

Special Children

Meeting Children's Additional Educational Needs

- Supporting children with SLCN
- Managing access arrangements
- Creating TA standards
- Mental health



Hearing-impaired musicians

Strategies to make music-making more inclusive

At school I don't feel I have to be something I'm not. I used to find it scary sometimes. Now I can relax enough to be myself and that's a great feeling.

Christopher, student on the autism spectrum

Sign up for free resources to help you support students on the autism spectrum at www.autism.org.uk/myworld

Be a part of

MyWorld

Mental health a priority

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Concern for children's and young people's mental health continues to grow, and with CAMHS struggling to cope with increasing demand, schools find themselves in the frontline.

Recent initiatives to help them include Rise Above For Schools, free PSHE resources from Public Health England covering topics such as positive relationships, exam stress and social media (<http://bit.ly/sc239-57>), and a pilot project from the Mental Health Foundation where Year 12 students teach Year 7s about mental health (<http://bit.ly/sc239-56>).

Meanwhile, Leeds Beckett University has launched the Carnegie Centre of Excellence for Mental Health, whose offerings include a School Mental Health Award to help schools evaluate their whole-school mental health provision (<http://bit.ly/sc239-58>).

Whole-school provision is absolutely crucial according to Clare Erasmus, whose inspirational work features on pages 32-36. Ms Erasmus will also be presenting at the Optimus Education conference on Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools in London on 8 November (www.healthinschoolsuk.com).

Sometimes students and staff just need to escape from the pressures of daily life, which is why an undergraduate with additional needs developed a sensory garden on his campus. Read how he set about it on pages 37-39.

Language and literacy

According to a survey by the National Association for Headteachers and the Family and Childcare Trust, primary headteachers find that children are starting school without the skills to participate in lessons, with poor language and communication skills of particular concern (see *News*, page 6).

On pages 8-10, one of this year's Shine a Light award winners outlines the teaching approaches, interventions and resources it uses to bring pupils' attention, listening and speaking up to age-expected standards. Children's needs don't evaporate at the end of Year 6, however, and on pages 10-12 the secondary school winner offers insights into its cohesive school-wide approach.

Clearly, good verbal skills are fundamental to children's subsequent progress in reading, but what of those pupils who find reading an uphill struggle? Find strategies to support them on pages 30-31.

Learning to learn

In its response to the consultation on the Rochford Review, the government has confirmed that the requirement to use P scales for pupils working below national

curriculum levels will be removed and that pupils not engaged in subject-specific learning will be assessed using the seven areas of engagement for assessing cognition and learning.

A school with experience of these is Brookfields School, whose early years Learning to Learn curriculum combines the areas of engagement with developmental aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage, underpinned by a relationship-based pedagogy called REACH. Find out more on pages 27-29.

The challenges of the SENCO role

Research by London Councils reveals a rise of 10% in the number of pupils with EHCPs, but only a 2% increase in high-needs allocations since 2013-2014, leading to a shortfall of £100 million in the SEND budget. Meanwhile, the first report on local area SEND inspections from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission paints a patchy picture, with some areas successfully implementing the code of practice while others have yet to grasp the nettle.

All of this makes life extremely difficult for SENCOs, yet their commitment remains undiminished. The silver award winner in this year's Pearson Teaching Awards featured on pages 14-17 is a shining example, and she insists she that hasn't 'done anything amazing that other SENCOs aren't doing all the time.'

A key element in a SENCO's ability to improve outcomes are skilled TAs who can support independent learning in class and deliver effective interventions. But how to make this happen? On pages 20-22 a primary deputy headteacher explains how her school developed comprehensive TA standards in collaboration with the TAs themselves. Meanwhile in secondary schools, access arrangements take up a lot of SENCOs' time. See pages 18-19 for some tips and advice.

Music impacts learning

To provide evidence that arts education not only has intrinsic value, but can also boost achievement, the Education Endowment Foundation is recruiting primary schools for five trial projects nationwide. One of these is a music programme based on the Kodály approach, a playful and physical method which uses techniques such as signs, games, clapping, and, centrally, singing.

Would deaf children enjoy this? Undoubtedly. See the pull-out resource on pages 23-26 to find out how to support them.

Alison Thomas *Sophie C.*

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Practical tips to give deaf children access to the joy of music-making

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Keeping in time with fellow musicians is a challenge for deaf children, but one that can be overcome



Free SEND cinema screenings

Picture © Warner Bros.



Lego Ninjago is one of the many dedicated autism-friendly screenings at the Into Film Festival this year

For many young people with SEND, a visit to the cinema can be challenging.

However, there are plenty of opportunities for them to enjoy a big-screen experience with their peers in a supported and stress-free manner at this year's Into Film Festival, which runs from 8 to 24 November.

The festival's key themes this year are mental health, anti-bullying and the environment. In all, there will be 3,000 free screenings and the festival is open to schools, colleges, youth leaders and home educators.

'It was really useful to go during school time,' said a teacher who attended last year's festival. 'It gave my pupils

(who have severe and complex learning difficulties) the opportunity to develop a range of social skills and experience the cinema without stress. An autism-friendly viewing meant we didn't need to keep them quiet or still.'

With an emphasis on making cinema accessible to all young people, whatever their situation or requirements, over half the programme is offered as audio-described, subtitled or autism-friendly.

The festival is hosted by Into Film as part of an on-going initiative to put film at the heart of young people's learning and personal development.

For programme information, to book tickets and download resources, visit www.intofilm.org/festival

Lawful and unlawful exclusions

Evidence suggests that the number of children excluded from school may be significantly higher than officially recorded.

In July, the Department for Education published statistics on permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England from 2015-16, highlighting that the number of permanent exclusions across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools had increased to 6,685 from 5,795 in the previous year. In primary schools alone there were 485 permanent exclusions.

However, evidence from the charity Coram's Child Law Advice Service (CLAS) suggests the number of children aged three to seven excluded from schools is likely to be significantly higher than this figure, as the statistics do not include exclusions by academies or unofficial

unlawful exclusions.

In the last 18 months, CLAS advised in 81 cases where a child aged three to seven had been excluded (24 permanently and 57 fixed-term). In 30 of these, the adviser concluded that the school may have acted unlawfully either by not complying with the correct procedure, or because it did not adequately consider the child's SEN.

In 2015/16, pupils with SEN accounted for almost half of all exclusions and were almost seven times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than pupils with no SEN. Often the schools with a high rate of exclusion of younger pupils are in deprived areas, with many children subject to exclusions having experienced difficulties at home and the involvement of children's services or other support agencies.

For more information, visit <http://childlawadvice.org.uk>

Transport issues

The Department for Education has announced that it will review guidance to local authorities on home-to-school transport for children with disabilities.

This is in response to a recent report from the charity Contact which revealed the difficulties and challenges parents face in finding suitable school transport arrangements for their children with disabilities (read the report here: <http://bit.ly/sc239-13>).

More than 2,500 parents and carers responded to the survey.

- 23% said their child's journey to school was 'stressful' and impacted their ability to learn.
- 48% said travel arrangements affected how long the parents and carers could work.
- In England, more than half of the local authorities publish misleading or unlawful guidance on transport arrangements for children with disabilities.

Young Epilepsy asked families about home-to-school transport in a survey earlier this year. It found 17% of families are concerned about home-to-school transport for young people with epilepsy. Among those, 34% were with regard to young people at secondary school. This older group are often expected to travel further and/or independently to get to school.

In Young Epilepsy's survey, a number of families spoke about their concerns that seizures might go unnoticed on school transport. They have had to adjust their schedules to enable them to take their children to and from school. Families raised concerns about their children taking public transport or walking alone due to the risk of seizures. In addition they voiced concern about the lack of training for transport staff, such as using emergency medication.

Local authorities are required to provide home-to-school transport for children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of their mobility problems, or because of associated health and safety issues related to their SEND. Contact's survey has prompted the Local Government Association to react, stating that councils are working hard to ensure suitable travel arrangements are made for children with disabilities, although they cite 'financial challenges' as a contributing factor to guidance not being met by some local authorities.

One in four girls is depressed at age 14

New research from the UCL Institute of Education and the University of Liverpool reveals that 24% of girls and 9% of boys are depressed at age 14.

The researchers analysed information on more than 10,000 children born in 2000-01 who are taking part in the Millennium Cohort Study.

At ages three, five, seven, 11 and 14, parents reported on their children's mental health. When they reached 14, the children themselves were asked for their views.

The research, published with the National Children's Bureau, also investigated links between depressive symptoms and family income. Generally, 14-year-olds from better-off families were less likely to have high levels of depressive symptoms compared to their peers from poorer homes.

Parents' reports of emotional problems were roughly the same for boys and girls throughout childhood, increasing from 7% of children at age seven to 12% at age 11. However, by the time children reached early adolescence at age 14, emotional problems became more prevalent in girls, with 18% having symptoms of depression and anxiety, compared to 12% of boys.

Behaviour problems, such as acting out, fighting and being rebellious decreased



Parents may be underestimating their daughters' mental health needs

from infancy to age 5, but then increased to age 14. Boys were more likely than girls to have behaviour problems throughout childhood and early adolescence.

As 14-year-olds' reports of their emotional problems were different from those of their parents, this research highlights the importance of considering young people's views on their own mental health.

Anna Feuchtwang, chief executive of the National Children's Bureau says: 'This study of thousands of children gives us the most compelling evidence available about the extent of mental ill

health among children in the UK. With a quarter of 14-year-old girls showing signs of depression, it's now beyond doubt that this problem is reaching crisis point.

'Worryingly, there is evidence that parents may be underestimating their daughters' mental health needs. Conversely, parents may be picking up on symptoms in their sons, which boys don't report themselves. It's vital that both children and their parents can make their voices heard to maximise the chances of early identification and access to specialist support.'

Download the report: <http://bit.ly/sc239-53>

Behavioural insights for education

The Behavioural Insights Team, a government institution dedicated to the application of behavioural sciences, has published a new guide entitled *Behavioural Insights for Education – a practical guide for parents, teachers and school leaders*.

This aims to equip parents, teachers and school leaders with the tools to improve students' educational outcomes by setting out simple techniques informed by behavioural science.

While policymakers and educational researchers have traditionally focused on big structural factors, such as class sizes or budgets, behavioural scientists have instead been looking at the details of what parents, teachers and school leaders say and do.

This has revealed a treasure trove of powerful insights to empower these key players in children's learning and development to make a difference. The guide has a real practical bent, with

exercises and activities throughout for readers to try.

The guide (<http://bit.ly/sc239-12>) is divided into three chapters.

- **Parents:** this chapter focuses on how parents can use behavioural insights to help their children achieve both educational and personal goals. It includes topics like metacognition, self-control and mindset theory.
- **Teachers:** this chapter provides practical ways for teachers to incorporate behavioural insights into how they teach and set up their classrooms. Topics include counteracting negative self-perceptions and providing effective feedback.
- **School leaders:** this chapter highlights the crucial role school leaders play in determining the success of a school and how they can apply behavioural insights to address some of the biggest challenges they face, such as teacher recruitment and retention, and parental engagement.

Closing the attainment gap

A new report from the Education Policy Institute examines the progress made in closing the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

The analysis considers how that gap varies across the country and how this has changed since 2007. Download the report here: <http://bit.ly/sc239-09>

When it comes to persistently disadvantaged pupils, key findings include the following.

- The most disadvantaged pupils in England have fallen further behind their peers, and are now on average over two years behind in their learning by the end of secondary school.
- The attainment gap at the end of secondary school for these persistently disadvantaged pupils has widened slightly by 0.3 months since 2007.

#oeMH17

11th Annual **MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING** *in Schools Conference*

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Are pupils school ready?

Eight out of 10 primary school leaders report that many children are starting school without the skills they need to take part in classroom activities, while almost a quarter say that this applies to more than half their intake.

- 88% cite inadequate school funding as a barrier to improving school readiness.
- 86% say that the problem has got worse over the last five years.

The findings come from a new survey of school leaders published by the National Association of Head Teachers and the Family and Childcare Trust. The most common reasons for lack of school readiness included the following.

- Failure to identify and support additional needs early enough (67%).
- Parents having fewer resources or increased pressure on parents and family life (66%).

- Reduction in local services and in local health services to support families (63% and 57%).

School leaders were particularly concerned about communication skills and physical development; 97% of respondents identified SLCN as the biggest issue.

Ellen Broomé, chief executive of the Family and Childcare Trust, says: 'Four fifths of school leaders said that children who had no previous early education demonstrated the most challenging issues. There is strong evidence that early education can help boost children's outcomes and narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers – but only if it is high quality. The government must make sure that every child can access high quality early education and that parents can get the right support to help them give their children the best start in life.'

Download the report:
<http://bit.ly/sc239-06>



Support for children with medical conditions patchy

Since September 2014, state schools in England have been required to support children with medical conditions such as epilepsy.

661 young people with epilepsy, their parents and carers responded to Young Epilepsy's recent online survey to find out whether schools are providing support that complies with government standards; 11% of respondents were young people with epilepsy, 89% were their parents or carers (<http://bit.ly/sc239-36>). While the number of respondents is relatively small, the responses indicate worrying gaps in schools' delivery.

- Only 45% of families said their school had a medical conditions policy.
- 36% of young people with epilepsy still do not have an individual healthcare plan at school. Of those that do:
 - 16% do not include information on

current medication/treatment

- 11% do not include what to do in an emergency
- 8% do not include what to do when a seizure occurs.
- 67% of plans do not include how epilepsy might affect learning.
- Only 51% of families said that school staff had been trained to support a young person with epilepsy. Concerns around training include:
 - lack of confidence among staff to deal with epilepsy
 - lack of understanding of the danger of prolonged seizures
 - insufficient understanding of the different types of epilepsy
 - lack of awareness of the impact of epilepsy and medication on young people's learning.
- 18% of young people with epilepsy

are excluded from activities at school, including assemblies, outside break times, swimming and other sports, after-school clubs and school trips.

- Just 24% of young people with epilepsy have an Education, Health and Care Plan or a statement of SEN.

Young Epilepsy is using this evidence to campaign for improvements in epilepsy support in schools. It is calling for:

- all schools to have a policy on supporting pupils with medical conditions and for these policies to be published on schools' websites
- school inspections to include a routine check for support for pupils with medical conditions
- schools to ensure that all young people with epilepsy have an individual healthcare plan.

Advice on continence

The children's bowel and bladder charity ERIC has published a number of new, free, downloadable resources for families and practitioners to support children's bowel and bladder continence.

These guides, written by experts, are

based on the latest clinical research and recommendations. They include the following.

- ERIC's guide for children with additional needs.
- The Right to Go: a detailed guide to help early years settings and schools

manage continence.

- A factsheet on children who will only poo in a nappy, which includes case studies about children who have additional needs.

Download them here: <http://bit.ly/sc239-10>

Lost in the middle

A new study shows that the term ‘average’ can obscure student problems and potential and could lead to significant underperformance in GCSE exams.

Only 20% of children should be considered ‘average’ across the ability range, according to an analysis of 24,000 children. The study, *The Lost Middle* by GL Assessment (<http://bit.ly/sc239-35>), found that most children exhibit some type of verbal, quantitative or spatial reasoning bias. Even if the top and bottom quarter of children in the ability range are excluded, the remaining 50% show distinct differences.

Three-fifths of ‘average’ children have a propensity for, or deficit in, verbal, quantitative or spatial abilities. This means that although they might be regarded as solidly average in school, their different reasoning abilities mean varying strengths and areas for development may be overlooked.

A child who is weaker verbally, for instance, but average in other abilities (6% of all children) will tend to struggle with English. Those who are quantitatively and spatially weaker tend to have problems with maths and science. Those who are slightly stronger in one of the three learning abilities tend to do correspondingly better.

This has a significant impact on



What does average mean? Most children exhibit verbal, quantitative or spatial reasoning bias

outcomes at GCSE. Among the students in the middle of the ability range, the chances of getting a B or above in English at GCSE ranged from one in 10 to seven in 10 in 2016, depending on their verbal reasoning bias.

This is because only 2% of students who were weaker verbally gained an A or A* at English GCSE compared to 33% who were more verbally able. Similarly, only 9% of those ‘average’ students with weaker verbal reasoning skills achieved a B at GCSE English, compared to 38% of those with stronger verbal abilities. At the other end of the scale, 53% of students who were verbally weaker failed to gain a good pass (C or above) at GCSE English in 2016 compared to 8% who were verbally stronger.

‘We should only use “average” sparingly and, not at all for individual children,’ says Shane Rae, head of publishing at GL Assessment. ‘It’s so broad a definition, it’s practically useless.’

The data at maths GCSE tell a similar story. Within the 50% cohort considered ‘average’, only 1% of students who were slightly weaker quantitatively gained an A or A* at maths GCSE in 2016. But for those who were more quantitatively able, the proportion rises to 30%.

‘When teachers have access to more granular information about their students, it is easier for them to identify who may be struggling below the radar and who may be capable of exceeding expectations with a bit of targeted support,’ says Mr Rae. ‘Of course, many teachers already know this, but while calling children average tells us a lot about their relative strengths and weaknesses compared to other children, it tells us precious little about how an individual learns.’

Educational psychologist Poppy Ionides agrees: ‘Two identical scores can hide startlingly different stories. We need to be alive to the possibility – likelihood even – of spiky areas of strength and difficulty in a child’s skill profile.’

‘One could argue that we should ask the question of all scores, not just average ones. But for those children who sit in the comfort of the mid-range, it is often not seen as relevant to look behind scores. However, each average score is part of a unique life story for which the future is all to play,’ she adds.

And finally...

Using evidence on the ground

The Communication Trust is running two workshops for senior leaders in education who want to use evidence to inform their approach to children’s speech language and communication. 14 November, London; 30 November, Manchester. <http://bit.ly/sc239-08>

Delegates will learn to:

- unpack the principles of evidence-informed whole-school provision
- develop an evaluation strategy to assess what works for their pupils
- consider what to do and not to do when leading evidence-informed practice.

Understanding fragile X

The Fragile X Society has launched the first in a series of new educational videos about the condition, which is the most common inherited cause of learning disability. <http://bit.ly/sc239-27>

Stop bullying

The law says that every school must have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying. The Department for Education recently updated its guidance aimed at school leaders, staff and governors on preventing and tackling this problem. <http://bit.ly/sc239-11>

Autism and sensory issues conference

From the National Autistic Society, this features the latest insight and best practice for supporting autistic individuals with sensory processing issues. 5 December, Leicester. <http://bit.ly/sc239-14>

Autism and social skills conference

From the National Autistic Society, this conference will provide delegates with the tools and strategies to support

autistic people at home as well as in the classroom or in other learning environments. 17 January, Leeds. <http://bit.ly/sc239-16>

SEND conference

Topics covered in this year’s SEND conference from Osiris Educational include the impact of the SEN reforms, designing effective interventions, and developing the skills of all stakeholders. 18 January, London. <http://bit.ly/sc239-17>

Practical strategies for safeguarding in education

From Optimus Education, this conference offers practical strategies and guidance to protect against dangers online, emerging threats and mental health issues. 22 February, London. <http://bit.ly/sc239-18>

Supporting children with language delay

A primary and a secondary school outline best practice when it comes to supporting children with language delay



Den-building opportunities provide places for uninterrupted play and quiet places to share stories

Catch them early

Vanessa Foxall explains how early identification of SLCN makes all the difference

Many children enter Reception at Parkdale Primary School, Nottingham, below age-related expectations for their communication and language development; in some cases significantly below.

This means that identifying children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is a priority when planning and organising the early years unit: last year, only 16% of the intake (two-form entry) had reached age-related levels for listening and attention, and only 13% for speaking.

Early screening

We start the process of improving language development before the new intake arrives by laying on extra transition sessions during the summer term, in partnership with the local Children's Centre.

During these, children are screened using the Communication Trust's Progression Tools for four-year-olds – a relatively quick way of determining where each child stands compared to typically developing children of the same age. Consequently, we have a good understanding of pupils' SCLN the day

they start school.

Around 10% of children require a referral, a third require in-school interventions and the rest we manage in the whole-class environment. The Progression Tools help by isolating the particular strand of SLCN in which each child needs support.

Children with delayed language development fall into two main groups: those who have narrative difficulties and those who need help with sentence structure. Interventions from Black Sheep Press, a specialist publisher of resources and assessments for children with SLCN,

have proven really effective, along with Talk Boost. The latter, an intervention developed by the children’s charity I CAN, is a targeted, evidence-based programme that supports children with language delay in Reception and Key Stage 1 to make progress with their language and communication skills (see *Special Children* 220 for a full article on Talk Boost).

Specialist training

The school employs an additional teacher to implement one-to-one and group interventions, ensuring these are tailored to meet the needs of each child as they progress through the school. In addition, a speech and language therapist comes in one day a week to support the delivery of interventions for children with SEN.

She also delivers training in two areas: first to enable the early years team to become more confident and accurate in SLCN identification, and second to improve universal provision delivery so that what we do as teachers and play leaders in class supports the narrative and sentence structure work being done in interventions.

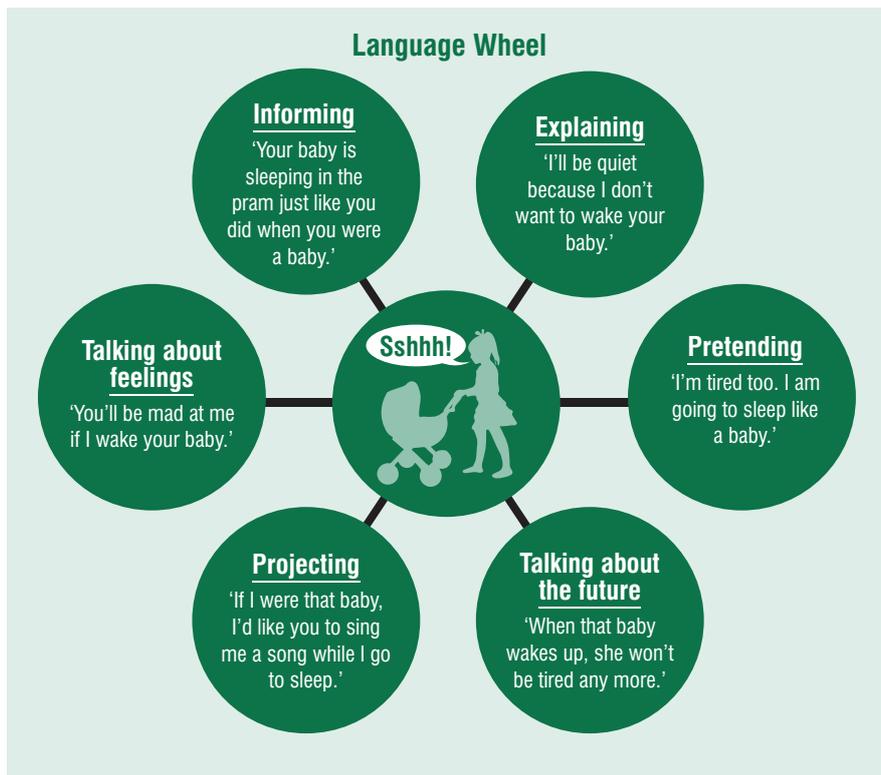
For example, when children are following their own interests, two play leaders work with them using strategies on the language wheel entitled Extend the Topic designed by Hanen (see below right) to support their speech and language development. This helps practitioners consciously use all the different strands of communication, such as predicting and recalling, and avoid falling back on endless questions.

Meanwhile, we work together as a team to ensure our skills and thinking are up to date. A lot of knowledge transfer takes place in special training groups after school, while during the day we regularly shadow each other and carry out peer observations.

A cosy environment

Every aspect of support is considered, from the way we interact with children to the way we organise our resources, interventions and classroom environment.

For instance, in contrast to typical Reception classrooms, which can look very bright and busy, full of primary colours and things hanging from the ceiling, our classrooms are minimalist, use natural, muted colours, and have everything thoroughly organised to enable children to follow their interests on their own. This includes quiet spaces to share stories, cosy corners for children to gather, uninterrupted play sessions and den-building opportunities.



The school has adapted the language wheel for different contexts

When it comes to organising the classroom environment, we have been strongly influenced by Elizabeth Jarman’s work and follow her Communication Friendly Spaces™ Approach. This challenges stereotypes around the way that environments have traditionally been

set up for children. She says: ‘It’s critical to understand how the physical space needs to connect with the underpinning pedagogy of the setting or school. It’s essential to tune into the environment from the learner’s perspective. We need to observe the way that children interact with the environment if a developmentally appropriate, inclusive and responsive learning space is to evolve, which really meets the needs of children in the space, reflecting their preferred contexts for learning.’

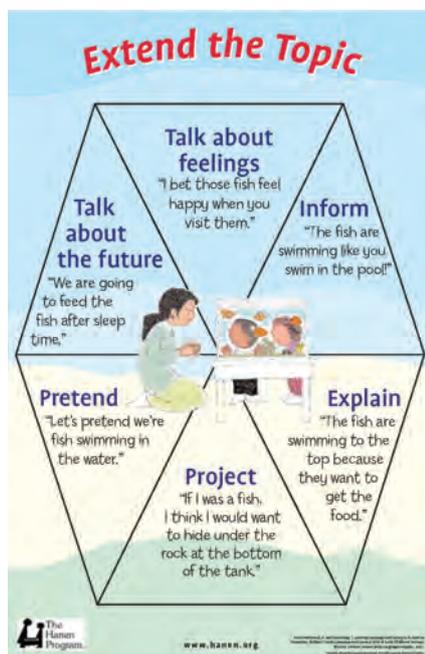
Meanwhile, everywhere you look, you will find signs and symbols to support children’s understanding of routine and concepts so that they can quickly become familiar with vocabulary in the environment. We find these particularly useful for children who speak English as an additional language.

Catching up

By the time pupils leave Reception, 86% of them will have reached age-related expectations for attention, listening and speaking.

For the children who have not caught up, we follow them through into Year 1 using the Talk Boost intervention and Language Land from Black Sheep Press. The latter provides modified lesson plans for children with SLCN that can be incorporated into existing class planning.

We follow children through as



Staff support language development using the language wheel designed by Hanen

Photo courtesy of Winslow Resources: www.winslowresources.com



The communication-friendly spaces approach includes quiet, cosy corners to gather and share stories, and muted colours for displays

necessary in Year 2, where we use Language for Thinking and Word Aware, also from Black Sheep Press. The former is a pack of 80 cards with suggestions for activities that promote speaking and listening in four key areas of oral language: asking questions, active listening, building vocabulary and using language for thinking. We use these as whole-class activities and for

interventions. Word Aware is a practical book that enables teachers to support effective vocabulary development in children of all abilities. The book provides a comprehensive and structured approach to learning and includes a multitude of activities and lesson plans.

While it adopts a whole-school approach for key stages 1 and 2, it is equally effective for specific classes and groups or individual learners, and for children who speak English as an additional language.

By the end of Year 2, only children with SEN will not have caught up to age-related expectations and we continue to work with them closely as they progress through school.

Such outcomes speak for themselves. Nevertheless, it was with pride and delight that we attended the 2017 Shine A Light Awards ceremony in March to receive the the Primary School of the Year Award for our on-going commitment to developing pupils' communication skills.



Vanessa Foxall is the early years lead at Parkdale Primary School, Nottingham

FIND OUT MORE

- Speech, Language and Communication Progression Tools (Primary) from the Communication Trust: <http://bit.ly/sc239-01>
- Black Sheep Press: www.blacksheepress.co.uk
- The *Extend the Topic* poster from Hanen is available from Winslow Resources (<http://bit.ly/sc239-05>). Other posters in the range include *Adjust the way you talk*, *Making turn taking easy in social routines* and *Keeping conversation going with questions and comments*, also available from www.winslowresources.com
- Talk Boost from I CAN: www.talkboost.co.uk
- Elizabeth Jarman's The Communication Friendly Spaces Approach: www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk
- Applications for the 2018 Shine A Light Awards, run by Pearson in partnership with The Communication Trust, open soon. To apply, visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk

The importance of developing a common language

Ruth Golding, Marina Breed and Carmen De Pablo Lopez discuss how they address speech, language and communication needs at Tor Bridge High School, Plymouth

People assume that most students will have attained a certain level of language fluency by the time they arrive at secondary school. In areas of high deprivation like Plymouth, this may be a dangerous assumption, no matter how good the feeder schools are.

Some students' inability to understand and use language with ease is more than just a barrier to their learning. It damages their confidence, self-esteem and social skills, and can lead to anxiety and other mental health difficulties, frustration and behavioural issues. If any language difficulties are not addressed early and continually as students rise through the school, they will never learn to express themselves effectively, while curriculum content and concepts will become further and further beyond their reach.

Many young people with SLCN end up



Students make notes in preparation for taking part in a discussion

struggling on the edges of society. Over 60% of people in youth justice have SLCN (Bryan et al, 2007). A survey at Polmont Young Offender's Institution found that 70% of young men had significant communication problems (Polmont, 2003). Meanwhile, in schools nationally, a high proportion of young people with

SLCN are the subject of permanent or fixed-term exclusions, although at Tor Bridge High our numbers are much lower than the national average.

Making an early start

Work starts as soon as students arrive in Year 7, when head of inclusion Carmen De Pablo Lopez goes through every student's file making a note on SIMS of any previous SLCN referrals, even if a case was closed years ago – she knows that such children will often need re-referring or additional interventions as they move through school.

Part of the problem is often the high level of support offered in primary schools, where a TA might have known a child well and helped them compensate, as well as the benefits they gain from having a single class teacher. However, in secondary school, these children suddenly

have to cope with up to six different adults a day, each using different nuances, types of language and concepts. If there is a processing difficulty, students can find themselves overloaded to the point where they can't think through anything at all.

Language Support Centre

A few students will always need specialist speech, language and communication support and Tor Bridge High is fortunate to have a dedicated Language Support Centre – the only one of its kind in the area. This is staffed by a team of specialists, including a speech therapist who works one day a week and who advises and trains all the staff.

ITT students and newly qualified teachers are signposted to the centre where they are given advice on how to differentiate for SLCN.

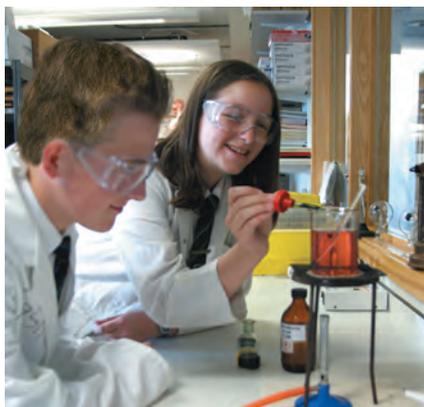
If a student appears to be struggling, teachers consult the centre staff on the different ways they might present the work and differentiate more effectively, or discuss whether the student might benefit from a specific intervention or a referral. In the latter case, the centre staff carry out an assessment. Following this, it is sometimes apparent that the reason the child is not paying attention in class or failing to access learning is because they have problems understanding and responding to the level of language being used.

Meanwhile, the school's termly holistic intervention meetings are attended by the Youth Service, the police, CAMHS, and an education psychologist, as well as school inclusion staff. It may be that a student might benefit from some time with a youth worker, or some social skills workshops or a little time working on their self-esteem or anger management – anger is often a result of poor language skills: students become frustrated when they cannot understand or express themselves effectively.

Working with I CAN

The school's involvement with the children's communication charity I CAN since 2010 has impacted language strategy on a number of levels. For a start, going through I CAN's Secondary Talk validation of good practice – an evidence-based practical programme in which Tor Bridge High was successfully validated at Universal Level, – helped the senior leadership team address what good language teaching looks like in the classroom.

As a result, the team is proactive about training practitioners to spot the signs when a student is struggling with language and deploy a variety of strategies



Communication skills are crucial across the whole curriculum

to make language more accessible to everyone. The school has also taken part in the Talk About Talk Secondary pilot programme, an intervention that trains staff to tutor and mentor young people to co-deliver workshops about communication to local employers. A group of students learned and practised a variety of communication skills that support other employability skills, such as team-working, time management and problem-solving. They then delivered the workshop to their peers in school before presenting to local businesses (see *Special Children* 238 for a full report).

“Students’ inability to understand and use language fully is more than just a barrier to their learning”

I CAN has also produced a series of videos which are excellent for whole-school training – these enable everyone to see exactly what needs to happen within the classroom. For example, Tor Bridge High staff have been trained to slow down their delivery to give students time to process, listen and then answer questions without becoming overwhelmed.

In addition, we have symbols for all the key, command and higher level words, such as ‘evaluate’ and ‘analyse’, displayed in each classroom – explicitly teaching students the meaning of higher level words allows them to attempt more challenging questions in GCSE.

Area training

Thanks to Tor Bridge's Language Support Centre and its long association with I CAN, the school is well positioned to take the lead

on language development in Plymouth. For the third year running, we are offering teacher training to schools in the area, giving them tried and tested strategies to help with differentiation, speaking more effectively, scaffolding learning and teaching in such a way that children with low-level language are able to access the curriculum (see box below for some of their tips).

This can be as straightforward as explaining words as they go. For example a teacher might say: ‘I want you to evaluate something, so you need to analyse carefully, and present both sides of the issue,’ and then make sure that they keep using the word ‘evaluate’ in different ways. Next time, they might ask for the pros and cons, or the positive and negative aspects of the issue. Or when a science teacher talks about the ‘function’ of something, they might hold up their pen and say that its function is to write on the board.

Some of the language strategies used in class

- Write the lesson objectives clearly and concisely on the board.
- Identify the topic and be clear when this is changing.
- Keep verbal and written instructions short and simple.
- Pre-teach key words/vocabulary.
- Be aware of how much of the time you are doing the talking.
- Repeat key information often, with visual support.
- Slow down the rate of speech.
- Emphasise new words by pausing, repeating and stressing the word.
- Explain the meaning of new words.
- Use new words often.
- Use visual supports.
- Use ‘rating scales’ e.g. thumb up (OK), sideways (unsure), or down (help).
- Provide students with written instructions.
- Pause between instructions.
- Structure tasks in the order the actions need to be carried out.
- Give lots of explanations and examples.
- Be aware of the wide variety of meanings some words have.
- Limit the use of idioms and irony.
- Use explicit pauses to provide thinking time and observe the results.
- Encourage students to talk with a partner before answering a question.
- Ask open questions that allow a fuller and more thoughtful answer.
- Monitor student responses to ensure understanding.
- Use clear alerts when the class is required to listen.
- Make your classroom an ‘asking friendly’ environment.

The training also helps practitioners recognise students with speech, language and communication difficulties. Some teachers may think that a particular student is behaving like a ‘typical teenager’ and doesn’t want to talk, but that may not be the case at all. They may simply be overwhelmed by the language all around them; it is essential to know how to recognise those needs.

Creating an ‘asking friendly’ environment

A lot of language development can be done in a whole-class environment. For example, we encourage students to ask for help if they do not understand something – we teach them that, by asking questions, they are likely to be helping someone else in the class. In fact, each classroom has a Wall of Fame where students’ names get posted after asking a good question. We praise mistakes and explain they are part of the learning process.

On the other side of the coin, we train teachers in the use of active questioning to differentiate: questions might range from identifying what something is to predicting what might happen next, and then asking other pupils to add detail.

A common language for literacy

Staff hold regular ‘Spark-meet’ sessions, where four or five teachers sit down together once a month to share classroom practice. This might be on how to manage a particular student, or a new way of differentiating to include everyone.

Out of one of these sessions came the idea of developing a common language for literacy. The English department subsequently trained all staff in the techniques and language they use for literacy; the maths department did the same for all subjects involving numeracy. Consequently, students are not confused by hearing different types of language in different lessons and understand exactly what they have to do when they are given instructions. For example, no matter what the subject, every student knows that when a teacher asks them to write an ‘SEA’ paragraph, this means: statement, evidence and analysis.

This idea of a common language was extended to the creation of speaking frames, which help students practise verbal language and speak in full sentences. These are laminated sheets of A4 with sentence starters, placed on desks around the classroom. Sentence starters include: ‘Yes that’s a good point. However, I feel...’ and ‘From my point of view...’



A lot of language development can take place in a whole-class environment

There are subject-specific speaking frames and green speaking frames – the latter give guidance across the whole curriculum.

Starting a TED-Ed Club

In the modern world, it is no longer enough to be able to understand and use language well. Employers value good presentation skills – the ability to organise ideas logically and coherently into a persuasive argument and present it confidently.

To help bring this about, the school has just been approved to run a TED-Ed Club where students learn presentation skills and then upload their talks. The purpose of our club is to get students talking about their passions, and in doing so, to become more fluent speakers. Gaining TED-Ed approval simply involved staff attending a webinar to learn how to produce high quality talks.

Speaking frame

Here are some ideas to help you express an opinion or construct an argument.

- In my opinion...
- I believe that...
- I agree that...
- Surely...
- One way of looking at it is...
- On the other hand... I agree/disagree because...
- What would happen if...
- That’s a good idea because...
- The answer is... because...

Here are some impersonal constructions for more formal argument.

- It is vital that...
- Others must agree that...
- It is clear that.../Clearly...
- Of course...
- Without doubt/Undoubtedly...
- The time has come to.../It has to be time that...

Just talking

On another level, we recognise that we need to get students talking more about their emotions. Last year, a sixth form student who wants to go on to mental health nursing set up a café run by students for students – anyone can drop in, get a drink and a biscuit, and talk.

The café takes a holistic approach to mental health: in spite of Prince Harry’s recent efforts to bring the subject out into the open, people still find it embarrassing to talk about mental health problems.

To this end, there are handouts on the tables and a whiteboard on which we write up conversation starters. One week it was: ‘Someone in my family has been affected by mental health.’ Another week it was: ‘When I hear homophobic abuse, I think...’

The concept has caught on and the café is well attended by students; adults float around promoting discussions, talking with young people and also identifying any of their friends who might benefit from a visit. Mostly, it is a place where students can talk with someone – either their peers or a member of staff. As a school, we recognise that it is important to stop and listen to students; sometimes it is enough just to have a cup of tea with them.

Meanwhile, our continued commitment to developing students’ communication skills was recognised recently when we won the Secondary School of the Year Award at the 2017 Shine a Light Awards. Students and staff alike were delighted.



Ruth Golding is a head of school,

Marina Breed manages the Language Support Centre, and Carmen De Pablo Lopez is head of inclusion at Tor Bridge High School in Plymouth

FIND OUT MORE

- How to start a TED-Ed Club: <http://bit.ly/sc239-04>
- I CAN’s Secondary Talk and Talk About Talk Secondary is launching in January 2018: visit <http://bit.ly/sc239-03>. Meanwhile, a profiling tool called Talk for Work Profile is now available; it allows schools to profile young people from Year 9 upwards to see who might need additional support for their communication skills for work. The tool comes with a book of practical activities to support young people’s language development. <http://bit.ly/sc239-26>
- Applications for the 2018 Shine A Light Awards, run by Pearson in partnership with The Communication Trust, open soon. To apply, visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk



SEND Inclusion Award

Demonstrate to Ofsted and stakeholders that your school has achieved an outstanding level of SEND provision and complies with the latest legislation.

“Our staff have been very grateful for the support the award advisors have given us along the way.”

Carol-Anne McCollum
Executive Headteacher, Barcroft Primary School



During a Conkers session, children prepare some food and enjoy eating it together outside

Excellence in special needs education

What does it take to be an award-winning SENCO? According to silver award-winner **Jeanette Baker**, every SENCO deserves an award

On 22 October, the silver award-winners of this year's Pearson Teaching Awards gathered in London's Guildhall to celebrate their achievements and find out who would receive the ultimate accolade of 'teacher of the year'.

One of the candidates for excellence in special needs education was Jeanette Baker, until taking early retirement in July 2017 the SENCO, safeguarding lead and behaviour coordinator at Delves Infant School in Walsall.

So what is the secret of her success? What prompted her headteacher to nominate her and why was she one of only three finalists selected from hundreds of entries?

I think I am a lucky person who was nominated and got through, and who has been very fortunate with the colleagues and the other people I have worked with over the years.

I can't stress that enough. I wasn't doing anything amazing that lots of other SENCOs aren't doing every day all over the country. I was just an ordinary SENCO who tried hard to ensure that all of the children could succeed and be happy at school no matter who they were, whether they were a square peg in a round hole, found certain aspects of school life a little difficult to handle or struggled a bit with their learning.

Is that not what we all do? That is also the ethos of Delves Infant School. I was just part of that.

Language and communication

As SENCO, my involvement with the children was for three years, four if they had been to nursery. I worked with staff to implement quite a lot of interventions, starting in early years as soon as it was apparent that a child was having difficulties.

One of my priorities was language and communication, crucial in any school but all the more so at Delves, which has a high proportion of children who speak English

as an additional language. To ensure that we picked up language issues straight way, we bought in the WellComm speech and language toolkit from GL Assessment and had some staff trained in the programme. Today, all children are screened on entry so that additional support can be put in place immediately for those who need it. This continues until their language skills are at the age-expected level, usually by the end of Foundation Stage, although a very small number of children continue to need intervention in Year 1. What form this takes varies according to individual need.

For children who are very quiet, or who find it hard to take turns and share with others, we also have little social and talk time groups, where they play games and maybe have a snack together – again, it depends on the needs of the individuals concerned. Sometimes it is just a matter of giving a child the confidence to talk, but it is mostly done through playing games, usually in groups of four.

When children move into Key Stage 1, we use the Talk Boost intervention from I CAN, which runs for 10 weeks, so we can get quite a lot of pupils through the year with that. I CAN has now brought out a version for early years, which my successor will be implementing this term.

There are also pragmatics groups in

Key Stage 1, and for children with speech needs, we work with the speech and language therapy service to identify how best to support them and if necessary arrange one-to-one speech therapy.

Other interventions

Other interventions I introduced covered a whole raft of things, from gross and fine motor skills to number skills... whatever the children needed, we put something in place to give them a boost as soon as there was a concern. Where this entailed one-to-one support, this was usually developed in house, either by me in collaboration with the class teacher or by an experienced TA with the skills to design and deliver tailored support.

Commercially produced packages that staff have been trained in include Read Write Inc, 1stClass@Writing: The Pirate Writing Crew (developed for Year 3 but we pitch for Year 2) and 1stClass@Number, both from Every Child Counts. We also have a member of staff trained to deliver Write Dance, a fun intervention which uses music, rhythm and dance to build and develop children’s pre-writing skills as they progress from expansive ‘movement drawings’ to fine motor movements, such as scribbling on paper to make different shapes.

Nurture

Three years ago, I set up a nurture group called Conkers together with the parent and family support advisor and a skilled HLTA. Operating three afternoons a week, it follows accepted nurture group principles, using the Boxall profile to assess need and returning to this at regular intervals to see how the child is doing on all the different strands.

- Sessions are structured in five parts.
- An opening discussion to review the children’s targets as identified by the Boxall profile.
- Choosing time, when they select what they want to do from a wide variety of games and activities. Sometimes they just want to draw and talk to us, so there are always pencils and paper available.
- Group time, when we all sit round the table to do an activity together – it might be around an emotional wellbeing issue we are working on, or something related to the curriculum incorporated into a nurture activity to make sure children don’t miss out through being absent from lessons.
- Snack time.
- Golden time, when we talk about how they have done, praise them for what they have achieved and give out stickers.



A sprinkling of snow provides an impromptu opportunity to practise numbers and fine motor skills

Some children find it quite hard to sustain the behaviour for an entire afternoon, so we break it up by awarding them a tick for each part, with four ticks earning them their sticker for the day. They build these up until they get five, which is rewarded with a prize.

Catch-me cards are a simple way of transferring what the children are doing in Conkers into the wider school environment – if a teacher catches a child carrying out their target, they put a sticker on their card. This keeps staff on board with what the children’s targets are and also with rewarding them for demonstrating the behaviour in the classroom.

Two members of staff for six or seven children makes this an expensive resource but the impact shows that it is worth every penny. Not in every case – we had one a child with behaviour issues who was so disruptive, he had to be withdrawn. But for most children, the security and targeted support of the nurture environment make a real difference, as evidenced by the Boxall profile. They absolutely love Conkers, which is why it has such a positive effect.

“The form intervention takes varies according to individual need”

Consideration for others is rewarded through kindness stars – a sheet of metallic stars and a large piece of black paper to represent the sky. Whenever a child does something kind, they get a star to stick on the sky. When the sky is studded with stars, they get a treat – a picnic outside, pizzas, den-building... whatever they would like within reason.

Promoting high quality teaching

As assistant headteacher with responsibility for safeguarding, behaviour and special educational needs, I didn’t have a teaching commitment, so I was available a lot of the time to support and advise staff, whether in a structured way through half-termly review meetings or just being there whenever they needed to talk things through.

We regularly collaborated on conducting the assess, plan, do and review process and where necessary devising a personalised programme of support. For example, we had a looked after child who was reluctant to talk



Parents get involved in what their children are learning during an Inspire workshop



Parents and children collaborate on an art project

or to write, and who was below the age-expected level in writing. A virtual reality project on dinosaurs captured his interest and allowed us to gain his trust, leading to lots of animated talk, which in turn generated a written fact file, and ultimately accelerated his progress until by the end of the year he had caught up with his peers.

Upskilling staff

Staff CPD is ongoing at the school through a combination of in-house training and specialist input from outside agencies. For new staff, that is crucial, but existing staff need to refresh their skills too. Communication in the classroom, differentiation across the curriculum, autism... we have covered lots of different aspects of SEND over the years.

The educational psychologist who comes in to work with children plays a key role in this, sometimes training

staff in a specific teaching technique, sometimes delivering more general training. Last year she ran sessions on quality interventions – what is going to make a difference? – really sharpening up our approach to interventions so that everyone could get the most out of every minute they spend with the children.



Learning about fossils in outdoor learning

Working with parents

I worked closely with the parent and family support advisor as aspects of our roles overlapped. Besides co-delivering the nurture group, she also runs some of the language and social groups, so she knows the SEND children really well.

Her participation in early home visits alongside nursery staff was really useful, as it allowed us to identify problems before children came into school. For example, a couple of years ago we had a little boy whose physical skills were extremely poor and whose general development also seemed poor, so we arranged for him to get involved in the local play group over the summer holidays to prepare him for nursery. Her home visits also helped us to pick up on parents who might be having issues with something and offer them support.

“ It takes time to develop relationships and build trust ”

We ran parenting programmes together, both on our own and in partnership with the junior school most of the children go on to, and also with the local church. These covered practical issues like toilet training, as well as maths and literacy skills to give parents the knowledge and confidence to support their child at home. We might suggest simple strategies, like getting their child to fetch three potatoes so Mummy can peel them, or explain how number lines and number grids work, as these may not have been used when some of our parents were at school. We also clarified the basic skills children need to have at the outset – parents sometimes have a tendency to rush forward into skills that are far too hard before the child has consolidated the simple ones.

Gaining parents' trust

If a parent is struggling to cope with a challenging child at home, the last thing they need is an overbearing 'expert' telling them where they are going wrong and what they should be doing instead. I have always taken the approach: 'We're all in this together. Lots of parents have the same problems and this is a chance to share and learn from each other. When I look back on my own parenting days, I wish I had had a support group to turn to. I know I would have done some things differently.'



Children in a fine motors skills group concentrate intently

Last year, the mum of a little boy with quite complex issues attended the meeting for parents of the new intake. She was consumed by anxiety, desperately trying to control things and contain her son's behaviour, and getting very stressed when he didn't respond in the way she wanted. She is now much calmer because she knows that whatever happens, we will work with it and slowly, slowly things will improve. And that is what happened. She is much more relaxed about it today and has shared her experiences at other parent meetings to give encouragement to people in a similar situation.

However, it takes time to develop

relationships and build trust. When the parent and family support advisor and I introduced SEND coffee mornings in conjunction with the local junior school, our first one, a general get-together, drew a fairly small turn-out. So we discussed what we thought parents would like to know more about, and ran a session on communication, followed by another on behaviour, inviting specific parents we thought would be particularly interested in these topics. Both sessions went well, but we only started this last year and there is more work to be done. Like everything, you have to start small and gradually build it up.

Learning outdoors

One of the ways Delves encourages parental involvement right across the school is through regular Inspire workshops, when parents are invited in to take part in their child's lessons and create something together. These are hugely popular with everyone, pupils, staff and parents alike. Last year they were extra special, as they were Forest School inspired.

As an urban school, we don't have a 'forest', just a tiny space between the fence and the school building that has been superbly well planned. There is an area with trees, a tree house and bird hide, a pizza oven, a craft area with tables and benches, a garden with raised borders and a composter, a dry water bed... lots of little corners where staff can run different activities, whether these are related to nature or incorporate an aspect of the curriculum to bring learning alive.

All children benefit from the opportunity to have that outdoor experience and to be exploring and handling natural materials. For children with SEND, the difference it can make is huge.

FIND OUT MORE

- **WellComm:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-28>
- **Talk Boost Key Stage 1:** www.ican.org.uk/talkboost
- **Early Talk Boost:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-29>
- **1stClass@Writing:** The Pirate Writing Crew: <http://bit.ly/sc239-32>
- **1stClass@Number:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-33>
- **The Write Dance programme:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-34>
- **The nurture group network:** <https://nurturegroups.org>. See also *Nurture for learning, Special Children 212*

Headteacher's perspective

On my initial visit to the school two and a half years ago, it was Mrs Baker who showed me round. Her passion, commitment and incredible knowledge of the children shone through. I knew straight away that this was somebody I really wanted to work with, somebody who would be hugely supportive and invaluable to me in what would be my first headship. That is what made my mind up about taking the job.

On taking up the post, I came to rely on her as a barometer of the wellbeing of everyone involved with the school. She knew how the children were feeling, how parents were feeling, she had her ear to the ground all the time. If there was anything starting to bubble, Mrs Baker would be the first to know. Likewise, whenever I was thinking of making changes or introducing something new, I would ask for her opinion first. She knew how it would be received by pupils,

staff and parents. She just read people so well.

She also had a way of engaging with parents that they really responded to – even when they came into school unhappy about something, she could immediately take the heat out of the situation with her warmth and her practical, down-to-earth approach. She may play down her qualities, but she was hugely experienced and knowledgeable, and incredibly skilled at getting the best out of people, whether they were children, parents or staff.

Our Ofsted report of 2016 noted: 'The leader for pupils with special educational needs or disability works very closely with the parent and family support advisor to ensure that vulnerable pupils get the support they need. They go out of their way to work with families to support their children's educational, personal and social development.'

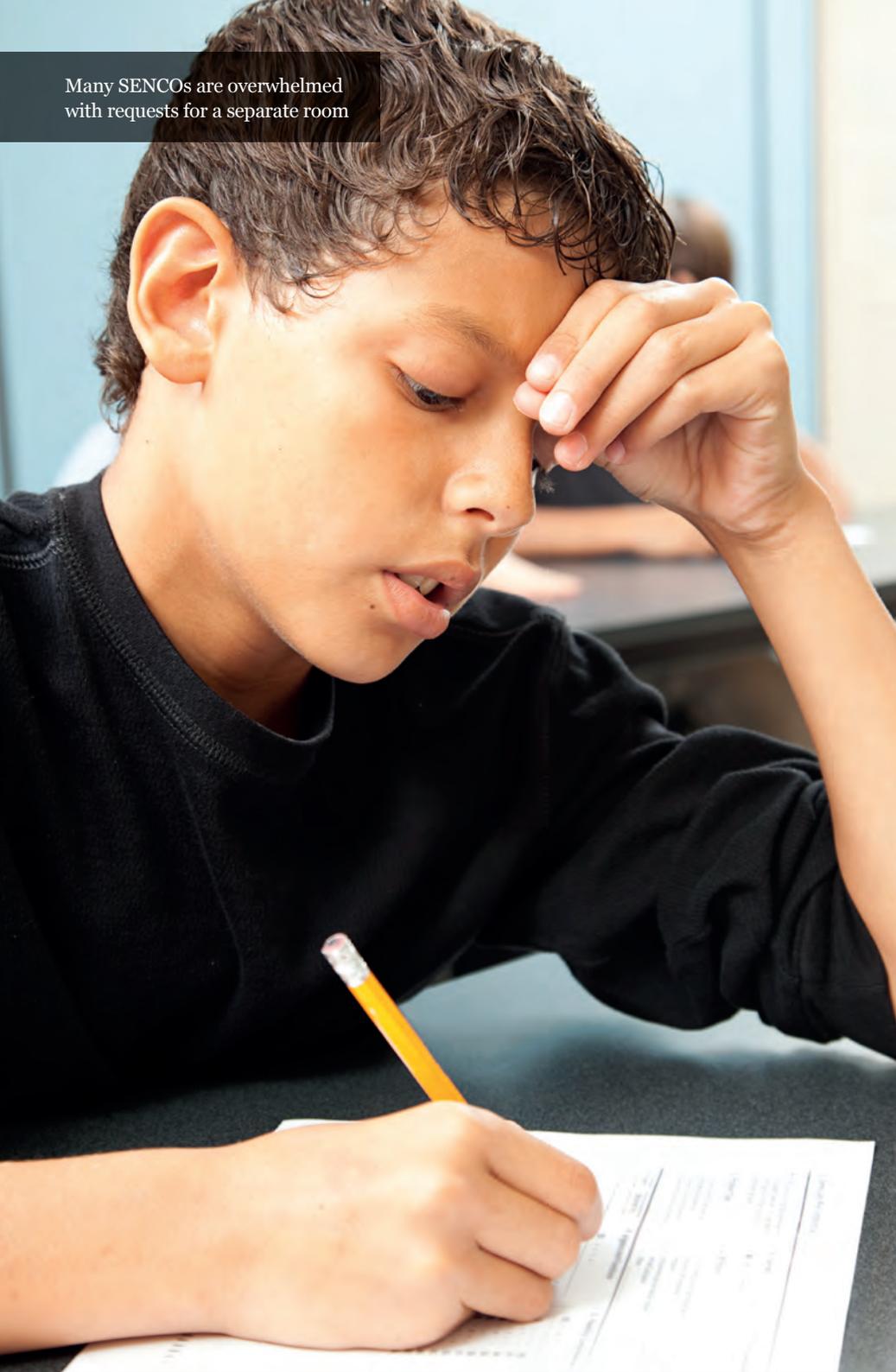
It also commended our staff for going the extra mile to ensure that no pupil will be left behind.

That really sums Mrs Baker up. She recognised that as teachers, we can go back and change or revise things if they don't work out first time, but for the children there is only one chance. She was determined that our most vulnerable pupils would get the best possible deal in school and stood up for them at every opportunity. 'What about those children? What are they going to get? What extra do they need?' She was relentless in that.

When staff learned that she was retiring in July, the news was met with stunned silence quickly followed by tears. Today, we are readjusting to school life without her, and thanks to her legacy we are in a strong position to continue moving forward. But we will never replace her personality and the wealth of experience she brought to the school. Things will never be quite the same.

Amanda Arnold

Many SENCOs are overwhelmed with requests for a separate room



Access arrangements – the burning issues

Sam Garner offers some advice to help SENCOs keep on top of access arrangements

SENCOs have more than enough to do as term gets underway, so they will have been relieved to see that the update to JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments, published in August, contained only a few minor changes.

There is still a lot to think about, however. Here I address some common concerns SENCOs raise with me when I go into schools.

Parental pressure to apply for access arrangements based on a private educational psychologist's report

The guidance is quite clear that the normal way of working in school takes priority over any assessment, which is just a snapshot of performance on that day.

Clause 7.3.6 of the regulations specifically states: 'A privately commissioned assessment carried out without prior consultation with the centre cannot be used to award access arrangements and cannot be used to process an application using Access Arrangements online.'

Even if an independent assessor does contact the school first, they cannot complete a wide battery of tests to come up with a score below the threshold of 85. JCQ stipulates that prior to the assessment they must find out from the school where the areas of difficulty are, and then only assess the student in those areas (7.5.3). They must also provide a copy of their relevant qualification certificates with their report. If the school decides to use the report, the assessor will have to complete and sign Section C of Form 8.

Finally, although an independent assessor can suggest a suitable access arrangement, this should not be based on the assessment scores alone, and must also take into account the background information supplied by the SENCO. Ultimately, the SENCO makes the decision and there has to be a history of need.

Turning down a request for access arrangements

Parents are understandably anxious and have the best interests of their child at heart. Show them that you share their concern, make sure they appreciate that it's not your personal decision and offer them a viable alternative.

'I understand that you are worried about your child. Unfortunately, it's not down to me. It's because they don't meet the threshold for JCQ regulations, so I am not allowed to award it. But we will continue to monitor the situation and if

you are still concerned, perhaps we could put in supervised rest breaks. That might be a more suitable approach.'

Some schools pre-empt the problem by including a clause in their access arrangements policy along the following lines.

'We do not accept any external assessments because we have a rigid assessment system in place in school and we don't want to discriminate against those students whose parents cannot afford a private assessment. If you send us a doctor's note or a private educational psychologist's report, we will use this as an official request to begin our own internal investigation into the eligibility of this student for an access arrangement.'

Gathering evidence of a history of need

You will already be communicating regularly with staff to monitor student progress, so include a section to ascertain which of their students requires extra support in class or extra time to complete tasks. Does this go beyond what is considered to be the normal way of working? Is it having a 'substantial impact' on the student's learning? Collecting these comments will soon provide evidence that a child has a history of need.

Once an application for access arrangements has been granted, let the relevant teachers know so they can start applying it straight away.

While Form 8 is compulsory when submitting the application, design your own forms for collecting and distributing information. Or copy others – an internet search will provide lots of templates you may wish to use or adapt.

Training

I always recommend that SENCOs run workshops for the students so that they know how to use their access arrangement correctly. If it's a computer reader, they will need plenty of practice; if it's extra time, they will need support in learning how to use that effectively.

Staff CPD is equally important, not only to ensure that teachers know how to apply access arrangements in their internal assessments and mock exams, but also to make them very clear about the thresholds and the deadlines for requests. It's no good having people coming to you with concerns about a student following poor performance in mock exams (late applications are only accepted in cases of temporary or sudden injuries or impairments). I advise imposing a cut-off deadline of Christmas in Year 10, otherwise you won't have time to assess the

child, establish a normal way of working, make sure they have practice in using the access arrangement and know how to use it under test conditions.

It is also worth arranging a slot at key parents evenings where you can explain the regulations and try to dispel the myth that extra time is the holy grail. Extra time, when not genuinely needed, can be detrimental, as students who finish too early often go back and amend correct answers because self-doubt creeps in.

Technology or adult support?

While adult support may sometimes be necessary – in cases of severe dyslexia, for example – for the vast majority of students, I would advocate technology every time.

When a student has a scribe, unless they dictate every word letter by letter, they lose out on the marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG). But it is not just their SPaG score that suffers. A lot of SEND students have short-term working memory difficulties. As they go through the laborious process of telling someone what to write, they lose their train of thought, whereas when they type their own answers, no matter how slowly, they still manage to hold on to what they wanted to say. More importantly, using technology prepares them for life after education, when they will no longer have a TA on hand.

Collecting regular comments from staff provides a history of need

The same applies to computer readers or exam reader pens (which don't even require an access arrangements application). In addition, human readers are not allowed in those sections of a paper that test reading, but electronic readers are. By having a human reader, you are again potentially limiting the student's marks.

Finally, using technology is more cost-effective – a significant advantage when resources are tight.

EAL students

When applying for access arrangements for an EAL student, JCQ requires proof that their difficulty is a recognised learning difficulty, and not simply the result of poor mastery of English.

Cognitive ability tests can be useful

here, or tests specifically designed for EAL students, such as those available from ELT well (<http://bit.ly/sc239-20>).

If you don't have enough evidence for extra time, a reader or a scribe, remember the alternatives that could be beneficial for an EAL child. An exam reader pen is one, or supervised rest breaks (it's very tiring working in a new language).

A flood of requests for a separate room

This has become a huge issue and needs to be addressed proactively. All students suffer from exam anxiety. It is about establishing to what level this is actually impeding them.

You also have to consider what resources you have at your disposal; those with legitimate disabilities have to take priority. Technically speaking, JCQ doesn't feel that exam anxiety is a disability unless it is long term, the student is having CAMHS help or other forms of support, or they are having major meltdowns.

Proactive measures

- Sit down and talk with the student. Teach them mental health techniques, such as cognitive behaviour techniques, to help them confront their anxiety and keep it under control.
- Have a whole-school policy of managing exam anxiety and not putting undue pressure on students.
- Consider the possibility that staff might be transmitting their desire for high performance table results onto the students. Don't let students think they can never retake an exam. Their first attempt may be the one that counts for the performance tables, but that doesn't stop them from trying again if they fail first time round.
- Make sure they are aware of all the post-16 options open to them, so they don't feel that all doors are closed to them if they don't get the grades required for entry to the school's sixth form.



Sam Garner is an education consultant specialising in behaviour, mental health and SEND.

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FIND OUT MORE

- **JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments 2017-2018:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-21>
- **Levelling the playing field:** a more detailed look at access arrangements, *Special Children* 228
- **EAL or SpLD?** *Special Children* 225

The Blean Primary School TA team was integral in developing the school's TA standards. In the opening session, led by Rachael Foster (left) and Hilary Burnage (right), they discussed their vision for the role of the TA at the school



Creating TA standards

Primary deputy headteacher **Rachael Foster** discusses how her school set about creating a set of TA standards to improve teaching and learning

Blean Primary School is a two-form entry school in Kent. Back in 2011, after Ofsted designated us a 'good' school, we took a long, hard look at our teaching and learning and set about creating Blean Primary teacher standards.

The aim was to provide greater clarity and a shared understanding around what each standard represented for our class teachers, and what great teaching looked like over time. The outcome was improved teaching and learning across the school, while the standards themselves provided a framework for both self-reflection and appraisals.

Teaching staff were closely involved in creating these, and they are reviewed regularly. Together with investment in training and annual action research projects, they have not only improved teachers' pedagogical skills but have had a

knock-on impact on TAs' skills too.

Developing TAs

Having seen the impact of the teacher standards on teaching and learning, in 2013 Hilary Burnage, the inclusion manager, and I began developing something similar for TAs.

We felt this was important because the school has changed a lot over the years. At the turn of the millennium, it employed just five TAs; today we have 22 and spend around £330,000 a year on support staff (the school has an above-average number of pupils with EHCPs but sits just below the national figure for pupils with SEND, while about 10% of pupils are on the pupil premium).

Even before 2013, TA development was a priority. Over and above including TAs in the weekly briefings, where staff shared information and safeguarding issues with

them, the school invested in formal TA learning and development twice a term. This ensured that the team remained professional and felt valued – vital at a time when the media was taking aspects of research and presenting the impact of TAs negatively.

When it came to creating TA standards, we wanted a document that would make everyone's roles and responsibilities explicit, with clear accountability and expectations. After much discussion, we decided to split the framework into three sections:

- the role of the TA within the classroom
- the role of the TA in delivering and managing interventions
- personal and professional TA conduct.

Research and exploration

Mrs Burnage and I started by reading the latest research on the role of the TA. This



essential component of the framework's subsequent success.

Gathering stakeholder views

Following this initial consultation, Mrs Burnage and I set about seeking the views of other stakeholders: the pupils, the teaching staff, the wider senior leadership team (SLT) and the governors.

During this process, it became apparent that we needed to be able to link our appraisal process to the framework. Consequently, we decided to grade the standards with three levels of expectation: 'meets the required standard', 'above the required standard' and 'outstanding'. For TAs who did not yet meet a required standard, the school would put in place some coaching and mentoring to resolve this.

Clearly, developing the framework and fine-tuning the wording would be labour-intensive, so Mrs Burnage and I set aside some time to work off site to assimilate all the information and begin constructing the framework.

“ A combined document that monitors progress and facilitates appraisals allows for greater consistency ”

helped us outline the non-negotiable aspects of our school's development needs, culture and ethos. A number of key questions also came out of it, which we decided to explore with the TA team during one of its half-termly development sessions.

The session kicked off with everyone discussing and then establishing a shared vision of the TA's role at the school: 'TAs are used to complement and add value to what teachers do by working with a variety of pupils (not just low-attaining pupils), developing independent learners using high quality, structured interventions that are well delivered, and ensuring that explicit connections are made between learning from everyday classroom teaching and structured interventions.'

The TA team then worked in groups to consider the questions Mrs Burnage and I had come up with, working on large pieces of paper to explore what good practice looked like, or could look like. This aspect was crucial – involving the TA team from the start in developing the standards has been an

Collating the materials

When the first draft was ready, we shared it with the SLT and the TA team and asked them if we had missed anything or if further clarification was required. A further redrafting session gave us time to edit the materials so they were accessible and ready to use.

A number of key elements needed to be added as an appendix to ensure that the final document encompassed everything a TA at Blean would need, all in one place. These included the following.

- Strategies and resources to promote independent learners.
- A question matrix (from *Maximising the impact of teaching assistants* by Russell, Webster and Blatchford (2013)).
- A class teacher/TA agreement.
- An intervention record-keeping form.
- An intervention impact form.

Developing a monitoring tool

Once the document was complete, Mrs Burnage and I sought to align the appraisal process more closely to the standards by developing a further tool

The process followed by Blean Primary to create TA standards

1. Read the research.
2. Share this with the TA team and gather its views through focused questioning.
3. Gather the views of other stakeholders.
4. Write draft materials encompassing research and stakeholder views.
5. Share these with the stakeholders.
6. Develop/select documents for the appendix.
7. Align appraisal documents to the standards.
8. Implement the standards, supporting TAs as necessary with training and development.
9. Review the standards regularly to identify anything that needs refining.

for the appendix called 'Appraisal Self-reflection'. This requires TAs to reflect on the different statements in the three areas (whole-class teaching and learning, delivering interventions, and professional conduct) and consider what evidence they have to support achievement against each of the statements. Before their next appraisal, they also consider what their next steps might be to progress any areas for development.

Creating a combined document that both monitors progress and facilitates appraisals allows for greater consistency. Even so, a professional dialogue between the SLT, class teachers and TAs is still required. However, thanks to the Appraisal Self-reflection form, this dialogue is now focused on teaching and learning and has helped staff and the school as a whole to improve.

Reviewing the standards

When we reviewed our TA standards in 2016, we considered some of the key findings of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)'s *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants* (Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015, <http://bit.ly/sc239-02>). The seven recommendations this contains are summarised as follows.

- TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low-attaining pupils.
- Use TAs to add value to what teachers do and not replace them.
- Use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning.
- Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom.
- Use TAs to deliver high-quality one-to-one and small-group support using structured interventions.

- Adopt evidence-based interventions to support TAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction.
- Ensure explicit connections are made between learning from everyday teaching and structured interventions.

These recommendations helped us reframe our TA standards in a variety of ways. Thus one of the components of the appendix is a class teacher/TA agreement, which sets out how the class teacher wants the TA to use their time in class and which children to focus on. Collaboration and communication are key and it is essential that the agreement sets out how this will happen, so that there is a shared understanding of expectations, roles and responsibilities.

The agreement includes a reference to documents such as the class inclusion profile. Having such documents linked to the agreement ensures that documentation created by the class teacher or inclusion manager is read and understood. Of course, the agreement is amended and adapted as practice evolves.

Creating independent learners

In addition, Mrs Burnage and the TA team created a new resource for the appendix entitled Developing Independent Learning, an *aide-mémoire* on how to support independent learning, which is designed to steer TAs away from task completion.

Class observations had highlighted this as an area to develop – we were concerned that some children, particularly those with SEND, were being oversupported, and we are adamant that we do not want to create a culture of dependency.

“Involving the TA team from the start has been an essential component of the framework’s success”

Our most recent focus has been trying to support staff to help children to make the link between interventions and their class learning. Our solution has been to provide time during teacher training sessions for class teachers to review interventions along with their TAs (we pay TAs additional time for this) using provision mapping. This particular aspect is still in development, and more thinking is required to ensure that children who need the most help receive the best quality support we can offer.

Making time to liaise

Liaison takes time and the school pays TAs an additional 30 minutes each week. The SLT is flexible about when and how

the teacher and TA teams might use this time. Some prefer to meet for 30 minutes on Monday before school starts; others take 10 minutes at the start of the day three times a week.

What are the outcomes of all this hard work and investment? The school was graded ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted in 2016. We are now a national support school, with headteacher Lynn Lawrence a designated national leader of education. In addition, the school was the south-east winner of the Pupil Premium Awards last year. More recently, it has been designated a teaching school by the National College.

Investing time to develop teacher and TA standards has certainly paid dividends in terms of teaching and learning at the school.



Rachael Foster is deputy headteacher at Blean Primary School, Kent

FIND OUT MORE

- Blean Primary School supports schools outside its own alliance and locality to develop TA standards, and provide training to support the progress and attainment of all pupils. It hosts a range of CPD opportunities throughout the year in its Learning and Development Centre. www.bleanprimary.org.uk or email learningcentre@blean.kent.sch.uk

Examples from the Blean Primary School’s TA standards

Managing provisions

Responsibility and accountability of key provisions as set out in the provision map/individual learning passport.

Outstanding	Above required standard	Required standard	Performance improvement strategy to meet required standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uses quantitative and qualitative data to understand and interpret the impact of each provision undertaken. ● Has a broad and excellent understanding of a range of provisions and communicates progress regarding interventions succinctly. ● Has an excellent range of questioning, which ensures children think independently, grow their conceptual knowledge and understanding, and extend their critical learning skills. The TA uses questioning to check for learning whilst the children are engaged with their learning. ● Expertly establishes very high levels of engagement through a range of hooks and strategies. ● Uses pupils’ mistakes as an opportunity to intervene and extend knowledge, skills and concepts, all underpinned by developing good levels of independent learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has a good understanding of entry and exit data and what constitutes progress within provisions. ● Fully understands the aims of any intervention and how clarity of information is an integral part of the provision-mapping process. ● Uses a range of questioning techniques to support and challenge thinking. ● Maximises engagement through clear expectations and the use of specific praise and encouragement. ● Understands why children need to make mistakes and actively promotes independence, as opposed to a culture of dependency. ● Has a good knowledge of ICT and resources to support learning and knows how to use them safely. ● Good pace and progression secures good or better progress because 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has a sound knowledge of the children’s needs (via inclusion profiles/LPs including associated data), through effective liaison with the class teacher. ● With the class teacher, is able to establish and understand entry and exit data. ● Is organised and prepared to deliver a provision. ● Builds positive and professional relationships with the children they are supporting. ● In conjunction with and after liaison with class teacher, has a sound understanding of the provision-mapping system and the key focus of any provision. ● Uses preparation time effectively. ● Has a sound knowledge of the provisions they are delivering, being proactive in seeking out support where 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A range of coaching and support will be put in place to enable the TA to meet the required standards.

Deaf children enjoy making music too

Bryony Parkes of the National Deaf Children's Society suggests ways of making musical activities accessible for deaf children

Musical activities provide rich learning opportunities for all children, and deaf children are no exception. Besides the immense enjoyment they bring, they can boost children's confidence, put them in touch with their emotions, enhance their powers of self-expression and help to develop their fine motor skills.

Each deaf child's experience of music is unique, however, and depends on the type and level of deafness, the technology used, and their previous exposure to music. A child who has lost their hearing may have a memory of music and therefore a very different experience from a child who was born deaf.

Moreover, some deaf children can use a lot of their residual hearing with the support of hearing devices, while others may be deaf in just one ear. This means that as well as enjoying the vibrations and visual aspect of music, they will be able to hear it too, if not in quite the same way as their hearing peers.

Top tips for communication

DO

- Ask the child how you should communicate with them.
- Use your arms and facial expressions to be as visual as possible.
- Establish the beat and give instructions before music is played.
- Teach or practise in rooms that have no background noise.
- Teach in small groups.
- Be aware that hearing aids and cochlear implants vary in how they process different frequencies.
- Take the student's lead on which instrument they would like to learn.

DON'T

- Work in a room that has an echo.
- Move around while you are talking or demonstrating.
- Talk while performing.
- Get frustrated if the child is repeating the same mistake.
- Give up. If the child is stuck, try explaining things in a different way, write them down or use pictures.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants

The majority of children with permanent deafness use either hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Hearing aids amplify sounds to make them more audible. They are programmed to amplify quieter sounds more than loud sounds so that what the wearer hears always remains within their comfortable range.

Children with severe to profound deafness may use cochlear implants. A cochlear implant includes an internal receiver and electrode package, which is surgically placed in the inner ear, and an external speech processor worn behind the ear. The speech processor converts sound into an electrical impulse which stimulates the nerves in the inner ear.

Points to consider when teaching these children

- Hearing aids and cochlear implants are programmed primarily to improve the clarity of speech. Speech and music have many differences, however, including intensity, energy at different frequencies, and frequency emphasis – musical instruments typically have a much greater dynamic range and frequency range than speech. This means that hearing devices do not reproduce music exactly, and that a deaf person may not experience music in the same way as a hearing person.
- People who use a hearing device find it much easier to follow a single talker, singer or instrument than sounds coming simultaneously from multiple sources.
- It is possible to add a program for music to modern hearing aids which alters the gain and output of the device, ensuring the volume remains comfortable and therefore improving the listener's experience of music.



Photo courtesy of the National Deaf Children's Society

You could suggest to parents that they contact their child's audiologist or teacher of the deaf for further information.

- Different types of assistive technology may help users of hearing devices to reduce problems caused by distance and background noise. Options include audio direct input leads as well as wireless devices (e.g. ear hooks, neckloops, Bluetooth streamers). Find out more at www.ndcs.org.uk/technology.

The word 'deaf' refers to all levels of hearing loss.

On page 26, Deaf with a capital D refers to people who see themselves as culturally Deaf; they actively use BSL and belong to the Deaf community

Pages 23-25 and the introduction to page 26 are adapted from *How to make music activities accessible for deaf children and young people*, created by the National Deaf Children's Society with the support of deaf musicians, researchers and teachers who have experience of supporting deaf children to connect with music. www.ndcs.org.uk/music

Instrumental tuition

'Rhythm can most definitely be taught using kinaesthetic exercises. Deaf people learn very visually, often by watching cues, following demonstrations and by imitation.' Rebecca Withey, deaf sign singer and workshop leader

Generally, the teaching and learning process during instrumental tuition does not need to differ for a deaf child.

Be guided by the student when it comes to choosing an instrument. Like hearing children, they may have strong ideas about what they want to do and it's important not to discourage them. Some deaf children may find it easier to hear lower or higher frequencies, so encourage them to explore and experiment with different instruments to see what suits them best.

Individual tuition

- Try and use rooms with minimal background noise so that sounds are clear.
- Face the student when you are teaching so that they can lip read and see your hand positions on the instrument you are using.
- Think about how a deaf child can see the music through finger positions, posture and mouth shapes.
- Be patient and give the student time to process what you are saying before you demonstrate or ask them to play.
- Establish the beat and rhythm of a piece before it is played, and maybe ask the child if they would like you to conduct throughout. Depending on their level of hearing, they may find it difficult to get the melody until

they understand the rhythm.

- If the child wears a hearing aid, check that the volume level is not too loud.
- Don't give instructions while the child is playing, as there is a chance they won't hear what you are saying. Likewise, avoid humming the rhythm, as it may make it harder for them to hear what they are doing.
- If they make a mistake, be aware that they may not hear it. Be clear afterwards on where the mistake was. Point to the score and make time for demonstration. Remember that a deaf child may take longer to learn new things in comparison to their hearing peers.
- Keep a music log so that progress can be tracked. It is also useful for letting parents know what their child needs to practise.

Group work

- Establish the rhythm and melody with the child before they join the group so they have the confidence to play along with their peers from the start.
- Agree communication rules from the outset; for example, no playing or tuning up while conversation is happening. Check the top tips for communication on page 23 or email helpline@ndcs.org.uk.
- Sit students in a semi-circle so that they can see everyone and

communicate clearly. Ask the child where they would prefer to sit within the group.

- Consider pointing at the score to support the student to keep rhythm if they are finding it hard playing along with another person or group.
- Be careful not to single them out if they make a mistake, as they may not be aware of it.

Playing in a brass band, string group, orchestra or pop band

Orchestras are set up so that every member can see the conductor, who uses clear visual signals to communicate. A deaf child can use this to their advantage.

- Make sure they have a chance to play on their own with a tutor and get used to the piece before playing it within a bigger group. The different instrumental groups could also meet regularly to run through their own parts before they are introduced to the full orchestra.
- Check if the child needs help to tune their instrument.
- Consider the child's positioning within their instrument group. Depending on their level of hearing, they may prefer to sit at one end of the group, closer or further away from neighbouring instrument groups. Ask them if they would like to have someone beside them to relay information and instructions. Try not to move instrumental positions as it can take the child time to get used to what they can hear in a new place.
- Ensure the conductor is on a raised platform so that they can be clearly seen. Check that there are no visual obstructions, such as soloists or stage props.
- Get the conductor to use a long baton to heighten the visual impact and help the child keep time with the rest of the orchestra.
- Make sure conducting is consistent. If there are to be any changes to the method or style, talk directly to the deaf child.
- The conductor may need to give a deaf soloist additional support with timing. Allow time for a clear discussion in advance to avoid miscommunication.

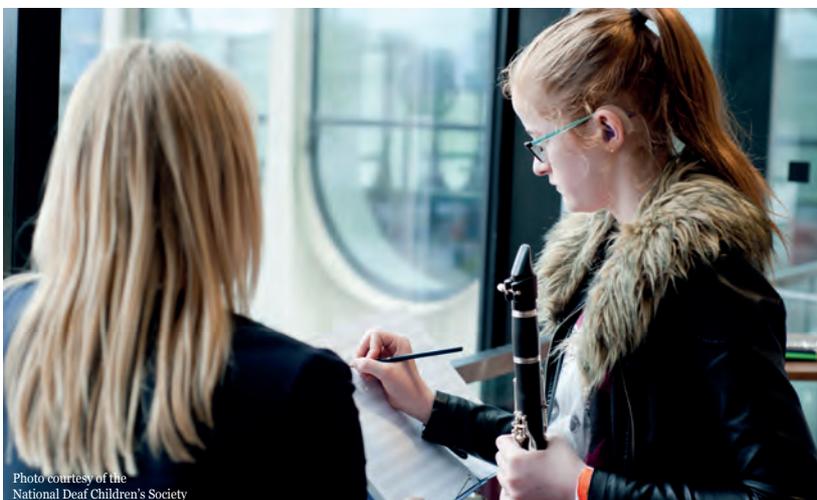


Photo courtesy of the National Deaf Children's Society

Learning to sing and singing in a choir

'In my own personal experience, when singing with grand piano accompaniment, it is important to have the lid down or there are too many overtones which confuse.' Janine Roebuck, deaf opera singer leader

Many deaf children enjoy singing and are able to sing in tune. There are many ways you can support them to take part, but be careful not to single them out.

Before you start

- Make sure the acoustics of the room are good. If the room has an echo, it will be more difficult to pitch the tune.
- Think about the way you communicate – don't forget that lip reading when someone is singing is much harder.
- Ask younger children who are learning about singing for the first time to feel their throat and diaphragm, so they can feel the vibration and get a sense of how it feels.
- Give the child a chance to sing on their own to get used to what they can hear and feel in their bodies before introducing them to a group or choir.

Performing with accompaniment

- Check which octave on a keyboard the child can hear most comfortably. The accompanying music may need to be altered depending on



A budding performer gets professional advice at a National Deaf Children's Society masterclass

whether they have better low or high frequency hearing.

- If the first beat of each bar is strong, this will aid timing. Try playing the whole chord as well as the single note – having the harmonics is a great help for pitch accuracy.
- Consider using a guitar or saxophone instead of a piano to accompany the singer because their clean and sharp sounds can help a deaf child to hear the tune. Percussive and staccato notes are also sometimes easier to hear.

Singing as part of a group

- Usually group members stand next

to others singing the same part. This makes it easier for deaf children to keep in tune and will give them extra confidence.

- Suggest that the child watches their co-singers' breathing patterns out of the corner of their eye to ensure they keep in time with everyone else.

Performing in front of an audience

- Consider using a microphone as a deaf child may struggle to know if the volume is right and adapt accordingly while keeping their voice steady.
- Consider asking somebody to stand opposite the child while they are singing to demonstrate the pitch with their hands and help them keep the rhythm by conducting throughout.
- If the child is self-conscious about their voice, assess their part in the group depending on their strengths. If they want the social benefits of being involved in a choir but prefer to lip synch rather than use their voice, consider allowing this, but don't draw attention to the fact.
- Some children's hearing aids shift or compress high frequency sounds into the child's lower frequency and more audible hearing range. If a child is unable to reproduce high frequencies accurately, consider whether they would be better suited to another vocal classification or whether a lower octave could be used.

DJ'ing and music technology

'Most of the young people I have worked with could hear to some degree, but the music technology side really opens up the possibility that those who are profoundly deaf could participate on an equal footing.' Alan Bryden, musician, DJ and music technology workshop teacher

DJ'ing and music technology are becoming increasingly popular. If a deaf child expresses an interest, here are a few things to consider.

- Give the child an opportunity to use headphones or adapters to connect their hearing aid or cochlear implant to the speakers, so that they can still be part of the group without

experiencing any background noise.

- Encourage the child to put their hands on the speakers to feel the vibrations from the beat of the music. Some children may be nervous about this in case they damage sensitive equipment, so clarify where it is safe to touch prior to the activity.
- Most deaf DJs prefer to use software

that is designed to be visual, such as Serato Scratch Live, rather than the old style mixers.

- Lots of music technology software has a visual element, particularly around programming rhythms, where the act of pressing the keys on a keyboard or drum machine creates a sound as well as a pattern on the screen, enabling the rhythm or musical sequence to be both seen and heard. You could also consider using music technology that incorporates visual feedback elements with lights on a grid, for example Novation's Launchpad or Yamaha's Tenori-on.

Sign song

Sign song is when someone uses sign language to interpret a song instead of singing the words. As it can be very visual, performances are often stunning to watch.

Sign song could add a whole new dimension to your class singing, or you could set up a sign song group to bring deaf and hearing children together, and give hearing children the opportunity to learn some signs.

Top tips for creating sign songs

- Ensure the signing represents the meaning of the lyrics – you don't need to sign each word. You can find out more about the structure of British Sign Language by contacting www.signature.org.uk.
- Be careful to use signs that fit in time to the music and flow well together.
- Use facial expressions to mirror



Heathland's signing choir throw themselves into an award-winning performance

what is being signed in place of tempo and tone.

- Look at alternative translations to suit the group you are working with; for example a more simplistic version for young children.
- Consider all suggestions and ideas for interpretation of the lyrics into sign. Everyone will have a different style and their own views on how the song should be translated.

Sources of support

- You can see examples of sign singing on YouTube.
- Music and the Deaf runs workshops all over the UK. www.matd.org.uk
- sign2sing week, 5-11 February 2018, is an opportunity to learn and perform a song written especially for the occasion and simultaneously raise money for vulnerable deaf children and adults. <http://bit.ly/sc239-19>

An all-deaf choir

Last year, Heathlands school for Deaf children, St Albans, won second place in the youth category of the national signing choir competition. Specialist teacher of the Deaf, Sarah Brinsden explains how it all came about

I loved singing as a child and belonged to the school choir. I wanted our children to have that experience too, so in 2013 I co-founded a signing choir. It also seemed a good way of helping the children improve both their English and their BSL translation.

At the start, I didn't really expect us to last beyond the first year, and here we are four years later getting stronger all the time. People expect to see us at school events, they want to see us there, sign singing has become part of school life.

Finding songs

YouTube is a great source of songs and you get the lyrics too, which is great. A word of warning, however. Hearing children pick up popular songs without really understanding what they are singing. Sign singing, by its very nature, involves looking at the meaning so you can interpret it. When you listen carefully, the words are not always very appropriate!

Preparing a song

I am a CODA (child of deaf adults) and my

fellow choir leader Lesley Reeves-Costi is deaf. Having a hearing and non-hearing person work together is important. I can help Mrs Reeves-Costi with the timing and together we can agree on the best signs. For example, a running tap and a running person are two very different things, so how do you capture that? Or if a song contains lots of similar words, we might decide to use a variety of signs to increase the visual impact, rather than having too much of the same.

Once we have agreed on the signs, we make a video and put it on the choir page of the school website so the children can practise at home.

Performing

Finding an audience is crucial. Besides our regular school performances, we have shared our sign singing with St John's Deaf Club in London and Luton Deaf Club, opening the door to other shared activities, which is brilliant and gives the children of hearing families a chance to feel part of the Deaf community.

Every year we sing in front of the Christmas tree at the Maltings shopping centre, a firm favourite with the children and an opportunity for the PTA to raise funds – we made £400 in two hours last year! We also make videos and in 2014 we marked the school's 40th birthday with a song about empowerment called *Deaf we can*.

Looking forward, we have been invited to help Hearing Dogs celebrate its 35th anniversary at St Albans Cathedral in February. Potentially, that could be a huge event and we are very excited.

What the children say

- 'I love sign singing – it's my hobby.'
- 'I like being involved.'
- 'I like going to all the different places we have been.'
- 'I like having new experiences.'
- 'When I am older, I want to do it with my own children.'
- 'I want to be a singer when I'm older.'
- 'I want to be famous!'

The deadline for the next national signing choir competition is 9 March 2018.
<https://nationalsigningchoircompetition.org>

In Blue class, staff add affect to learning by reflecting back pupils' emotions through words, facial expression and signing



Learning to learn

Annie Grant visits an outstanding special school to learn about REACh, an innovative approach to engaging autistic pupils

It's the end of a busy week at Brookfields School and in the Green class a member of the support staff appears to have fallen asleep. Another has turned her back on the child she is working with, and the teacher is chasing a little boy around the classroom.

Catherine Bernie, the deputy headteacher, puts her head around the door and is pleased with what she sees. The children in Green class are learning to learn.

Learning to learn

Brookfields School is an outstanding special school in Tilehurst, near Reading, where pupils in the early years (aged 2-7) follow a Learning to Learn curriculum designed around the seven areas of engagement, as set out in the Engagement Profile and Scale developed by the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) project, and incorporating the key areas of development from the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Pupils follow a personalised learning programme linked to their Education, Health and Care plans and are encouraged to develop competency across each area



The seven indicators of engagement

of engagement by progressing through five increasingly challenging levels of interaction:

- themselves
- their environment
- adults
- their peers
- interdependence.

At the heart of this curriculum is REACh (Relationship Education for the Autistic Child), a relationship-based pedagogy

focused on reducing the barriers to learning for children with learning disabilities by nurturing engagement and providing a deep foundation for building early communication and interaction.

How it all began

Brookfields first considered taking a new approach to teaching autistic pupils following a school behaviour audit. Behavioural incidents were more frequent in unstructured times because the social skills taught and used in class were not being transferred to other contexts.

'We had children who were developing language but weren't able to use it functionally,' remembers Catherine Bernie. 'They could ask for tangible objects, but they weren't interested in interacting with other children or adults, and that led to difficulties at transition times and in the playground, where pupils who lacked the language to negotiate with their peers expressed their anxiety and frustration through their behaviour.'

Staff were also concerned about pupils' eventual transition to adulthood. They knew that on leaving Brookfields, pupils were unlikely to find the same structure and

Autism

predictability they experienced at school, and poor behaviour would restrict their ability to participate in the community. So the search began for a teaching approach that would encourage them to develop their social and communication capability and use that in other social contexts.

'We wanted to enable children with autism to join us in our world, as well as us making it possible for them to function more effectively in their own,' explains Ms Bernie.

The development of REACH

In 2007, Ms Bernie attended a two-day course on PLAY (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters), an approach based on DIRFloortime® which had demonstrated how children with autism could make progress and build effective communication and social skills.

'At the time, we were already experiencing some success using intensive interaction with pre-verbal children to establish communicative relationships, but we were finding it difficult to extend those one-to-one adult/child relationships into more active communication with others,' observes Ms Bernie. 'PLAY seemed to offer us a way forward. But it was a therapeutic, pre-school intervention, so we developed REACH, a school-based model founded on the same philosophy, and trialled it with a small group of autistic pupils in early years.'

The results of the trial were positive. While there were individual differences, every pupil made significant gains in socialisation, interaction and behaviour – areas that, previously, they would have found difficult. And rather than becoming emotionally dysregulated when they encountered difficulties in social situations, children began to find ways of coping.

Encouraged by these results, Brookfields extended the REACH approach to autistic pupils across early years and key stages 2 and 3.

Building trust

'The REACH approach involves, as a first priority, the child engaging actively with an interactive adult partner,' explains Catherine Bernie. 'Without that secure base, children cannot begin to develop the baseline skills they need to learn, in a meaningful way.'

It starts with a period of relationship-building between staff and pupils. Adults demonstrate to pupils that their behaviours are acceptable by reflecting back their babble or movement, using intensive interaction. They follow children's lead, engaging them in activities



Josh Connick uses a chasing game to motivate a young pupil to engage with him

that reflect their interests, playing with them as peers rather than accommodating adults. At first, play is often based around sensory-motor activities, such as the chasing games taking place in Green class, because children feel comfortable with them and they provide the impetus for children to enjoy engaging with staff.

'We know structured approaches are often used successfully in schools for children with autism,' says Ms Bernie. 'But REACH takes some of that structure away and we have seen that as children begin to trust the adults working with them and feel safe, they realise that if things go wrong, they can cope and the adults will support them in that.'

Introducing challenge

As trust is established and children become comfortable in the interaction, staff begin to introduce a little more challenge into the relationship (increasing their 'circles of communication') by putting obstacles in the child's way that require them to solve a small problem if they want to continue with the activity.

'So, if we were rocking to music with a child, we might sabotage the activity slightly, but gently or in a humorous way,' says Ms Bernie. 'We might perhaps, turn our back, so the child has to turn us



The first priority in the REACH approach is for children to engage actively with an interactive adult partner

around to get us to continue. We might go and hide, or pretend to fall asleep, or go to turn off the music with a big exaggerated finger, so the child has to interrupt us.'

It was this sabotage element of the PLAY approach that provided 'the missing bit of the communication puzzle' for Brookfields School, because it offered autistic pupils a way to progress from simply interacting with one person towards more complex and useful interaction and communication through problem-solving. As pupils develop more self-regulation and begin to cope more independently, the 'circles of communication' are gradually increased.

'Children with learning difficulties are often protected from experiencing setbacks,' explains Ms Bernie. 'Sabotage allows us to acknowledge pupils' emotional responses, including fear and anger, and demonstrate to them that if things go wrong, they can get through it.'

Affect

Acknowledging, sharing and reflecting back children's emotions explicitly is an important part of the REACH approach and staff take every opportunity to attach emotions to learning experiences.

'Research indicates that we remember things better if there is emotional resonance,' Ms Bernie observes. 'So staff attach emotions to learning experiences, so that our children learn how to manage them, because when they're frightened, angry, frustrated or jealous, that's when the challenging behaviours creep back in.'

She gives the example of a child who wants to play in a water tray where staff have 'forgotten' to provide a plug.

'They might get cross about that, so the adult will acknowledge that they are cross, ask them why and what they could

do about it, as well as having the means available for them to solve the problem,' she explains. 'Because they want to play, pupils are motivated to solve problems, and when they do, they remember it better because of its association with an emotion, and how they regulated that emotion successfully and got what they wanted.'

'If we just train them to put the plug in,' she continues, 'then pupils will perhaps use that skill again in the same setting, but they are less likely to generalise the skill across different settings, because it's what they have been told to do, rather than a response to how they feel.'

Planning and assessment

Although REACH classes can appear to be free flowing and unstructured, lessons are quite tightly planned. A baseline is established for each child so that progress can be measured using the evidence-based Brookfields Affective Communication Skills Checklist (BACSC).

'We know where we want the children to go based on the assessment,' Ms Bernie explains, 'so we plan activities that will allow us to tease that progress out. But if the pupil pursues something different, because we know them so well and we know where they are heading, we can spontaneously add in additional steps along the way as we go.'

In cases where, despite staff persistence, pupils do not engage with the planned activities, staff revert to a preferred activity, usually a step back on the BACSC, and then move forward again from there.

Embedding REACH across the school

As part of the new early years curriculum, Ms Bernie and her colleagues are currently developing ways of helping staff to employ a REACH approach within each of the seven areas of engagement and to move children through the five levels of competency.

'The vision for our classes is to have an approach that looks similar to outstanding nursery practice in that it is really child led,' says Josh Connick, head of early years and the teacher of Green class. 'It's not necessarily changing everything that we do, but it's trying to replicate the really excellent things that we do in more situations. The ultimate aim is that, relative to their need, children will become communicative, independent, engaged and ready to learn.'

The REACH philosophy is apparent in classrooms across early years. For example, in Blue class, teacher Kathryn Sykes now routinely incorporates REACH techniques

Structured teaching approaches

- Routine
- Practice of mastered activities
- Timetabling
- Predictability
- Social skills training
- Deal cards
- Symbolic/visual support

REACH curriculum

- Relationship based
- Pupil led
- Flexible routines
- Deliberate change
- Use of 'sabotage'
- Full of 'affect'
- New challenges every time
- Intrinsic motivation
- Symbolic/visual support

into all her interactions with the children. As she leads a carpet session before lunch, she injects a little challenge by 'mistakenly' singing Happy Birthday instead of the lunchtime song until the children point this out, and then she puts it right. At the end of the session she adds affect to a child's expressed reluctance to stop by using words, signing and facial expression: 'It's so sad that we have to stop, but it's lunchtime.'

Challenges

Although results from the rollout of REACH across the school were very positive and there are still pockets of good practice, Catherine Bernie acknowledges that REACH has not made as much difference as she would have liked beyond the early years.

A determining factor in this has been staffing. 'REACH is very staff dependent,' she explains. 'If key staff leave and new staff aren't used to the REACH approach or comfortable working in that way, they find it quite challenging. There is a huge pressure to do continual staff training to maintain consistency, which is difficult.'

Another factor is the age at which children are first exposed to REACH and the amount of time REACH input is sustained. 'Interventions are most effective if they are started in the early years, before behaviours become entrenched, and continue for more than two years,' observes Ms Bernie. 'Our experience suggests that only then are pupils ready to interact with other people in an effective way. So there are pupils who have moved from a class where REACH was taught incredibly well to another class where they haven't made the progress we would have liked. Instead they have reverted to familiar, unhelpful behaviours and the curriculum becomes

training rather than learning, which is just what we wanted to get away from.'

'However,' she adds optimistically, 'if pupils then return to a more appropriate environment, they demonstrate that they have not lost the skills they had previously gained.'

Looking to the future

The removal of National Curriculum levels and the new freedom for schools to tailor the curriculum to the needs of their pupils has led to a curriculum review at Brookfields. More able pupils following a formal curriculum have moved to a model that emphasises mastery learning through project-based work.

The senior leadership team sees an opportunity for elements of REACH to be built into this curriculum.

'We can incorporate the ethos of REACH at Key Stage 3 even if we are not able to implement the approach quite as intensely as we can lower down the school,' Ms Bernie explains. 'All staff across the school receive training in engagement based on the REACH philosophy and we're very clear that if a pupil's main area of difficulty is social or emotional, then we should see that reflected in their curriculum until they are able to engage with more formal learning. How effective that will be will depend both on training and the skill of our teachers in facilitating it.'

Making a difference

Despite the challenges of implementing REACH, there have been many individual success stories. Ms Bernie talks about a boy who used to slam his head on the edge of the table in response to any change in routine and a girl whose self-injury was causing serious concern. As a result of intense work on emotional self-regulation through REACH, neither pupil exhibits those behaviours now. Other pupils have developed functional communication.

'These are huge, life-changing achievements for the young people concerned,' says Ms Bernie. 'It's outcomes like that which make REACH worth doing.'

Annie Grant is a freelance consultant, producer, writer and editor

FIND OUT MORE

- **Engagement Profile and Scale:** <http://engagement4learning.com>
- **Intensive interaction** (see *Special Children* 211): www.intensiveinteraction.org
- **PLAY:** www.playproject.org
- **DIR Floortime®:** www.floortime.org



Reading and MLD

Natalie Packer discusses successful reading support for pupils with moderate learning difficulties

How many pupils do you currently teach who have moderate learning difficulties (MLD)? The number is likely to be fairly significant as MLD is the most common type of SEN in the UK.

In fact, recent figures from the Department for Education show that approximately 23% of all pupils identified with SEN have a moderate learning difficulty.

One of the most significant barriers to learning for many of these pupils is reading; it can often be a challenge for them to develop the basic skills of decoding and comprehension. Improving reading skills is key because it impacts the whole curriculum.

Common difficulties

So what is it about reading that many pupils with MLD find challenging? Although it is important to remember that each child is an individual, pupils with MLD may present with some of the following traits.

- Being unable to link letters to sounds or blend/segment phonemes.
- Confusing similar letters or words.
- Being able to recognise a word on one page but not on another.
- Reading on, even when what is being read does not make sense.
- A limited vocabulary.
- Misunderstanding what they have just read.
- Struggling to infer or deduce.
- Finding reading activities stressful.

Improving the whole experience

When reading is a chore rather than a source of pleasure or a tool for learning, pupils' overall confidence is impacted and they can become disengaged with the reading process.

For ideas to instil a love of reading, see the pull-out resource in *Special Children* 235. However, while instilling a love of reading is something most teachers endeavour to encourage, this can become an uphill battle where a pupil has been turned off reading altogether.

Becoming a successful reader

When considering how to support pupils with MLD, we need to start by looking at how reading skills are developed. Based on a relatively simple view of the reading process, there are two key components that affect someone's ability to become a fluent and successful reader.

- **Word recognition:** e.g. recognising letters, blending sounds, recognising frequently used words.
- **Language comprehension:** e.g. understanding what is read, understanding the use of punctuation and its impact on meaning, using inference and deduction.

Although these two components are related, they each require specific kinds of teaching strategies. Therefore it is important to find out in which area a pupil is struggling so you can be confident you are using the most appropriate strategies, bearing in mind that many pupils with MLD will find both areas a challenge.

Word recognition strategies

Put very simply, to be able to decode words, pupils need to understand the relationship between the grapheme (symbol) and the phoneme (sound). Plenty of practice is important so they can begin to recognise an increasing number of words automatically; the more they recognise, the more fluent their reading. If pupils are at an earlier stage of decoding, you might want to try some of the following strategies.

- Encourage them to sound out regular words – those that follow common phonic or spelling patterns – and blend the phonemes (c/a/t).
- Identify letter patterns within words (a/g/ai/n, t/r/ai/n), find common endings (-ing, -tion) or count the number of syllables.
- Ask pupils to look for familiar letter chunks within a word. These could be prefixes, suffixes, endings or whole words (e.g. 'eat' within cheat).
- Teach irregular words (those that don't follow common phonic or spelling patterns) using letter names and as sight words that are automatically recognised (e.g. said).
- Where appropriate, ask pupils to look at a picture or use their prior knowledge to help them decide if a word makes sense.
- Encourage pupils to read on past an unfamiliar word or read the sentence more than once and look for clues to help them recognise the word.
- If a pupil is still at the stage of learning

the alphabet, try using an alphabet arc. This is more memorable than a line and pupils will be able to visualise it more easily. Encourage the pupil to recite a few letters at a time and demonstrate where they are on the arc.

Comprehension strategies

To comprehend a text, pupils need to be explicitly taught skills that will enable them to understand literal questions, deduce or infer information and respond to a text. Provide plenty of opportunities for them to practise by asking them to predict, question, clarify and summarise what they have read.

In addition, try some of the following strategies.

- Prepare pupils before reading a text by discussing the cover illustration, title, synopsis and contents page to predict the type of text, the genre and the theme.
- Introduce them to key vocabulary they will come across in the text that they might find difficult. Subject-specific words, for example, can be particularly tricky. Provide a key word mat with visual clues to illustrate their meaning, or show examples of how the key words can be used in sentences as this helps to contextualise the language and provides a model for pupils to follow.
- Pair pupils up with a reading buddy so they can share the reading and discuss the text together.
- Check that you are providing pupils with opportunities to read whole texts so they can get a better sense of the context and meaning; reading whole texts is often more enjoyable than just reading extracts.
- Use drama to develop comprehension. Drama provides an active, hands-on approach to learning; developing aspects of text into performance requires pupils to have a thorough understanding of what they have read.

A positive environment

Pupils with MLD who are struggling with developing the essential skills for reading will benefit from the opportunity to experience reading in a positive environment. This can be done by providing an appropriate space to read and making a literacy-rich environment where there are books on display and posters that encourage reading, as well as dictionaries, visual symbols and access to magazines, leaflets, ebooks or online blogs.

Finding materials to keep pupils interested in reading and enable them to see themselves as readers is crucial. Many publishers offer high interest books



It is important to find materials that enable all pupils to see themselves as readers

suitable for pupils with a lower reading age that do not appear too childish – ask your literacy coordinator, head of English or SENCO if some of these could be explored.

Meanwhile, it is often helpful if pupils see that the adults helping them to read are readers themselves. Discuss examples of books you've read or provide your views on texts you've shared together. Encourage parents to model the reading process to their child. As well as listening to their child read, could they read aloud to their child? This strategy will enable their child to access stories that may be beyond their current reading level but within their understanding.

Accessing text

Often, pupils are required to read in lessons where there is no opportunity to teach or practise this skill, but they still need to understand the text. Where you are using worksheets, textbooks, web pages or other reading material as a resource, consider how you can make them as accessible as possible for pupils with learning difficulties. For example, you might do one of the following.

- Change the font style and size. A rounded font that reflects cursive script, such as Arial (size 14), tends to be one of the most accessible.
- Increase line spacing to 1.5 or 2 lines so the text looks less cluttered on the page.
- Highlight or underline key words.
- Split the text into chunks using bullet points or text boxes.
- Include pictures or diagrams to illustrate the main points.

Remember that pupils with MLD will often have to put twice as much effort into reading. If they also have a poor working

memory, they may lose track quickly or find it tricky to follow when someone else is reading to them. If a pupil finds it difficult to follow words when reading, help them by providing a reading ruler or tracker. Scanning pens can also be used – these convert text from most print and read it aloud. If pupils become tired as a result of the extra effort required, allow them to have short breaks between tasks.

Know your pupils

Remember, however, that each child is unique and what works for one pupil with MLD may not work for another. Knowing each pupil well, building on their strengths and understanding why certain strategies might be useful for them is a good starting point. So much of what our pupils learn in school depends on their ability to read. Supporting pupils with MLD to develop these key skills and access text can open up a whole world of learning possibilities.



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FIND OUT MORE

- Scanning pens: www.scanningpens.co.uk
- *Keeping stories at the heart of early years reading instruction*, and *Embedding a reading culture in a secondary school*, *Special Children* 232
- *Libraries as centres of learning*, *Special Children* 230
- Active Phonics, an intervention that combines phonics with PE, *Special Children* 227

Colourful murals in the stairwell start the conversation about mental health



Communication, resilience and trust

Secondary school director of mental health and wellbeing **Clare Erasmus** tells Alison Thomas how she developed a whole-school mental health support programme that is relevant, robust and empowering

‘Bread is therapeutic in that tactile, relaxing, kneading way that a lot of other cooking doesn’t quite reach. From the simplest ingredients you can create “life” and you have to nurture it and show it love. You can take the most basic dough and create lots of different breads.’

This is how celebrity chef Mark Lloyd describes the rationale behind a Love Bread workshop he led last year at the Magna Carta School in Staines-upon-Thames, Surrey.

Over the course of a weekend, 14 vulnerable students joined a group of staff volunteers for six hours to learn about the science of baking, make their own pizzas and focaccias, and prepare a sourdough starter to feed and nurture at home.

‘These were students whose erratic attendance was causing concern,’ says director of mental health and wellbeing Clare Erasmus, ‘yet here they were giving up part of their weekend to come into school and, better still, enjoying the experience.’

“**Staff began to build relationships with students who were hard to engage in class**”

The adults, meanwhile, appreciated the opportunity to build constructive relationships with students who might be hard to engage in class. ‘Making food is a great leveller as all adults and students in the room were learning something new together,’ was typical of the comments she received in the post-intervention evaluation. ‘This allowed for humour, trust and private conversations to flow. Out of these sessions I found the opportunity to connect with three students in particular. To listen to their stories about their week and their weekend.’

A place to talk

Love Bread was the first in a series of extra-curricular ‘pop-up’ challenges, the latest addition to a whole-school mental health and wellbeing programme that has been running for the last two years.

‘We have in place a self-referral system and a staff referral system for students who need to talk,’ explains Ms Erasmus. ‘However, we found that some people were slipping through the net because they couldn’t face the prospect of discussing personal issues in a one-to-one or within a group, it just made them feel really uncomfortable. We could see there was a problem and that it was definitely linked with mental health challenges – the evidence was there in their behaviour and in their attendance – but we couldn’t get them to open up.’

The challenges were designed to address this by engaging the children in a creative activity that would hold their interest and help to build communication, resilience and trust. ‘They look and feel



Students learn to make dough, nurture it and turn it into a tasty treat

like after-school clubs,' says Ms Erasmus, 'but the environment is actually very controlled and structured and the adult volunteers play a critical role – we've had curricular leaders, senior leaders, counsellors, social workers, TAs, ICT support staff... all sorts of people. The point is that they are on an equal footing with the students. They share a task, they build or make something together, and in the process they start to have those conversations.'

Love Bread was followed by the Chef's Challenge, where students and adults stayed behind after school once a week for six weeks to prepare a two-course meal, and then sat down to enjoy it together and celebrate each other's achievements. Next came the Bicycle Challenge, which also comprised six after-school sessions and involved dismantling old bikes to remove and replace the worn parts and restore the bike to full working order.

'With each session, the children began opening up more and more,' says Ms Erasmus. 'But because they were busy preparing food or working with a bicycle wheel, it didn't feel quite so artificial, quite so formal. And in the course of interacting with the same adults every week, they began to build trust and

develop a rapport. They started to re-engage, which was what we wanted them to do, and they started to share.'

The Bushcraft Challenge

The fourth challenge was organised slightly differently and ran for two full days a week over three weeks. In the rural oasis of Big Hat Bushcamp, 10 minutes from school, the children learned survival skills, such as fire lighting, campfire cooking, tracking



Students are shown how to build an efficient fire

and shelter-building, as well as engaging in outdoor trust games, undertaking personal development exercises and practising mindfulness in nature.

'Outdoor education is an incredible resource – I don't think we do nearly enough of it,' says Ms Erasmus. 'When it comes to working with mental health, take children out for a day to interact with the natural landscape and you will be amazed at what comes out of it. It worked particularly well with the children on the SEND register, who responded superbly.'

The group would start the day by checking in with how they were all feeling, openly and honestly. Some did this extremely well, others found analysing and expressing their emotions a little more difficult. There were several more check-ins as the day progressed to see how their mental health barometer was changing.

“ They would sit together on a log deep in the forest and the child would just talk ”

While the various activities were going on, up to four members of staff would take individuals aside for a chat, with a view to building a picture of their physical health, their attitude to school, their friendships, their personal confidence, their family relationships, the values they held dear and their ability to communicate all of these things. The outdoor environment is ideally suited for this. 'The adult and child would sit on a log under a tree deep in the forest looking at some wild flowers – that would be their vista and the child would



Preparing a meal during the Bushcraft Challenge

just talk,' Ms Erasmus says.

As with the other challenges, the outcomes of these conversations were plotted on a visual diagram under the different headings at the start of the programme and again at the end. The final diagram showed clear evidence of progress, as well as some reflection and growth.

At the same time, the more detailed observations recorded by staff highlighted that some students were deeply troubled and a serious cause for concern. In other cases, they revealed something new about a child, or reinforced an issue staff were already aware of.

'This might be linked with personal safety, sexual identity, self-respect, respect for others, relationships, relationships to food... those sorts of things,' says Ms Erasmus. 'When you have got that information and the young person is starting to talk about it, then you can start to work with them.'

'Our role is not to diagnose. That is really important,' she adds. 'Our role is to be pre-emptive and proactive. One of the things we need to do is to open up the avenues so that the young people feel they can talk. Another is to put aside what *we* see as important, what matters to us, so that we can see it from the child's perspective. It's about abandoning the traditional hierarchy and creating a level playing field. Young people respond really well to that.'

The importance of research

Seeing things from the perspective of the people on the receiving end is fundamental to Ms Erasmus' approach. When she was appointed director of mental health and wellbeing in 2015, there was no job description attached – the school's vision for the role and how it

evolved would be organic.

So where to begin? The answer lay within the school community. Ms Erasmus consulted the young people to find out what they felt. At the same time, the senior deputy head conducted a staff survey to develop a parallel wellbeing programme for them. 'The mental wellbeing of staff is often neglected or merely addressed in a token way,' she observes. 'Unhappiness at work leads to stress, illness, absence, poor quality teaching... you can't support the young people without supporting their teachers too.'

With the aid of a professional researcher, she conducted focus groups



Restoring a bike to good working order gives students a sense of achievement

with every year group, from Year 7 through to Year 11. Based on the results, she then developed a questionnaire for the whole student body. This allowed her to identify:

- the mental health and wellbeing barometer of the school
- the school's mental health assets
- the deficits.

Her next step was to find out what she could do to improve things. Finally, and crucially, within three months of completing her research, she started rolling out the first initiative.

'You need to show people you have heard what they are saying and you are acting on it,' she says. 'That immediately establishes a climate of trust, a sense of collective ownership and a sense of unity. These are all healthy qualities in a school. Get that right, and you will get incredible support from your community. If people feel they are being listened to and their wellbeing is being prioritised, they feel safe and valued. They then feel confident, and they start having aspirations about committing to whatever it is that is you are trying to achieve.'

“When students wanted face-to-face support, they didn't know where to go”

My TeenMind

One of the messages that came out of the research was that students found the wealth of information on mental health on the internet overwhelming – too many sites to sift through, too much advice couched in impenetrable language – with the result that many of them didn't use it at all. As a creative media studies teacher, Ms Erasmus decided to tackle this through a cross-curricular project with her mixed-ability Year 9 around the topic of app design.

With the support of Gaia Technologies Plc for the technical side of things, the students explored the NHS website to research the issues they felt were important and settled on three themes, each with several subsections. My Body covered eating disorders, healthy eating, puberty and sex and gender, My Mind looked at depression, self-harm and stress, and My Relationships focused on bullying, friendship, peer pressure, sexting, sex and consent. For each subsection they came

up with a design that was sweet, short and simple.

- A definition.
- What are the signs?
- What is the advice?
- Where can I get help in my school and in my community?

'It is proving immensely popular with teachers,' says Ms Erasmus. 'If they have a child they think might be developing an eating disorder, or who might be beginning to self-harm, they can pick up the app and say: "Let's just have a look at the definition together. Let's see if we agree that this is what we are talking about." It serves as a sort of textbook reference. It also offers them the language. Self-harm is a good example because it conjures up images of something catastrophic when actually it's not. People can self-harm by pulling out their hair or their eyebrows. The app helps to bring things into perspective and stop them from becoming hysterically misinterpreted.'

Another popular feature is the mood tracker, which staff might ask a child to use to see if a pattern emerges, which then opens the door to a conversation about what's going on and what the triggers might be.

The app has been thoroughly vetted by mental health charity Woking Mind, mental health nurses and social workers, as well as the school's safeguarding officer and SENCO. This makes it very valuable to parents whose children might be investigating sensitive topics like sexual orientation on highly dubious websites. This is a tool that parents can trust.

The creation of a wellbeing zone

Another deficit Ms Erasmus discovered through her research was that when students wanted face-to-face support, they did not know where to go, who to talk to, or when. 'They knew that support was available. The trouble was that the advice kept changing,' she says. 'First, they would be told to go to the library, then it was the SEND room, or their tutor... there was no coherent, reliable system.'

This led her to create the wellbeing zone, a suite of four rooms that function as normal classrooms during lesson time, but take on a whole new identity at lunchtime. The tone is set as students walk up the stairs, where colourful murals by a professional artist start the conversation about mental health. On arrival, they are greeted by trained peer supporters in three of the rooms or the adult mental health mentor in the fourth.



Preparing cupcakes during the Chef's Challenge

Whichever room they visit, they know that they will feel valued, their voices will be heard, and they will be safe. Equally important, they know that the support is always there whenever they need it. Some students rarely use the facility; others come on a regular basis. At times, one of the rooms will have no visitors at all. But it will always be there.

The anti-bullying room

The anti-bullying room already existed long before the wellbeing zone was conceived, and was set up by Ms Erasmus six years ago in her capacity as anti-bullying coordinator.

'Students were telling us they had no one to turn to,' she explains. 'Yes, they might have the support of their families, their friends or their tutor, but



Laying out food to share together at the Chef's Challenge

these people weren't always around at lunchtime when they were likely to be needed the most.'

The anti-bullying room was created to put this right. It's a place where students can talk to trained anti-bullying ambassadors from years 10 and 11 about all forms of bullying, break-down in communications and importantly where restorative sessions take place for healing.

When a child arrives, often in tears, the ambassadors will listen to their story empathetically, help them to calm down and compile a report to establish the facts. They might conclude that the incident is just a falling-out between friends, or they might decide that it is a genuine case of bullying and call over a teacher, who is on hand in the background to oversee such eventualities. An email is then sent to the tutor informing them that a report has been filed and requesting immediate intervention. 'It is essential that every teacher works very quickly to sort out the facts,' says Ms Erasmus. 'The situation must be resolved within 24 hours, or at least be under investigation, so that parents can be informed.'

“The boys knew what steps they could take to prevent things from escalating”

She recalls a recent incident when two Year 11 boys, one of them on the autism spectrum, walked in and asked to speak with her directly, requesting that she 'do a restorative session with us before I knock his block off.' 'I was so pleased, so impressed,' she says. 'They have known the room since Year 7, they know the language and they know what steps they could take to prevent it from escalating. That's what I mean by being pre-emptive and proactive.'

The wellbeing pop-in lunchtime room

The wellbeing pop-in room operates on the same principles as the anti-bullying room, and is where students can come to talk about their personal mental health and the challenges they are facing.

These ambassadors have completed 15 hours of training with RELATE in how to listen, how to signpost if necessary, and how to ask questions to help the young person come up with solutions themselves. Like the anti-bullying ambassadors, they

Mental health

file a report, but first they read out a confidentiality clause making it clear that if there is a safeguarding risk, the information will be passed on.

They too have adults waiting in the wings, in this case two mental health mentors, and the session ends 10 minutes early to give them the chance to wind down and talk through anything they are concerned about with these adults. 'Some students just come to talk about their worries and know there is someone who will listen, but others disclose serious issues,' explains Ms Erasmus. 'Safeguarding and safety are paramount.'

Club Chill

'A beautiful room and a safe haven' is how Ms Erasmus describes Club Chill. 'It holds the best Christmas party in school. It is one of the happiest rooms ever!'

Reserved for the school's most vulnerable students, membership is by invitation only and lasts throughout the child's time at school if they need it. A lot of its members are on the autism spectrum, while others are students on child protection who are being closely monitored. Then there are those who just find school life very difficult to navigate, especially at lunchtime when the structure and support of the classroom are withdrawn.

When Ms Erasmus described Club Chill to a child with ASD from another school, he was impressed. 'A little space where you can go and play chess, play Minecraft, or listen to the music you want to listen to?' he said. 'A place where you can have a conversation with your friends without worrying about the possibility of being bullied or finding yourself in a difficult social situation? It sounds wonderful.'

The Magna Carta students think so too. So much so that two students who have now moved on to college come in at lunchtime to be mentors. Praise indeed.

The wellbeing centre

Open all day, the fourth room is a dedicated space for one-to-one support with the trained student support mental health and wellbeing coordinator and a place where external agencies offering specialist mental health support can come to work with specific students.

Students are referred here by heads of house, who have been alerted to concerns by a member of staff through the school's mental health referral tracking system. Interventions include time-bonded supportive sessions, self-esteem and confidence-building programmes, an opportunity to develop problem-solving



The layout of My TeenMind is attractive and simple

skills, and information and advice on where a student can go to get further support. In the most serious cases, students will be referred to their GP and CAMHS.

“Vulnerable students feel valued and part of the school community”

Working with families

Although the combined impact of these and other initiatives has made a significant difference to vulnerable students' wellbeing and sense of self-worth, Ms Erasmus is concerned by the dip she perceives after school holidays.

'Attendance has improved, they are becoming engaged, they are talking to us in the classrooms and in the corridors, they feel valued and part of the school community,' she says. 'Then they have a week or two at home and we have to start reeling them in again.'

Which is why this year she is planning to run 'pop-up' projects with particular cohorts of parents and their children with a view to encouraging the parent and child to interact with each other and build trust between the parent and the school.

'I just want to keep communication channels open and start that whole conversation about positive mental health, trust and communication,' she explains. 'And resilience. When we are not coping alone, what other resources do we have available to help us? When we find

ourselves in a challenging situation, what are our assets?'

She already has a small group of parents who are wellbeing ambassadors, and she is considering training them in resilience so that they can then train others. But at the end of the day, the direction she takes will be influenced by the parents themselves.

'Everything at the Magna Carta has always been about grassroots,' she says. 'We start by researching the students and then the student voice dictates. We research the staff voice and initiatives are dictated by what the staff have to say. We need to do the same thing with our parents to find out what it is that *they* want in terms of support, or the role they would like to play, or what they would like to see more of in our community. And then see, not only what the school can do, but how we can work with our local council and the county.'

My TeenMind moves on

Meanwhile, My TeenMind has taken on a life of its own. It has already been integrated into the Year 7 PSHE curriculum through a series of lessons where children are presented with hypothetical scenarios and asked to use the app to come up with answers. In this way, they are becoming familiar with the layout and the content, which hopefully will encourage them to use it whenever they need to as they move up the school.

At the same time, the group that designed the app, now in Year 11, are planning a few more sections including What are Panic Attacks? They also want to explore the concept of extremism and its implications for mental health.

'The students have done it all. They are amazing,' enthuses Ms Erasmus. 'The same is true of the ambassadors. Young people are so keen to do right by others and exercise values they are proud of. If you give them the platform, skill them up properly, and then allow them to take the lead with their wonderful, authentic, leadership skills, they do get it right, they are bang on target.'

'Schools are places to learn,' she concludes, 'but let's also make sure we are addressing the most important things first – ensuring that children feel safe, secure, and listened to and can make informed choices about lifestyle and their emotional and mental wellbeing. Get that right, and academic aspirations and progress will undoubtedly follow.'

My TeenMind is free to download:
<http://bit.ly/sc239-54>

The chosen site still waiting to be developed



From vision to reality

Jonathan Reid describes how an undergraduate with physical and sensory needs planned and developed a community sensory garden, with transferable lessons for schools

Over recent years, there has been growing concern about the social, emotional wellbeing and mental health of children from all backgrounds and across all phases of education.

Studies consistently show that children with SEND are particularly at risk, while for those with complex learning difficulties, 'mental health is the most pervasive and co-occurring need to compound and complicate children's special educational needs and disabilities.' (*The Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project*, Barry Carpenter and Jo Egerton, <http://bit.ly/sc239-37>).

The situation is equally concerning in higher education where, only a few weeks ago, an extensive analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research revealed a fivefold increase in the proportion of undergraduates disclosing a mental health problem (<http://bit.ly/sc239-38>).

Educational professionals too are coming under increasing pressure, with almost a third of school teachers and FE/HE lecturers reporting that they feel stressed most or all of the time, and three-

quarters attributing psychological or physical symptoms to their work (Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Education Profession 2017, Education Support Partnership, <http://bit.ly/sc239-39>).

This article describes the development of a restorative, sensory garden space, designed and project-managed by an undergraduate to encourage all staff and students to take time out from their busy lives.

The context is therefore a little different from that of schools. However, many of the lessons we learned would apply in any setting.

The growth of an idea

The idea of creating a sensory space at Oxford Brookes University (OBU) Harcourt Hill Campus followed a chance meeting I had with first year undergraduate James Burley-Jukes during induction week.

Over the following months we discussed his experiences of university. Despite enjoying his studies, as an independent young person with a range of complex physical and sensory needs,

James was also encountering significant challenges and frustrations.

In the course of one of our conversations, he suggested that the university environment could be improved with an accessible space where students and staff could go to relax and enjoy some time away from the pace and pressures of university life. As the idea began to grow, we discussed how we might go about locating, designing and creating such a space.

Securing funding

OBU has a Student Impact Fund, an alumni-financed initiative which invites applications from students who want financial support to develop a project that will benefit the whole community and demonstrate Brookes' guiding principles of generosity of spirit, confidence, enterprising creativity and connectedness.

James' idea fulfilled these criteria in every respect, and he made sure that his application made this very clear. He explained that his vision was to create:

- a sustainable sensory garden that was accessible to everyone



Plants have been selected for their different textures, scents and colours

- a soothing refuge from the pressures of university life ('plants relax people')
- somewhere that could be used as a social meeting point
- a potential source of food as it would include kitchen garden element.

His bid was successful and following an initial award of £500, he was granted an additional £250 in recognition of his enthusiasm and commitment.

Locating an appropriate space

Having secured the funds, James now had to provide details of how these would be spent, and we developed a detailed timeline of scheduled activities. Our first activity was to establish the criteria for a suitable location. The garden would need:

- to have enough space, light and access to water to grow a wide variety of sensory plants and vegetables
- to be able to support full accessibility
- to be highly visible to increase the potential of community involvement.

Having tracked down three possible sites, we began the process of negotiating with senior colleagues. It was at this point that progress ground to a halt, and we quickly realised that change, particularly in large educational institutions, takes time. Undaunted, we persevered, and with the help of the university stewardship officer secured the support of two members of the university grounds team, who visited the campus on several occasions to help us identify and secure a seven- by eight-metre plot, which was subsequently officially approved.

Seeking community support

To ensure the sustainability of the garden as a community resource, James and I began advertising for volunteers. We designed online surveys, which we distributed to students and staff via e-mail and e-newsletters. Responses flooded in and we now have a long list of people who have offered their time, labour and even donations of garden items to be up-cycled for use as the garden begins to take shape.

Our student volunteers represent just about every faculty, from history of art through to biomedical sciences, psychology, adult nursing, occupational therapy and initial teacher education. Staff volunteers are similarly diverse and include academics, administration colleagues, a director and a programme lead.

Given such an overwhelming response, I would imagine that in schools, which are much more close-knit communities, the potential for recruiting a sizeable team of helpers could be immense. The key is to get the message out there. You don't know

who has hidden talents or access to useful resources until you ask.

Designing and developing

The time had come to sketch our initial plans, consider planting and decide where to place a variety of garden features, including a water fountain, wind chimes, bird boxes, a wildlife hotel, hanging baskets, a bench and an archway.

We wanted to grow a wide range of plants and vegetables to support different sensory experiences and attract wildlife. For a selection of our choices, see box below.

An important aspect of the garden plan was accessibility. Having cleared it of plants and shrubs, we discussed different types of surface for a pathway with our helpful grounds staff. The path needed to be:

- permanent
- safe
- smooth
- as flat as possible

Choosing plants	
Sense	Example
Sight and sound	Climbing roses and clematis for height and colour, long grasses such as briza maxima (greater quaking grass) and melica (long, erect stems bearing spikelets of papery grass flowers) and bamboo for visual impact and the whispering sounds they make in the wind.
Touch	Stachys byzantine (lamb's ears) for its velvety feel, moss which is soft and spongy to the touch and ferns for their feathery leaves and a whole variety of different textures.
Smell	Aromatic plants such as honeysuckle and jasmine and herbs like rosemary, thyme, dill, parsley, spearmint, basil and oregano.
Taste	Fruits such as strawberries as well as lettuces, nasturtiums and a range of vegetables.

Sources of funding for schools

Businesses, large and small, are keen to demonstrate that they support their local community – put out feelers and you may be pleasantly surprised.

- **Waitrose, Tesco and the Co-op** offer funding to community projects based on the votes of their customers. <http://bit.ly/sc239-40>; <http://bit.ly/sc239-41>; <http://bit.ly/239-42>
- **Tesco Bags of Help** awards grants of up to £4,000 to local community projects, including schools. <http://bit.ly/sc239-43>
- **Awards for All**, part of the National Lottery, awards funding of £300-£10,000 to community groups and projects that improve health, education and the environment. <http://bit.ly/sc239-44>
- **Ernest Cook Trust** offers grants of up to

£4,000 to state schools and small charitable organisations for projects that encourage young people's interest in the countryside and the environment, the arts and to improve literacy and numeracy. <http://bit.ly/sc239-45>

- **Learning through landscapes** runs a Local School Nature Grants Programme, supported by People's Postcode Lottery. This provides an assortment of nature equipment, such as bird boxes, bee hotels, recycled wood planters and den-making kits, up to the value of £500 and a two-hour training session. <http://bit.ly/sc239-46>

- wide enough to accommodate all types of wheelchairs
- able to withstand all weathers.

We eventually settled on concrete as it met all of our criteria and was within our budget.

Today, a curving pathway sweeps through the space and we have installed three raised boxes to provide a suitable working height for all volunteers. James also contacted a national tyre-fitting service to seek donations of tyres for additional raised growing areas. These are now stacked three high ready to be painted to make them an attractive feature.

From every small acorn

James and I have been delighted with the progress to date. However, it is important to appreciate that developing a sensory space is not easy. As James remarked: 'The project has been difficult and stressful but very rewarding. Without the invaluable support of the grounds department we would have struggled.'

Meanwhile, the project is expanding in ways we hadn't initially envisaged and we are already in discussions to extend the space and hope to be involved in the redesign of a concrete area opposite our developing garden.

We also hope to extend participation in the sensory garden to members of the community beyond the university. Last week James met representatives of a local charitable organisation, FarmAbility, which supports adults with autism and learning disabilities to access 'meaningful activities that improve their wellbeing and increase their independence, enabling them to participate actively in their communities'. We hope that Farmability volunteers will join us in progressing the next stages of our venture.

A future flourishing space

From its initial inception, James' vision was to develop a community project that engaged a broad range of students and staff from across the university.

As a large school of education which provides a range of undergraduate programmes of study such as education studies, SEND and inclusion, and initial teacher education, we will be encouraging our students to support the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the space.

We will also be using it to explore pedagogy, practice and curriculum relevance in relation to the benefits of outdoor education and give our students insights into the role of nature and wildlife in the development of additional qualities such as collaboration, inclusion and creativity, as well as the many positive impacts of gardening-based interventions.

And, of course, the sensory garden will benefit the whole campus community in relation to social and emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Ultimately, we hope to be able to realise James' original vision of creating a social space, a place of belonging and a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.



Jonathan Reid is a senior lecturer in child development and SEND/inclusion at the School of Education, Oxford Brookes University

FIND OUT MORE

- **Additional planting ideas:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-50>
- **Sensory garden design:** <http://bit.ly/sc239-51>
- **FarmAbility:** <http://bit.ly/sc238-52>

Activities children might do in the school sensory garden

The Sensory Trust offers free resources outlining creative activities to encourage children to connect with nature. These range from making paint brushes out of natural materials (try out the different effects you can create with feathers, leaves, pine cones...) to exploring the symbolic significance of plants in mythology and folklore and matching plants and objects to the correct landscape. Where relevant, activities come with step-by-step instructions. <http://bit.ly/sc239-47>



© the Sensory Trust

Through its Sensory Nature Hub project, the trust has also developed materials for special schools, including simple ideas to encourage children to engage their senses as they explore the natural environment, instructions for making a bird feeder and a bug hotel, and a smash and smell activity – the instructions for the last two are also presented as Widgit sheets. <http://bit.ly/sc239-48>



© the Sensory Trust

A simple strategy to help children slow down and take heed of their surroundings is to get them to create a sound map.

- Give each child a piece of plain cardboard and a pencil or pen.
- Ask them to sit or stand still and listen to what is making sound around them.
- In words or drawings, get them to mark themselves in the middle of the card, then mark the sounds they can hear and where these are coming from.

When the trust used this strategy with a school group, the children enjoyed it enormously and it generated lots of lively discussion. As an extension activity, the trust suggests asking children to combine different senses by recording the shapes they associate with different sounds, or the textures – if they could touch the sound what would it feel like? <http://bit.ly/sc239-49>

Improving inclusion for children with ASD

Creating Autism Champions – Autism awareness training for Key Stage 1 and 2

By Joy Beaney (illustrations by Haitham Al-Ghani)

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN 9781785921698

£19.99

Reviewed by Saira Pester

With around one in 100 children on the autism spectrum, of whom over 70% now attend mainstream schools, establishing a culture of acceptance and understanding amongst staff and pupils is vital.

In *Creating Autism Champions*, Joy Beaney has developed a whole-school programme to help schools raise awareness of how their ASD learners may be experiencing school and take proactive steps to promote their inclusion. Based on her experiences as part of an outreach team, Mrs Beaney is well placed to provide us with the tools to achieve this.

The programme includes slides and resources for a whole-school assembly and a separate staff training pack. In addition, there are six detailed lesson plans to use with either a whole class or with small groups of pupils chosen to become 'autism champions'.

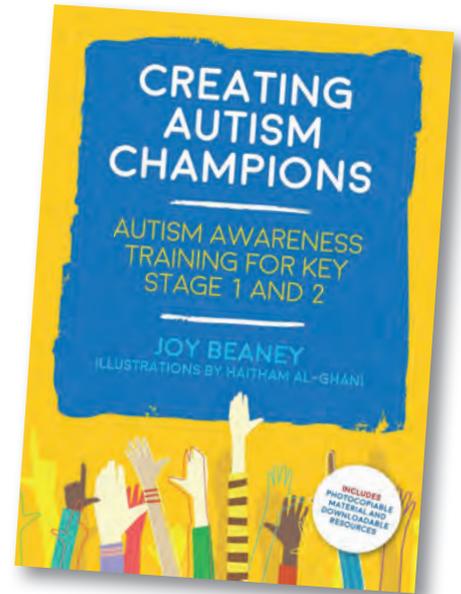
The assembly is based on a PowerPoint presentation which comes with scripted notes. Lasting 10-15 minutes, this colourful resource is clear and concise, and includes many important points, such as that people are born with ASD ('you can't catch it from someone else'),

it affects each person differently, and sometimes people with autism find it hard to understand those around them. Schools can add to or adapt the wording to suit their particular pupils.

The six detailed lesson plans each comprise lesson objectives, resources and activities, along with notes and suggested assessment criteria. Topics include how we are all different, non-verbal communication, sensory difficulties, understanding feelings, how to be a good friend and how best to support a pupil with autism. The activities are interesting and varied. I particularly liked the one about how everyone sees the world differently. This uses optical illusions and a spot the difference exercise to drive home the message. Another activity illustrates how children with autism are often visual learners.

The staff training resource comprises a 52-slide PowerPoint presentation which conveys a wealth of information on sensory integration, central coherence, theory of mind, generalising learning and strategies to support communication, and the revised DSM-5 criteria for ASD.

With all teachers now expected to be



teachers of SEND and SENCOs driving the development of a more inclusive universal provision, these ready-made resources offer a cost-effective and valuable addition to any school development programme.



Saira Pester is a specialist teacher with eight years' teaching experience in mainstream and special schools. After 14 years as a learning needs teacher for her LEA, she set up her own company providing specialist teaching and advice

Developing literacy skills in dyslexic learners

Dyslexia-Friendly Strategies for Reading, Spelling and Handwriting: A toolkit for teachers

By Diane Montgomery

Published by Routledge

ISBN 9781138223158

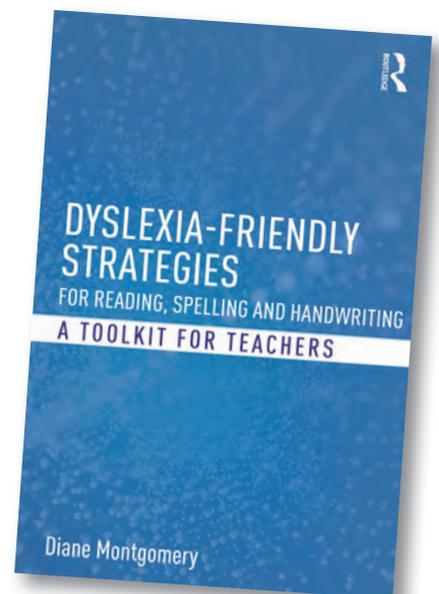
£24.99

Reviewed by Martin Edmonds

Diane Montgomery's name will be familiar to many SEND teachers as she has written more than 30 books on education issues and well over of 100 articles. As professor emerita at Middlesex University, she continues to research and lecture on educational topics and also runs the Learning Difficulties Research Project.

National data sets suggest that one in

five children leave primary school scoring below national expected levels in reading and writing and one in six adults have the reading skills of an 11-year-old. There is a vast number of books available purporting to offer practical strategies to support students with dyslexia. This one does not disappoint; unlike many others that I have purchased over the years, it fulfils its promise of providing practical, evidence-based strategies for the classroom. All the



recommendations are made in response to a thorough literature review, analysis of multiple case studies and cohort research.

Following an introduction to dyslexia, dysgraphia and educational underachievement, the book is divided into seven chapters that focus on identifying and addressing a student's difficulties in the 'three faces of dyslexia': the logographic, alphabetic and orthographic phases of literacy development. Professor Montgomery also addresses the importance of handwriting skills in an excellent chapter that discusses coordination difficulties, exam access issues, the impact of handwriting problems on fluency and the effect on a child's self-esteem. Suggested interventions for supporting

the development of cursive penmanship, speed of writing and legibility then follow and are illustrated by a number of informative case studies.

“ Practical, evidence-based strategies for the classroom ”

The author's practical experience of teaching children with literacy difficulties and her empathy for children as individuals shine through. This volume would also be of great interest to researchers or those taking courses of further study. As is to be expected,

(but unlike far too many recent books in the SEND field), Professor Montgomery provides full references for the statements made and the research she refers to, enabling readers to explore these issues and approaches further.

This dense volume is best read in full, as literacy difficulties are explored and different strategies discussed in the light of current research before recommendations for practice are made in the context of this wider debate.

I would heartily recommend this book to teachers or researchers.

Martin Edmonds is a secondary school SENCO and manages an enhanced specialist provision for children with a diagnosis of ASD

Supporting pupils with anxiety

All Birds Have Anxiety

By Kathy Hoopmann

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN 9781785921827

£9.99

Reviewed by Helen Punter-Bruce

All Birds Have Anxiety is Kathy Hoopmann's fourth book about the difficulties that some children, young people and adults may be living with. Others in the series look at ADHD and Asperger syndrome, each using a different animal to portray the challenges experienced by people with these conditions.

Anxiety is a highly topical and pertinent issue, since it is being identified as a barrier to social inclusion and learning for more and more children. The book explores its complexities in an innovative and extremely accessible way, using different types of birds to beautifully illustrate the fears that anxiety might produce, the thoughts and emotions that can arise, and, crucially, what children could do that might help them to manage these more effectively.

The text is presented in a dyslexia-friendly font, which schools may be familiar with. Using everyday scenarios to explain feelings and thoughts, it addresses the reader directly in the first person plural, creating an immediate impression of reassurance and understanding. It has the style of a social story that would engage children reading on their own, as well as those being supported by an adult. Sentences are constructed in a logical and

sensitive manner and each page is self-contained, allowing concepts to be explored in depth, although the book could equally be enjoyed as a whole in one sitting.

I admire how the information has been pulled together – bright and engaging photographs, laced with humour, combine with simple yet illuminating text to uncover the layers of anxiety some people may be having to cope with. Towards the end, there are suggested solutions, which make a lovely conclusion to this very reader-friendly and supportive book.

As an inclusion manager, I would recommend parents read this to their children if they become aware of growing anxiety issues. It is suitable for use in assemblies, as a whole-class resource for the PSHE curriculum or it could form the basis of a whole-school focus on inclusion (along with other texts) – it is an easy book to read to children, and for children to read by themselves. I would also use it as a one-to-one resource where teachers or TAs would be able to explore the sentiments and information in more depth with an individual child.

I look forward to seeing more books by Kathy Hoopmann as they are helpful, reassuring stories for children and their families facing new or existing concerns or difficulties.



Helen Punter-Bruce is a specialist leader for additional educational needs and an inclusion manager at Parkside

Primary School in East Sussex

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An A-level study resource for maths and physics – Anh Nguyen

MarkIt is an online resource offering exam practice to students studying A-level physics and maths. It takes them through questions in tiny steps, offering a choice of several possible answers, only one of which is correct. The others represent common misconceptions. The system gives them tailored feedback each step of the way, including the option to click: ‘Yes, I think I have finished this question.’

I use it every week with my maths students. While I encourage them to use pen and paper, as that is what they will have to do in the exam, the website works well in conjunction with this, boosting their confidence because each step is so small and logical. While there is always more than one way to solve a problem in maths, MarkIt usually opts for the way I would choose and shows what an examiner would be looking for.

Obviously, students need instruction in the relevant methodologies first, and MarkIt is no substitute for good teaching. However, it is very good at teasing out fallacies when students are studying alone because the multiple choice answers are designed to alert them to the familiarity trap and test their mathematical argument and deduction. In this way, they are made aware of potential pitfalls and practise avoiding these so they don't make that type of mistake in the exam.

The focus of the feedback is on the thought processes involved. For example, in a question about circles, instead of expecting students to start working out the solution straight away, MarkIt asks them which circle theorem they plan to use, with unlimited chances to select the right answer. In this way, students'



Students practise typical exam questions in the classroom as well as at home

knowledge and understanding becomes deeper, while they learn to become self-reliant, self-correcting as they go.

They really appreciate the immediate feedback – it is like having a virtual teacher at their elbow. Meanwhile, working through questions at their own pace helps build the confidence of students with SEND, who may have slower processing speeds than some of their peers. And they feel empowered when they crack a problem. They did it themselves, and will sometimes tell me: ‘I got it right! I did it the MarkIt way.’

I opted for this resource because the questions are well chosen and designed to draw out misconceptions quickly. You still need a textbook and other exercises, but the platform offers useful practice – there are five to 10 questions per topic, with a focus on wordy questions, proof methods and the use of diagrams to explain problems.

As a teacher, I can see a breakdown of responses for the whole class and for each individual. The former allows me to tailor my lesson plans and ensure that everyone understands a crucial step that, say, 70% of students are getting wrong. The latter means I can identify the precise steps someone keeps getting wrong and coach them through these.

I think it is an excellent resource, offering good value for money and I highly recommend it.

A site licence for MarkIt is £15/student + VAT per year. <http://markit.education>



Anh Nguyen is a mathematics lecturer at Westminster Kingsway College, London

Seeing clearly – Sophie Chalmers

After many years of fruitless visits to specialists, Charlie Mason was eventually diagnosed at age 7 with Stargardt's macular dystrophy. This means the middle of his vision is very fuzzy. However, a new device from GiveVision has transformed his life.

‘Charlie came to me at the beginning of the 2016/7 school year,’ says his class teacher Debbie Handslip at Goldsborough Primary School near Harrogate. ‘For the last couple of years, as his sight deteriorated he was unable to access the

curriculum in spite of all the efforts of my colleagues and vision services. For example, he can't track backwards or forwards along a line because the area he can see is so minute. This made editing his written work impossible for him.’

Charlie's self-esteem and motivation to learn plummeted as he fell further and further behind his peers. As an intelligent, happy boy, his frustration was evident. All the school could do was photocopy materials in larger print and provide him with a laptop whenever possible.

He could barely read and his vocabulary and spelling suffered as a consequence. Although he was good at mental maths, by Year 4, pupils are using writing to manipulate larger numbers, and this was also impossible for him.

All this changed when his aunt happened to watch an item on *BBC Breakfast* in which the partially-sighted Paralympian Libby Clegg, who has the same condition as Charlie, was discussing how an aid called SightPlus from GiveVision was helping her. A couple of



in partnership with



Wellbeing Award for Schools

Promote positive social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and wellness for pupils and staff in your school.

Developed in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, this whole-school award focuses on ensuring effective practice and provision is in place to promote the emotional wellbeing and mental health of staff and pupils.

phone calls later, Charlie and his mum were on their way to the developers to see if the goggles might be suitable for him.

SightPlus is a hands-free, portable device that looks like a pair of virtual reality goggles (the developers say that the next generation of the device will look more like a pair of glasses). Slotted over the top is a dedicated smartphone (you would not want to remove it, say, to take a phone call), with the camera facing out, and loaded with the SightPlus app. This enlarges things for anyone who is visually impaired but who still has quite a bit of vision. The goggles come with a hand-held remote control allowing the user to zoom in and out, or change the colour of the text and/or background, the contrast, and the amount of light entering their eyes.

'When Charlie tried on the goggles, he was flabbergasted and spent a long time staring at his palms because he'd never seen them before,' says his mother Mrs Mason.

The impact of the goggles has been profound and Charlie has now caught up with his peers. 'He hates being different,' says Mrs Handslip. 'However, while using the goggles makes him stand out, his classmates are very supportive and he can see that wearing them allows him to keep up with them academically. He can now watch a short film on the smartboard, or read what I've written there, just like everyone else. He can even sit at the back of the room if he chooses to. Crucially, he can work in "real" time and no longer needs a TA to transcribe what is on the smartboard. This makes a huge difference in subjects like maths and science, where he can follow the explanation as I write a formula on the board.'

The downside is that the goggles are quite heavy so he can't look down easily.



Charlie reading from the smartboard using his SightPlus goggles

Mrs Handslip has also had to deal with a couple instances when the app crashed, but on the whole she finds the goggles work really well.

Another advocate for SightPlus is Suzanne MacDonald, who used to work as a learning support assistant for her county council eye service, and now runs MagnificentView, a social enterprise set up to change the way visually impaired children are supported in mainstream education. She uses the goggles with two pupils at St Brendan's Primary School in Corby who are registered blind – they both have photophobia as a result of albinism and cannot filter the light from the sun. In addition they have nystygma (a poor ability to focus).

'When the eldest, Harry, first arrived in my class last September,' says Year 5

teacher Pamela Bell, 'we connected an iPad to the interactive whiteboard so he could have a mirror image in front of him. However, whenever I used the large whiteboard, he had to photograph each part and then copy the text from the image. This caused him huge delays and he was unable to keep up with the rest of the class.' Meanwhile, just as at Goldsborough Primary School, Mrs MacDonald used to print out enlarged resources for the boys. This is time-consuming and costly, but more importantly, it does not encourage independence.

In the spring term, both boys tried out and now regularly use SightPlus. The difference this has made to their lives is incalculable. In the past, using an optometrist's vision chart, they only used to be able to read the top letter; wearing their goggles, they can read right down to the bottom line. They can sit anywhere they like and see the board. They also have the freedom to choose a book from the library on their own, just like their peers, without having to have it enlarged or find themselves restricted to titles available for downloading onto their iPad, where they would enlarge the font themselves.

'After just a couple of weeks using SightPlus, Harry said he would now choose this as his preferred tool over an enlarged book or using his iPad,' says Mrs MacDonald. 'The goggles have made a huge impact in maths lessons – the boys could never read angles on a protractor or measurements on a ruler before because these are things you cannot enlarge.

'I recommend pupils keep their remote control on a lanyard around their neck so they don't lose it. The goggles are easy and straightforward to use but only when seated – they offer no peripheral vision, so it would be dangerous to move around in them: it's a bit like walking around with a pair of binoculars strapped to your head.'

Looking ahead, Harry, now in Year 6, has indicated that he will not need any additional support when he transitions to secondary school. He feels he has everything he needs to access the written word thanks to his iPad and the SightPlus goggles.



The two boys see each other clearly for the first time

After a two-week-trial, SightPlus is available for a £299 one-off payment plus £39.95/month. Subscriptions may be cancelled at any time. Subscribers are entitled to a free hardware upgrade every two years and free software upgrades for life. Sign up to the waiting list for a SightPlus trial from GiveVision at www.givevision.net

Virtual field trips – Jean Crozier

Virtual reality (VR) can transport pupils away from the classroom and into another world. In spite of all the televisual spectacles children have access to on a daily basis, VR still manages to give them wonderful ‘Oh!’ moments which teachers can’t create just by telling them something. These moments of wonder really motivate pupils to find out more.

A good source of VR content for schools is Google Expeditions, which we use to improve children’s storytelling abilities in years 3 to 6. There are over 600 expeditions to choose from, which include 360° panoramic scenes and 3D images, art and culture, the Great Barrier Reef, the International Space Station, Machu Picchu, the plains of Africa and even parts of the body. Pupils wear goggles to see the expeditions; these are comfortable and not too heavy, even though they have a built-in mobile phone loaded with the app. There is no audio accompaniment.

We’ve been using VR since March. Google Expeditions came into the school to give us a demonstration, and then recommended we source our equipment from Redbox VR. Although this is plug-and-play, I usually spend about 10 minutes with each teacher showing them around the system. Using it is intuitive. That said, one teacher somehow managed to delete all the content – Redbox VR was very good about guiding me through the process of reinstalling it over the phone. The equipment includes a lockable box to charge all the phones and tablet.

The equipment also includes an android tablet for the teacher, which allows them to control the expedition and guide pupils around it. When an expedition is paused, explanations, points



A pupil points to something that has caught her attention

of interest and even questions come up on the tablet, making it easy to plan lessons. Incidentally, smiley face icons on the tablet indicate where pupils are looking, so teachers can ascertain that everybody is looking at roughly the same point when giving an explanation.

Pupils sit spaced out on the floor – because they are wearing goggles, we don’t want them wandering around, but they still need to be free to explore the virtual environment from all angles, including behind them. As they do so, they think about how they might use what they see in their story.

For the last couple of weeks, Year 3 has been exploring life below the oceans. Scenes include images of shipwrecks, manta rays and sharks. The teacher used her tablet to pause trips and start a discussion about what the pupils were

looking at, or introduce and explain new vocabulary.

The children’s reactions? ‘It helps us imagine and describe settings.’ ‘I think the VR is great because it is like going on an adventure.’ ‘It feels like you are there and you get great ideas.’ ‘I can see fish under the sea.’ ‘VR helps me learn new words and makes me imagine what is under the sea.’ ‘We learn about new things.’ ‘VR helps us to see things that we could never see in real life.’

This term, as a school, we will be investigating how we might use Google Expeditions across the whole curriculum.

Martin Banks, professor of optometry, vision science, psychology and neuroscience at the University of California, says that there seems to be no evidence that a child below a certain age could somehow be adversely affected by wearing a VR headset. Even so, manufacturers of VR equipment remain cautious and set age limits on its use, so the school does not use it with pupils below Year 3.

Redbox VR is a Google Expeditions partner. A 30-student all-in-one iNSync charging case is £9,945 +VAT. This contains 30 student devices plus one teaching device with intelligent charging and integrated router.
www.redboxvr.co.uk

Jean Crozier is the ICT technician at Woodside Primary Academy, Walthamstow

Take note – Charlotte Collins

I work with FE students who have a range of learning difficulties, including SpLD, mental health difficulties and ADHD, and who struggle to take notes in lectures. However, using the Notetalker app allows them to focus on listening to the lecturer without being distracted by the need to get everything down on paper.

The app works on smartphones and records the entire lecture. During the recording, students can save bookmarks

at key moments to refer back to, although, more usually, they do this when reviewing the lecture back home. Bookmarks might draw attention to a particular topic that is relevant to an essay, or something that the student didn’t quite follow and wants to revisit later.

Students can also take photos during the lecture, say of diagrams explaining complex ideas or part of a presentation, which supports visual learning and acts as a memory prompt when they play back the recording. Crucially, they can input

more than one picture per bookmark – useful for capturing, say, steps in a process.

A student will usually import their recording into Notetalker Edit (desktop software) where they can add notes, along with further visual stimuli such as PowerPoint or PDF resources, images and, in the Windows version, even video footage to support revision and essay writing.

I’ve been recommending the app to FE students with SEND for two years. I

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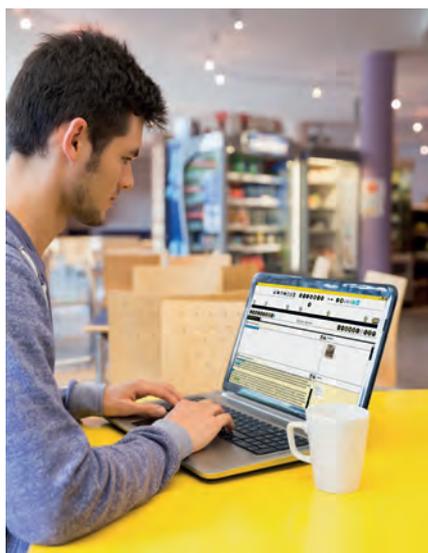
love its simplicity – it is very intuitive and uses just a few icons; for example, record, capture image and bookmark.

In Notetalker Edit, the audio is made visible in a bar across the screen with all the bookmarks highlighted, making navigation quick and easy. Bookmarks can also be colour-coded, and text inserted within each bookmark can be highlighted.

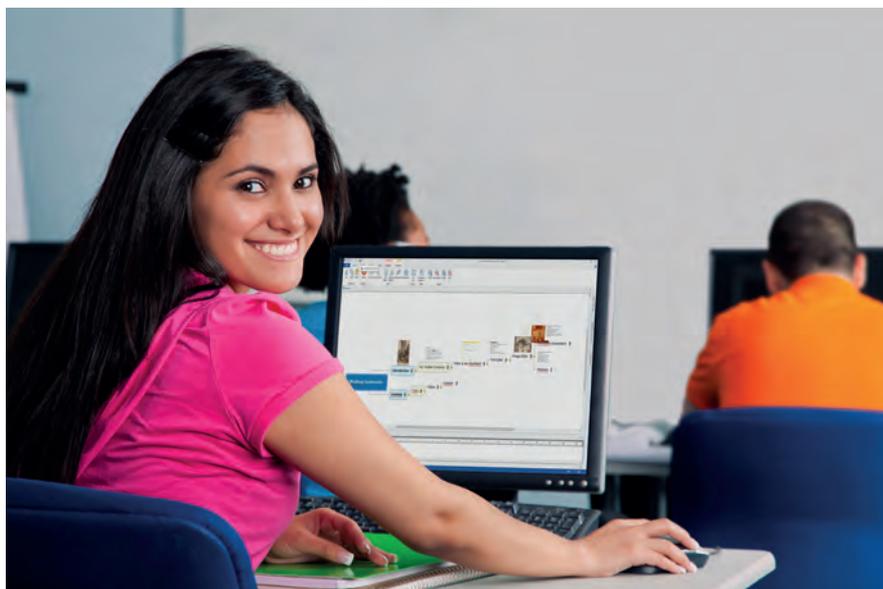
Notetalker is compatible with mind mapping tools such as MindView. Thus, once they have added all the written notes they want in Notetalker Edit, students can export the file as a mind map, to which they can even attach sections of audio, although most of my students prefer to revert back to the original audio file and bookmarks for this.

Because Notetalker sits discreetly on their phones, my students don't stand out from their peers when they use it. To start a new recording, they simply create a new file, save it to, say, a cloud account for additional peace of mind and to save space on their phone, and then press Record. They can either sit and listen, or make bookmarks as they go. Sometimes they personalise these with a title, but many of my students find this difficult mid-lecture, so they usually leave it until they get home. All material is saved automatically – useful for those who might forget to press Save.

The app has proved a life-changer for one student with mental health difficulties, for whom simply getting to lectures can be a challenge. Much of her anxiety is allayed by knowing that her phone will do the work. All she has to do is switch it on and start recording and then review the lecture later in the safety of her room.



A student works in Notetalker Edit to add notes and PDF documents into the relevant bookmarks



A student uses her notes in Notetalker Edit to revise

Another student, who is studying geography, is dyslexic. She is a very visual learner and the subject has a high proportion of practical elements – there are field trips as well as practical processes and skills to learn – which is where Notetalker's ability to combine pictures and photos with audio has proved really helpful.

“Students can input more than one picture per bookmark”

She imports her recordings into Notetalker Edit to colour code key terms or steps in a process, before exporting her annotated data to MindView to create a flow chart, which she prints out and sticks to her wall to learn.

Meanwhile, one of the media students has ADHD and I encourage him to take his phone into lectures. By arriving five minutes early, he is able to secure a seat near the front so that the app picks up a good level of sound. Many of his classes include film footage, and the latest version of Notetalker Edit allows him to add video to his notes to remind him of key points (only in the Windows version).

I also encourage him to take random pictures of things that sidetrack him, as these too can help trigger memories. In addition, they highlight where he may have stopped paying attention, so he knows to review that section back at home. It is here, in his 'safe space', that he is able to reflect on the lecture and extract

the key information in Notetalker Edit, and later export this to a Word document, which he prints out and chops up to make cue cards for revision.

Since the app runs on a mobile phone, it is essential that this is adequately charged, and Notetalker Pro comes with a portable battery charger to reduce the likelihood of disasters, as well as an external microphone to improve sound quality. Ideally, students should get some training on it to bring them up to speed with its full capabilities quickly, although they can use it out of the box. Notetalker also offers some excellent webinars on its website to encourage better note-taking.

Notetalker has revolutionised access to learning for many of my students. I have found it to be an excellent tool.

Notetalker Pro is a bundle supplied to students in receipt of DSA funding, and comprises the Notetalker app, Notetalker Edit, a directional microphone and a portable battery charger (normally £143.98 inc VAT and shipping). www.notetalker.com

MindView from MatchWare is assistive mind mapping software for schools. A site licence starts at £949/year + VAT. <http://bit.ly/sc239-31>

Charlotte Collins is an assistive technology trainer in Dorset for Diversity and Ability, a nationwide IT training company

A model for employing people with autism

Viola Sommer of IT consultancy Auticon explains how job coaches help people on the autism spectrum hold down a job

Many people with autism have traits that are extraordinarily valuable to business. Sadly, these are often overlooked in the commercial world. Not so at IT and compliance consulting business Auticon, whose consultants are all on the autism spectrum.

Founded in Germany in 2011, the company has gone from strength to strength, expanding in 2016 into France and the UK, with offices in London as well as doing business in Newcastle and Nottingham. It now employs over 100 consultants, 15 of whom are UK based. Clients are mainly blue chip companies such as Experian, Allianz and GlaxoSmithKline.

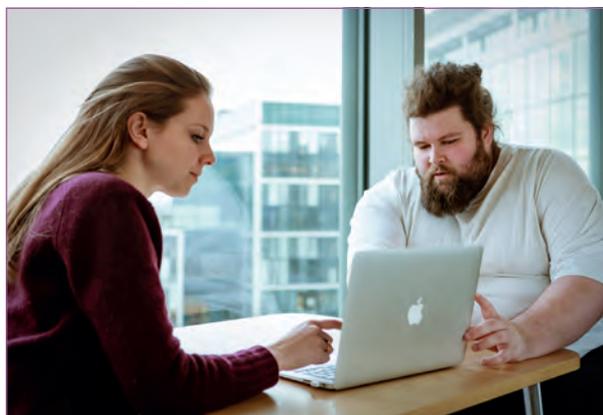
It is a regular consultancy business employing very bright IT consultants who happen to be autistic. In fact, our service portfolio is designed with the specific cognitive talents of autistic people in mind, such as attention to detail, pattern recognition and a general awareness of quality standards, systems and processes.

Consultants range in age from the mid-20s to early-60s and work on a variety of projects, from data analysis to quality assurance and quality management. Typically, we use the breaks between assignments for professional development and annual leave.

The Auticon model

Two things set the Auticon model apart. The first is our team of project managers, who have a background in running big IT projects. Having been trained to work with autistic people, and with a deep understanding of each consultant's strengths and the way they work, they allocate individuals to the projects that are best suited to them.

Secondly and crucially, we employ full-time, in-house job coaches who work closely with between six and eight consultants each. They do everything necessary to ensure the work environment



Job coach Antonia Hatzfeldt and consultant Thomas Cowley meet regularly to discuss progress on his assignment

allows consultants to work to their full potential.

The support is highly personalised and sustained. This is what underpins Auticon's success and where other organisations often fall short. They may run an autism awareness programme, but that only works up to a point because no two people on the spectrum are the same. Moreover, any support provided at the start of a person's employment is usually withdrawn later on. This is where it goes wrong for many people on the spectrum. Workplaces are very fluid – colleagues come and go, new line managers may be assigned and offices move to new locations. That is why we offer our consultants on-going support.

The job coaches' role

Job coaches will:

- prepare candidates for their future workplace and brief them on the client's corporate culture
- brief future team members about autism in general and any specific characteristics their new colleague might have, and how best to work with them
- support the consultant travelling to and from work until they feel comfortable travelling independently
- facilitate workplace adjustments

wherever necessary and/or possible

- mediate between the client and the consultant
- offer any support that consultants require in order to be productive at work.

Small adjustments can make a big difference

Besides the support they receive from the job coaches, the consultants are treated like every other employee in the organisation.

Around 90% of them were unemployed before they joined us. Many found it hard to find

and hold down a job. Usually the problem was down to simple things that could have been accommodated if the employer had met them with the right level of understanding.

For example, one consultant struggles with the sensory environment of the workplace, which had resulted in prolonged periods of unemployment before he came to us. His current assignment allows him to work from home some of the time, which is something we can negotiate with our clients on a case by case basis. When he is on site, we ensure his desk is in a very quiet area, that it is acceptable for him to wear his headphones and a baseball cap, and that people avoid interrupting him as far as possible.

These are not big issues, but for him they make all the difference.



Viola Sommer is the chief operating officer for the UK division of Auticon. www.auticon.co.uk

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