EMPOWERING SEND STRATEGY & SUPPORT: USING SELF-EVALUATION AND DATA TO DRIVE AND IMPROVE PROVISION

With Simon Tanner
National Director of SEND, E-Act

AT A GLANCE

PRODUCTS

- EMS SEND self-evaluation
- CAT4
- NGRT
- Progress Tests

REGION

UK

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KEY TAKE AWAYS

- EvaluateMySchool empowers practitioners to make data-driven decisions with confidence
- Data from GL assessments supports the identification of students' strengths and challenges, and helps monitor progress and impact
- Combined together these tools give schools a common framework and language for SEND support

E-ACT is a multi-academy trust with 38 academies, teaching over 26,000 students across England. The Trust's aim is to create supportive learning environments where all students will realise their full potential. Simon Tanner, National Director of SEND, leads on inclusion and SEND across the Trust, helping E-ACT to become a system leader in the education of SEND students and developing provision across all their academies.

When Simon joined E-ACT two years ago, his priority was to ensure that the Trust had robust systems in plaec that would allow them to make informed operational and strategic decisions on SEND identification and provision needs, as well as to create detailed SEND action plans for each academy.

Schools within the Trust had already been using ability and attainment data from GL's assessments, but began to combine this with the insights that the **EvaluateMySchool (EMS) SEND evaluation platform** gave them. EMS's SEND evaluation provides schools with best practice questions across seven keys areas, helping SENCOs and senior leaders to identify their school's strengths and areas for development, as well as providing MAT-level insights to help drive school improvement. The evaluations help ensure that leadership of SEND is strategic and has maximum impact, improving outcomes for all students.

Simon explains more: *"E-ACT schools have been using GL assessments for some time - particularly the **Cognitive Abilities Test** (CAT4), **Progress Tests** (PT) and **New Group Reading Test** (NGRT). From a SEND perspective, they were a key part of the identification of those students who needed support, providing us with information on students' cognitive abilities and allowing us to look at their reading ability, and attainment and progress across English, maths and science. For intervention groups, we used the assessments to track students through the process to see the impact. Our academies also use GL's screeners to further dig into the needs of individual students.*

I'd used EMS in my previous trust, so when I joined E-ACT I implemented it immediately as I wanted to ensure that we had SEND action plans in place across all of our academies and were getting into the detail of effective school improvement and what each school needed to implement in order to move that forwards."

IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS

By combining GL's assessment data with the EMS insights, the Trust have been able to identify patterns and trends in their SEND practice - informing their MAT-level SEND strategic plan and allowing them to prioritise objectives.

Simon explains more: *"With the information provided by EMS and GL, I was able to identify our top priority areas where we needed to pool our resources and ensure that we were working on that collectively - this was a Trust focus. It also allowed me to recognise strengths and to challenge perceived strengths from SENCOs and individual academies, using the data as a guide."*

"We were able to look at the priority areas for us and identify if these were something we were seeing in pockets regionally, or whether it was something we saw across the Trust. This informed our planning and resourcing."

The Trust introduced a new SEND support and leadership programme for their SENCOs and have begun in-person cluster days where the staff come together regionally to collaborate and share best practice.

Simon explains *"At the start of the process, the EMS self-evaluations were done by the SENCO and their headteacher, before they moved through the SEND educational support and leadership programme. It was really benficial to SENCOs to have that knowledge and understanding as they went through the programme, so that they could discuss the higher-level school improvement aims, as well as looking at the implementation.*

We now look at SEND plans on our regular academy visits and have introduced two cluster days each year where we get together in regions and the SENCOs come together and reflect on their action plans and the journey they're on - but also touch base with colleagues to share learnings."

CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR SCHOOLS TO THINK ABOUT SEND

By using EMS and GK across the Trust, the schools are now able to develop a consistent approach to SEND provision as well as having a common language for evaluation and sharing of experience.

"EMS has given us a common language to discuss SEND between our academies. It gives us a framework that the schools are working to, and improves the team's understaning on inclusion. There's a MAT dashboard so we can all go into that, as well as the individual school ones. The platform allows easy reporting, recording of conversations, assigning of actions - and the ability to upload evidence."

"We can refer out from EMS to the GL assessment data, as well as brining that data into the identification area and the impact area - helping to ensure that we're working with the right students and that we are seeing the impact of our activity."

CONTINUING THE MOMENTUM

The Trust were keen to ensure that after the initial EMS evaluations were done, the learnings were continually reviewed and actioned.

Simon explains *"Rolling it out is the easy bit really - the team go through the questions, get the RAG rating, identify the CPD - but then it could fall flat. So, what we need to ensure is that the SENCOs are pro-active in what they're doing, and continuing to be accountable.*

We've worked hard to make it current and give it purpose, to keep the momentum going. That's why we've introduced the EMS cluster meetings. We get all the SENCOs together, we review everything we've done previously, we look at the EMS activity tracker and want to see consistent engagement. As they are in-person meetings, ther is some really great sharing of best practice, which means that we can accelerate things across and between schools.

On the data side, we've set up spreadsheets that summarise all the data across all the assessments - and this allows us to easily see, for example, which students might need access arrangements. It helps us to see progress across the year - for example with NGRT repeat testing, we can compare each test with the prior score and this helps to create a more informed picture that evidences impact.

With our EAL students, we can use the data to inform whether the requirement is SEND related or whether they need reading support to build on comprehension, so it helps focus our efforts and identify the reason behind each student's challenges. The data helps our teachers to better understand individual learner needs, and in turn helps them to make well-informed decisions for improving outcomes for our SEND students.
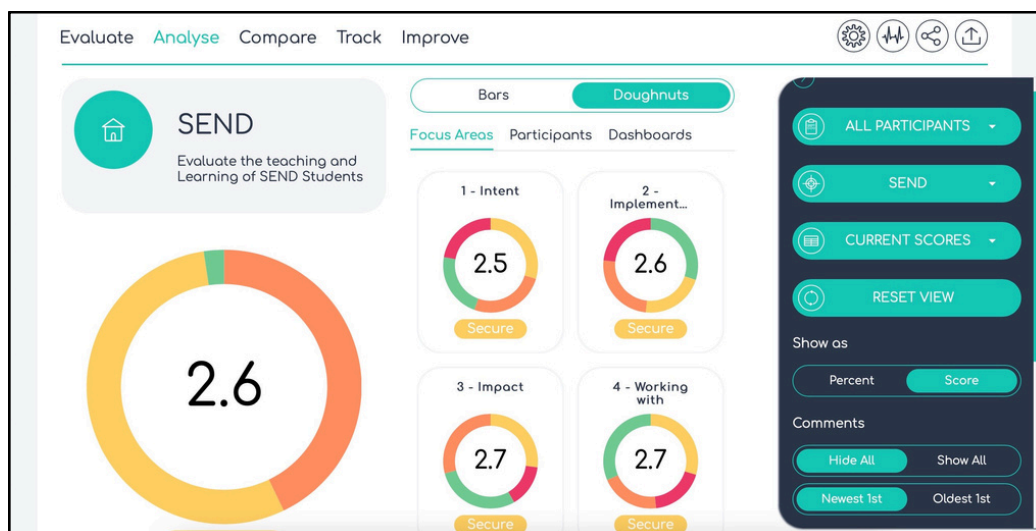
Example data from the EMS platform

IN CONCLUSION

So by bringing together the EMS common standard SENCO framework and the GL assessment data - what has the impact been?

Simon replies: *"Within my role as National Director of SEND, one of the big benefits is that it's a key assurance tool for us. We can cross reference the data with questions like 'Here's your bottom 10% of readers - can I see them on your provision map? Are they all on the reading programme?' And if any of the answers are no, then we can explore that further with the school.*

I can hold the SENCOs to account more easily on whether appropriate provision is in place - exploring whether they have solid identification and can see impact. When we have inspections it also provides evidence that allows the school to show progress over time and gives the SENCOs a structure to talk about the keys areas that they're addressing.

Some new schools have just joined the MAT, and they completed the EMS self-evaluation as part of the process. This meant we could hit the ground running with a SEND action plan already in place when they joined us, that we could start to action and look at alongside the assessment data.

"We've found EMS to be a platform that helps you to engage at a higher and wider level within individual schools - and combining this with GL assessment date give staff a better understanding in their role as SENCO".

With thanks to Simon Tanner, National Director of SEND, E-ACT

You can find out more about our solutions by visiting our websites:

EvaluateMySchool   www.evaluatemyschool.co.uk

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A Renaissance Company   www.gl-education.com