Program Evaluation

An Evaluation of the Learning Support Model in the Primary School at Garden International School, Kuala Lumpur

Prepared by Etienne Visser
Department of Educational Leadership
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Table of Contents

Abstract

This inquiry project evaluates the Learning Support Model in the primary school at Garden International School (GIS) in Kuala Lumpur. The evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness of the learning support provided to students with mild to moderate learning needs, including those with social and emotional difficulties. Key areas of focus include the management and impact of interventions, the preparedness of class teachers in supporting students with learning needs, and the role and efficacy of Personal Learning Assistants (PLAs). Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and the analysis of the SEND register, including class teachers, learning support specialists, and PLAs. The findings highlight an over-reliance on learning support specialists and inconsistency in intervention implementation. Gaps in teacher training and support have also been identified as an area for improvement. The evaluation suggests the need for a more structured approach to interventions, enhanced PLA training, and better collaboration between class teachers and learning support specialists to foster inclusivity.

Introduction

Garden International School (GIS) was established in 1951 and serves a diverse population of nearly 2000 students aged between 3 and 18 years old. Students at GIS also represent a broad spectrum of learning styles and abilities. GIS follows the British National Curriculum, leading to GCSE, IGCSE, and A-Level qualifications. The school adheres to the statutory and non-statutory guidance outlined by the British National Education Department. The legal framework for SEND provision in England is outlined in the Children and Families Act 2014. (*Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years*, n.d.) This

legislation sets out the legal obligations regarding the identification and support of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

At GIS, the learning support department provides support for learners with mild to moderate learning needs. Support is provided for students with learning gaps, delayed learning, behavioral challenges, and social and emotional difficulties that may hinder their access to the curriculum.

Monitoring and evaluation cycles over the last nine months of different year groups highlighted an over-reliance from class teachers on learning support specialists. Learning support specialists are often conducting booster groups for students with gaps in their learning or supporting the beginner phonics groups or reluctant writers. Interventions are not happening consistently and there is no evidence that progress is tracked to measure the impact of interventions.

There is no consistency across the school around which students should rightly receive support from a specialist and which could be supported by the class teacher. A routine evaluation of the learning support department found that students with PLAs often do not receive any direct support from the learning support links or the class teacher. There was also no evidence to suggest a consistent training or approach to further developing PLAs. The fact that each of the learning support specialists is linked to a specific year group sometimes creates disproportionate levels of support in year groups with more needs that need to be addressed.

The desired outcome of the evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the current learning support model in supporting students with needs that prevent them from accessing the curriculum fully. The areas of focus for the evaluation will be to determine how effectively interventions are managed and the impact they have on individual students, how equipped class teachers are to support students with learning needs and the support learning support

specialists provide in this area. A final intended outcome of the evaluation is to evaluate the impact PLAs have on the students they support and how qualified they are for the role they are in.

Program Background

The learning support department in the primary school at Garden International School (GIS) consists of seven learning support specialists, each linked with a different year group from Nursery to Year 6. All are qualified teachers with relevant experience. They receive regular professional development and are considered experts in their field by the rest of the staff body at GIS.

The learning support department provides support for learners with mild to moderate learning needs through integrated teaching. Direct support is provided mostly through in-class assistance, but also where appropriate in small groups and one-to-one instruction. Additionally, indirect support is provided through liaison with the class teachers, especially in adapting teaching materials to suit the needs of students who are on the learning support register. Lunch clubs and social groups are also offered for some students, to address social and emotional issues. The learning support specialists also provide full class teaching across the year groups they are linked with to introduce students to interventions designed to improve their emotional literacy.

Students on the learning support register are categorized into four distinctive groups based on the level of support needed for them to access the curriculum. This is determined as part of the admissions process when families disclose a diagnosed need, or a learning need that received support in a previous setting. All applicants to GIS complete an admissions assessment during which learning needs could be identified. A student will only be admitted to

the school if the school is confident that the year group the student will belong to has the capacity to support their needs. Class teachers can also refer students who have already been admitted to the school for the learning support programme and there is a system in place to ensure that referrals are considered with the students' best interest at heart.

From the 944 students in the primary school, there are 148 students on the learning support register. This amounts to around 16% of the primary school student body with the highest need for support in Year 3. 14 of the students on the Action + register work alongside a personal learning assistant (PLA) to help them to access the curriculum. The PLA is directly employed by the parents of these students but is managed by the school. The day-to-day management of the PLA is the responsibility of the learning support link teacher in close consultation with the class teacher. There is an expectation that differentiated work is prepared by the class teacher and shared with the PLA ahead of the lesson.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions for the program evaluation have been designed to determine the effectiveness of some of the key aspects of the learning support model followed by the primary school. These aspects involve how interventions are managed and the level to which class teachers feel prepared to support additional needs in their classes. Another key focus of the evaluation is the impact that PLAs have on the students they support. Using both quantitative and qualitative measures, an analysis of the data collected aims to answer the following questions:

1. How effectively are class teachers responding to students with learning needs in their classrooms?

2. How are learning support specialists supporting the development of class teachers in this area?

3. What impact do PLAs have on the students they support?

Literature Review

Inclusive education, particularly within mainstream classrooms, has emerged as a significant aspect of contemporary educational debates. This shift reflects a broader societal movement towards embracing diversity and inclusion in various contexts, including schools. (Robinson 2017). The way teachers address the needs of students with learning difficulties is significantly affected by their self-confidence and belief in their abilities (Hawkins 2009). Successfully differentiating teaching methods to suit various learning styles demands a confident approach. Hawkins observed that a lack of confidence could hinder teachers' readiness to implement differentiated instruction, which is vital for catering to diverse student learning needs. Teachers who perceive disability as a normal and acceptable part of human diversity tend to be more adaptable in their teaching methods and classroom settings, making accommodations for these students (Lieber et al. 1998; Trent 1998). This approach is in line with the inclusive education model, which promotes integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms and advocates for teaching strategies that address various learning needs (Will 1986). Some teachers, influenced by a traditional medical view of disability, may see these students as outside the norm and focus on making them 'normal', showing less readiness to modify their teaching or classroom environments (McPhail & Freeman 2005; Fitch 2002). Such an approach can be harmful to students with disabilities as it shifts the responsibility of

adjustment onto the students, rather than adapting the educational setting. Teachers often rely heavily on personal learning assistants (PLAs), sometimes called paraprofessionals, which may decrease direct teacher engagement. This phenomenon, known as the "training trap," implies that teachers might assume paraprofessionals are more equipped to handle the needs of these students, inadvertently leading to less teacher involvement. However, teachers who are instructionally engaged with students with disabilities tend to take responsibility for educating all students, regardless of disability, and they work in collaboration with special educators and paraprofessionals to direct the support provided in the classroom (Giangreco, 2003). Teachers address students' learning needs by continuously developing their professional skills. Emphasizing collective teacher efficacy, which is the shared belief in their impact on student outcomes, is crucial. This mindset is key to fostering inclusive education and effectively meeting diverse educational needs (Donohoo 2017).

Collaboration between class teachers and special education teachers is becoming more necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The success of this partnership greatly relies on teachers' mutual views and beliefs about disability and inclusive education (Carter et al. 2009). Learning support specialists are vital in boosting teachers' abilities via professional development. They help enhance teachers' confidence and ability to tailor instruction for diverse learners. Hawkins (2009) stresses the importance of continuous professional development for effective differentiated teaching. Teacher training and professional development programs play a crucial role. They equip teachers with strategies for handling philosophical divergences and improving communication and conflict resolution skills (Friend & Cook 2006; Davidson & Wood 2004). This training is critical, as the successful collaboration between general and special education teachers is fundamental in creating an inclusive environment conducive to the learning of all students (Kamens et al., 2003; Klinger & Vaughn,

2002). Specialists also assist teachers in understanding and implementing instructional strategies that have been proven effective for students with disabilities, such as explicit instruction, comprehension strategies, and behavior management programs (Forness, 2001). Learning support specialists aid in the development of class teachers by facilitating professional learning programs that focus on collective teacher efficacy. These programs are designed to improve teachers' skills, attitudes, and knowledge, enabling them to better address the learning needs of all students, including those with disabilities. The emphasis is on collaborative and inquiry-based approaches, fostering a collective approach to student learning and development (Donohoo, 2017). The role of special educators and the collaboration between classroom teachers, special educators, and paraprofessionals are critical. Effective inclusion of students with disabilities requires concerted efforts among the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes teachers, special educators, families, and administrators. The development of class teachers in this area heavily depends on their ability to collaborate and participate in decision-making with special educators and paraprofessionals (Giangreco, 2003). Studies by Hattie (2015) and Donohoo (2016) show that Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) significantly influences student achievement, highlighting its primary role among factors impacting student success.

Personal learning assistants, often working closely with students with disabilities, play a crucial role in the students' academic and social development. They provide individualized support, facilitate the implementation of accommodations and adaptations in the classroom, and help bridge the gap between the student's needs and the curriculum (Bryant et al., 1999; deBettencourt, 1999). Research suggests that the presence of a learning assistant can significantly improve the learning outcomes for students with disabilities, especially when the assistants are well-trained and work collaboratively with class teachers and learning support

specialists (Stockall & Gartin, 2002). The positive impacts include not only academic achievements but also improvements in social skills, independence, and self-esteem. Effective collaboration between special and general education teachers is shown to facilitate successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Friend & Cook, 2006). In the context of collective efficacy, personal learning assistants can be seen as vital contributors to the learning environment. They support individual students' needs, thus enabling teachers to focus on delivering inclusive and effective instruction to the entire class. Paraprofessionals, often with little to no training in behavior management, play a crucial role in supporting students with disruptive behavior disorders (DBDs). Research emphasizes the importance of providing training and support to paraprofessionals, as their ability to appropriately conceptualize and identify student behavior concerns is vital for effective intervention. This implies that when paraprofessionals are better equipped, they can support class teachers more effectively (Burnstein et al., 2004, Bronstein et al., 2021). Properly trained paraprofessionals can positively impact the learning environment and student outcomes by promoting effective conceptualization of behavioral targets for student intervention (Bronstein et al., 2021). While paraprofessionals are integral in providing support, their involvement sometimes leads to unintended negative effects, such as the isolation of students with disabilities within the classroom, overdependence on paraprofessionals, and inadequate instruction and peer interactions. The effectiveness of paraprofessionals also hinges on appropriate training, supervision, and the clarity of their roles. Their support should be carefully designed to avoid these negative outcomes and ensure positive impacts on the students they support (Giangreco, 2003).

The literature underscores the complexity of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. It requires a multifaceted approach involving teacher confidence and belief, collaboration among educational professionals, continuous professional development, and

effective use of personal learning assistants. By addressing these aspects, educators can create an environment conducive to the learning and development of all students, including those with disabilities.

Evaluation Methodology

This section outlines the participants, procedures, data collection methods, and analysis plan for the program evaluation of GIS's Learning Support Model.

Participants

The following participants were included in the program evaluation. They represent a diverse group of staff working with students with diverse learning needs at GIS in different capacities.

Learning Support Specialists

Within the learning support team at GIS, the learning support specialists play a pivotal role in the support of students with diverse needs. Three out of seven learning support specialists participated in the evaluation.

Personal Learning Assistants

The Personal Learning Assistants (PLAs) serve as direct support for students and bring a range of experiences to their roles. Some are newcomers to the educational field, while others

boast prior experience in working with students. From the eighteen PLAs in the primary school, five participated in the evaluation.

Class Teachers

The Class Teachers embody a rich diversity that spans age, gender, experience, and expertise. Ranging from newly-qualified educators to seasoned professionals, these teachers employ diverse teaching methodologies and approaches, leveraging their subject expertise and years of experience to adapt to different learning styles. Five out of thirty-six class teachers participated in the evaluation of the learning support model at GIS.

Specialist Subject Teachers

Similar to Class Teachers, the Specialist Subject Teachers are diverse in age, gender, experience, and expertise. These teachers employ diverse teaching methodologies and approaches, leveraging their subject expertise. Where Class Teachers teach a range of subjects to the same group of students all year, Specialist Subject Teachers teach their specialist subjects (PE, music, art or World Languages) to different classes. Eight subject specialists took part in the evaluation.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) Specialist Teacher

At GIS students who are new to English or students who do not have the efficient language to access the curriculum fully are supported by an EAL specialist teacher. The support is a combination of in-class and pullout support, depending on each student's need. Three from the eight EAL specialist teachers participated in the evaluation.

Data Sources and Instruments

In the comprehensive evaluation of the learning support model at GIS, a diverse array of data sources and instruments were employed to gather insights from various stakeholders. To effectively capture these varied insights, a suite of instruments were crafted with specific focuses and target audiences:

Learning Support and Intervention Model Review Survey

The survey was designed to measure the perception of different stakeholders around confidence levels supporting students with diverse needs, the role learning support specialist teachers play in aiding teacher development in this area and the impact PLAs have on the progress of the students they support. Questions were multiple choice and different for different stakeholders.

Overview of SEND register 2023/24

The overview of students on the SEND (special educational needs and disability) register was designed to provide a breakdown of the number of students receiving learning support per year group, the number of students at different levels of support per year group and the specific needs of the students receiving learning support.

Teacher Self-efficacy and Collective Efficacy Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was designed with a set of questions to evaluate the self-efficacy and collective efficacy interviewees demonstrated and their perception of these in the primary school. Some questions focus on collaborative planning and problem solving specifically with the diverse needs of students in mind.

Procedures

The evaluation process for the learning support model at Garden International School involved a structured, multi-phased approach designed to assess the efficacy of support provided to students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The evaluation aimed to capture insights from various stakeholders, including teachers, learning support specialists, and PLAs, focusing on their perceptions and experiences in supporting students with diverse needs.

The first phase commenced on February 5th, when a survey was distributed to 26 educational professionals, encompassing class teachers, learning support specialists, EAL specialists, specialist subject teachers, and PLAs. The survey, delivered via email in Google Form format, was tailored with specific questions for different stakeholder groups to assess their confidence levels in supporting students with diverse needs, both personally and among their colleagues. Additionally, questions sought to evaluate the learning support specialists' role in enhancing class teachers' capabilities in this domain and the impact of PLAs on student progress.

A total of 17 participants returned the survey, providing a representative cross-section of the stakeholder groups. The data collected were primarily quantitative, enabling the evaluator to

compare perceptions across different groups and to identify any notable similarities or discrepancies within each group.

With authorization from the school, the evaluator accessed the SEND register for the primary school. This register organized students from Nursery to Year 6 into groups based on their required level of support and detailed their specific educational needs. To ensure privacy, all names were anonymized with placeholders such as "Student 1" and "Teacher 1".

The evaluator extracted and sorted data from the register to compile detailed tables showing the number of students receiving support per year group, the levels of support, and the specific needs addressed. This analysis provided a comprehensive overview of the support structure and needs at the school, offering quantitative insights into the distribution and intensity of support provided across different year groups.

The final phase of the evaluation occurred between 15 and 24 April 2004, involving one-on-one interviews with six teachers representing the various stakeholder groups previously surveyed. The decision to conduct these interviews was driven by the need to delve deeper into issues of teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy in supporting students with diverse needs, as highlighted by the survey results.

The interview questions were designed to explore aspects of collaborative planning and problem-solving specific to students with diverse needs. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was recorded and transcribed for thorough analysis. The open-ended nature of the interview questions allowed the evaluator to probe deeper, clarifying information and pursuing follow-up questions to gather rich qualitative data.

This multi-phased evaluation process provided a holistic view of the support system for students with SEND at Garden International School. By integrating both quantitative and

qualitative methods, the evaluator was able to capture a nuanced understanding of the efficacy of the support structures in place, as well as the perceptions and experiences of those directly involved in the educational process.

Results

Data Analysis

Learning Support and Intervention Model Review Survey

Twenty-six participants received the survey, with seventeen surveys being completed. These participants comprised two teachers, five learning support/EAL specialists, five subject specialists, and five PLAs. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participant roles in the evaluation.
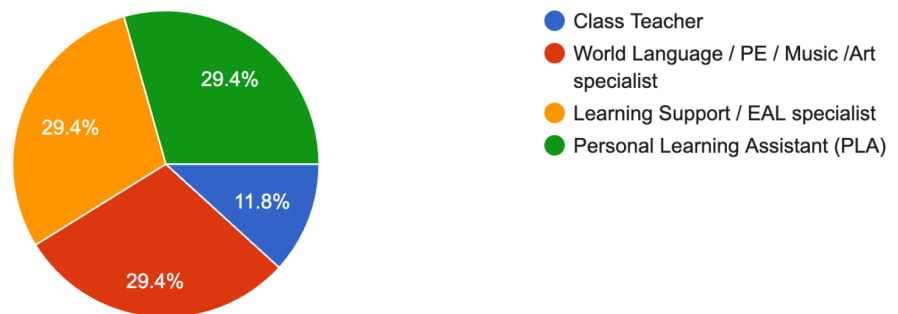
What is your role?
17 responses

- Class Teacher
- World Language / PE / Music /Art specialist
- Learning Support / EAL specialist
- Personal Learning Assistant (PLA)

Figure 1 - Survey

Analysis of the survey results indicates that class teachers perceive themselves as somewhat confident in supporting students with diverse needs within their classrooms. Among the learning support specialists, two perceive class teachers as very confident, while two perceive them as somewhat confident. One learning support specialist perceives class teachers as not confident. Additionally, perceptions of subject specialist teachers' confidence effectively supporting students with diverse needs show four learning support specialists perceiving them as somewhat confident and one perceiving them as not confident. Figure 2 shows these perceptions in comparison to each other.
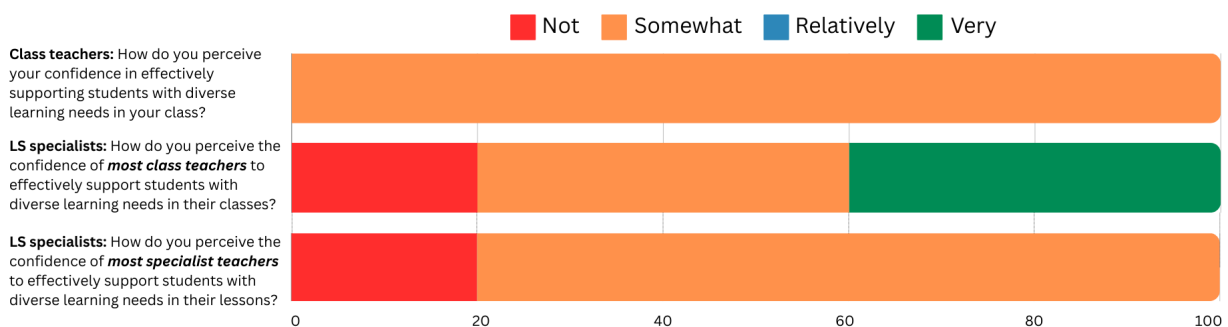

Figure 2 - Survey

Notably, class teachers report engaging in collaborative problem-solving sessions to address diverse learning needs among their students at least once a month. However, responses regarding collaborative planning with learning support specialists varied, with one teacher indicating less than monthly engagement and another indicating monthly participation. In contrast, learning support specialists reported weekly collaborative planning with class teachers while findings also revealed that three learning support specialists communicate less frequently with subject specialist teachers about shared students' learning needs compared to daily communication with class teachers. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the responses from different stakeholders regarding collaborative planning and problem solving.

Stakeholders' responses to questions regarding collaborative planning and problem solving:

Class teacher responses

How often do you participate in collaborative problem-solving sessions to address challenges related to diverse learning needs in your class?
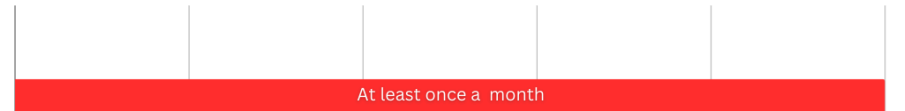
How frequently do you engage in collaborative lesson planning sessions with a learning support specialist to incorporate differentiated instructional strategies in your class?

Subject specialist responses

How regularly do you engage in communication with class teachers to exchange information about the learning needs of shared students?
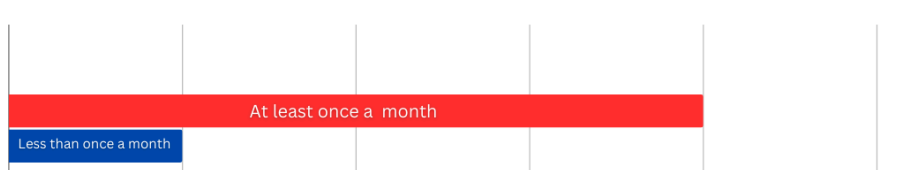
How often do you participate in joint planning sessions with class teachers to align your approach with strategies used by the class teacher?

LS specialists responses

How often do you communicate with specialist teachers to exchange information about the learning needs of shared students?

How regularly do you engage in communication with class teachers to exchange information about the learning needs of shared students?

How regularly do you participate in joint planning sessions with class teachers to align your approach with the overall class objectives?

Legend:
■ At least once a day   ■ At least once a week   ■ At least once a month   ■ Less than once a month

Figure 3 - Survey

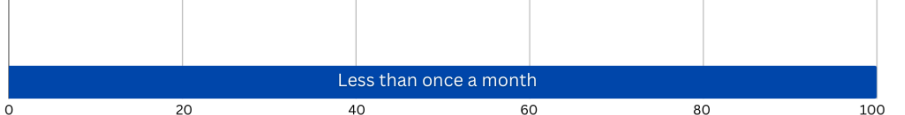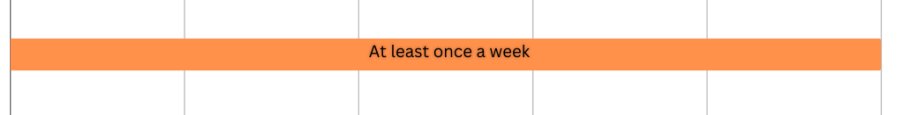Moreover, four PLAs indicated participating in collaborative planning with class teachers less than once a month. Responses regarding communication frequency with class teachers varied, ranging from less than monthly to daily. Similarly, responses regarding the frequency of class teachers providing individual support to students with PLAs varied.

Figure 4 shows how learning support specialists perceive their impact on how effective class teachers and subject specialists support students with diverse needs in their lessons respectively. While three learning support specialists perceive their impact on subject specialist teachers' practice as insignificant. Four learning support specialists consider their impact on class teacher practice as significant.

How learning support specialists perceive their impact on subject specialist teachers' practice

To what extent do you feel your support impacts specialist teacher practice to effectively support students of different learning needs in their lessons?

How learning support specialists perceive their impact on classteachers' practice

How do you perceive your impact on the practice of class teachers to effectively support the students with learning needs in their classes?

Figure 4 - Survey

Regarding the perceived impact of PLAs, responses varied across all areas covered in the survey, with most PLAs considering their impact significant. Subject specialist teachers' perceptions of PLA impact ranged from noticeable to significant, mirroring the varied perceptions among class teachers and learning support specialists. However, a greater proportion of learning support specialists perceived the PLA's impact as noticeable. Figure 5

provides a breakdown of how different stakeholders responded to questions about the impact of PLAs on the students they support across a range of areas.

Perceptions among stakeholders around the impact of PLAs on the students they support:

How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) **fostering an inclusive learning environment** for students they support?

How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) contributing to **building a sense of belonging** for the students they support?

How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) actively contributing to the **social and emotional needs and development** of the students they support?

How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the **academic progress** of students they support?

How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the **engagement and participation** of students they support?
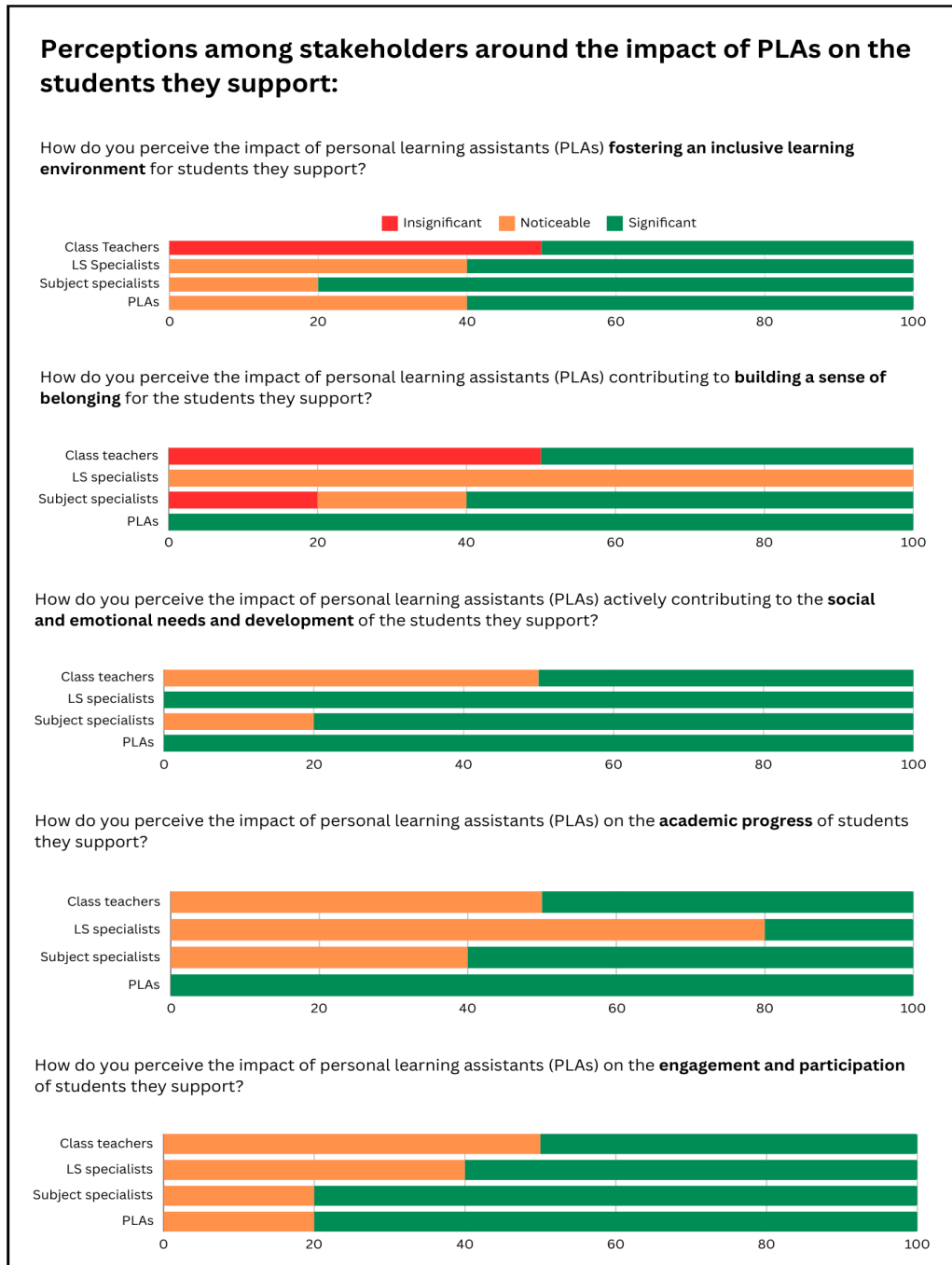
Figure 5 -

Survey

PLAs had varied responses for the question about how often they receive professional development in school. Two PLAs answered less than once a month and three answered that they receive development weekly. Two learning support specialists, however, responded that they actively develop PLAs less than once a month and three learning support specialists responded that they develop PLAs at least once a month.

Overview of SEND register 2023/24

Table 1 and table 2 provide an overview of students on the SEND (special educational needs and disability) register for the primary school at GISI. Students on the register are sorted according to their year group (Nursery to Year 6) and in each year group, students are grouped according to the level of support they require. Table 1 shows the number of students at different levels of support for each year group.

	Action +	Action	Supported	Monitored	PLA	Total	
Nursery	1	0	1	4	0	**6**	LSS1
Reception	2	1	1	4	2	**10**	LSS1
Year 1	5	0	4	9	2	**20**	LSS2
Year 2	2	2	5	3	2	**14**	LSS3
Year 3	8	2	7	11	3	**31**	LSS4
Year 4	3	2	9	4	3	**21**	LSS5
Year 5	1	3	11	9	0	**24**	LSS6
Year 6	0	3	14	3	2	**22**	LSS7
Total	**22**	**13**	**52**	**47**	**14**	148	

Action +: *High needs / external support*

Action: *Additional support (in class and 2 hours per week pull-out)*

Supported: *In-class support*

Monitored: *LS specialist supports the class teacher with strategies to support these students*

LSS = *Learning Support Specialist (7 specialists in total)*

Table 1 - Overview of SEND register

The seven learning support specialists are individually assigned to different year groups (LSS1 - LSS7).

Table 2 shows the number of students against the needs they receive support for.

	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
Dyslexia	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	6
Dysgraphia	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dyspraxia	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
ADHD	0	1	0	2	1	5	0	3	12
ASD	0	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	12
GDD	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Receptive Expressive Language disorder	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Literacy Difficulty	0	1	5	4	8	3	3	6	30
Literacy Difficulty (writing)	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	6	12
Maths Difficulty	0	0	4	5	3	8	12	5	37
Fine Motor Skills	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	5
Attentional Difficulty	2	1	5	7	10	2	7	7	41
Social/Emotional Difficulty	3	3	5	4	6	5	11	5	42
Sensory Difficulty	2	0	0	1	5	1	1	2	12
Behavioral difficulty	2	2	0	0	5	0	1	2	12
Anxiety	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	5
Low cognitive ability	0	0	0	0	5	0	2	0	7
Speech and language	1	6	4	2	4	2	4	1	24
Medical (hearing)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Medical (vision)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Medical (other)	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	5

Table 2 - Overview of SEND register

Further analysis of the data indicates a high Incidence of the following needs:

- Attentional Difficulty: 41 students

- Social/Emotional Difficulty: 42 students

- Literacy Difficulty: 30 students

- Maths Difficulty: 37 students

There is a low incidence of the following needs:

- Dysgraphia: 1 student

- Dyspraxia: 1 student

- Low Cognitive Ability: 7 students

- Medical Needs (hearing, vision, other): Minimal

Year-wise analysis of the data shows that Year 3 and Year 5 have the highest numbers of students receiving learning support. Years 1, 3, and 5 have significant needs in terms of attentional difficulties and social/emotional difficulties.

Teacher Self-efficacy and Collective Efficacy Interview Protocol

In evaluating the learning support model at the international school, qualitative data from interviews with six staff members revealed several key themes. These themes provided insights into teacher efficacy, the need for professional development, and the role of collaborative planning in supporting students with diverse needs.

One prominent theme was teacher efficacy, which refers to the belief teachers have in their ability to help students progress and develop. Many teachers expressed confidence in their general teaching abilities but felt less assured when addressing specific learning needs, particularly those related to neurodiversity. For instance, one teacher noted, "I feel fairly confident in identifying gaps in children's learning and understanding what support they need. However, I'm less confident with specific learning needs, particularly those beyond literacy or basic numeracy" (Class teacher 2). Another teacher echoed this sentiment, saying, "So I find that overall with the class, I find that I'm very effective at helping kids to progress, but I will find that there are certain children every year that I struggle to help them to reach their full potential"

(Class teacher 3). These reflections indicate that while teachers generally feel effective in their roles, there is a notable gap in their confidence when it comes to specialized support for diverse learning needs.

The need for ongoing professional development and targeted training was another significant theme. Teachers appreciated past training sessions but emphasized the necessity for more comprehensive and consistent professional development opportunities. One teacher remarked, "We haven't had much training on supporting children with diverse needs. Last year's LS sessions were helpful, particularly the one on executive functioning" (Class teacher 2). Another teacher shared, "Every child is different... I always go back to research... working within my team. I will then ask, say, I've noticed this, I haven't come across this before. How can you help me?" (Learning support specialist). These comments underscore the critical role of professional development in equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively support diverse student needs.

Collaborative planning and collective efficacy were identified as crucial for the success of the learning support model. However, the practice of collaborative planning was found to be inconsistent and often hindered by systemic barriers and time constraints. One teacher described the current state of collaboration, saying, "It's more ad hoc than consistent. When I notice something in my class, I speak to the LS teacher to ask for strategies. I try them and give feedback. But it's not collaborative in the sense of working together in the classroom" (Class teacher 2). Despite recognizing the potential benefits of collaborative planning, the implementation of such practices was limited. Another teacher emphasized the importance of collective effort, stating, "I think if you're all pulling in the same direction, that you will have more success, won't you? And I think that's why it's really important that the ethos of the school is that

we do all support each other, and we do all pull in the same direction" (Class teacher 3). These reflections suggest a need for structural changes to facilitate more effective collaboration among teachers.

While themes were largely consistent across interviews, some discrepancies were noted in the implementation and perception of collaborative planning. Some teachers reported regular team meetings and a sense of shared goals, while others felt isolated and underutilized in their collaborative efforts. One teacher highlighted a positive experience, saying, "We have our team meetings every week, and I think it's a really good time for us all to get together and to share ideas" (Class teacher 3). In contrast, another teacher expressed frustration, stating, "I would prepare the lesson. And then I would go to the LS teacher or other EAL teacher and say that, this is what we have planned, this is what I have planned for, for that particular EAL child" (EAL specialist). These discrepancies indicate variations in collaborative practices across different teams and highlight areas where the school can standardize and improve its approach.

The analysis reveals a strong foundation of teacher efficacy and recognition of the importance of professional development and collaborative planning. However, significant areas for improvement remain. Addressing gaps in training and creating a more structured approach to collaborative planning will be essential for enhancing the effectiveness of the learning support model at the school. By focusing on these areas, the school can better support its teachers and, ultimately, its students.

Limitations of Study

The limitations for the study on evaluating the Learning Support Model at Garden International School include the following:

- Sample Size and Representation: The study involved a relatively small number of participants, with only a limited subset of class teachers, learning support specialists, PLAs, and specialist subject teachers participating in the evaluation. This limited sample size may not fully represent the diverse perspectives and experiences of all staff members involved in the learning support model.

- Participant Bias: The participants selected for the study may have biases based on their roles, experiences, or personal views on the learning support model. This could affect the objectivity of the data collected, especially in the qualitative interviews.

- Time Constraints: The study was conducted over a specific period, and the data collection phases were limited to certain months. This time limitation may not capture the full range of activities, challenges, and successes experienced throughout the entire academic year.

- Self-reported Data: Much of the data collected through surveys and interviews relies on self-reporting by participants. This method is subject to inaccuracies, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their own abilities, the effectiveness of the support model, or the

- Lack of Longitudinal Data: The study does not include longitudinal data that would track the progress and outcomes of interventions over an extended period. Without such data, it will be difficult to assess the long-term effectiveness of the learning support model.

- Generalizability: The findings of this evaluation may not be easily generalizable to other contexts or schools, as the study is specifically tailored to the learning support model at Garden International School.

Discussion

How effectively are class teachers responding to students with learning needs in their classrooms?

The evaluation identified several key issues related to the confidence and effectiveness of class teachers in supporting students with diverse needs. While some teachers demonstrated strong confidence and competence in implementing strategies for students with mild learning difficulties, others expressed uncertainty and lacked consistent approaches, particularly when addressing more complex cases involving neurodiversity. This variability suggests a need for targeted professional development and greater support from learning support specialists.

The survey results highlighted that while collaborative problem-solving was a common practice, it was often informal and lacked the consistency and structure necessary to effectively address the diverse learning needs of students. The frequency of collaborative planning sessions between class teachers and learning support specialists varied significantly, suggesting that not all teachers were receiving the same level of support and guidance in this area. This inconsistency may contribute to the uneven quality of support provided to students across different classrooms.

Furthermore, the reliance on learning support specialists to lead interventions and manage students with additional needs was evident. This reliance, however, appeared to contribute to a perception among some class teachers that they were less equipped to

independently support these students. As a result, there was a tendency for some teachers to defer responsibility for students with learning needs to the learning support specialists, potentially limiting the development of their own skills and confidence in this area.

How Are Learning Support Specialists Supporting the Development of Class Teachers in This Area?

Learning support specialists play a crucial role in enhancing the capabilities of class teachers to support students with diverse needs. The evaluation found that the learning support specialists were generally perceived as valuable resources, particularly in providing targeted advice, strategies, and professional development opportunities. However, the impact of their support was unevenly felt across the teaching staff.

Learning support specialists reported engaging in regular collaborative planning with class teachers, yet the frequency and depth of these interactions varied. Some teachers benefited from weekly planning sessions and ongoing professional development, which significantly improved their ability to support students with learning needs. In contrast, other teachers reported less frequent collaboration, indicating a potential gap in the support provided.

The analysis also pointed to the need for more structured and consistent professional development opportunities focused on inclusive practices and differentiation strategies. While some training sessions were highly regarded, such as those on executive functioning, there was a clear demand for more comprehensive and ongoing professional development that addresses a broader range of learning difficulties. This need is particularly pressing given the diverse and often complex needs of the student population at GIS.

The evaluation also highlighted a potential area for improvement in the alignment of learning support across year groups. Given that each learning support specialist is linked to a specific year group, there were instances of disproportionate levels of support depending on the needs of the year group. This situation may create imbalances in the availability and effectiveness of support, emphasizing the need for a more flexible and responsive support model that can adapt to the varying needs across different year groups.

3. What Impact Do PLAs Have on the Students They Support?

PLAs are integral to the support framework at GIS, particularly for students requiring more individualized attention. The evaluation revealed that PLAs have a significant impact on the academic and social development of the students they support, especially when they work closely with both the class teacher and learning support specialists.

However, the evaluation also identified some challenges related to the role and effectiveness of PLAs. One of the primary concerns was the variability in the training and support provided to PLAs. While some PLAs received regular professional development, others indicated that their training was infrequent and not always directly relevant to the needs of the students they were supporting. This discrepancy in training could lead to inconsistencies in the quality of support that PLAs provide, which may, in turn, affect student outcomes.

Moreover, the over-reliance on PLAs by some class teachers was noted as a potential issue. In some cases, PLAs were seen as the primary support for students with additional needs, with the class teacher stepping back from direct involvement. This dynamic can inadvertently lead to the isolation of students from their peers and may limit their opportunities for interaction and engagement within the broader classroom environment.

The findings suggest that while PLAs are essential to the learning support model, their role needs to be more clearly defined and supported through consistent training and supervision. Additionally, there is a need for greater collaboration between PLAs, class teachers, and learning support specialists to ensure that the support provided is cohesive, inclusive, and aligned with the overall educational goals for each student.

The evaluation of the Learning Support Model at Garden International School highlights the strengths and areas for improvement in how class teachers, learning support specialists, and PLAs collaborate to support students with diverse needs. While there are clear successes, such as the perceived value of learning support specialists and the positive impact of PLAs, there are also challenges related to the consistency of support, the need for ongoing professional development, and the potential over-reliance on specialized staff. Addressing these issues through a more structured and inclusive approach will be key to enhancing the effectiveness of the learning support model and ensuring that all students receive the support they need to thrive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the evaluation of the Learning Support Model at Garden International School, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of support provided to students with diverse learning needs:

1. Enhance and Standardize Professional Development for Class Teachers

To address the variability in class teachers' confidence and effectiveness in supporting students with learning needs, it is recommended that the school implement a more comprehensive and consistent professional development program that focuses on:

- **Differentiation Strategies:** Providing teachers with practical strategies for differentiating instruction to meet the diverse needs of students in their classrooms.
- **Neurodiversity Awareness:** Increasing understanding of specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD, and social-emotional challenges, and how these can be supported within the classroom.
- **Inclusive Practices:** Training teachers on how to create an inclusive classroom environment that fosters the engagement and participation of all students, regardless of their abilities.

Regular, ongoing professional development sessions should be scheduled throughout the academic year to ensure that teachers have continuous opportunities to develop their skills and apply new strategies.

2. Strengthen Collaborative Planning and Support Structures

To ensure more consistent and effective collaboration between class teachers and learning support specialists, it is recommended to:

- **Formalize Collaborative Planning Sessions:** Establish regular, scheduled collaborative planning sessions between class teachers and learning support specialists. These sessions should be mandatory and structured to ensure that they are focused on specific student needs and intervention strategies.
- **Create Cross-Year Group Support Networks:** Develop cross-year group networks that allow learning support specialists to share resources, strategies, and expertise, particularly in areas where certain year groups may have higher needs. This will help balance the distribution of support across the school and ensure that all students receive the attention they need.

3. Clarify and Support the Role of PLAs

The evaluation revealed that while PLAs are vital in supporting students, there is a lack of clarity regarding their roles, leading to inconsistencies in the support provided. Additionally, the training and supervision of PLAs varied significantly, contributing to a disparity in their effectiveness across the school. Addressing these gaps by clearly defining PLA responsibilities and standardizing their training is essential for maximizing their impact on student learning and development.

Recommendations include:

- **Provide Consistent Training for PLAs:** Implement a regular training program for PLAs that focuses on the specific needs of the students they support, as well as general strategies for promoting independence and social integration.

- **Define Clear Roles and Expectations:** Establish clear guidelines that define the roles and responsibilities of PLAs, including how they should collaborate with class teachers and learning support specialists. This will help prevent over-reliance on PLAs and ensure that students remain integrated within the classroom environment.

- **Increase Supervision and Support:** Ensure that PLAs receive ongoing supervision and feedback from learning support specialists to continually improve their practice and adapt to the evolving needs of the students they support.

4. Implement a Structured Monitoring and Evaluation System

To improve the consistency and effectiveness of interventions, it is recommended to establish a more structured system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Learning Support Model. This system should include:

- **Regular Progress Tracking:** Implement a standardized process for tracking the progress of students receiving learning support. This could include regular data collection, such as assessments and observations, to measure the effectiveness of interventions.

- **Annual Review of the Learning Support Model:** Conduct an annual review of the Learning Support Model to assess its impact, identify areas for improvement, and adjust

strategies as needed. This review should involve feedback from all stakeholders, including teachers, learning support specialists, PLAs, and parents.

5. Promote a Whole-School Culture of Inclusion

Finally, to ensure that all students feel supported and included, it is recommended to foster a whole-school culture that emphasizes collective responsibility for the success of students with diverse needs. This can be achieved by:

- **Encouraging Collective Teacher Efficacy:** Promote a culture where teachers and staff believe in their collective ability to positively impact all students. This can be supported through team-building activities, shared professional development, and a focus on collaborative problem-solving.
- **Raising Awareness Among the School Community:** Increase awareness among all staff, students, and parents about the importance of inclusion and the school's commitment to supporting all learners. This could involve workshops, information sessions, and communication campaigns.

By implementing these recommendations, Garden International School can strengthen its Learning Support Model, ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed academically and socially within an inclusive and supportive environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Learning Support and Intervention Model Review Survey Form*

Primary Learning Support & Intervention Model Evaluation

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. The information you provide here is an invaluable piece of the evaluation of the learning support and intervention model currently used at GIS in primary school. GIS is committed to personalized learning, inclusion and belonging. We strive to continuously evaluate and improve our practice and the systems and procedures in place to support our students.

There are 15 questions specific to your role in relation to learning support to answer. Please answer all the questions. The survey is anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose than data collection for the purpose of evaluating the learning support and intervention model.

What is your role?

Class Teacher
World Language / PE / Music /Art specialist
Learning Support / EAL specialist
Personal Learning Assistant (PLA)

Class Teachers

Please provide honest answers to the questions below. Where you feel unsure of the answer, choose the best fit. For the purpose of this survey, "learning support" or "learning support specialist" include EAL support / specialists. "Students with learning needs" DO NOT ONLY refer to students on the learning support or EAL registers (except where otherwise indicated).

1. How often do you use formative assessments to identify individual learning needs in your students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

2. How do you perceive your confidence in effectively supporting students with diverse learning needs in your class?

Not confident at all
Somewhat confident
Relatively confident
Very confident

3. How regularly do you update your teaching methods based on the evolving learning needs of your students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

4. How frequently do you plan for and directly support a student with a personal learning assistant (PLA) in your class?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day
Not applicable (No PLA in my class)

5. How regularly do you actively seek assistance from learning support specialists or other experts when encountering difficulties with individual students in your class?
Learning support specialists in this context include EAL specialists.

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

6. How often do you participate in collaborative problem-solving sessions to address challenges related to diverse learning needs in your class?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

7. How frequently do you engage in collaborative lesson planning sessions with a learning support specialist to incorporate differentiated instructional strategies in your class?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

8. How regularly do you actively seek additional training or resources to enhance your ability to address the unique learning needs of your students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

9. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) fostering an inclusive learning environment for students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

10. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) contributing to building a sense of belonging for the students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

11. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) actively contributing to the social and emotional needs and development of the students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

12. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the academic progress of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

13. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the engagement and participation of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

14. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) influencing the overall growth and development of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

15. How satisfied are you with the current training and professional development opportunities provided for addressing the unique learning requirements of students you support?

Not satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
Very satisfied

WL / PE / Music / Art specialist

Please provide honest answers to the questions below. Where you feel unsure of the answer, choose the best fit. For the purpose of this survey, "learning support" or "learning support specialist" include EAL support / specialists. "Students with learning needs" DO NOT ONLY refer to students on the learning support or EAL registers (except where otherwise indicated).

1. How often do you use specific modifications or accommodations for students with different learning styles in your subject area?
modifications are changes to the curriculum itself (different outcomes)
accommodations are means to support the student to reach the intended outcomes (extra time, a timer, tools, oral instead of written assessments etc.)

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

2. How frequently do you differentiate assignments or activities to meet the varied needs of your students?
Differentiation in the context of this survey is defined as providing different means to access the content without changing the learning intentions.

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

3. How regularly do you incorporate technology or alternative resources to support diverse learning needs?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

4. How regularly do you engage in communication with class teachers to exchange information about the learning needs of shared students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

5. How regularly do you actively seek feedback from class teachers to refine your support strategies for individual students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

6.How often do you participate in joint planning sessions with class teachers to align your approach with strategies used by the class teacher?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

7. To what extent do you feel trained and prepared to address the unique learning requirements of the students you support?

Fully prepared
Somewhat prepared
Not prepared

8. How regularly do you actively seek additional training or resources to enhance your ability to address the unique learning needs of your students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

9. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) fostering an inclusive learning environment for students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

10. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) contributing to building a sense of belonging for the students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

11. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) actively contributing to the social and emotional needs and development of the students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

12. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the academic progress of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

13. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the engagement and participation of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

14. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) influencing the overall growth and development of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

15. How satisfied are you with the current training and professional development opportunities provided for addressing the unique learning requirements of students you support?

Not satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
Very satisfied

LS / EAL specialist
Please provide honest answers to the questions below. Where you feel unsure of the answer, choose the best fit. For the purpose of this survey,"learning support" or "learning support specialist" include EAL support / specialists. "Students with learning needs" DO NOT ONLY refer to students on the learning support or EAL registers (except where otherwise indicated).

1. How do you perceive the confidence of most class teachers to effectively support students with diverse learning needs in their classes?

Not confident at all
Somewhat confident
Relatively confident
Very confident

2. How do you perceive the confidence of most specialist teachers to effectively support students with diverse learning needs in their lessons?
Specialist teachers in this context refer to art, music, PE and world languages teachers.

Not confident at all
Somewhat confident
Relatively confident
Very confident

3. How often do you communicate with specialist teachers to exchange information about the learning needs of shared students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

4. How regularly do you engage in communication with class teachers to exchange information about the learning needs of shared students?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

5. How regularly do you participate in joint planning sessions with class teachers to align your approach with the overall class objectives?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

6. To what extent do you feel your support impacts specialist teacher practice to effectively support students of different learning needs in their lessons?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

7. How do you perceive your impact on the practice of class teachers to effectively support the students with learning needs in their classes?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

8. How often do you actively develop personal learning assistants (PLAs) working with students on your register?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

9. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) fostering an inclusive learning environment for students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

10. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) contributing to building a sense of belonging for the students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

11. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) actively contributing to the social and emotional needs and development of the students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

12. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the academic progress of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

13. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) on the engagement and participation of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

14. How do you perceive the impact of personal learning assistants (PLAs) influencing the overall growth and development of students they support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

15. How often do teachers plan for interventions to support students with specific learning needs without prompting from the learning support specialist?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

Personal Learning Assistant (PLA)

Please provide honest answers to the questions below. Where you feel unsure of the answer, choose the best fit. For the purpose of this survey,"learning support" or "learning support specialist" include EAL support / specialists. "Students with learning needs" DO NOT ONLY refer to students on the learning support or EAL registers (except where otherwise indicated).

1. How frequently do you engage in collaborative planning sessions with class teachers?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

2. How often do you actively seek input from specialists to enhance the support provided to students in your class?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

3. How often do you communicate with class teachers to understand and align your approach with the specific learning needs of the student you support?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

4. How regularly does the class teacher engage in communication with you to exchange information about the learning needs of the student you support?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day
5. How regularly does the class teacher provide individual support to the student you support?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

6. How often does the class teacher differentiate learning to make it accessible for the student you support?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

7. How regularly do you receive development from the school that is relevant to your role and the specific needs of the student you support?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

8. How regularly do you communicate with specialist teachers (PE, music, art and world languages) to exchange information about the learning needs of the student you support?

Less than once a month
At least once a month
At least once a week
At least once a day

9. How do you perceive your impact fostering an inclusive learning environment for the student you support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

10. How do you perceive your impact contributing to building a sense of belonging for the student you support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

11. How do you perceive your impact actively contributing to the social and emotional needs and development of the student you support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

12. How do you perceive your impact on the academic progress of the student you support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

13. How do you perceive your impact on the engagement and participation of students you support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

14. How do you perceive your impact influencing the overall growth and development of the student you support?

Insignificant
Noticeable
Significant

Appendix B: Interview Protocol - *Teacher Efficacy and Collaborative Planning for Supporting Students with Diverse Needs*

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview focused on teacher efficacy and collaborative planning to support students with diverse needs in our primary school setting. Your insights are invaluable for understanding the current practices, challenges, and opportunities in our educational community. The information gathered will be used for research purposes and to enhance support systems for our students. Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential.

Background Information:

a. Can you briefly describe your role and responsibilities within the school?

b. How long have you been working in the education field, and what experiences have you had in supporting students with diverse needs?

Teacher Efficacy:

Efficacy is defined as a belief in one's abilities to do something. In the context of school, it is a teacher's belief that they have the ability to support students effectively.

a. How confident do you feel in your ability to support students with diverse needs in your classroom or specialized area?

b. What factors contribute to your sense of efficacy or lack thereof in supporting these students?

c. Can you share examples of successful strategies you've implemented to support students with diverse needs?

d. Conversely, can you discuss any challenges or barriers you've encountered in supporting these students effectively?

Collaborative Planning:

Collective Efficacy is the belief that collectively we have the abilities to do something. In the context of school, it is a teacher's belief that they have the ability to support students effectively.

a. How often do you engage in collaborative planning sessions with other teachers and specialists, specifically aimed at supporting students with diverse needs?

b. Can you describe the structure or format of these collaborative planning sessions?

c. What benefits have you observed from collaborative planning in supporting students with diverse needs?

d. What challenges or barriers, if any, have you experienced in the process of collective planning with other teachers and specialists?

Future Directions:

a. What do you believe could be done to enhance collective teacher efficacy in supporting students with diverse needs?

b. How do you envision improving collaborative planning processes to better support students?

Closing:

a. Is there any additional information or insights you would like to share regarding teacher efficacy and collaborative planning for supporting students with diverse needs?

b. Do you have any questions or concerns about the topics discussed during this interview?

Conclusion:

Thank you once again for your participation and valuable contributions to this interview. Your perspectives will greatly inform our efforts to improve support systems for students with diverse needs within our primary school community. If you have any further thoughts or ideas following this interview, please feel free to share them at any time.