and the SATs. For secondary schools the progress 8 scores must be positive values. Although the targets are straightforward, I am not sure who the targets are for. The targets are always simplified, with no adaptations/considerations of the pupils taken into account when setting these targets by those who set them.

For pupils with special educational needs and disabilities who are below the level of these assessments, there are thankfully no such expectations. The reason for this is there can't be as there is no guidance. There is no guidance for pupils working beneath the level of the Year 1 programmes of study. The Rochford Review and the Pre-Key Stage Standards clearly focus on the end of key stage 1 and 2 assessments only, as does the Engagement Model. There is no guidance or support for pupils in secondary settings, they simply disappear off the radar if they don't sit GCSEs.

Although there is no legal requirement to set targets, most special schools and other provisions for pupils with SEND still set targets. To do this they use a range of different types of information on which to base their assumptions.

Professional Knowledge and Experience

Professional knowledge is a very important aspect of the target-setting process. Without it, targets cannot be personal, and therefore relevant. In some settings, pupil targets may be based (or partially based) on a professional's own understanding of the pupil. A professional will make a judgment on how they think a learner will develop over the coming period.

Which teachers should be involved in creating the targets?

The teacher for this school year or the previous teacher? The teacher who has spent an entire year with the pupil is likely to have the best understanding of their capabilities. They have seen what the pupil has achieved, and they have witnessed the areas within which they have struggled. They have observed, first-hand, the pupil's attitude toward learning and their social and emotional interactions with a variety of staff and pupils. The target they create would be based on all of this information and what they feel they could support the pupil to achieve. It wouldn't take into consideration the impact of a different teacher who does not know the pupil as well as they do.

There is also the politics of setting targets for others. Will the targets be feasible or aspirational? The person setting targets would be above scrutiny if the pupil was unable to achieve the targets as they would have no accountability. Who sets the targets for the pupils coming into the lowest year?

The teacher who will be working with the pupil this year is going to have the greatest impact on their development. However, they have very little information upon which to base their judgements. Having not necessarily worked with that pupil before, the teacher may be completely unaware of the pupil's potential or the way the pupil interacts with the people and environment around them.

A combination of these approaches could be employed by tasking the two teachers to set the targets for each pupil. This is a doubling-up of teacher workload but should lead to more realistic targets along the discussion

on how to achieve the target, passing on crucial information from one teacher to the next. This does not really happen in schools due to the time required.

Pros

The benefit of professional set targets is that they can take into account every facet of the learner's life including, attainment, progress, behaviour, relationships, homelife, curricula challenge, and school priorities to mention but a few. Professionals have the greatest chance to affect the pupil's learning and therefore are most likely to be able to drive the learning of the pupil towards the target. Teachers with prior knowledge of the learner are also best placed to set aspirational targets for them.

Cons

Some teachers may be put under pressure by senior leaders to achieve all the targets that are set. Teachers, therefore, may set unambitious targets, so that pupil will achieve the targets that are set. This makes the data look good, the teacher looks good and the school look good. Does this process help the pupil? Targets are often set at the start of the school year when the teacher is unlikely to have a full understanding of the pupil's needs and what is achievable.

My View

This has the possibility to be a very good way to set targets when the previous and new teachers are involved. They can discuss the pupil's needs, discuss the target and how to support the child effectively and remove barriers. The problem is this is not really feasible in schools, the time simply isn't there. The result is that the pupil's new teacher who doesn't know the child or how to support them is setting targets. These targets may or may not be achievable.

Prior attainment and progress

Schools can look at a pupil's prior attainment and progress to set a target. This process will give a school individualised targets for all learners.

Pros

Basing targets on the prior progress of a pupil is a highly personalised approach to target setting. Pupils will typically make similar amounts of progress each year, depending on their individual barriers or needs and how well they are supported. Pupils working at age related expectations generally stay on this flightpath. Pupils with SEND will be on their own individual flightpath and using this prior attainment and progress to set a target can be very effective.

Cons

This approach assumes that there are no changes in the provision, no changes in how a pupil's needs impact their learning and no changes in the pupil's barriers to progress. There are a number of factors that can impact progress year on year including the pupil's home life. These changes can have a positive as well as negative impact on progress. This process is just a way of looking at the past and drawing conclusions about the expectations we now have for the future.

My View

Prior attainment is one of the first places to look at when setting future targets. It is the best starting point for setting targets. If a pupil made 30% progress last year and there has been no changes in provision, it would be reasonable to target 30% progress this year. Provision shouldn't stay the same year on year as schools should be looking to improve the provision to improve outcomes. There are also many other factors that have an impact on outcomes.

Attainment of similar cohorts

Some schools develop targets and expectations based (or partially based) on the school's experience of previous pupils with similar needs and similar starting points. This means that practitioners or school leaders will review prior data and use it to make a judgement for a current pupil based on how much progress a previous pupil (or group of pupils) made.

There have been attempts to create national datasets for pupils with SEND. CASPA collated information from a variety of assessments systems when everyone used P Levels and Levels and curated a national dataset. Durham University also performed a similar service for schools. The Progression Guidance, published by the DFE in 2010 and 2011 was a national dataset helping schools to set targets for pupils with SEND. Progression Guidance had a small data set and the data and expectations it produced was significantly higher than produced by CASPA. Both systems had the same issue, inconsistency. The schools used lots of different systems and different approaches. The data produced was unreliable. With the removal of P Levels, there is no national data for pupils working below Year 1 or working below the level of the SATs. Any datasets that do exist are too small to provide any useful data.

If you read the Rochford Review: Final Report, on page 13 it discusses reliability of the P Levels for expectations and comparison. This applies to any data set for pupils with SEND.

"Like the old national curriculum levels, assessments using P scales rely on best-fit judgements. Teachers make on-balance evaluations about which P level best describes a pupil's attainment. This means that 2 pupils can be assessed as being at the same P level, but each can have different attainment profiles. This also undermines the reliability and validity of expectations and comparisons based on P scale data because pupils who have achieved a particular profile of attainment within a P level may well progress differently to pupils who have achieved a different combination at the same P level."

Page 13, Rochford Review: Final Report

Pros

If a school has a large amount of historic data for similar pupils, then this method can give them a good idea of the sort of progress that they can expect to see learners making. For example, a school that caters for a small variety of needs, has a low turnover of staff, and has a longstanding curriculum may expect to see most ability groups making similar progress to previous year groups.

Cons

This process is the most effective when a school has used the same approach and same assessment system for a number of years, to build up data for a cohort of children with only slightly differing needs. The constant changes around education make this difficult and within SEND, the variety of needs and combination of needs

will mean the data used to generate targets will not be reliable. This approach works for SATs due to the number of pupils involved. The number of pupils with SEND and the variety of needs means this doesn't really work.

My View

This has been a very common way for schools to set targets. It works well for non-SEND pupils, the number of pupils and the limited ability range gives targets the pupils are likely to achieve. For pupils with SEND it does not work. There are no relevant data sets for pupils with SEND, the variation of need and attainment is too great. Schools can build their own datasets over time, but with all the changes to curriculum and provision, the data set will not be reliable.

Age-related expectations

Pupil progress targets for non-SEND pupils are based (or partially based) on age-related expectations. In its most simplistic form, this means that all schools would expect all pupils to attain all the skills and understanding expected of them at a specific age. For most pupils it works well, for pupils with SEND it does not.

As I mentioned earlier, mainstream schools have targets set for them by the Department of Education. They compare pupils' results to the results of other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment. There are no age-related expectations for pupils with SEND, instead they are judged against the same national expectations as their non-SEND peers.

Pros

The information collected within national databases such as these is vast and covers the attainment of pupils with a wide variety of needs and from a wide variety of backgrounds. It is harvested from over half a million pupils in each key age group each year.

Cons

Although data is gathered from pupils with a variety of needs and from a range of backgrounds, it only really contains information for pupils working at or near age-related expectations. Pupils who do well in Key Stage 1 are expected to do well in Key Stage 2, they don't always. The nature of a pupil's SEND might have a greater impact as they get older or the level of development increases. This process also only looks at English and Maths (Science too, but no one looks at that).

My View

This works well for non-SEND pupils. In primary they have end of year outcomes for each year group and this is what pupils are expected to achieve. For pupils with SEND it does not work, if pupils don't meet the age-related expectations, there are no expectations for these pupils.

Appendix B: Format of Academic Targets

Linear Numerical Targets

This is the way schools typically look at data and set targets. Linear data uses the pupil's current attainment level at different points to show progress and attainment. Schools often break levels into smaller chunks to show progress. At B Squared we use percentages while a number of schools split level into segments. Emerging, Developing and Secure being one example. Linear targets could be a pupil moving from Emerging to Developing over a term or could be being Secure at the end of the year.

Pros

Linear numerical targets are easy to read and easy to analyse. They follow a long-established method for setting targets, assessing attainment, and reporting progress.

Cons

Linear numerical targets do not reflect all the achievements made by a pupil—they are an incomplete picture. Linear targets only look at the progress made on a pupil's current level. Most schools use generic rules for groups of pupils that don't take into account individual pupil's needs. Pupils, especially those with SEND often make progress across a range of levels within a subject. We talk about pupils with autism having spikey profiles, but most pupils with SEND have a spikey profile, so looking at progress one level at a time doesn't make sense.

My View

These targets are the most common used for analysis, yet are the least useful. These targets are typically set, managed and monitored by senior leaders over the course of a year. In some schools teachers are involved in setting the targets, but this is not the norm. Teachers are often not involved in the management and monitoring of the targets either. In the majority of schools, the process does not support the school to achieve the targets as not everyone is involved in achieving the targets.

Non-Linear Numerical Targets

These types of targets can be used to identify progress made over a range of levels. They take into account the total progress made within an area of learning. A common autistic trait is a pupil may have good word reading skills; however, their comprehension skills may not be quite so advanced. Conversely, individuals with recognised dyslexic traits may demonstrate good comprehension skills but may have more difficulty with word recognition. If schools assess progress across multiple levels, it gives a truer reflection of a pupil's abilities and highlights the differences in different aspects of a subject.

Subjects are a combination of strands of development linked together. Levels are simply a way of organising skills within these strands. They link skills that are seen as a comparable level of difficulty. And yes, they are a comparable level of difficulty to the typical pupil. For neurodiverse pupils and other pupils with SEND, there can be a very big difference in terms of the level of difficulty in these skills, depending on a variety of factors.

If you set a target of a pupil achieving 60% progress this year, and they achieve 40% on their current level (with more still to achieve), but they have also achieved 30% on the level above. If we look at this in a linear way, they have not achieved their target. If we look at their overall progress, across both levels, they have made 70%, exceeding the target.

Pros

Non-linear numerical targets allow schools to target the total learning of the individual within a subject area. The targets do not limit pupils' reportable progress by enforcing a strict best-fit or secure-fit rule. The targets do not adhere to artificial level boundaries.

Cons

These types of targets can be harder to analyse than linear targets and are potentially open to gaming. A teacher may focus on the easier to achieve skills and ignore the ones that they are less likely to achieve, to ensure the teacher meets the target that have been set. At some point the pupil will have several skills that are hard for them to achieve, they will be barriers to progress. The pupil's rate of progress will drop significantly, and questions could be asked about the drop in progress and the teacher's ability.

My View

Very few, if any schools use non-linear targets. They are hard to manage, how do you ensure teachers are looking at the hard to achieve targets on the pupils' current levels, compared to skills on higher levels they could achieve easily. Looking at non-linear progress is extremely useful; I don't believe setting non-linear targets has any real benefit.

Levels of Achievement/Engagement Targets

Within our Connecting Steps software, schools can record progress towards achieving individual skills. It is not a simply can or can't, we can record if the pupil is engaged, or the level of support required to achieve the skill. These additional engagement/achievement levels help when pupils are making slow but important progress towards a specific skill. They are particularly useful for demonstrating the progress of pupils with complex needs. Schools can choose how many stages they wish to use. When you are writing these targets you are typically writing a SMART/SCRUFFY target, but the target would be the pupil requires less support, achieve with prompting etc.

Pros

This approach will allow teachers to target small steps of progress for pupils with complex needs. This process is more granular and allows staff to set a very customised level of expectation rather than basing progress on the percentage of a level completed.

Cons

Teachers need to have a consistent understanding of the different levels of engagement/achievement. It will require support from senior leaders around how aspirational the targets are and moderation. Are the targets being set of a challenging but realistic nature for the pupils? Another downside to this approach is that it will take more time to set targets than a simplistic data-based progress figure.

My View

These targets are going to be very much teacher led and will be similar to the SMART/SCRUFFY targets. They have the buy in from the staff as they are involved in achieving the targets. There are often not used at a higher level, so not used to make decisions. This is often due to the additional work around ensuring targets are of a similar level of aspiration for different pupils. Not an easy task.

SMART/SCRUFFY Descriptive Targets

SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-related) and SCRUFFY targets (Student-led, Creative, Relevant, Unspecified, Fun, For, Youngsters) are targets which, in one way or another, use language rather than data to identify goals for pupils. These targets are typically used in IEPs, IDPs, EHCPs etc., they are often reviewed with a pass/fail outcome or a RAG rating.

Pros

Both of these types of targets are very useful for teachers to use in order to help them identify the needs of specific pupils and share the current targets with other teachers, teaching assistants, the pupils and families. They are useful for identifying next steps and short-term aspirations.

Cons

Identifying next steps relies on the teacher's knowledge and experience. For pupils in mainstream settings working significantly below their peers, the teacher might not know what the next steps look like. These types of targets are difficult to moderate. Both ambitious and unambitious teachers may write detailed targets but unless the senior leaders who oversee the target-setting process have a comprehensive knowledge of the child or subject in question then it can be hard to guarantee that the targets are attainable and aspirational.

My View

These types of targets are typically agreed with all stakeholders, sometimes they require teachers to breakdown the targets into smaller steps. They have the buy in from the staff, pupils and parents as they are all involved in achieving the targets. This means they are, in reality, the most important type of target. Everyone is working to achieve the goal. Schools often don't turn this into higher level data, yet this is the most useful as it is the target that really targets where pupils need support and where all stakeholders are invested in achieving the outcome.

Appendix C: Who Should be Involved in Target-Setting?

Pupils

Many older or cognitively able pupils are capable of setting and aspiring to reasonable goals based on a realistic assessment of their own personal capacities. When the pupil is involved in the target-setting process, they can develop a greater ownership of their academic endeavours.

Parents

Many parents have the best interest of their children at heart. Parents get to see their children in a variety of different situations, and many may have a more holistic awareness of their child's strengths and challenges. When the parents are involved in the target-setting process, they can help to support the child's development at home thus reinforcing and adding to the endeavours undertaken at school.

However, not all parents take a strong interest in their child's education. Not all parents have the skills, abilities, or time available to support their child's development towards their learning targets. Some parents may also struggle with some of the areas of learning themselves.

Teaching Assistants

Many teaching assistants work most closely with the pupil who have the highest level of need; in some cases, they are more familiar with the pupil than the teacher is. This level of understanding can be invaluable when identifying what the child excels at, what they struggle with, and how they learn best. However, some teaching assistants are inexperienced and not fully aware of the school's curriculum and assessment process. They might not be able to contribute to the target-setting process.

Class Teachers

Teachers often have a good balance of pupil knowledge and curriculum awareness. They will either have a strong understanding of the child's previous capabilities (previous teacher) or the highest impact on a child's future learning (current teacher). Some are lucky enough to have both.

Middle Leaders

Being responsible for a year group, a key stage, or a subject can give middle leaders a longer-term and wider perspective than some class teachers. This puts them in a good position to help set targets over a longer period as they can observe and have an impact how all the small steps fit together in order to develop the bigger picture. Whilst some middle leaders may know all the pupils for whom they have a responsibility, there will be others (particularly those in larger schools) who may only have fleeting interactions with a proportion of these children, this will mean they will have less to add in the target setting process.

Senior Leaders

Learning-focussed senior leaders such as SENDCos, assistant heads, deputy heads, and the headteacher should have a good knowledge of their school's curriculum and the school's development priorities. They should be very well equipped to understand the whole school data and its implication for the school. Senior leaders are likely to spend less time with individual pupils and may not have complete knowledge of all the strengths and challenges faced by every single pupil. They will have a less direct effect on the development of each child, but are in a position to make larger changes within the school to improve outcomes for all pupils. One of the challenges for senior leaders is finding a balance between setting the level of targets the local authority/MAT want them to set and setting targets that are aspirational, but realistic.

External Agencies/Professionals

External agencies/professionals may be required to be involved in the target setting process for specific children. For example, some children will have provision for therapists and social workers. These individuals should have a detailed understanding of the needs of the children they work with and can help identify targets and next steps.

The answer is to have as many relevant people involved in the target setting process as possible, by including all the relevant people, they will be aware of the target and will be working towards achieving the target. This also means you should include all their views when reviewing the target.