

What is personalised learning?

Personalised learning is much more than a portfolio of effective teaching and learning strategies focused on the individual. It is primarily about an ethos or culture that is expressed through a number of pivotal components:

- *Achievement*: personalising learning has to be focused on maximising the achievement of every individual by the full spectrum of definitions, most notably all of the components of ECM.
- *Aspiration*: central to personalising learning is a culture of high expectations and aspiration, again expressed in every dimension of a child or young person's life but focused in particular on their entitlement to optimum success at school.
- *Inclusion*: personalisation applies equally to the gifted and talented and those with special needs. In many ways it offers a powerful strategy to ensure optimum provision for all young people that is geared to their particular needs and talents.
- *Relational*: learning is an interpersonal process and personalisation offers scope and opportunities to maximise the quality of learning relationships between learners and all those involved in supporting them, including parents and fellow learners.
- *Accountability*: personalising learning clarifies personal and professional responsibilities and places high significance on performance for all those involved in the learning process. It can help to remove dependency across the system and highlight individual outcomes and strategies.

The Gilbert Review (2007) defines personalised learning in the following terms:

... personalising learning and teaching means taking a highly structured and responsive approach to each child's and young person's learning, in order that all are able to progress, achieve and participate. It means strengthening the link between learning and teaching by engaging pupils – and their parents – as partners in learning. (2007: 6)

The five core components of personalised learning were defined by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as:

- Assessment for learning and the use of evidence and dialogue to identify every pupil's learning needs and the steps they need to take.
- Teaching and learning strategies that actively engage and challenge learners and develop their ability to focus on their learning skills and their capabilities to take ownership of their own progress.
- Curriculum entitlement and choice that allows for breadth of study, personal relevance and flexible curriculum pathways.
- Creative approaches to school organisation, to enable a student-centred approach which integrates performance with wellbeing and inclusive approaches with attainment.
- Strong partnerships beyond the classroom, both to enrich learning and support care of pupils in the wider sense through, for example, home-school links, inter-agency work, or community partnerships. (NSCL 2007: 27).

The DfES report *Making Good Progress* (2004) highlights the potential contribution of personalised approaches:

- A curriculum that takes account of prior learning and experiences and helps pupils to develop the full range of knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes.
- Attention to appropriate curriculum materials....
- Securing expected levels and good progress for all pupils in speaking, listening, reading and writing....
- Strategies that enable pupils to see clearly how they are progressing....
- An explicit focus on higher order thinking skills....
- Study support and out-of classroom learning.... (2004: 15)

A further perspective on personalised learning is provided by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) in their model of deep learning that is defined as:

Deep learning is secured when, through personalisation the conditions of student learning are transformed (Sims 2006: 2)

They identify the gateways to deep learning as: student voice, assessment for learning and learning to learn.

Any review of the leadership required for success in personalised learning has to start with establishing consensus as to the components of the personalising learning process. The Gilbert Review identified existing practice in schools that points to the following elements being present in varying degrees in many schools:

- Pioneering and evaluating approaches to learning how to learn.
- Using data on pupils' learning for target setting, tracking progress and supporting further achievement.
- Using ICT to enhance collaboration and creative learning.
- Using timetables flexibly to allow, for example, weeks devoted to intensive study on themed project work.
- Designing approaches to engaging and raising the achievement of underachieving groups.
- Establishing curriculum teams of staff and pupils to develop plans for improving learning and teaching.
- Increasing curriculum breadth by delivering some lessons remotely using video conferencing.
- Greater use of adults other than teachers to extend the range of skills and support for pupils. (Gilbert Review 2007: 12)

Summarising the various perspectives listed above produces consensus on the essential components of any approach to personalised learning:

- learning how to learn
- assessment for learning
- a portfolio of effective teaching and learning strategies
- curriculum choice
- mentoring and support

However, it is important to stress that personalised learning is about a new culture of teaching and learning. The Children's Plan identifies the essential components of such a culture as follows:

Personalised teaching and learning:

The distinctive feature of the pedagogy of personalisation is the way it expects all pupils to reach or exceed expectations, fulfil early promise and develop latent potential. Personalised lessons are stretching for everyone. At the heart of personalisation is the expectation of participation, fulfilment and success. The hallmarks are ambitious objectives, challenging personal targets, rapid intervention to keep pupils on trajectory, and vigorous assessment to check and maintain progress. There are clear plans to support those who do not or cannot maintain trajectory.

Other key features include:

Talking to learn: Pupils are challenged to justify their answers by explaining their thinking.

Guided work: The teacher works with a small group to apply what has been learnt in the main part of the lesson.

Keeping up: Instead of retrospective catch-up, the first impulse of personalisation is to hold pupils in to the pace of learning.

Tracking for success: Effective teachers are continually updating what they know about each child's progress and using the information to plan next steps with precision. Tools such as Assessing Pupil Progress are used to track progress and to tell pupils how they can do better.

Planning for progression: In the past, progress meant getting through topics. Today it is about pupils progressing in their learning. The curriculum is constructed to deliver efficient steps of progression, helped by the National Strategies Frameworks.

Stimulating new talents: A range of cultural and social opportunities are on offer to help children to discover or develop new interests and talents.

Different paths to the same ends: The curriculum of the past was dominated by content coverage led by the teacher. Today we are building a curriculum around optimum progression for individual pupil learning. This means improving the way we tailor the curriculum for individual needs, and increasing choice. (DCSF 2007: 64)

Which of the above strategies are already in use in your school?

Which strategy is most likely to be implemented in the short term?

Which strategy presents the greatest challenge?

How would you describe the culture of learning and teaching in your school?

What would be the logical sequence for the implementation of the components of personalised learning in your school?

**Effective teachers
are continually
updating what they
know about each
child's progress**