Early intervention and prevention (Primary)

In view of the substantial international evidence that early-intervention and prevention programmes can lead to improved outcomes for pupils, school leaders should ensure that some teaching resources are used for this purpose. As schools engage in a process of self-reflection and review, they will become aware of whole-school issues that may be addressed through early-intervention programmes, which are evidence-based and which are responsive to the local context. Schools have the flexibility to innovate by developing and trialling new approaches and by using assessment data to evaluate the efficacy of these interventions. Developing and sharing successful practice has the potential to contribute to improvements in the overall provision for pupils with special educational needs. Schools may find it helpful to deploy additional teaching resources in junior classes to strengthen station teaching approaches which target the promotion of language, literacy and numeracy skills. The use of early-intervention and prevention programmes helps mitigate the development of learning, social and emotional difficulties. A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development is an example of a resource for early-intervention and prevention of literacy difficulties.

Schools could also seek advice and training in well-validated programmes to address behavioural and emotional needs, for example, the Incredible Years – Teacher Classroom Management programme as a means of preventing the emergence of behavioural difficulties; FRIENDS for Life as a means of preventing anxiety and building resilience, or similar evidence-based programmes.

In addition, the Department’s support services offer a wide range of programmes and resource materials related to the social, emotional and behavioural needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. These programmes cover such issues as bullying, transition and behaviour management. A sample of programmes currently available includes:

- Anti-Bullying Support Materials
- Transition - Early Childcare and Pre-School to Primary School
- Transition - Primary to Post-Primary
- Challenging Behaviour and Social Skills for Students with Special Educational Needs
- Pathways to Prevention

All intervention programmes should be carefully monitored to assess and record their impact on pupil progress, participation in learning and in school life. These programmes are most effective and achieve better outcomes when they are implemented as intended by the designers and when implementation is intensive and includes frequent opportunities for pupils to practise skills.

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