



## **The impact of providing symbol support software across all schools in one local authority in England**

### **The context for the use of ICT for Inclusion**

The Plymouth Advisory Learning Support (PALS) service identified the need to ensure that schools utilise symbols to support pupils' learning needs. This was recognised as a common need through discussion with other local authority support service colleagues (Communication and Interaction Team and Hearing Impairment Team). It was agreed that it would be beneficial if all schools had access to an appropriate tool to produce symbol-supported resources; staff could act on the advice given by support services to use symbols to support pupils. Ensuring that one symbol-processing tool was available in every school would ensure continuity and consistency.

### **The policy context**

The computer program 'Communicate: In Print (CiP)' (Widgit) was identified as a possible tool to support the creation of symbol-supported resources. The use of CiP was demonstrated and discussed with support service colleagues and an agreement was reached that this would be appropriate.

Funding was secured to purchase CiP for every Plymouth school over a two-year period. In year 1, a single-user licence was purchased for every primary, infant, junior and special school and in year 2, a two-user licence was purchased for every secondary school.

PALS took the lead in distributing the program and providing opportunities to upskill school staff in the appropriate use of the resource. This supported inclusion by providing access to the resource and training in its use.

### **The use of ICT**

- The licences were distributed to each setting via a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) conference run by PALS. A brief demonstration of the program and input about appropriate use of symbols to support pupils were provided. Some local practitioners demonstrated how they used symbols to support their learners and outlined the impact that this had on the pupils' inclusion and learning.
- A practical training course, 'An Introduction to Communicate: In Print' was developed. The aims were to teach staff the skills that they needed to use CiP and the rationale behind appropriate use of symbols. Schools were able to access this free training six times a year in the first three years of the project.
- Central training opportunities continue to be held three times a year and bespoke in-school training is arranged on request.
- A year after introduction of the program, SENCos were asked to bring examples of symbol-supported resources that had been made and used in schools to a SENCo conference. These were displayed for all to see and used to promote discussion and practice sharing around the use of symbols to support learning.

### **Key outcomes and benefits**

Support services noted an increase in symbol use to support learning and inclusion across Plymouth schools.

Between January 2007 and January 2011, 232 staff members from 67 schools attended central training.

Central courses continue to be held three times a year and bespoke in-school training is provided at the request of schools.



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### **Main challenges and obstacles**

Staff turnover and loss of skills in the use of CiP will always be an issue. The practical training course continues to run three times a year to address this.

### **Additional information**

Widgit Software: <http://www.widgit.com/>

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