

# EVALUATION OF THE 5P APPROACH



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## 1. Introduction

The most recent statistics from the Department for Education (DfE) show that 24.5% of pupils with a statement or Education and Health Care (EHC) plan in January 2015 had autistic spectrum disorder recorded as their primary need (DfE 2015). The incidence of pupils with autism exhibiting challenging behaviours at school, including anxiety, self-injury and aggression are well documented (Maskay et al. 2013). Our understanding of how to support pupils in their self-regulation in order to better manage these behaviours is emerging (Doehring et al. 2014). These behaviours are often a barrier to pupils with autism taking part in mainstream education (Lindsay et al. 2014). This report presents the findings from a 'realistic evaluation' of the 5P approach for pupils with autism in three schools. It was commissioned by one of the schools who were one of the first to adopt schools.

## 2 Aims and objectives

The 5P Approach offers a practical framework which can be used by professionals, parents and organisations who want a better understanding about the behaviour of children and young people with autism and how to prevent problems from arising. It supports staff with the process of managing behaviour change and who want to adopt a preventative and positive approach to their work with pupils. Since its development, the 5P Approach has been used within many schools and organisations for individuals, within classes and groups or as a basis for a whole school or organisation approach to intervention - whatever the individuals' needs.

To date there has been no independent evaluation of the framework. An evaluation is now considered an important next step with an emphasis on how it is used and the perspective of professionals as to how it helps them to improve their practice and ultimately outcomes for pupils with autism and other special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Such an evaluation is also timely as the 5P framework reflects the approach to assessment and teaching described in the new SEND Code of Practice 2014 (DfE 2014). The findings would also contribute towards building an evidence base for the approach.

The following research questions were the focus for the evaluation:

Research Question 1: How is 5P implemented across three different types of school settings?

Research Question 2: How does the 5P approach support pupil learning?

Research Question 3: How does the 5P approach enable practitioners to better support pupil learning?

Research Question 4: What should schools consider before/when implementing the programme?

### 3 Evaluation methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

A realistic research design was used to inform the methodology of the study (Davies 2011, Pawson et al. 2004). This approach recognises the complexity of evaluating interventions in schools and places a focus on process, not just outputs ('why/how does it work?', not just 'does it work?'); and there is a recognition of the important influence social contexts can have on programmes. These contextual factors include:

- i. individual capacities (e.g. interest, attitudes, capability, credibility, beliefs and skills of key stakeholders);
- ii. group factors and interpersonal relationships (e.g. lines of communication, management, administrative support, professional contracts);
- iii. organisational factors/institutional setting (e.g. organisational culture, charter and ethos of the school, clear and supportive leadership from senior managers).

In order to evaluate how and why the 5P approach was effective in the different schools, it was important that the study encompassed these three levels of contextual factors.

#### 3.2 Sample

TA purposive sampling approach was adopted with the evaluation taking place in three schools in an outer London borough. The schools were two special schools for pupils with autism and one mainstream school with a large resource base for pupils with social communication difficulties and complex needs. A total of 25 members of staff took part in the study which included three members of the senior leadership team (SLT), twelve teachers (T) and ten teaching assistants (TA). The range of professionals meant that the study afforded the opportunity to elicit any differences in experiences and/or perspectives of different professional roles in the school setting.

#### 3.3 Data collection methods

The following data collection methods took place in each school:

1. Semi-structured interview with the member of SLT responsible for implementing 5P

2. Focus group with teachers
3. Focus group with TAs.

The focus groups for teachers and TAs were separated in order to ensure that the voice of all professionals would be heard and for practical reasons to ensure that there were sufficient staff available for supervising/teaching pupils.

### 3.4 Procedure

Three schools currently running the 5P programme agreed to take part in the evaluation and asked for staff to volunteer to take part in an interview or focus group. The interviews and focus groups took place in the schools in December 2015 and January 2016. The interviews were recorded manually and using a Dictaphone and ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 45 minutes in duration. The study adopted the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Revised Ethical Guidelines to inform the research process (BERA 2011). Consent was sought from participants throughout the process starting with an invitation letter, supporting information sheet and consent form.

### 3.5 Data analysis

The study used a thematic approach to analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarization with the data, generation of codes, searching and reviewing of themes, defining and naming themes, and the production of a written account. Phase 1 involved collecting a start list of codes prior to beginning fieldwork (Miles and Huberman 1994). For Phase 2, a provisional list of codes was drawn up. This formed the initial coding framework for the three interviews and six focus groups but the coding was conducted with fragility (Fisher 1997). The next two phases, the searching and reviewing of themes, entailed the construction of a range of initial thematic maps in order to identify the relationship between codes and which of them could form themes to answer the research questions (phases five and six) (Braun and Clarke 2006).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Research Question 1: How is 5P implemented across three different types of school settings?

There were many similarities in how the 5P approach was implemented across the three settings, following the guidelines of the programme. Any variance in practice that existed was due to the different needs of the pupils and contexts of the school.

All of the settings launched the 5P approach with two days of **training** led by the author of the programme. In two of the settings, a member of the 5P team visited the schools weekly or biweekly to provide ongoing support to the

whole school implementation of the programme but also to offered supervision to individual members of staff with a focus on a pupil. The participants in these schools spoke very highly of the support provided and the opportunity to speak with someone external to the school and who did not know the pupils. It was felt that this brought a 'fresh pair of eyes' (TA) and possibly more objectivity to examining the behaviours of pupils with suggestions of how to move forward. Both SLT leasers in the schools reported that the cost of retaining a consultant was very good value for money and had been essential to ensuring success during the first year of the programme. Each of the schools continued to provide induction training in 5P to new staff as they arrived and one of the schools had it as a standing item on the agenda weekly staff meeting.

**Time** had to be allowed from the perspective of the whole school and for staff and pupils to embed learning. Although there was some variation in responses, it was reported that it took at least a year for individual staff to become fully confident in effectively using the approach to help with identification and strategies for managing behaviour. From the perspective of the whole school SLTs reported that this could be two years to fully implement and embed in school processes. The philosophy behind the programme took time to fully understand and appreciate that the approach was about providing a framework for practice and was not a 'quick fix intervention'.

It is not a solution, it is a framework to assist you in finding a way forward. (T)

When first introduced all participants reported that agreeing 'green behaviour' for each setting and then each class can take a considerable amount of discussion and needs to be reviewed annually. Finally, all participants spoke of the importance of additional planning time at the beginning of the year to update or write new plans. Pupils developed and changed over the period of a year, term to term and sometimes day to day and this needed to be reflected in the planning document.

Finally, it was possible to see consistency across the settings in how the approach was used and **displayed in the classroom** and with individual pupils. Each classroom would have a poster with green, red and amber zone agreed by the pupils and staff in that class. Pupils had their own green, amber and red zone on the wall (easy access for staff to read), on their desk and/or carried it around on a chain in their pocket. This was especially the case for pupils in the resource base who could then use it discreetly if needed in mainstream classes. All schools and classes completed writing a green, amber and red zone for all pupils but in one setting, detailed plans with the hierarchy of interventions, were only written for pupils who presented with particularly challenging behaviours regularly.

#### **4.2 Research Question 2: How does the 5P approach support pupil learning?**

The main themes from staff responses focused on: the **accessibility** of the framework for pupils with autism, that it provided 'tools' for pupils to begin to **self-regulate** their emotions and behaviour in all settings, was very **pupil**

**centered** and supported pupils in developing empathy for themselves and for others. Each of the themes are described in more detail.

### ***Accessibility of the approach for pupils with autism***

The traffic light system used in the 5P approach provided a very effective visual hook for pupils that in turn allowed them to access the vocabulary and conceptual understanding required of beginning to self-regulate their behaviour. As one senior leader commented:

It makes the abstract concrete. (SLT)

It helps to put behaviours in black and white and take away some of the misunderstandings that arose around different scenarios. These 'rules' were then agreed across each class and then the school. The pupils welcomed and responded very well to the consistent approach used by all of the school community and that the approach could be used at different times of the day, for example, at break and in mainstream lessons.

### ***Improved self-regulation of emotions and behaviour***

The visual cues, common language for feelings, knowledge of their own personal strategies and consistency of approach by enabled pupils to feel secure in their environment and ultimately in a calm state for learning.

Pupils talk in colours. (SLT)

This 'readiness for learning' also facilitated greater small group work on the part of many pupils. At the same time, pupils were able to recognise in themselves if they were beginning to have more negative feelings and that these could then be communicated more quickly and effectively to staff and other pupils. Many of the pupils in each setting were increasingly able to self-regulate and understand themselves better. There were still pupils who needed, and it was envisaged, would always require support to regulate their emotions and behaviour. Staff in all settings had observed the considerable progress made by pupils in regulating behaviour and being able to increasingly talk about their emotions. All staff of staff reported a reduction in close support needed by some pupils as the use of the framework became more familiar to pupils.

I have been here sixteen years and 5P has had the most impact for pupils of all initiatives we have implemented.

(TA)

### ***Pupil centred approach***

Staff reported that the pupil centred focus of the framework meant that pupils were at the heart of the programme. This was exemplified by the fact that, where possible, pupils contributed ideas and specific strategies to their plan. Pupils were aware of their plan and often knew what to do without having to make reference to it. Therefore, they were more likely to succeed. One TA described how she felt in the discussion and development of the plan for self-regulation, some pupils began to understand that it was ‘...ok to be who you are...’ and that changes in moods and behaviours was natural for everyone, including those without autism, and that to manage and respond positively was what ‘...’ we all had to learn...’. With the support of the traffic light system and strategies, staff had observed that many pupils were able to develop this emerging empathy for themselves into empathy for others. They could observe behaviour from other pupils and put it into a ‘5P’ context as opposed to responding more personally.

### **4.3 Research Question 3: How does the 5P approach enable practitioners to better support pupil learning?**

The main themes from staff responses focused on: **consistency** in practice across staff teams, using the approach enabled staff to become more **confident** about their practice, encouraged **collegiality and team working** and took an **inclusive** approach in who, where and how it could be used.

#### ***Consistency to practice***

The theme of consistency was the first to be reported in all interviews and focus groups. The framework facilitated consistency in understanding behaviours, labelling and ‘grading’ acceptability of behaviours.

We are all singing from the same song sheet. (T)

This in turn supported more accurate and consistent identification of need and strategies to support and manage individual behaviours. Consistency lay in the process of addressing pupil behaviour as opposed to treating all pupils the same which is how consistency might be interpreted in other behaviour programmes.

#### ***Confidence in practice***

Staff reported how the training, framework and regular discussions with colleagues, developed their analytical skills of asking the ‘why’ about behaviours, that behaviour was a function and with supporting pupils and staff to move from the ‘..negative to the positive.’ (T). As the approach helped pupils to develop their skills of empathy, similarly, staff reported feeling greater empathy towards pupils as their knowledge and understanding of the causes of different behaviours developed.

You start to look differently at the action of a pupil tapping a pen. (T)

It allows you to build a relationship with a pupil that is friendly but based on trust and respect. (TA)

The process helped to provide much distance for a member of staff between themselves and the experience of witnessing and trying to manage more of the challenging behaviours. All staff spoke of how their confidence in managing behaviours and knowing 'what to do' was continually improving. One senior member of staff reported that the school now felt more confident in their referrals to outside agencies such as CAMHS. Many felt that using the approach had empowered them in the classroom and had contributed to developing their day to day resilience in responding to behaviours.

### ***5P encourages collegiality and team work***

It puts you all on the same team. (T)

For the 5P approach to be effective it requires the team around each child to come together, regularly, to discuss what is working on the plan and what might need to be adjusted. All staff spoke of how this plan needs to be a 'living document' and it was a mechanism through which staff could agree a way forward, which was particularly appreciated if the behaviour of a pupil was of particular concern or regularly challenging. Participants never reported feeling isolated in their work with a pupil and that the approach helped to create an ethos where it was not just accepted but where staff were encouraged to reflect and seek advice from colleagues. All staff recognised their responsibility to supporting a pupil to remain in the 'green zone' at any given time. New members of staff, especially TAs, commented that the approach helped them to understand more clearly and very quickly their contribution to each pupil's education. This was something that had not experienced in previous schools. Many of those interviewed commented how they wish the approach had been available in their previous schools.

### ***Inclusive approach to teaching and learning***

It supports everything we do. (SLT)

All teams of staff commented on the inclusive approach to teaching and learning of the 5P framework. This was because staff felt that it could be used by all pupils including pupils in mainstream classes. This was because the idea of a 'green zone' was relevant for all pupils (and staff). In one focus group there was a discussion around how it might be adapted for secondary mainstream school, with a suggestion that the concept of the green, amber and yellow zones delivered through PHSE, with pupils writing their own green zones. Individual pupils but then be targeted, personalised plans. The 5P approach was inclusive because it could be used to support pupils across settings, for example, in school and at home and in different activities throughout the school day such as the

playground and on school trips. One setting spoke of how applying the 5P approach and philosophy to break times had a drastic impact in reducing the number of conflicts and misunderstandings that would happen between pupils during this time. The same thing happened when assembly time, structure and activities were changed in light of 5P. Finally, all staff very much welcomed the fact that 5P was sufficiently flexible to accommodate and complement all of the other approaches generally used to support pupils with autism such as PECS and TEACCH.

#### **4.4 Research Question 4: What should schools consider before/when implementing the programme?**

Participants were asked to explore the challenges of implementing the programme and what schools, particularly, SLTs should ensure is considered and in place at the start of the programme to help ensure it begins positively and quickly becomes effective.

All participants spoke of the importance of commitment and leadership ‘from the top’ to the programme and a recognition that a school was perhaps looking at two years before the approach was fully embedded in all aspects of school life. Senior leadership teams needed to foster a culture in school of the value and contribution of ‘trial and error’ in practice and that this was the only way forward in working with long term challenging behaviours of some pupils. There needed to be a recognition and understanding that supporting pupils in self-regulating behaviours can be complex at times and will be an ongoing process for many of the pupils during their time at school and life as an adult. At the start of introducing the traffic light element of the programme, discussions around green behaviours may well be protracted but understand that this debate is healthy and is fundamental to the success of the approach. Finally, SLTs would need to understand that there can be tensions with more mainstream whole school behaviour support programmes and the philosophy of 5P, for example, within 5P pupils will be ‘treated’ differently at times, but once again understand that such exploring the tensions is a positive activity and beneficial or all professionals and indeed pupils.

## **5. Conclusion**

The responses from the participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the 5P approach. They were very clear as to how and why the programme was effective for pupils in supporting pupils to self-regulate their emotions and behaviour. There was unanimous support for continuing with the programme in all schools and many spoke of how they wished they had been introduced to the approach earlier in their careers. All would recommend the approach to colleagues in other schools, including mainstream schools with perhaps some minor modifications for secondary aged pupils. It was an approach that would work for all pupils including those without SEND.

The approach embodies the very best of inclusive education (Booth 2002). Firstly, the framework is one of the few approaches to provide universal and targeted support to pupils' development and learning. It is universal in that it can be used as a whole school approach, whilst sufficiently flexible to be personalised for individual pupils. This is at the heart of the graduated approach to learning required in the current SEND Code of Practice (DfE 2014). Secondly, the approach contributes to fostering a sense of community and empathy in a school setting between pupils and practitioners.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the responses of the participants the following recommendations are made to the senior leadership teams of the schools in the study.

All participants spoke of the need for increased joint planning in class teams with a focus on 5P discussing pupils and updating 5P support plans. Wider research on the collaborative relationship between teachers and TAs has demonstrated the importance of joint planning to effective teaching and learning (Webster et al. 2015).

**Recommendation 1: To formalise more opportunities for joint planning between teachers and TA across the school year.**

The participants highly valued the external support and supervision provided in the first year of implementing the programme. It was also recognised that experienced staff in the approach could provide supervision to new and less experienced colleagues.

**Recommendation 2: To formalise more opportunities of individual and small group supervision for practitioners with a focus on individual pupils.**

All participants were convinced of the benefits of extending the use of the 5P approach with parents so that pupils began to experience consistency across settings. The spirit of the revised Code of Practice is for closer partnership working between schools and parents. Increasingly, stand-alone programmes, such as the Cygnet autism programme for parents, are being used by schools with parents.

**Recommendation 3: To develop and expand the current offer to parents for training in the 5P approach.**

This was a small scale exploratory evaluation and as such there were many limitations of the study including not being able to generalise the findings to all schools and the wider population of pupils with autism. Another significant limitation was the lack of pupil voice in the findings.

**Recommendation 4: Any future studies should include data collection methods that include the voice and perspectives of the pupils in the 5P approach.**

This evaluation sought to primarily investigate *how* the 5P approach supported pupils in their self-regulation of behaviours and their learning. It was not an evaluation of the ‘effectiveness’ of the programme. Nevertheless, participant responses point strongly to the effectiveness of approach with individual pupils and as a whole school approach but they acknowledged that it was a challenge to provide quantitative data to support their views. This is perhaps not surprising as the 5P approach is not an ‘intervention’ and therefore not easily measured using standard quantitative methods. During the interviews and focus groups, suggestions were made such as the possibility of using entries in behaviour logs as possible evidence.

**Recommendation 5: 5P team and school leadership teams to investigate the validity and feasibility of collecting quantitative data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach for pupils and across the school.**

The findings of this report would be of great interest to senior leadership teams and all practitioners in special and mainstream education. It is important that the findings and experience of the participants in the schools in this study are disseminated. This report will be shared with school teams and governing bodies. However, there are additional options including an academic journal, a school practitioner magazine such as ‘special’ (membership magazine for nasen) the TES and newsletters such as that of SENJIT at UCL Institute of Education. Due to copy right issues it would not be possible to do all of them. Each option brings advantages and disadvantages for ‘reach’ and academic impact.

**Recommendation 6: To devise a pathway for disseminating the findings from the report.**

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