GL Assessment

Assessment in Focus

A guide to helping 'hard to spot' children

Greg Watson – Chief Executive, GL Assessment

Greg is the Chief Executive of GL Assessment. He has been involved in the education sector since 1998, having spent his early career in marketing and IT in the oil industry. Prior to GL Assessment, Greg was the Chief Executive of OCR, the UK public examinations and qualifications division of Cambridge Assessment. He then led Bell, a leading, internationally recognised provider of English language learning and teaching, particularly to children of school age from around the world.

About GL Assessment

GL Assessment (known internationally as GL Education) is the leading provider of benchmarking, formative and diagnostic assessments to UK schools and has a growing presence in British, bilingual and international schools in over 100 countries worldwide. We also provide assessment services to ministries of education and their agencies.

Our assessments are developed in collaboration with a global community of experts from leading universities and research teams, and have been used by education, health and psychology professionals for over 30 years. We believe in a 'whole pupil' approach to assessment and our integrated portfolio helps to reveal students' potential, track their progress and identify any barriers and learning difficulties they might have.

Recognising that technology is a driver for educational change, we have also pioneered an award-winning digital assessment system, which has delivered over 7 million online tests across the globe, and we continue to innovate with adaptive testing and tablet-based assessments.

Find out more at www.gl-assessment.co.uk and www.gl-education.com.

A guide to helping 'hard to spot' children

Contents and contributors

Who gets missed?

Greg Watson, Chief Executive, GL Assessment

Making sure every child reaches their full potential has long been the goal for teachers, but how confident are you that this is actually being achieved in your classroom?

It's a common problem that while we are able to spot and challenge high achievers or support those who have clearly recognisable learning difficulties, there is a subset of children who are at risk of flying under the radar. These are the diligent children who hide their struggles, who do 'well enough' in class but could be capable of so much more, or children whose obvious disruptive behaviour is masking a more serious issue.

What often frustrates educators about this situation is that if these pupils can be spotted early enough, there is a chance they can be taught the skills they need to progress. Yet these children, and the obstacles that prevent better learning, can be very difficult to identify.

"The 'hard to spot' may have spent years learning how to hide the things they don't know."

Peter Wylie,
Director of
Education, Baker
Dearing Trust

Who are the 'hard to spot' children?

As you will know only too well, barriers to learning come in many shapes and sizes. In this report we look at some different types of 'hard to spot' Here are some examples.

The pupil with a reading difficulty

Far too few children who have an issue with reading are picked up in primary school. Often the problem only becomes apparent when the child joins secondary school, when so much teaching and learning is text based.

We have published some research with the University of York on pupils with reading difficulties. The research, which studied 857 11- to 16-year-olds, found that there were some students in every secondary school year group who had a reading age of 6 or 7 years. In addition, 54% of 12- and 16-year-olds were shown to have significant reading problems but were not identified on the school's SEN Register.

The quiet or disengaged pupil

This group of pupils share a common characteristic – the fact that their apparent compliance masks hidden abilities or barriers to learning. This is the pupil who does not raise their hand in class, manages a C in tests and never causes problems, so their true ability is often lost.

The pupil whose behaviour hides a more serious problem

The intelligent but disruptive child who does not see the point in learning. It is their behaviour that often becomes the focus of the school's attention so their potential remains untapped.

Assessment data can give you that 'A-ha!' moment when the reason why a pupil might be hiding their light under a bushel is finally revealed.

Reliable and rigorous assessment can be critical in helping us uncover these 'invisible' children.

In conjunction with teacher judgements, good assessments that are built in to the curriculum will go beyond a simplistic picture of progress. They triangulate information from different sources and help delve into a more diagnostic approach to ensure all children are given the best chance of success.

Assessment data can give you that 'A-ha!' moment when the reason why a pupil might be hiding their light under a bushel is finally revealed.

This guide shares real examples from teachers and school leaders of how 'hard to spot' children may present themselves in the classroom. It also looks at how practitioners have gone about identifying these children using assessment and other means, and most importantly, will look at some of the best ways to support them so that they are put on track to fulfil their true potential.

'Hard to spot' children in the classroom

The very visible naughty child whose misbehaviour hides a more serious problem

Beccie Hawes, Head of Service, Rushall's Inclusion Advisory Support Team

Sometimes a pupil's needs can be difficult to unpick because behaviour can mask what is really going on and lead to a label that only covers the surface.

I have the pleasure and privilege of getting to know many young people as I support them through our service work in schools. This involves me finding out about their strengths and areas of difficulties. Often, when working with a new pupil, the school based conversation starts something like this: 'I have this child and no one knows what to do about them.' This then leads to: 'We've exhausted everything we've got to offer and were hoping you could come and have a look with your magic wand.'

At this point I always agree. I love a challenge and am yet to find the unteachable learner. What I usually find is that the pupil is exhibiting a series of behaviours that are communicating something about their learning to us. My task is to be the person that unpicks this!

I recently observed 13-year-old Josh* sat outside the head teacher's office doing what a nearby teaching assistant referred to as 'his constant chuntering' about receiving yet another detention. It transpired that he had received yet another consequence for not having his PE kit and the right ingredients for food technology. Josh had then stormed out of his form room and punched the wall.

In hushed tones the teaching assistant explained that Josh always forgets everything, was always angry, always damaging stuff and just not doing well at school. She shared that this was 'just the way it was with him'. I couldn't accept this and set myself the challenge of exploring if there was a reason why this was the way it was for Josh.

Sometimes a pupil's needs can be difficult to unpick because behaviour can mask what is really going on and lead to a label that only covers the surface. After six months of exploring below the tip of the iceberg, we realised that Josh experiences dyslexia. His dyslexia had been hidden behind thirteen years of frustration, fear and embarrassment-driven behaviour. Josh and the others just like him are the perfect reason why we must do the following.

- Dig deeper than what the surface shows us.

- Never accept that 'this is just the way it is'.

- Triangulate information from a range of situations and sources.

- Have robust assessment for learning procedures and practices that drive learning forwards.

At the heart of this we then need to remember that the pupil doesn't have a learning difficulty – we have a teaching difficulty. It is up to us

* Names have been changed.

to find the best way in which a pupil will learn. Going under the tip of the iceberg to accurately identify a need is the only way our teaching difficulties will be solved.

A version of this article was originally published by SEN Magazine.

The child who could slip through the cracks in maths

Ronnie Ebanks (Head of Maths) and the Maths department, St George's British International School, Rome

Tempting as it might be to brush off this issue ('It's Maths! I'll know if they have difficulties because they'll get it wrong!'), I'd like to invite you consider the following three types of learners. Are they slipping through the mesh of your assessment web?

Coasters

Familiar to us all, the coaster is as common in the maths classroom as any other, and so our first port of call must be the progress models (CAT indicators, Fischer Family Trust models, as well as teacher tracking from year-to-year). Be on the prowl for those students who are doing 'fine', but really have a lot more to give!

Once identified, intervene with differentiation and push them with extension work to drive them out of their easy-maths-life into deeper waters where they can really learn to swim.

Be on the prowl for those students who are doing 'fine', but really have a lot more to give!

Algorithmatiser

The algorithmatiser loves to follow the steps, knows them well and can replicate them with almost negligible effort, but, if pressed a little ('why does that work?'), will mumble something about that being the way you do it, repeating the method parrot-fashion as a supposed explanation. Given a different example, they cannot adjust the approach to suit the problem.

These students need us to widen the scope of the type of work we do in the maths classroom beyond practice to problem solving. Students will develop these problems if we continue to teach the process and not the concept. We must allow students to discover the principles themselves and develop their own strategies. They must be given opportunities to think mathematically, reason, justify, explain, argue and debate. We need to step back from instruction to become facilitators and let the students become the experts.

Goldfish

The goldfish is fully engaged during the learning experience yet, when you revisit a topic, looks at you blankly, as if they'd never encountered it before. Given the recent expansion of the curriculum – both in terms of its depth and variety – it is perhaps not surprising that goldfish are becoming more common in our classrooms!

Help these students by building consolidation points into your curriculum plan – also providing yourself with useful opportunities to spot them and intervene. Like language learning, maths requires fluency – if you only rehearse the present tense, then you never master the others.

These are the three most common types of students that slip through the cracks, and the strategies we use to identify them and – better still – to prevent them from developing in the first place, can only support deeper progress for all students.

A version of this article was originally published by the TES.

The child with English as an additional language

Matthew Savage, Deputy Head of School, Bromsgrove International School, Thailand

Professor Michael Barber warned back in 1996 that there would be a swathe of young people who would, were interventions not applied, be either 'disappointed', 'disaffected' or 'disappeared' before too long. In the subsequent decade, UK schools were tasked with implementing strategies for 'hard to reach' students, partly in order to reduce the number of those who were NEET (not in education, employment or training).

However, even today, a significant number of students remain similarly under threat, and my fear is that most schools have not spotted who they are, yet.

My quest, in pursuit of #TheMonaLisaEffect, a model of personalised learning which aims to ensure that every student believes their learning experience has been designed specifically for them, with all their strengths, needs, interests and passions in full and deliberate gaze.

I believe strongly that, within the 21st Century classroom, this becomes so much easier when furnished with a sophisticated and rich data triangle on each and every student. At Bromsgrove International School, Thailand, we make full use of the assessment portfolio from GL Education. The lens of our learning personalisation has become especially sharp as a result of each student's aptitudinal and attitudinal data.

With the *Cognitive Abilities Test* (*CAT4*), my teachers have a profound insight into every child's academic ability, beneath and beyond the veneer of what is, for the majority of our cohort, a significant English as an additional language (EAL) barrier. This data is, more often than not, a liberating force, unleashing the potential of young learners for whom English really is the only obstacle. Subsequently and simultaneously, the *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School* (*PASS*) survey shows us #WhatLiesBeneath, the attitudinal currents which swirl and rip under the masks increasingly worn in childhood, especially within Asian societies.

Like a treasure map, *CAT4* and, increasingly, the educators become treasure hunters. Meanwhile, *PASS* is an emotional MRI machine, often showing us precisely why the treasure is proving difficult to find – or, using the terms of this blog, 'hard to spot'.

This data is, more often than not, a liberating force, unleashing the potential of young learners for whom English really is the only obstacle.

Knowing that, for example, a child is suffering from low self-regard, that their metacognition is underdeveloped, or that their risk-aversion is rooted in a fear of failure, finally we can do something about it, and empower them to dig for their own treasure. This is #TheMonaLisaEffect, and it is proving very powerful in driving forward pupil progress.

This article was originally published by Independent Education magazine.

The child with the hidden talent in science

John Dyer, Lead Teacher for Innovation and Lyndsay MacAulay, Director of Enterprise at Liverpool Life Sciences UTC

In a busy school science lab, amongst the hustle and bustle of demanding students – keeping teams on task, making sure everyone is using the equipment safely and hoping that they will find the results they are expecting – it can be easy to miss the hidden talent.

Liverpool Life Sciences UTC is a pretty unusual science school. A longer school day, extensive industry curriculum support and a commitment from our students to future careers in science and healthcare means we are better placed than most to identify those gems who will go on to be the leaders of research in the future.

But finding that student whose quiet but determined passion for science is not immediately obvious, could be the key to finding the cure to cancer or a source of safe renewable energies. So, here at the Life Sciences UTC, we applied some science to our search.

1. Use your data

So many of us now use the *Cognitive Abilities Test* for target setting, but are we taking full advantage of the different areas of information it provides? One, often underused, component which demonstrates a unique aspect of intelligence is spatial ability, which has established links with potential in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. Reflecting on a student's spatial scores, particularly where it is around 10 points higher than similar verbal, quantitative and non-verbal scores, can help you to identify talent in science.

2. Spot the patterns

Data from our sixth form students allowed us to spot a pattern. Those with scores for spatial that were at least as high, or higher, than their quantitative scores, in turn, demonstrated particularly strong practical experimental skills.

Finding that student whose quiet but determined passion for science is not immediately obvious, could be the key to finding the cure to cancer or a source of safe renewable energies. So, here at the Life Sciences UTC, we applied some science to our search.

3. Alter your environmental variables

Allowing students the opportunity to complete extended lab-based projects, rather than just the short practical tasks typical of the A-level curriculum, helps us to identify those with the skills essential to a future in research. Students who were identified initially in the data demonstrated great skill in completing complicated lab procedures with a high degree of accuracy and precision.

4. Think beyond the A-level curriculum

Strong performance in the A-level science curriculums does not always correlate with excellence in the technical and experimental areas of scientific research. Through placing the emphasis only on A-level attainment we may be missing some of the most gifted experimental scientists.

5. Investigate further

Our school is still very young, and it is still too early to say if *CAT4* spatial ability is a consistently good indicator of experimental science ability, but it is definitely worth investigating.

This article was originally published by the TES.

How can we identify and support 'hard to spot' children?

Identifying 'hard to spot' children using standardised tests

Daisy Christodoulou, Research and Development Manager, ARK Schools

From the earliest days of national curriculum levels, we've known that levels conceal more than they hide. Pupils categorised as being a level 2 at age 7, for example, have been shown to have reading ages ranging from 5.7 to 12.9. Similarly, at age 11, approximately 25% of all pupils get a 5c on the KS2 reading test, meaning there is bound to be significant variation between pupils with the same level.

Lumping pupils into large, broad and quite vague categories like levels (or the popular 'emerging, expected, exceeding' model) practically guarantees that some pupils will be miscategorised. Pupils who genuinely struggle or excel at a subject will be placed in the same category as pupils who are much closer to average.

Take the example of a quiet, hard-working and well-behaved child who has an average level. She may still have great difficulties with reading, but have developed coping mechanisms that hide her struggles. Because she is so diligent and has an average level, a teacher may not pick up on her struggles.

Standardised tests can help to identify such pupils. They report a pupil's performance on a much finer and more nuanced scale than levels. Standardised scores run from approximately 70–140, meaning that individual differences can be seen with much greater clarity. Second, the structure of tests like GL Assessment's *New Group Reading Test* (*NGRT*) allows you to diagnose where a pupil's difficulties might lie – for example, when she reads, is she struggling with vocabulary, or with decoding words?

Not only that, but a wealth of research shows that teacher assessment is often biased against disadvantaged pupils and those from ethnic minorities. This research can be difficult to accept, and the researchers carrying out such studies are at pains to point out that such bias is unconscious, and that it is not particular to teachers, but rather a feature of all human judgement. But the flaws in the way humans make judgements make it even more important for us to cross-reference that judgement with external checks like standardised tests.

In practice, I've found that teacher and test judgements do agree in the majority of cases. But then there are an interesting handful of cases where there is a discrepancy. Some of the time, this is because the student just had a bad day when they took the test. But in other cases, the test really has picked up on something interesting that the teacher might not have noticed. Often, the test has identified those two or three 'hard to spot' pupils in a year group - pupils whose strengths and weaknesses, for whatever reason, had proved difficult to identify.

Even if it's only a small number of pupils, it's surely worth the effort to make sure we stop them falling through the cracks.

> *"Pupils who are already disadvantaged can miss out sometimes – this is why tests are so important."*
>
> Daisy Christodoulou, Research and Development Manager, ARK Schools

"We've got to know as much about our youngsters as Tesco knows about me."

Dame Kathy August
DBE

Top tips on identifying 'hard to spot' pupils

- Work hard to uncover strengths and weaknesses pupils may be hiding by engaging them every day.

- Increase the questioning of pupils in the classroom on a particular topic to test knowledge before moving on to the next.

- Change pupil attitudes: address reasons why a pupil may be 'reluctant to have a go'.

- Use pupil assessment data which is well tailored and regularly reviewed to pick up patterns of learning.

- Use cognitive ability tests to uncover potential that can be masked by a lack of confidence.

- Use the progress triangle: Identify needs, track needs, measure progress.

Working with families of 'hard to spot' children

Poppy Ionides, Educational Psychologist and Consultant

I was reminded of the skill and subtleties required for communication with families about 'hard to spot' children recently when talking with a mother whose child's unusual behaviour in nursery was noticed and discussed with her. Appropriate support was put in place at nursery. But the possibility of referral to investigate diagnostic labels was not raised by practitioners. It had been assumed (wrongly, in this case) by practitioners that waiting for the family to ask about referral possibilities was the best way forward.

Again and again pieces of case work have illustrated to me the way in which assumptions held by practitioners – often unconsciously so – can be a barrier to effective working with families around 'hard to spot' children. Keeping a series of questions in mind helps to uncover and challenge these assumptions. For instance:

What are the hopes of the family?

Some families are keen to involve professionals from outside education, others are not; some families are keen for difficulties to be discussed and assigned a label, others are not; some families are deep in denial of the possibility of difficulties, others are not.

Does the child present in a similar way in different environments?

Children's presentation in a particular place is an interaction between the child and the place rather than being defined purely by characteristics of the child. A child who is withdrawn and tearful within a classroom is not necessarily so at home. Finding out how a child presents with the family gives rich strands of evidence to add to observations and assessments in non-home settings.

By noticing and putting aside our assumptions when working with 'hard to spot' children and their families we help to maximise the chance of positive outcomes for all.

Even if the child presents similarly for you and home, do the family share your view of the situation?

Families view their children's presentation through their own lens of culture and experience. For example, behaviour that is typically framed in the UK in medical terms might be understood very differently within another culture (e.g. in some cultures, autism is viewed as punishment for a family's previous sins); characteristics that can be problematic within a school context (e.g. lack of interest in literacy, assertion of individuality) may be considered to be no problem at all or may even be celebrated within the home.

By noticing and putting aside our assumptions when working with 'hard to spot' children and their families we help to maximise the chance of positive outcomes for all.

Reaching 'hard to spot' readers through personalised teaching

Steve Cox, Assistant Principal, and Cath McCarney, Vice-Principal, Bluecoat Academy, Nottingham

No teacher wants to miss a child who is struggling to read, the one who went undetected because they'd learnt to mask the fundamental gaps in their understanding.

In schools such as ours, the potential risk of such a child flying under the radar could be high. We certainly face challenges; we're a comprehensive academy trust of 2000 students, with a large special educational needs (SEN) cohort and many EAL children. Literacy levels tend to be lower than the national average when students join, and it's not uncommon for children to start Year 7 with a reading age of five or six.

Nonetheless, we're quietly confident that significant progress in reading ability isn't just possible, it's happening every day in our school. With the *Complete Digital Solution*, we can drill down into exactly what is going on and adjust teaching, learning and the curriculum accordingly.

In fact, we are already enjoying vast improvements – we've seen students make almost two years progress in just six months – and our GCSE results reflect this.

Here are seven strategies that we've found most effective:

1. Benchmark on entry

We use *CAT4* to benchmark Year 7 entry and examine ability. We have over 75 different feeder primary schools so this greatly helps validate the Key Stage 2 results.

2. Know children's reading age

Knowing the standardised reading age of every student is as important a part of contextual information as special educational needs or pupil premium. Every member of staff is aware of the reading ages of the children so they can respond with appropriate teaching.

3. Be ambitious

We've set each child an aspirational target of progressing two reading age years for every one academic year. *NGRT* is central to helping achieve this – we use it at the beginning and the end of each year, and in the interim to monitor progress.

4. Personalise resources

In a Year 11 class, reading ages might span from 7 to 17 years old. No way could all students access and understand the same written material. So, staff take time to differentiate the text using freely available readability score websites. Our aim is to personalise our lessons as much as we can so we can provide outstanding lessons to students of all abilities – and that requires robust and consistent assessments to validate our teacher judgements.

5. Support and challenge all abilities

We hold literacy lessons and phonics groups in Year 7 for those who need extra support; challenge the academically more able with advanced activities such as peer mentoring; have volunteer readers come in from the local community; and pair readers from Year 10 with Year 7 twice a week.

6. Remove barriers to learning

We use *PASS* to look at anything else that might be going on. For example, in Year 11, we noticed a small cohort of boys with very low expectations of themselves. After a 'soft' mentoring programme, we rapidly saw an improvement of achievement and attitudes.

7. Be focused

Our whole academy is on board with improving literacy. In fact, one of our improvement priorities for teaching and learning is the planning of regular lessons that explicitly enhance the reading skills for all our students.

Addressing negative attitudes to learning

Jane Starbuck, Newark Area SENCo, Nottinghamshire

Monitoring the progression of 8,000 pupils' emotional and social development, across a cluster of 17 schools, is no small task. My role is to develop provision for SEN and ensure the needs of vulnerable or challenging pupils are met. One thing I've often come up against is how hard it is to demonstrate the headway we've made when it comes to these areas.

My remit covers primary and secondary schools as well as a special school, so I needed something that could be used across the board to maintain consistency in the way we assess. *PASS* fitted the bill. When I discussed with head teachers the type of attitudinal information we could expect to collect, the response was very positive. Everyone felt excited about gaining a unique insight into our young people.

PASS gives us hard data on individual pupils, cohorts, schools and as an area. As we discover who is disengaged, we can work on specific ways to re-engage them.

Some schools are telling me it has pinpointed what they knew or suspected, but for others it has brought to the fore things they hadn't expected to come up. Over the cluster, we've been surprised by the low scores in perceived learning capability and in finding out that self-worth as a learner is so low and so widespread. Self-confidence has a clear effect on ensuring children making the progress they are capable of so it's certainly giving us all food for thought.

I had no expectations about what the results might show, but I'm particularly interested in the children with the lowest scores. Most of these children are known to us already so now we can drill down into exactly what the issues are, get staff discussing each child in-depth and look at how we can best help.

The feedback from individual schools has generally been, 'Wow!'. School leaders in particular have been extremely positive. They know Ofsted looks at the impact of specific initiatives, such as the Pupil Premium Grants (PPG) and *PASS* helps evidence these. It's even useful when drafting individual schools' PPG website statements. Previously it has been nigh on impossible to show any impact when it comes to emotional development, but *PASS* helps.

Now we know self-confidence is the biggest area of concern, we can work out what interventions we need to put in place. Schools are writing this into their improvement plans and looking at different things to build esteem, including kick-boxing and film making classes, celebrating success with parents, discussing what makes a good learner and concentrating on circle time.

This approach helps us make sure schools have the tools they need to successfully educate the child as a whole.

Now we know self-confidence is the biggest area of concern, we can work out what interventions we need to put in place.

Accelerating achievements for all children

Mark Dakin, Headteacher, St Giles Primary CE School, West Midlands

Our teachers and senior leaders are keenly aware of how important it is to make sure all children achieve well. Our school receives the Pupil Premium for nearly half its 365 pupils, a quarter speak English as an additional language and 17% have SEN.

We have a diverse range of barriers to learning, from speech and language issues when children join in Reception to a lack of expectation from parents who perhaps didn't have a positive experience of education themselves.

Meeting the needs of individual children is of paramount importance to us, so we rely on robust and trustworthy assessments to track their progress, especially in core subjects. They help identify those in need of extra help, as well as those who are particularly able.

We use the *Progress Test* series for English, maths and science, which our teachers think are fantastic. It validates their thoughts and gives them confidence that their judgement is right from an objective point of view. They feel reassured that pupils are achieving the levels they should be.

External assessments also act as an early marker for those who may have special educational needs. We consider ourselves adept at spotting these, but having an additional filter ensures no child slips through the net. We've noticed some children being picked up who previously wouldn't have been identified so easily or with such clarity.

We're also better able to address the learning loss many children face over the summer holidays. We're in an area of deprivation where families that read a lot are in the minority, so children often lose academic knowledge during the summer. However, we now know which areas to target with homework to match the gaps.

Teachers are able to draw up a list of topics to directly address any gaps in knowledge which helps focus our efforts on moving children on quicker and faster with immediate effect.

In short, with a summative picture of the attainment of children at the end of an academic year, we can identify any new learning that needs to take place. We're building a very powerful and complete picture of children's attainment as they move through the school and this will help their achievements accelerate.

External assessments also act as an early marker for those who may have special educational needs. We consider ourselves adept at spotting these, but having an additional filter ensures no child slips through the net.

Top tips on supporting 'hard to spot' children

- Build good relationships with pupils to encourage two-way discussions.

- Personalise how you work with pupils as every child will respond differently to different approaches.

- Have pupils work collaboratively to encourage peer assessment.

- A child's hidden talents can be revealed by other pupils as they can feel more confident among their peers.

- Look at data to identify patterns and address any difficulties immediately.

- Intervene earlier to catch any issues, shifting the focus to pre-intervention when it is easier to address gaps.

- Engage with parents to unearth any barriers to learning.

- Introduce small group interventions to build confidence and knowledge.

"Interventions should be pre-intervention rather than post-interventions."

Dame Kathy August, DBE

Conclusion

As is often the case with educational interventions, time is of the essence. The danger with 'hard to spot' children is that the longer they go under the radar, the more learning time is being wasted. Spotting these children earlier could have a huge impact on their achievement and their ability to access the curriculum. And, of course, it's only by identifying who is disengaged that you can work on specific ways to re-engage them.

The good news, as Beccie Hawes, Head of Service at Rushall's Inclusion Advisory Support Team, points out, is that she is yet to find the unteachable learner. Rather, it is a question of unpicking the behaviours that are communicating something about the students' learning and instigating appropriate support.

While no two children will have exactly the same combination of factors affecting them, there are a number of commonalities amongst the 'best practice' ways our case study school have employed in order to stop 'hard to spot' pupils falling through the cracks.

These include the following.

- Adopting an approach that uses various sources to collate and compare information on ability, attainment and barriers to learning.

- Digging beyond the surface and investigating the root causes of underachievement or disruptive behaviour.

- Personalising lessons and resources by differentiating pupils' performance on a nuanced scale.

- Building consolidation points into the curriculum plan to support and challenge all abilities.

- Providing appropriate and early interventions that specifically address the issues.

- Using data to eliminate any unconscious teacher bias.

It is always possible to spot and help the 'hard to spot' if the right processes are in place.

No matter how large a school is, how diverse the demographics of the student population, how many sites it is split over, how many feeder primary schools, how high the percentage of children who speak English as an additional language, have special educational needs or qualify for pupil premium – it is always possible to spot and help the 'hard to spot' if the right processes are in place.

A 'whole pupil' approach to assessment

GL Assessment has worked in partnership with schools for over 30 years to develop a range of assessments that support better outcomes for pupils. We believe in a 'whole pupil approach' to assessment, which alongside a teacher's own judgement, can provide a powerful and objective all-round view of an individual learner.

Our *Complete Digital Solution* (*CDS*) allows schools to test consistently across all pupils without the worry of escalating costs. It delivers a critical insight into every student's ability, attainment and their barriers to learning.

CDS provides schools with unlimited usage (subject to a fair usage policy) across a range of leading standardised assessments, including our *Cognitive Abilities Test* (*CAT4*), the *Progress Test* series, our *New Group Reading Test* (*NGRT*) and our *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School* (*PASS*) survey.

Data rich reports enable teachers to cross reference attainment and potential to identify any children who would otherwise be 'hard to spot', and give an insight into the factors that are influencing them.

For further information on any of the assessments included in our *Complete Digital Solution* please visit www.gl-assessment.co.uk/cds. To contact your local area consultant to organise a school visit or obtain a free quote please visit www.gl-assessment.co.uk/consultants or email cds@gl-assessment.co.uk

Printed in Great Britain