Implementation of Lucid assessment software in North Ayrshire schools

Approaches to identifying and assessing the needs of learners who struggle to develop the skills associated with literacy – reading and writing

A report by
Allan Cowieson
Quality Improvement Officer
Additional Support for Learning and Pupil Support Service
North Ayrshire Council

The main area of concern faced by several education managers and psychological services emerged from discussions with class and subject teachers. Many teachers felt that they did not know how to help children and young people who appeared to have difficulties with developing fluency, accuracy and speed of processing aspects of text-based work. The teachers felt that they had identified pupil difficulties but that they did not know where to go with their concerns. School managers also felt nervous about raising the question of specific learning difficulty with parents.

For several years, the policy in North Ayrshire has been to raise the capacity of schools to deal with the widest possible range of difficulties faced by children and young people. It was agreed that some action had to be taken to:

a) equip schools to be able to assess the needs of learners with specific difficulties,
b) develop intervention strategies that would meet these needs, and
c) be able to talk with some confidence about these strategies to pupils and to parents.

These concerns received added currency through the (at that time) draft Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill and the first draft of the proposed Code of Practice. The duty to identify and assess whether any pupil who was failing to benefit from education had additional support needs strengthened the case that had already been made.

The Head of Service (Inclusion) and the Quality Improvement Officer discussed the problems. It was determined to find a well-respected resource that would form the starting point for this initiative. A number of articles in educational journals outlined a computer-mediated approach to assessment. Lucid Research had three programs, Lucid CoPS, LASS Junior and LASS Secondary that appeared to offer the kinds of support that were being sought to equip schools.
**Pilot project**

A pilot project was established, designed to run for 15 months (5 academic terms). Twenty Support for Learning Teachers were recruited to take part in the project. This gave coverage of around thirty Primary schools within the authority. Letters were written to all of the Head Teachers in the schools covered by the Support Teachers. One indication of the welcome for such an initiative was the fact that none of the schools contacted opted out.

Standard letters were developed to be sent out to parents when it was decided that a pupil might be tested. Ten lap-top computers and ten licences for each of *Lucid CoPS* and *LASS Junior* were purchased. The teachers worked in pairs. Three full-days and two half-days were set aside for training, monitoring and evaluation for the whole project team.

The evaluations from the project indicated that staff felt more confident about identifying pupils at risk of having specific learning difficulties and about talking to them and to their parents. There was also a sense of a better match when it came to thinking about intervention strategies. Evaluations from a number of school managers also supported the sense of increased accuracy and confidence in identifying and assessing need. Discussions with parents were also positive. This was so evident that some of the pilot schools developed high levels of confidence in contacting and speaking to parents where before there had been great diffidence.

**Adequate, effective and efficient**

From the management perspective, one of the main benefits of using *Lucid CoPS*, *LASS Junior* and *LASS Secondary* is that, following proper training, the assessment can be supported by a classroom assistant. The results can then be interpreted by Support for Learning specialists in consultation with class and subject teachers.

On the basis of the project outcomes, five-year licences were purchased for *Lucid CoPS and LASS Junior* for each Primary school in the authority. Five-year licences were also purchased for *LASS Secondary* for each of the Secondary schools.

There was a fairly significant initial financial outlay to purchase the licences. However, schools have found that they are well able to implement the assessments drawing on their own resources. This has represented good value for money.

The requirements to identify and to assess the needs of learners who may have additional support needs are now fulfilled – in this area of Specific learning Difficulties/Dyslexia by ongoing curriculum-based information gathering, discussions with learners and with their parents/carers. These existing processes have been enhanced by the additional use of the Lucid programs.

A memorandum was circulated to all schools, indicating that the programs should be used to assess difficulties when pupils were transitioning from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the authority’s *Additional Support for Learning, Staged Intervention model*.

*Stage 1* is within class. The class teacher meets these needs using differentiated approaches and additional resources. When a pupil still fails to make expected progress after all manageable strategies have been attempted, they progress to Stage 2. *Stage 2* is about whole-school approaches and will involve intervention...
from Support for Learning staff. It is at this stage of considering what additional support might be offered and what resources and approaches to use that the Lucid results were to be used.

Training
A full-day for training was set aside to launch the programs in all schools. Dr Chris Singleton, from Lucid Research Ltd, was invited to run the training day. In addition to this, the twenty Support Teachers who had worked on the project were able to offer a level of ongoing support to schools and to other Support colleagues. Educational psychologists were invited to attend. School-based staff and educational psychologists rated the training day very highly. It was agreed to ask Dr Chris Singleton to come back and to develop a continuing link with the authority around this initiative.

Two further days for training have also been run. These were focused on interpretation of the assessment results and on matching strategies for intervention. One day was purely to allow groups of school-based staff and educational psychologists to support one another in developing skills in interpreting the assessment results. On the second day, Dr Singleton again provided support around interpreting the results but moved on to looking at strategies for intervention.

As a consequence of this day, Lucid’s Memory Booster program has been purchased for all Primary schools in the authority.

The Quality Improvement Officer continues to offer staff development opportunities through the Additional Support for Learning CPD catalogue within the authority.

Some resources have been purchased to support the work of schools in meeting the needs that are identified. These will be evaluated in schools and the results made available to colleagues. This process is intended to help schools when matching strategies to assessment outcomes.

Conclusions
Overall, the authority has found that the process of identification, assessment, consultation with learners and parents and developing strategies for intervention, outlined in the Code of Practice, has been strengthened through the use of the programs.

A one-day conference is planned for 2007 on Specific Learning Difficulties/Dyslexia. This will be run through partnership between Educational Services and Psychological Services. Dyslexia Ayrshire (a local branch of Dyslexia Scotland) has been very supportive. The conference is for school staff and for parents.