

Turning Engagement Data into Leadership Action

Barton School

Using the DfE Engagement Model to strengthen group learning, reduce escalation and make small-step progress visible

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THE BIG QUESTION

What were we trying to understand?

Can the Engagement Model help leaders see what behaviour data alone can miss — and use that insight to improve readiness, participation and group learning?

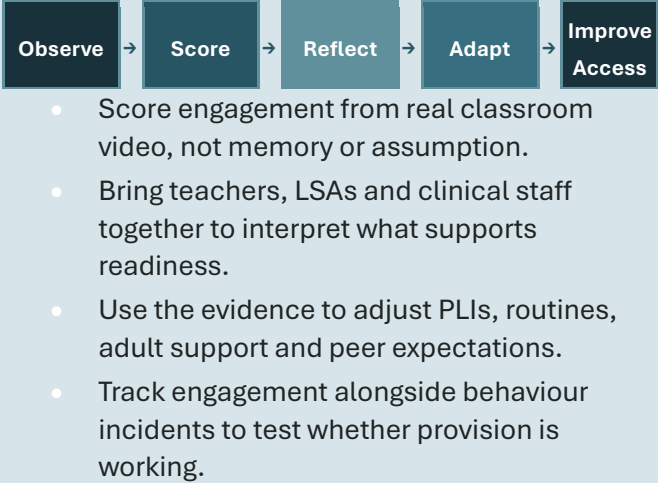
WHY THIS MATTERS

The Challenge

As the school moved from highly individualised provision towards larger shared learning groups, some pupils were not yet ready to participate successfully. This created a leadership challenge: how to increase access to group learning without losing safety, belonging or individualised support. The project tested whether engagement data, video reflection and sharper PLIs could help staff see progress earlier, respond more precisely and avoid mistaking dysregulation or withdrawal for lack of potential.

THE LEADERSHIP METHOD

Simple, repeatable and evidence-informed



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Context: **Specialist autism school shifting towards more shared learning.**

Focus pupils: **Three KS2 pupils on the Stepping Stones pathway.**

Timeframe: **16 weeks of structured observation, review and adaptation.**

Evidence: **Engagement scores, PLI progress, behaviour incidents and staff reflection.**

Led by: **Deputy Head and Lead Clinician/Specialist OT with the class team.**

WHAT LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

The project turned subtle engagement into usable leadership intelligence.

HEADLINE FINDING

Progress was visible despite being non-linear

The Engagement Model helped staff identify meaningful progress, understand dips and adjust provision before disengagement escalated.

OUTCOME DATA

Overall engagement improved when strategies were adapted and PLIs were pitched from pupils' actual readiness, rather than expected age or pathway stage.

Learning progress: Two of three pupils moved forward against group-learning PLIs; one pupil needed the target scaled back, which then improved engagement.

Behaviour impact: Behaviour incidents reduced for the two pupils who made PLI progress and showed improved engagement.

WHY IT MATTERS OPERATIONALLY

- Gives leaders a practical early-warning system for readiness and participation.
- Moves conversations from “behaviour” to learning access, environment and support.
- Prevents premature abandonment of interventions when progress is non-linear.
- Creates a shared language across education and clinical teams.

WHAT SHIFTED IN THE CULTURE

PUPIL INSIGHT

“Your reason is the strongest thing in the world.”
Motivation and meaning mattered as much as strategy.

STAFF INSIGHT

“I didn’t realise he had made so much progress.”
The process helped staff see progress that behaviour records alone did not show.

SYSTEM INSIGHT

Next step: strengthen parent/carers voice.
Home-school insight could make engagement profiles even sharper and more consistent.

LEADER ACTIONS

What should leaders do differently?

- Treat engagement as core learning data, not an additional assessment task.
- Build short, protected review cycles around video evidence and team reflection.
- Check whether group-learning targets are ambitious and achievable from the pupil’s starting point.
- Use dips in engagement as problem-solving prompts, not proof that an intervention has failed.

IMPACT ON PRACTICE

What changed as a result?

- All pupils on the Stepping Stones pathway will now have Engagement Model reviews.
- Staff reflection became more strengths-based, precise and solution focused.
- Clinical and education teams developed a shared view of readiness, regulation and access to learning.
- The school gained a replicable model for evaluating the impact of individualised support.

SCALE & SUSTAIN

Next leadership moves

- Establish engagement profiles within the first weeks of placement or pathway entry.
- Apply the model across a larger cohort to test consistency, scalability and impact.
- Draw parent/carers insight into engagement profiles to strengthen continuity.
- Analyse which strategies have the strongest impact so leaders can invest in what works.

THE HARD-HITTING MESSAGE

If leaders only track behaviour, they risk missing progress. Engagement data shows what is working, what needs adapting, and how pupils can move safely towards shared learning.

