

## Riverside

CAROLINE CURRIE: Steady... Go!

COLIN WARD: Riverside is a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, aged from three to 19. They travel here from Antrim Town, Randalstown, Templepatrick, Crumlin, Kells and Ballyclare. So we've been using Quest for a number of years to help us to assess our pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties. But there was a gap between the Quest and levels of progression. And Q Skills has really filled that gap.

CAROLINE CURRIE: Riverside introduced Q Skills from September 2012 and what we decided to do was we decided to include it in our school development plan over a three year period. This obviously had to involve the writing of action plans and sitting as a staff team, and figuring out how we were going to actually implement Q Skills in a way that suited us as a school, and also suited the needs of our pupils.

COLIN WARD: So the vision of our school is to provide a really strong school community where both our staff and our pupils enjoy working and learning together. And what we're trying to do there is to provide a really high quality of teaching and learning where we know that pupils are enjoying learning and as our school motto talks about, the pupils flourish at a level and pace that's appropriate to their individual needs.

CARLY CAMPBELL: For all the children in the class, it's very important for us not only to plan, but also to assess as well. And it's so important because whenever we come to actually teaching, that we're planning with a purpose for setting targets, for example, for each child, to make sure that it fits in with the theme as well.

We can't go over it, we can't go under it. Oh, no! We've got to go through it!

At the end, we assess using either Quest or Q Skills and that informs our planning for future years, and also helps us to see how the child has progressed throughout the year.

CATHY GASTON: The learners in this class are aged between 14 and 16, so it is key that the skills that they learn in school are key functional life skills. We are working with a learner at the moment who has difficulty in choice making. He needs to learn to do that in school so that he can transfer that skill outside of school and be able to use that on a daily basis. Those moderate levels of support will eventually diminish. And just the fact that we're taking that level of support away from him into more, a lower level of support, that itself is progression.

CARLY CAMPBELL: We have a range of ICT skills that are being developed in the classroom at the moment. Individual work with the children looking for targets, and even just to have cause and effect. So there's a range of different things that we're doing, and those can be differentiated to suit to the different abilities of the children as well. So, Madeline, for example, during cause and effect choice

time can choose between two pictures, whereas some other children can handle choosing between ten pictures. So it's a range of different techniques, and it's so important to use ICT to boost any child's abilities. So, for example, Madeline and Charlotte, both in the classroom, benefit from ICT and can learn numeracy, literacy and a range of different topics.

JENNY MARSHALL: This year I have eight in my class, so we're working within Q Skill Four, which is focusing on number and money work. We have been working on, generally, the concept that you need coins, and we need these coins to exchange for goods. These maths skills overlap into other activities, and another activity that we do outside of the classroom is down in the PE hall, where we're doing our indoor PE activities: sorting, counting and matching. So, the children are transferring those skills.

CAROLINE CURRIE: Here in Riverside School, pupils are given lots of opportunities to learn outside of the classroom, and engage in play-based and activity-based learning. This can happen in our soft play areas, in our playground, in our multi-sensory studio, or even indeed in educational visits.

JENNY MARSHALL: These main activities include going down to a local supermarket where we do our cookery shopping, so the children are going down with a list of the cookery items, choosing these, and then going to the cashier.

CAROLINE CURRIE: During these activities, teachers and classroom assistants engage in informal observations for all the cross-curricular skills.

CARLY CAMPBELL: Whenever the children are playing or at an activity, we'd take a note of a milestone that they've maybe achieved, or something that we have never seen before, and we would just scribble that down on a sticky note so that we're not forgetting things and missing out on brilliant achievements that the children have made.

CAROLINE CURRIE: And then these are translated to a more formal recording sheet at a later time.

Let's see, where are you sort of thinking at the minute in terms of--

CARLY CAMPBELL: Well, that one there. "Show pleasure when presented with a range of sensory stimuli."

CAROLINE CURRIE: Okay.

CARLY CAMPBELL: So, she was clapping at things, and sort of jumping in her seat.

So note-taking in this classroom makes it so much easier for me. At the start of the year, whenever I come to write my IEP's and set my targets,

because I'm able to see where the children are starting off at the beginning of the year and then again, whenever I come to look at that again at the end of the year, I can see how they've progressed, and how they've met the targets. And again, that's fantastic whenever you're reporting back to parents, because you can show them the progression throughout the year, and you've got the evidence to prove it as well.

CAROLINE CURRIE: There are many practicalities to consider when implementing Q Skills in school. The first one we really had to look at was whole staff training, and we took an inset day and trained our teachers and our classroom assistants in how to use Q Skills effectively within classroom practice. The second thing that we had to consider was the big issue of time, and we had allow staff to have time, both in and outside of class in order to get their heads around the document, to understand its layout, the language that was involved, and basically to try and see how they can use it within their classroom settings.

CARLY CAMPBELL: It's fantastic to have the support from Caroline, the vice principal here, and also a range of other staff members that you can go to to get advice, and also to see how they are recording. The format is very easy to record, and Q Skills can be simply filled in with the observations that I've taken from my Post-It notes. So that support network is in place, and everyone is developing this throughout the year through the school plan. So it's fantastic to go through that together.

CAROLINE CURRIE: We hope that the end product in using Q Skills throughout the school will be that we have a consistent and standardised form of assessment for all of our pupils. Therefore, as pupils move from class to class, or from key stage to key stage, or indeed school to school, that they will have an assessment format that moves with them so we know exactly where they are and can plan how to move them on.