

Adapting for learners with additional needs

A special school used the Cooking and nutrition lessons from Oak National Academy to support pupils with a range of additional needs. The aim was to build pupils' independence, confidence and understanding of food through structured, but flexible lessons.

Teachers used Oak's lessons as a starting point rather than following them exactly. The clear structure helped staff quickly understand the learning goals, but resources were regularly adapted to suit pupils' needs. Slides were simplified, key information reduced and activities broken down into smaller steps to make learning more manageable.

In many cases, one Oak lesson was delivered over several shorter sessions, giving pupils more time to process information and practice skills. Teachers also selected specific parts of lessons, focusing on the most relevant content rather than trying to cover everything. Practical cooking was gradually introduced and carefully scaffolded. Staff modelled each step clearly, often repeating demonstrations and using visual prompts to support understanding.

Recipes were simplified where needed, and pupils worked at their own pace, with support from adults when required. The flexibility of the Oak resources made it easy to adapt tasks without adding significant planning time.

Outcomes

- Increased confidence: Pupils became more willing to take part in cooking activities, with many showing greater independence over time.
- Development of life skills: Simple food preparation tasks helped build essential everyday skills, such as following instructions, using equipment safely and working step-by-step.
- Improved engagement: Hands-on, practical lessons supported focus and enjoyment, particularly for pupils who benefit from sensory and active learning.
- Better understanding of food: Pupils developed a clearer awareness of ingredients, healthy choices and where food comes from, at a level appropriate to their needs.
- Manageable for staff: Teachers found the resources easy to adapt, allowing them to deliver meaningful lessons without excessive planning or workload.

Teacher reflection

Staff found that Oak provided a helpful framework that could be easily shaped to fit their learners. The ability to simplify, adapt and slow down lessons meant that all pupils could access cooking and nutrition in a way that felt achievable and relevant to their everyday lives.

