

Special Children

Meeting Children's Additional Educational Needs

- Literacy initiatives boost outcomes
- National Citizen Service: preparation for adulthood
- Supporting children using Cued Speech
- Beekeeping in schools



Spreading happiness

Putting wellbeing at the heart of the curriculum

PULL-OUT RESOURCES
 Helping students recognise and handle stress



SEND Inclusion Award

Demonstrate to Ofsted and key stakeholders that your school has achieved an outstanding level of SEND provision.

“The specific requirements for each of the award’s key performance indicators helped staff to pick up on areas they might otherwise have missed.”

Carol-Anne McCollum, Executive Headteacher, Barcroft Primary School

Following a process of self-evaluation, action planning and evidence collection, your school can identify good current practice and prioritise areas for further improvement and development.

Mental health on the agenda at last

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The government green paper, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision*, has been widely welcomed, albeit with reservations.

Commenting in *SecEd* in January, Anna Feuchtwang, chief executive of the National Children's Bureau, wrote: 'All in all, the proposals could mark an important milestone in how children access mental health support, but the trouble with the government's plans is not the proposals themselves but the lack of urgency. Children in urgent need today will not benefit from the new way of working as none of the green paper's initiatives will be funded until 2019 at the earliest and the majority of areas won't see them implemented until after 2023.'

One of the schools which piloted the green paper's proposal to improve collaboration between schools and NHS mental health services was Tipton School in Sheffield, which outlines some of the steps it has taken on pages 21-22 and offers resources for the classroom on pages 23-26. Meanwhile, a primary and a secondary school that put wellbeing at the heart of everything they do explain how they have integrated a happiness programme into the curriculum on pages 16-20.

Another of Anna Feuchtwang's concerns is the lack of provision for children in care. 'These vulnerable young people, who often don't meet a clinical threshold for specialist NHS care, could benefit greatly from support at school,' she notes. In *Talking point* on page 48, the headteacher of a school for looked after children and children with SEMH offers schools advice on boosting these pupils' self-esteem and helping them to feel valued.

Reading for pleasure

Teenagers who read in their spare time know 26% more words than those who never read, according to UCL Institute of Education (IOE) researchers at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS). The 14-year-olds, whose lives have been tracked through CLS's Millennium Cohort Study, were given 20 different words and five possible synonyms for each, and asked to match each word to the correct synonym.

Even taking into account other factors, those who read for pleasure still got 12% more words right, while those from book-rich homes scored 9% more, prompting lead author Dr Alice Sullivan to observe: 'The link between reading for pleasure and better vocabularies suggests that if young people are encouraged to discover a love for books, it could alter the course of their lives, regardless of their background.'

A focus on reading for pleasure is the

cornerstone of a primary school's approach to developing literacy skills as explained on pages 10-12. Meanwhile, writing and publishing their own book has been the incentive for pupils in the inclusion centre of a mainstream school to improve the quality of their writing – see pages 7-9.

Another way of developing children's language skills is through an eTwinning project as demonstrated on pages 28-30. Funding for this impactful programme is guaranteed until 2020, so if you want your classes to benefit, now is the time in case Brexit pulls the plug.

Volunteering matters

Recent years have seen a huge push by the government and voluntary sector to encourage youth volunteering. Rates of volunteering among 16-25 year olds rose by 50% between 2010 and 2015, a remarkable success story. One of the initiatives that has contributed to this is the National Citizen Service, which last year expanded by almost a quarter. See pages 31-33 for an article on its potential to open up opportunities and develop life skills for young people with SEND.

On a slightly different note, it was volunteering that set Rebecca Ward off on the path to train as a teaching assistant, culminating in her recent recognition as Outstanding HLTA of the Year 2017. Find out more on pages 34-36.

Deaf children are being let down

A recent report that shows a widening gap between deaf students and their peers at GCSE level, coupled with a drastic decline in the number of specialist teachers for deaf children (see *News*, page 3), has prompted the National Deaf Children's Society to call on the government to fund initiatives to restore specialist provision to a more acceptable level.

In the meantime, lots of deaf children are being let down. One way of supporting them is through Cued Speech, which not only allows them to interact with their peers, but also opens the door to phonics, and hence the secrets of reading. Find out more on pages 13-15.

Creating a buzz

Finally, the average age of a UK beekeeper is near retirement age. However, because bees face an ever-increasing range of threats, the best hope for their future lies with young people. Find out how adding beekeeping to the curriculum is making a difference to pupils in two schools on pages 37-39.

Alison Thomas *Sophie C.*

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Cover picture:

Children in Nottingham kick off a random-acts-of-kindness day by dancing to Pharrell Williams' *Happy*
Credit: Karina Lyburn



Deaf children's attainment slips further

New data published by the Department for Education (DfE) shows that at GCSE level, the attainment gap has widened between deaf children and their peers.

Deaf children have now fallen 24% behind their classmates, and their exam results are more than a grade lower. The data also shows that 71% of deaf children do not achieve a good GCSE in English and maths.

These new figures come within weeks of a report showing that deaf children's education nationally is in disarray. The report showed that, in the last seven years, there has been a 14% cut in the number of specialist teachers of the deaf, with 15% of councils now having only one specialist teacher to support over 100 deaf children.

Commenting on the government data, Ian Noon, head of policy and research at the National Deaf Children's Society says: 'Just recently, the DfE was saying our concerns over the state of deaf children's education were unfounded because their attainment at GCSE was "at a record high".

'As their own data now shows, this couldn't be further from the truth. Deaf children are continuing to fall behind their hearing peers, the attainment gap continues to widen, cuts to services are continuing up and down the country,



Photo courtesy of the NDCS

Deafness is not a learning disability

and the government continues to have absolutely no plan in place to sort this mess out.

'We now have a new team of ministers at the DfE, and my question to them is: "What's your plan to make sure the UK's 50,000 deaf children get the support they so desperately need?"'

Emma Fraser, who has worked as

a specialist teacher of the deaf for the last nine years, adds: 'Deafness is not a learning disability, and with the right support, deaf children can do just as well as any other child at school. It's so upsetting to see deaf children continue to fall behind. For those children, we need action now. Anything less is unacceptable.'

Muscle-wasting conditions and mental health

A new parliamentary inquiry investigating access to psychological support for children and adults with muscle-wasting conditions and their families has been launched by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Muscular Dystrophy, chaired by Mary Glindon MP.

Muscular Dystrophy UK will work alongside the APPG during the six-month inquiry, which will also look at the support required in relation to any newborn screening programme.

As well as the oral evidence it will gather through face-to-face meetings, the APPG would like to receive written testimonies from people with muscle-wasting conditions and their families about their experiences of accessing psychological support.

Muscular Dystrophy UK has prepared a *Have Your Say* document with a set of questions (<http://bit.ly/sc241-26>). Alternatively, testimony may be submitted in the form of a statement of up to 250 words. Email Jonathan Kingsley: j.kingsley@muscular dystrophyuk.org by 27 April.

The report will be presented to the Department of Health and NHS England. Dr Sadie Thomas-Unsworth, a clinical psychologist who chairs Muscular Dystrophy UK's Mental Health Matters Steering Group, says: 'This inquiry provides a vital opportunity for people affected by muscle-wasting conditions and health professionals in the neuromuscular field to tell MPs about the importance of accessing appropriate psychological support.'

Celebrating inclusive practice

The Root Of It has announced the National Special Educational Needs Awards 2018, celebrating the most inclusive practice for young people across the UK.

Schools, colleges and training providers are invited to apply for one or more of the following categories.

- Most inclusive practice across a school.
- Partnership with parents (must be co-written with parents).
- Most innovative special needs intervention.
- Best use of external special needs professional.
- Inclusion in further and higher education (up to 24 years).

Closing date: Sunday 30 April.
www.senawards.com

Missing from school



July has autism and finds it hard to fit in at school so she stays at home, alone all day

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) carried out a Freedom of Information request last October to establish the number of children missing education (CME) in England. It found that 49,187 children were reported.

Local authorities were asked to provide data on how many of these children in their area were in receipt of free school meals or known to social services. The NCB found that:

- 15% of children missing education were known to social services
- the proportion of CME who were eligible for free school meals when

last on a school roll is 9% higher than average.

July is 14 and has autism. Watch an animation about her experience here: <http://bit.ly/sc241-12>

The definition of CME is a child of compulsory school age who is not registered at a school and not receiving education elsewhere. These children are vulnerable. It is widely accepted that they are likely to underachieve academically, and evidence suggests they may also be at greater risk of abuse, exploitation and neglect than their peers. Read the full report: <http://bit.ly/sc241-11>

Early language development

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has published a review that summarises the existing literature on language development.

Commissioned by the EEF in partnership with Public Health England, *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds* evaluates which interventions have the greatest potential for boosting young children's language skills and reducing inequalities in outcomes. <http://bit.ly/sc241-19>

It finds that the right environmental support has the potential to make a real

difference to children's language learning, and, consequently, to their later academic success.

However, this requires a coherent approach along the following lines.

- Providing cost-effective, evidence-based training and interventions that promote the most effective types of language-boosting interactions between children and those caring for them.
- Monitoring children's progress at different stages of communicative development to identify those children falling behind, whatever their stage of development.

Support for pupils with SLCN

The Communication Trust's *Involving Children and Young People with SLCN – a Brief Guide* is a free, accessible, resource for practitioners in educational settings.

The resource covers the strategies you can use to gain the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people, ideas and advice on enabling them to participate as fully as possible in decision-making, and information about how to help them achieve the best possible outcomes.

Included in the guide are links to a number of downloadable, printable resources. <http://bit.ly/sc241-27>

Meanwhile, the Communication Trust has joined forces with Afasic to launch a 26-minute professional development video entitled *Talking to parents about their child's, speech, language and communication*.

This explains how teachers might raise initial concerns about a child or young person's speech, language and communication development. After each section there is a prompt for reflection, or discussion if teachers are watching the video as a group. Afasic and the Trust have also developed a checklist to help teachers plan and prepare for this conversation as well as reflection/discussion questions. <http://bit.ly/sc241-13>

The big picture

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has added a new section called *The Big Picture* to its website. This is a one-stop shop for resources on key themes chosen in collaboration with teachers.

Gaps between more affluent children and their peers emerge before the age of five, so efforts to support learning in the early years are particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. To support this, the EEF has included a section on *Early Years: supporting children's early learning and development*.

This contains an Early Years Toolkit laid out in the same way as the Teaching and Learning Toolkit. More than 1,500 individual studies are grouped into 12 topics, each summarised in terms of the average impact on attainment, the strength of the supporting evidence, and cost.

Find out more: <http://bit.ly/sc241-16>

A new chapter for reading in Peterborough

A pioneering new approach has been launched in Peterborough to ensure that every child in the city enjoys reading and can read well.

The first approach of its kind, A Vision for Reading in Peterborough was developed by Peterborough City Council, Vivacity and the National Literacy Trust. It builds on the work these partners are already doing across the city.

The vision establishes reading as a priority for every service, business and community group, outlining how the city can work together to give Peterborough's children improved opportunities through reading.

Although there were improvements in Peterborough pupils' reading achievement between 2016 and 2017, the results remain significantly lower than national

averages. Last year, just 63% of pupils in the city reached the expected level in reading at the end of primary school, compared to 72% nationally.

A Vision for Reading in Peterborough prioritises getting more children enjoying reading and reading more often, which will support improvements in reading achievement. It will place a particular focus on:

- encouraging schools and partners to prioritise reading by signing the Peterborough Reading Pledge
- recruiting and training reading buddies to support pupils at Peterborough schools
- raising awareness of and implementing the School Readiness Project to ensure more children are ready to learn when they start school.



Without reading, there is no access to the curriculum

Councillor Lynne Ayres, Peterborough City Council's cabinet member for education, says: 'This is a fantastic initiative which will have a positive effect for children across the city. It is vitally important that children can read to a good standard in order to take advantage of opportunities throughout their time in education.'

Closing the attainment gap



How do we ensure that everyone learns to the best of their ability regardless of gender, disadvantage or disability?

Before we can begin to close the attainment gap, we first have to understand it – both the scale and nature of it, as well as the factors most likely to help reduce it.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has published *The Attainment Gap*, a report that assesses the gap through the lens of children and young people, and then of schools, from early years to post-16 settings. It highlights what the EEF believes to be the key issues, and how its analysis of these informs its practical work with teachers and senior leaders.

The EEF then summarises 15 of the key lessons it has learned from its six years of funding research to improve teaching and learning. <http://bit.ly/sc241-14>

Safe streaming

Live streaming involves using an app or website to put out a broadcast without delay or edit, just like live TV.

It's becoming one of the most popular online activities for children and young people.

However, there is an increase in the use of live streaming by offenders seeking to abuse children.

Thinkuknow has produced a new education package for both primary-

and secondary-aged children called #LiveSkills. Based on intelligence gathered by the National Crime Agency, the resources aim to build children's ability to resist tactics that offenders might employ – such as flattery, bribery with virtual gifts, initiating apparently innocent games, pressure or bullying behaviour – and empower them to respond safely if they ever encounter such tactics.

Find out more at <http://bit.ly/sc241-28>

Increasing resilience in traumatised children

The 2017 Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize was awarded in December to the War Child organisation in the Netherlands for its global efforts to improve the lives of children exposed to war.

Millions of children live in nations affected by conflict, where their rights to be protected from violence, to live in dignity and to be supported to develop to their full potential are eroded on a massive scale. In addition, they are

vulnerable to increased rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and externalising behaviours. As a consequence, many lose their confidence, and their trust in others and the future.

War Child supports these children to regain their confidence and build positive relationships with their peers, families and wider communities. Watch an eight-minute video about their work: <http://bit.ly/sc241-24>

More than 10% of 14-year-olds admit to binge drinking

Just under half of young people in the UK had tried alcohol by the time they were 14, with more than 10% confessing to binge drinking, new findings from the Millennium Cohort Study have revealed.

Researchers at UCL Institute of Education's Centre for Longitudinal Studies examined data collected from more than 11,000 14-year-olds about their experiences of a range of different risky activities, including drinking, smoking and drug-taking.

Study participants, whose lives have been tracked through the Millennium Cohort Study since they were born, had previously been asked about drinking and smoking when they were 11.

Comparing their answers at age 11 and at age 14 reveals big increases in the rates of both smoking and binge drinking (having five or more drinks at a time on at least one occasion) among the group.

Less than 1% had been binge drinking by age 11, compared to almost 11% at age 14. Meanwhile, 3% had tried a cigarette by the time they were 11 with the figure jumping to 17% by age 14. And around 6% of 14-year-olds had taken drugs, mostly in the form of cannabis.

25% of those who tried their first cigarette when they were 11 or under were regular smokers by the time they were 14. By contrast, just 15% of those who had their first cigarette when they were 12 or older had gone on to develop a smoking habit by age 14.

Looking at the teenagers' backgrounds and where they lived, the researchers identified some patterns. Comparing similar boys and girls, substance-related activities were a little more common among the boys than the girls by age 14,



Research shows that experimentation before the age of 12 can lead to more habitual use by the age of 14

and boys were also more likely to have started these activities at a younger age than girls; 20% of boys had drunk alcohol by the time they were 11, compared to 14% of girls.

Substance use was much less common in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK. On the whole, ethnic minority teens were less likely to use substances than their white peers. 94% of Bangladeshi 14-year-olds said they had never tried smoking, drinking or drugs, compared to just 44% of white British 14-year-olds.

Parents' education neither increased nor decreased the odds of their teenage children smoking and/or drinking.

Professor Emla Fitzsimons, one of the authors of the research and director of the Millennium Cohort Study, says: 'Our findings are a valuable insight into health-damaging behaviours among today's teenagers right across the UK.

'There is clear evidence that substance use increases sharply between ages 11 and 14, and that experimentation before age 12 can lead to more habitual use by age 14. This suggests that targeting awareness and support to children in primary school should be a priority.'

<http://bit.ly/sc241-23>

Mental health training

The Department of Health and Social Care is funding a one-day course entitled Youth Mental Health First Aid aimed at secondary schools.

Every secondary school in England is entitled to one free place through the Youth MHFA in Schools programme. Afterwards, the attendees will take on the role of Youth MHFA Champions in

their schools, able to spot the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues, provide support on a first aid basis, and guide pupils to further support if needed.

The course will also promote the importance of personal wellbeing, teaching staff how to look after their own mental health while supporting others to do the same. <http://bit.ly/sc241-15>

And finally...

Seeing things differently

Michael Morpurgo's latest novel, inspired by his autistic grandson, will be published in March. *Flamingo Boy* is set in the Camargue in the south of France during World War II and features a boy who 'sees the world differently'. <http://bit.ly/sc241-09>

Conduct disorder conference

The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (ACAHM) is running a one-day conference on conduct disorder, often referred to as antisocial behaviour. This is diagnosed in childhood and/or adolescence, and presents in a recurring and continuing pattern of behaviours in which the basic rights of others are abused. 19 April, Preston. <http://bit.ly/sc241-21>

ADHD Essentials Training

ACAHM is also running ADHD Essentials Training, a one-day course equivalent to six hours' CPD aimed at people who work with, or have an interest in, the management and support of children and young people with ADHD. 15 May, London. <http://bit.ly/sc241-22>

The Autism Professionals Annual Conference 2018

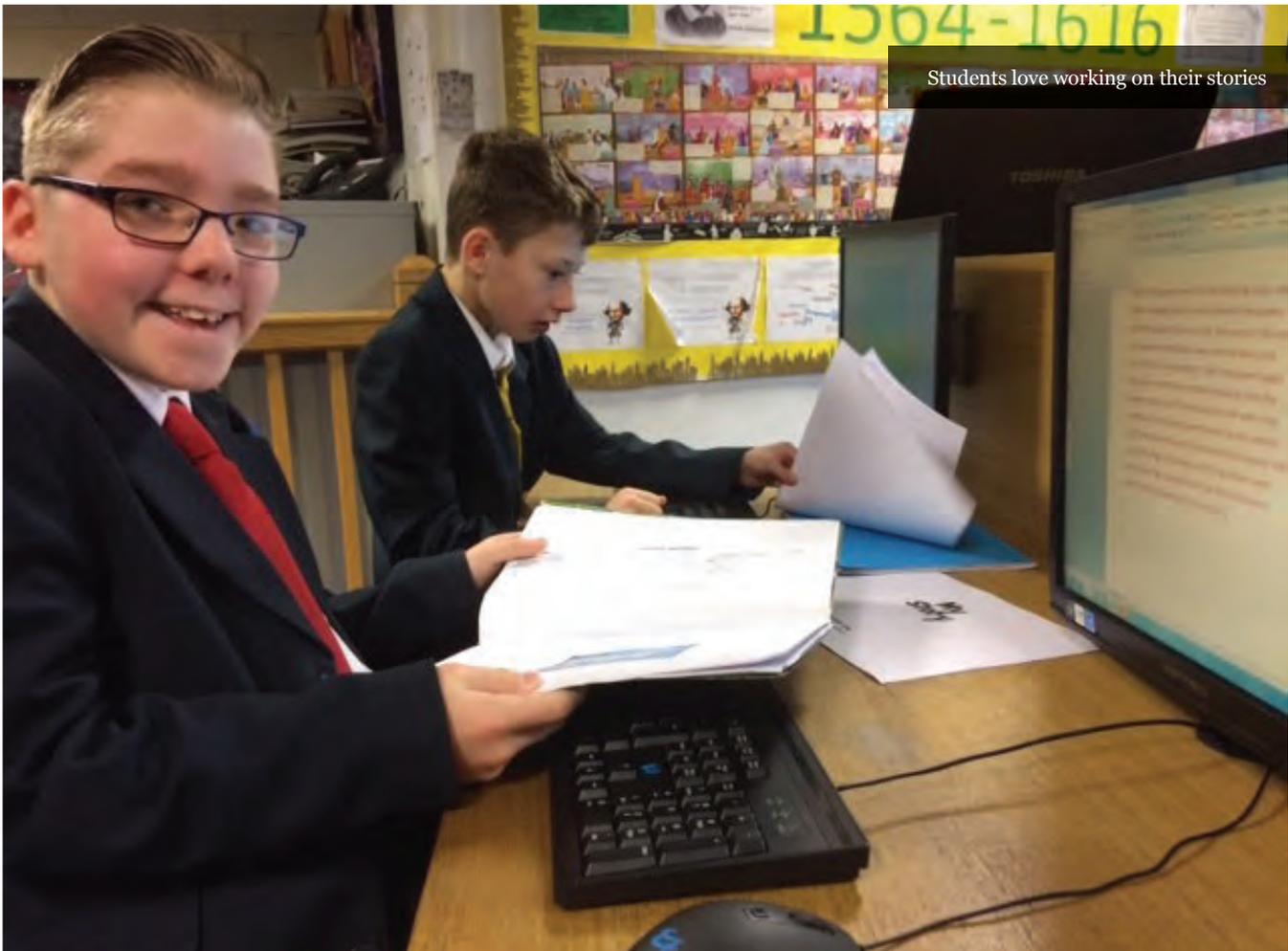
Topics at the National Autistic Society's two-day conference include recognising and treating anxiety, helping parents to improve their child's sleep patterns, using speech and language tools to aid communication, autism and epilepsy, and techniques for coping with bullying. 7-8 March, Harrogate. <http://bit.ly/sc241-25>

Autism Awareness Week

To celebrate World Autism Awareness Week, which takes place between 26 March and 2 April, the National Autistic Society has created free age-specific resources on autism and a free fundraising pack. One easy idea is to put on an end-of-term non-uniform or Onesie day for the charity on 29 March. <http://bit.ly/sc241-10>

Cutting back on SLCN

Just before Christmas, the Communication Trust was informed that the Department for Education did not intend to renew the specialist SLCN contract which funds the trust's programme of work. While the DfE indicated that it prioritises SLCN, there were no plans to provide funding for this area, although it will consider maintaining some elements of the trust's work. Meanwhile, there is likely to be considerable scaling back of the support the trust can provide.



The My Story project

Rachel Wilkinson describes an initiative to turn reluctant writers into published authors

The inclusion centre at Nunthorpe Academy, Middlesbrough, is a separate teaching area within the school for students with SEN who are unable to access mainstream classes. Many of them lack confidence and have a low sense of self-worth. I wanted to help them overcome this.

One of the problems with literacy is that when you ask students to write something in a particular genre for a particular audience, the task is not real, and so the motivation to write, let alone spend time polishing a piece of work, is missing. What if students' stories were published, and they had the potential to earn royalties on the sales? Then

assignments would be very real. In addition, simply holding their very own book in their hands, even if they never sold a single copy, would boost their confidence and sense of self-worth.

This thought led me to develop the idea for the My Story project, which I am delivering with the support of a publishing company called Sixth Element Publishing; one of their editors came into school to talk to the students about the process of writing a book. She now comes in regularly and is helping with the editing.

Developing the lead character

Eleven students aged 11 to 12 are taking part in the first project, which will finish

this summer. They have a range of difficulties including autism, dyslexia, slow processing skills, poor working memory and extreme anxiety. Some come from difficult backgrounds.

We started off by studying successful storybooks. What makes a great title? What makes a great character? What is the story's arc?

The children then set about writing their own story featuring a protagonist who has the same experiences and difficulties in education as they do. Transferring these to a fictional person makes it easier for them to see things from an external point of view, while giving them a chance to think about how their character might react in different

situations. The whole process helps them become more self-aware and develop their own coping strategies.

However, these books are designed to be more than just therapy for the authors. Few published books have characters who have a learning difficulty. I wanted other children to be able to pick up one of our books and enjoy it, and realise, if they too have SEN, that they are not alone.

Encouraging flow

In a typical literacy lesson, students write a few lines of their story (the finished product will be about 500 words long). Sometimes I struggle to read their work, especially if they have dyslexia, but I never correct it or stop their flow in the lesson. This would confuse children with slow processing skills and a poor working memory, and put up barriers for those with low self-esteem or dyslexia. By the end of each session, all the students have produced something they feel good about.

If they are handwriting their story, I type it up; if they are using a computer, I correct spellings, punctuation and sentence structure. The results are then sent to the editor, who makes some editing suggestions – we never talk about correcting students' stories; editing is what professional authors do.

In the next lesson, I hand back the correctly spelt and punctuated chapter, which the children read several times before embarking on the editor's suggestions. Some stories have to be edited quite heavily, some are barely touched at all, and sometimes the plot needs to be changed slightly because not all the ideas fit in. However, at the end of the process, the story and the ideas are the students' very own. We have simply helped them polish their work into something the public might buy – the local WH Smith has agreed to stock their books and they will also be available on Amazon.

A personal notebook

When the editor first visited us, she brought all the students a special notepad and explained that it was not for school but for them to do with as they pleased at home. If they had a great idea for their story, they might write it down here. She stressed that they did not have to write anything and that the notebook was completely private.

She then showed them her own notebook, which was filled with things crossed out and rewritten. She explained that rewrites were a sign of intelligence – it showed you were able to change your mind about something because you had

a better idea. These children are used to seeing red marks all over their books, yet here was an adult proud to show off her scribbles. It was quite a revelation for them and they are beginning to understand that editing is a continual process that helps them develop their stories in the direction they want.

Creating a cohesive piece of work

Editing can be incredibly time-consuming, especially for those students who go off on tangents and need guiding back to their original idea. In the early lessons, children are told to choose a title and create some characters, give the main character a problem and solve it. While no one has to stick rigidly to their initial plan, the finished story must make sense and everything must hang together, which for children with low literacy skills is easier said than done.

 ***The whole process helps them become more self-aware and develop their own coping strategies*** 

This is where writing for publication helps because they have an end product in mind. For example, one student was writing about football, yet his title was *The Apocalypse*. When we discussed how someone going into a shop to buy a book about football might react to this, he was able to steer himself back to a more appropriate title without me having to say another word.

Understanding the business side

I have planned some trips to help students learn about publishing and selling books. Some children have never been to a bookshop, so I have arranged a visit to the local WH Smith, where the manager will talk about marketing, pricing and positioning books in a shop, and another to Drake The Bookshop in Stockton-on-Tees, where the manager will talk about how he treats customers when they come in, and how the blurb on a book's cover makes all the difference in helping him pick out titles that might interest them.

A key visit will be to Sixth Element Publishing, where students will see how a book is packaged. Eventually they will

all sign a contract with the publisher; the royalties for the first 100 books will go to Nunthorpe Academy to fund the next project and any profit thereafter will be theirs. When the students discussed if they might become millionaires, I gently grounded them by telling them that my own book has made £30, but that having it available for purchase is really exciting because anyone could buy it.

The publisher's in-house artist is illustrating the stories. The students kick-start this process by drawing their own pictures, which the artist works from, although one student's artistic skills are good enough for her to create her own cover illustration in the Manga style.

How well the books sell will be down to students' marketing skills – another strand of teaching and learning.

Overcoming reluctance

One boy has severe dyslexia and it takes me a long time to understand what he has written. It helps that I worked on the outline of the story with him so I have some idea of what he is getting at. He finds it very difficult to write. Sometimes he picks up a pen, writes a little and then gets stuck, throwing down his pen in a temper and running out of the room. Sometimes he has lessons in a different room because he disturbs the rest of the class so much.

At first he refused to write anything, convinced he was a failure because he could not read or write. When he finally got down to it, we ended up with just one sentence to work with: 'Tommy rolled the dice and collapsed onto the street.' The editor remarked that this was very dramatic and provided an excellent hook into his story. Other than the spelling corrections, she simply suggested that he swap the full stop for an ellipsis.

He stormed off in disbelief at that point; it took a while to convince him that we were serious, and that chapter 1 should be this single dramatic sentence, which he would develop further in the next chapter. In the lesson before Christmas, he sat typing for about 10 minutes, smiling all the while. I can't convey how heart-warming that smile was, reflecting a real sense of achievement instead of the usual outbursts and cries of frustration because he 'can't do it.'

Another student refuses to work in school. One day, she brought her notebook in to show us, bursting with pride. She had been writing stories at home for her little sister. It turns out three other students have also been writing prolifically at home, where they feel safe: there is no judgment, no one interferes and this is their thing.



One student is working on Manga characters for her book illustrations

The impact on learning

By the time students had a couple of chapters on their screens, they were constantly asking for reassurance: 'Miss, can you come and read what I have written so far?' It was not long before they were sharing their work with fellow students, who were supportive and encouraging. Now they volunteer to read each other's work. In this way, they are reading for at least 20 minutes a day.

The impact of all this additional reading has been remarkable. When we tested students at the start of the project in October, some had a reading age as low as six. By early January, interim tests showed they were starting to make huge improvements: one student increased his reading age by 14 months and another student's reading age went up from seven years and three months to eight years, which really boosted her confidence.

Anecdotally, we know it is making a difference in class. One teacher reported: 'WG has been brilliant these last few weeks. A helpful, nice lad. What have you done with him?' She went to remark: 'There has been a noticeable improvement in all of the students, but W and M stand out. They're like different kids!' Another teacher has noticed that the students are more willing to write.

Funding the venture

I entered the My Story idea in the 2016/7 Let Teachers SHINE awards. This provides grants to enable teachers to develop ideas to improve learning outcomes for children; my grant allowed me to bring the publisher on board.

To schools running a similar project without this support, my advice is to approach an independent publisher, who

may be prepared to volunteer some time and who will definitely help with ideas to fund and publish a book. One possibility is to pre-sell copies to parents, staff and governors, thereby providing you with money up front to pay the publisher and perhaps even make a profit to go back into school funds.

To further save on production costs, stories could be combined into one anthology or the publishers may allow printing on demand. I now know a lot more about editing and publishing thanks to Sixth Element Publishing, and am in the process of capturing those insights in lesson plans to enable schools to run their own project.

“Other students have also been writing prolifically at home”

Future plans

With regard to my own project, instead of using a professional illustrator next year, I plan to work with A-level students from our own art department. I also want to extend the concept to an after-school club called Tall Tales and Short Stories. Here too, all creative and marketing strands of the project remain valid. Students still have to write good, well-illustrated stories and market their publication, even if it is just in the school library – what will persuade a reader to pick it off the shelf?

The project so far is looking successful. The young people are proud of the way their books are coming along and are taking great pains over their work; they

are making connections and look forward to literacy, in which they are making good progress.

Top tips

- Ensure all students write under a pen name. This gives them the confidence to open their souls and express their anxiety and needs through their central character without feeling exposed. They can choose whether or not to tell people they are the author.
- Never say that they have work to correct. They only have work to edit. These children have been corrected all their lives; here they are simply developing their ideas.
- Print off each edited version so they are always reading correct spellings and punctuation – it is amazing how much they enjoy rereading their own and their friends' work.
- Read aloud to students who have literacy difficulties, otherwise they will never develop a love of stories and a desire to read more. Nor will they understand story structure, which they will need to replicate.
- Be wary of taking short cuts in the final production as a professional looking book will boost the children's self-esteem. The last thing we want is for them to be disappointed with the final product.
- Look for available budgets in your school to help with costs, such as the pupil premium grant.
- Consider using the Blob Tree books and poster (Routledge) to discuss attitude. These contain pictures of trees covered in lots of human figures with minimal expressions and lots of body language. Every figure is open to interpretation so there is no wrong answer. I asked students to identify themselves and their attitude to literacy with one of the blobs at the start of the project and will repeat the exercise at the end. I hope to show that they have made a huge emotional journey.

FIND OUT MORE

- Lesson plans will be available from the autumn term 2018. Email: RWilkinson@nunthorpe.co.uk
- SHINE: <http://bit.ly/sc235-28>



Rachel Wilkinson is a librarian and the Key Stage 3 literacy intervention teacher at Nunthorpe Academy in the education authority of Redcar and Cleveland



A pupil is engrossed in a task with Harry Potter by his side, ready to offer support

Hooking them in

Catherine Cookson tells **Alison Thomas** how a focus on reading for pleasure is impacting on children's literacy skills

It was a normal day at St Anne's Catholic Primary School in Birkenhead, Merseyside – or so the children thought. They knew that someone from outside school was coming in to work with them, but other than that, it was business as usual.

As they entered the classroom, their eyes were drawn to a table at the back laden with pencils, rubbers, sweets, chocolates and biscuits. 'Strange,' they thought, but the man who was waiting for them was giving nothing away as he explained that today they would be working on their English skills. 'We're going to be looking at figurative language,' he said. 'Your teacher tells me you have done this before. Who can tell me what a metaphor is?'

What happened next caught them completely by surprise as a familiar figure sprang out a cupboard waving his wizard wand. Harry Potter had come into school to give them a helping hand.

Literacy Alive

As the session progressed, Harry was joined by Professors Dumbledore and Snape and the next two hours sped by in a series of engaging, interactive activities designed to introduce and consolidate figures of speech through the medium of a well-loved book.

The intervention is one of eight options offered by Literacy Alive, a new Key Stage 2 course from PET-Xi Training, each focusing on a different aspect of literacy, each facilitated by different fictional favourites, from Alice and the Mad Hatter to Tigger and Willy Wonka or Peter Pan and Captain Hook.

'We are having a major drive on reading for pleasure this year,' explains deputy headteacher Catherine Cookson. 'We serve quite a deprived area and while we have a few avid readers, we were concerned by the number of pupils who rarely pick up a book. One of the ways we are addressing this is for each class to share a really good story together, which

in the case of Year 6 is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. When we spotted that a team from Hogwarts was teaching children to recognise and use similes, metaphors and personification, it was too good an opportunity to miss.'

'Although Year 5 is reading a different book,' she adds, 'we arranged a session for them as well because figurative language is something they are working on this year. Meanwhile, for Year 6 it was a chance to revise an important skill they will need for their Sats.'

A reason to write

The characters stayed in role throughout the session. Harry might point to a text on the screen and say: 'I can't see any similes here,' then waving his wand: 'Oh look! A simile has magically appeared. Quick! Write it down before it disappears again.' Meanwhile Dumbledore would be wandering the room, encouraging pupils to help each other, offering them tips when they got stuck and dishing out



All eyes are glued to the screen, while Professor Dumbledore stands by to add a touch of magic

prizes from the goodie-laden table to the fastest group or the one that came up with a really good simile of their own.

Snape, on the other hand, would try to put a spanner in the works. 'I bet they can't find any similes,' he would say, or: 'That's not a simile. A simile is a rhyming word.' And the children would respond: 'No! That's not right! A simile is when you compare two things with words like "as" and "like".'

'They were tumbling over themselves in their eagerness to participate,' says Ms Cookson, 'but it never got out of hand because the facilitators knew just how to tread that fine line between inspiring their enthusiasm and keeping their behaviour under control. In Year 6 we have a boy with specific needs who struggles to cope with noise and often wears headphones at events like assemblies. Even he was OK with it because we talked to him beforehand and sat him to one side with his teacher. So he knew what was coming and he had that support.'

She was equally impressed by the variety of short, focused activities designed to catch the children's attention, get them applying that piece of learning and then move on. 'That's what our children need, especially those with SEND, but given our catchment area, lots of the others too,' she says. 'When things drag on for too long, that's when you lose them. Likewise, when it comes to writing, they need a reason to put pen to paper. By challenging them through role play, games and quizzes, with the prospect of a prize if they tried their very best, Harry and his friends spirited away the barriers that can often hold them back.'

Independent reading

Another resource the school has been using to great effect is Bug Club, the online reading scheme from Pearson. 'It particularly appeals to some of our SEND pupils, who might not like sitting with a book but who enjoy using the iPads,' she explains, 'although it works well for everyone. It also provides a link with home. Many of our parents struggle to find the time to read with their children. Now pupils can go home and read on their own, and they do. It has really captured their interest.'

All the children get a log-in and a password, which takes them into their very own online world containing a variety of books their teacher has selected specifically for them. 'We can tailor it to each child's needs,' Ms Cookson explains. 'For example, for children working at Phase 5 in Letters and Sounds, we might allocate all the Phase 5 books, or just a few, depending on how confident the child was. The child clicks on My Books, chooses the one they want, and clicks again to turn the pages. They can also opt to have it read to them, but we can switch this facility off, so we are still in control.'



Bug Club is very popular with all of the children

One of the skill areas the school has been keen to focus on is comprehension, and every so often the Phonics Bug pops up with a comprehension question. If a child skips any of these, it pops up again at the end of the book with the comment: 'You have completed two out of the five.' This information is relayed to their teacher, who can also see if they have abandoned a book halfway through and send them back to finish it off. 'There is something for everyone,' Ms Cookson says. 'Fiction, non-fiction, comics, Lego books, Alphablocks, Ben 10 books... these have gone down really well with Year 3 boys who are normally turned off by reading.'

Another advantage of the system is the removal of any stigma attached to pupils reading books well below the expected level for their age. 'They don't know how the books are classified,' she explains, 'and because they are in their own little world, they have no idea what other children might be reading. They love it. All classes have time in the computer room and we use it in after school club, as well as at home.'

“They were tumbling over themselves to participate”

'It is just another way of developing their literacy skills,' she observes. 'If their reading is developing, their vocabulary is developing, their phonics knowledge is developing and ultimately their writing will start developing too.'

Using a story to develop empathy

The school is always on the lookout for a book that will inspire pupils' interest and *Wonder* by R J Palacio, adapted for younger readers in *We're All Wonders*, has proved exceptional.

Recently turned into a film starring Julia Roberts, it tells the story of a little boy called Auggie with a horrendous facial abnormality who struggles to make friends. The simpler version confines itself to how people stare at him and say unkind things behind his back, and how that makes him feel. In the more complex original, his parents have tried to shield him from this by educating him at home, but now he is about to start school and dreading it.



As the week goes by, the kindness jar in Ms Cookson's classroom fills up with pom-poms

'It was the focus of a whole week's work,' says Ms Cookson, 'starting with Monday's assembly where we watched a clip of the film, read a short extract, and gave the children the well-known expression: "Don't judge a book by its cover", which they amended to read: "Don't judge a person by their appearance."'

As the week went by, they read the text in full and explored the themes through

activities like role play and Conscience Alley (see box). Finally, they wrote letters urging Auggie to come to St Anne's, where he could be sure of a warm welcome because: 'We think everyone who is different is great. We are all different, and that is good.'

This last point was reinforced through PSHE work, including a lesson on similarities and differences, where the children talked about their respective strengths and challenges and concluded that they were all 'wonders' in their own way – a message that was particularly powerful for the children with SEND.

Another strand of the initiative was #choosekindness, where each class had an empty jar which gradually filled up as the days went by. Every time someone did something kind – helping a child who had fallen, fetching water for a younger child – the teacher would say: '#choosekindness, go and put a token in.'

'It's about finding the right text, something that really engages them,' says Ms Cookson. '*The Wonder* was especially good because it has the two versions, so the whole school was involved.'

Conscience Alley

Question: Should Auggie go to school? Yes or no and why?

Having developed their ideas first, the children lined up, with the 'no' camp facing the 'yes' camp. The teacher then walked down the middle, listening to each child's argument on the way and reaching their own conclusion when they came to the end of the row.

'If children can say it, they can write it,' explains Ms Cookson. 'They were passionate about the book, so they all wanted to be part of the debate, even those you might expect to lack the confidence. That is the key: finding a text they really buy into.'

FIND OUT MORE

- **Literacy Alive:** <http://bit.ly/sc241-06>
- **Bug Club:** <http://bit.ly/sc241-07>
- **Free resource for We're All Wonders from Teachit Primary:** <http://bit.ly/sc241-08>

I can see
everything
you're saying

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Cued Speech: a speech perception tool

Tobin Broadbent and **Cate Calder** explain how to make learning more accessible for hearing impaired pupils

Cued Speech is a system of eight hand shapes in four positions which clarify speech lip patterns. These give deaf children better access to the spoken word by adding a visual element to sounds that they cannot hear, or hear only partially.

Language development

Babies are primed to learn language, but have a limited amount of time to do this by absorption. Once they have mastered their first language, they can pick up another one with relative ease because their understanding of the first provides a context for the second.

However, if they have not acquired basic language skills in their mother tongue by the age of four, language then becomes a learned experience, which requires a conscious effort. Unfortunately, many deaf children do not acquire these skills during the vital early years because they miss out on so much of what is said.

Hearing people often assume that deaf people can learn to lip read instead, but

this is only possible in a language they are already fluent in. As it happens, English is very difficult to lip read – only about 30% of the lip patterns are discernible, so the majority of lip reading is guess work plus context. For example, ‘ferry’ and ‘fairy’, and ‘mat’, ‘bat’ and ‘pat’ look identical when spoken.

“Hearing children are immersed in a language-rich environment from the day they are born”

Some hearing people are able to recognise a few phrases – ‘I love you’ is familiar to many people, especially as it is said in a context. What hearing people are actually having is an auditory experience in which they hear their own voice putting the sound in. Many deaf children do not have

that language in their heads and so have nothing to refer to in order to make sense of new vocabulary.

BSL

Might British Sign Language (BSL) provide the answer? There is no doubt that BSL opens the door to rich learning opportunities – over 120,000 deaf adults and about 20,000 children use BSL in the UK and it is the focus of a vibrant culture and community.

What it doesn’t do, however, is give children access to the English language. This is because it operates in a totally different way. Rather than communicating meaning through a combination of sounds that make up words, it throws up pictures in the person’s mind.

The syntax too is different. For example, there are no tenses in BSL – instead, the timing of an event is added after the sign for the verb. Likewise, descriptions begin with the noun, followed by the adjectives to provide further detail – so ‘big black

Hearing impairment



The lip patterns of some sounds are virtually identical. Cued Speech adds visual signals to make the distinction clear.

car' becomes 'car', with 'big' and 'black' added if the signer is fluent.

And therein lies another problem. BSL has 4,000 discreet signs and it takes around five years of concentrated study to become fluent. However, over 90% of deaf children are born into hearing families who are unlikely to have any prior experience of the language. By the time they have mastered it, a large part of their child's language acquisition window will have closed.

Impoverished language

Meanwhile, unlike hearing children who are immersed in a language-rich environment from the day they are born, the deaf child will have limited exposure to BSL. For example, their parents might say to their siblings: 'It's raining cats and dogs; let's put our coats on because we're going to the park.'

To the deaf child they might only be able to sign 'coat' and maybe 'park' in BSL, leaving them impoverished in terms of language.

These families are often encouraged to learn some signs and take their child to baby signing classes, where they are taught a list of nouns – rabbit, elephant, cat, milk, brother and sister – and learn to map a gesture onto a spoken word. This will not help the child learn English. When children use the BSL gesture for dog, they don't realise that it is made up three sounds – 'd', 'o' and 'g' – knowledge they will need later on when they start learning to decipher the written word.

Why cue?

In contrast to BSL, Cued Speech can be learned in about 20 hours. Fluency comes with practice; research in Spain shows that most parents who were taught to cue to their deaf babies were fluent within six months.

The English language has over 171,000 words in current use, but only 44 sounds. It is these that Cued Speech interprets, making each one distinguishable through a combination of lip patterns and hand signals.

“*Never accept delayed language as “normal for a deaf child”*”

The signals are clear and consistent, so that the deaf child's brain doesn't even analyse them, just as hearing people don't analyse the sounds 'd-o-g', but just hear the sound 'dog'. Research shows that 96% of English can be lip read accurately this way.

Seeing language

It enables deaf babies and children to see the whole of the English language as plainly as hearing people hear it. Crucially, when these children start school, they already have the language they need to learn to read and write.

Deaf children who have grown up with cueing have an innate understanding that words are made up of individual sounds, and can therefore usually progress in literacy at the same pace as their hearing peers. Deaf children who have not had this experience do not have a working phonology in their mind's ear to refer to, and have to learn English before they can read and write.

The benefits for schools

From a social point of view, if cueing is taught to all children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, deaf children end up

able to take part in conversations and interact with their peers on an equal footing.

SLCN

When it comes to teaching phonics, Cued Speech can be used to support children with a wide range of difficulties. For instance, it helps children with speech language and communication needs, enabling them to 'see' all the sounds in a word.

Auditory processing difficulties

Likewise, it gives children with auditory processing difficulties consistent visual signals to clarify the mixed messages they may be receiving from the sounds.

Hearing aids

Cued Speech can also support the use of hearing aid technology – when children are given cochlear implants, sounds have no meaning at first. However, children who are familiar with cueing already have a means with which to cross-reference new sounds.

For example, one of the families we work with was enjoying a trip in a rowing boat one day. The daughter had put her cochlear implant in her pocket to keep it safe and dry. When a cormorant landed on the bow, the mother wanted to name it to her daughter. There isn't a direct BSL equivalent for cormorant and her grasp of BSL was not good enough to get her much further than 'bird, black, C'. Instead she tried cueing 'cormorant'; this worked and her daughter immediately repeated the three syllables back: 'Cor-mor-ant'.

Speech therapy

While Cued Speech allows deaf children to pick up the English language so they start to think in English, their spoken language is unlikely to sound authentic.

Their pronunciation will be accurate, in that they will be able to articulate the mechanics of how a word is structured. However, issues around pitch, intonation, volume and stress will remain and they may need to work on this with a speech and language therapist.

Raising expectations

We leave the conclusion to Anne Worsfold, a parent of two deaf children and the recently retired director of Cued Speech UK. She says: 'Accessing and acquiring language should not be hard for a deaf child – it should be easy and natural.'

'If children are struggling to understand something they partially hear, the effort is all theirs, and the failure to understand is often – unfairly – seen to be theirs too. For example, even the most saintly parent may get irritated if they are in a hurry and say something several times which their deaf child just doesn't understand – and that's damaging to both parent and child.'

“Only about 30% of the lip patterns are discernible”

If their parents and the professionals around them use Cued Speech, all language is clear and the only effort the child needs to make is to look.

'Finally, never accept delayed language as "normal for a deaf child" – with Cued Speech a deaf child can make the same progress in understanding English as a hearing child.'



Tobin Broadbent is advocacy lead for Cued Speech UK and Cate Calder is one of its Cued

Speech specialist trainers

FIND OUT MORE

- Cued Speech UK is a national charity that works with hearing families of deaf children to help them communicate with their child. The child can see language, absorb it and learn it, which allows them to interact with those around them and participate fully in family life. They can access all the learning experiences so vital to child development and when the time comes, they will have an inner language which they can use to read and write. www.cuedspeech.co.uk
- *Giving language a helping hand*, a TED talk by Cathy Rasmussen on how cued speech works and why teachers might use it. <http://bit.ly/sc240-01>
- Enabling deaf children to access music: *Pull-out resources, Special Children 239*
- *Sound advice*: removing learning barriers for pupils with a hearing impairment. *Special Children 240*

Accelerating phonics learning with Cued Speech

Nikki Summers explains how Cued Speech helped children with dyslexia and SLCN

Two years ago I used Cued Speech to help a boy we'll call Peter in Class 1 (Reception and Year 1) at Lythe C of E Primary School. He has a profound hearing impairment and communicates using a combination of BSL and Cued Speech.

How it works

Cued Speech turns the 44 phonemes of speech into visible units that can be blended to make words and sentences, giving Peter access to full English.

I decided to teach it to all the pupils in his class as they learned their phonics so that they would be able to communicate with him more easily. In doing so, I discovered that Cued Speech also supported children with speech, language and communication needs and dyslexia.

One step ahead

As it happens, I had come across Cued Speech before Peter arrived in my class and had been on a course to learn it, although I was far from fluent; to begin with, I kept just one step ahead of my pupils.

It is relatively easy to learn; the key to fluency was using it every day, which coincidentally accelerated everyone's take-up of phonics. Studies have shown that when we cue to deaf children, they learn to read like their hearing peers.

Visual reminders

To begin with, when I held up a flashcard with a letter on it, the children would say the sound and make the hand shape. This acted as a visual reminder, helping all the pupils link the grapheme with the phoneme.

While there are other visual phonic schemes on the market to help teach phonics using actions, Cued Speech alone allows you to blend signs to create language.

Addressing other difficulties

It helped children with speech difficulties to identify sounds. For example, if a child could not pronounce 'c' but instead made the sound at the back of their throat like a 'g', they would give me a hand shape to clarify which sound they meant.

When it came to literacy, children, particularly those with SLCN,

sometimes missed sounds out when writing, but when reading back their work using Cued Speech, they could identify that they had written, say, 'wet' not 'went' and correct themselves.

Progress was so good that when they took their phonics screening check at the end of Year 1, all the children were unconsciously cueing the phonics to themselves before saying them aloud.

Keeping up with his peers

Importantly for Peter, I cued when I explained things to him, and read and cued the circle time story at the end of the day, enabling him to participate fully in all activities from the start.

From my observations over the course of the two years, I believe that all children's progress in phonics was accelerated because they were using it the whole time, and not just to communicate with Peter. As important, thanks to Cued Speech, Peter's progress was exactly in line with that of his peers.



Nikki Summers is a class teacher and the SENCO at Lythe C of E Primary School, Whitby

The world's first 'outstandingly happy school'



Putting happiness on the curriculum

As concern about young people's mental health continues to grow, **Andy Cope** offers a solution that spreads happiness throughout the school and beyond

It's a crisp March morning in 2017 and I have come to the headteacher's office of Billingham South Community Primary School, Stockton-on-Tees, to make a podcast with four pupils who were introduced to Brilliant Schools by my two colleagues six months ago. So what can they remember?

'The happiness pig!' declares eight-year-old Belle instantly. 'Tell me more,' I respond, and she's off.

'The happiness pig was just an ordinary pig,' she says, 'who became even more ordinary by being happy, because happiness should just be an ordinary thing inside of you. Then he had so much happiness, he couldn't keep it all inside of him, so he decided to share his happiness so he could see more happy faces.'

'And what happened next?' I enquire.

'First it came to all of the pigs,' she rattles on. 'Then it came to the sheep. Then it came to the chickens. And then it

came to the entire world!'

Six months may have passed, but Belle and her classmates can remember it all vividly, from the 2%ers – the tiny proportion of people who are really positive almost all of the time – to mood-hoovers whose constant whingeing rubs off on others, and the sausage machine whose end product is only as good as the ingredients you put into it.

Better still, their 10-point action plan to spread happiness throughout their school and out into the community has borne fruit and they are our first 'outstandingly happy school.'

Brilliant Schools

Brilliant Schools is the latest programme from Art of Brilliance, which provides training for businesses and schools based on research I conducted into the habits and mindset of 2%ers for my PhD in positive psychology. Tailored to the needs of the group, who range in

age from Key Stage 2 through to sixth form, it creates and embeds a culture of wellbeing by putting the children firmly in charge.

It starts with three half-days of training, where the children are introduced to six key principles through fun, interactive activities.

- Choosing to be positive.
- Understanding your impact on those around you.
- Taking personal responsibility.
- Resilience – what we call bounce-back-ability.
- HUGGs – huge unbelievably great goals.
- Strengths – finding your strengths and playing to them.

On day three, we challenge the children to take what they have learned and design a 10-point action plan to make their school the most brilliant in the country, mapped against three areas.

- What can you do to improve your own learning?
- What can you do to improve the happiness of everyone else in your school?
- What can you do to improve the wellbeing of your family and the wider community?

A teacher is appointed to oversee the project and we leave them to it, keeping in touch through email and Skype, returning five or six months later for the inspection, when the children present evidence of the progress they have made and explain where they might go from here. Finally, we compile a full report in child-friendly language and present them with a huge banner to display to the world: 'We are officially an outstandingly happy school.'

Spreading happiness and wellbeing

Because the project is driven by the children themselves, no two plans are the same. However, here is a selection of activities from a cross-section of schools.

- Random acts of kindness (more of them, or devoting a special day to them).
- Singing to residents in a retirement home.
- Packing bags for customers in the local supermarket.
- Children design and deliver a mini 'happiness curriculum'.
- Children run happiness assemblies.
- 'Kindness police' issue a ticket to anyone caught exhibiting a positive behaviour, which the recipient must take to the headteacher, whose cupboard is well stocked with prizes.
- Children wash their teachers' cars (without telling them first).
- Children design 'golden tickets' for a special parents' evening, where they explain 'being brilliant' to their mums and dads.

Impact

It requires buy-in from staff, which is why we run twilight training sessions or a half-day Inset if the school can manage it. Where schools have put their hearts into it, the impact has been profound. But they can explain that better than I can. Time to hand over to two pioneers, starting with the headteacher of the world's first outstandingly happy school.

FIND OUT MORE:

- **Art of Brilliance training for schools:** <http://bit.ly/sc241-18>
- **Billingham South Primary School pupils' podcast:** <http://bit.ly/sc241-17>

Andy Cope is a happiness expert, author of the best-selling children's Spy Dog series and of The Little Book of Emotional Intelligence: How to Flourish in a Crazy World. www.artofbrilliance.co.uk

Pupils prepare to inspect the quality of the school's happiness and growth mindset displays



A joined-up approach

Headteacher **Edwin Squire** explains how becoming an 'outstandingly happy school' has been part of a wider initiative to embed a positive mindset across the school

My deputy headteacher Kathryn Hendy and I first came across Andy Cope at a headteachers' conference in 2015 soon after we were promoted to lead the school.

What he was saying resonated with our own views on education and, indeed, on life as a whole. We put him temporarily out of our minds, however, while we focused on our first priority: resilience.

Resilience and growth mindset

Billingham South Community Primary School serves an area of significant economic and social disadvantage and a lot of our children found it difficult to try hard. This was confirmed by our first pupil voice session. We had gathered 12 pupils in my office, and when we asked them: 'What do you do if you find a task difficult in class?' nine out of the 12 said they gave up or opted out in some way. Yet they weren't lacking in initiative. One boy's strategy for keeping out of trouble was to 'make sure somebody notices that the person next to me is doing worse than I am!'

In contrast, the pupils in our support base for children with cognition and learning difficulties were amongst the most resilient in the school; you could see from their happy smiling faces that they positively relished coming to school. Staff in the base were working

hard to encourage a 'can do' mentality – it resembled growth mindset in some respects, although we didn't give it that name. How could we harness that elsewhere?

We discussed this at length, attended a conference led by Carol Dweck, read up about it and were thoroughly convinced. So growth mindset has been one of the drivers transforming the culture of the school.

Vision and values

Another major influence has been our values. The school has always provided a values-based education, but in the past these changed year on year through a democratic vote. We already knew what kind of school we wanted to be, so the first thing we did was to draw up four sentences to capture our school vision.

- Everybody prepared and inspired to be the best they can be.
- Excellent classrooms.
- Excellent relationships.
- Hearts in Billingham and eyes on the world.

In consultation with staff, we then decided on five core values that we felt would support our children to be successful in life: quality, trust, happiness, resilience and courage.

Calling in the inspectors

Now that we knew the direction we were taking, in the autumn of 2016 we turned to Brilliant Schools as the third plank of our approach.

In the interests of sustainability, we chose years 3 to 5 as they would still be with us the following year. Two Art of Brilliance trainers worked with each year group in turn – 180 pupils in all, accompanied by their classroom staff.

We have amazingly positive staff. They had already willingly stayed behind on a bleak, snowy evening for a training session and were eager to get started. It's all too easy for projects like this to be viewed with an element of cynicism, so it's vital to have your staff fully on board.

The children spent the next three days working on their huge unbelievably great goals, the idea being that they would conceive of small steps to get where they wanted to be. As part of that, they were introduced to the idea of resilience and happiness – turning up at school ready to embrace it, have fun, enjoy their learning and have a go at things.

On day three, they started developing their plans. One of their ideas for the classroom was to rename all the classes with positive, dynamic names. Their ideas for around school included having playground buddies and approaching anyone who looked unhappy to see if they could cheer them up. They also came up with ways of incorporating our values and helping out and about in the community – something we were already doing, since we have our 'hearts in Billingham and eyes on the world'.

Which brings me back to our vision and values.



A pupil stands by a values display proudly wearing her rainbow badge

Rainbows and badges

At the start of that same autumn term, we had called a staff meeting to discuss how we could embed our values into the daily life of the school. Out of this came the idea of having a rainbow display in every classroom and giving the children a coloured sticker every time they displayed a value. They would get a sticker for showing happiness, and another if they proved trustworthy in carrying out a job. They would get a sticker for trying hard at something difficult or embarking on a project they didn't really want to do. When they had collected all five, they would be awarded a rainbow badge.

18 months down the line, these badges are massively prized. To keep the children going, every time they demonstrate the five values again, they get a certificate, which is also their

licence to keep the badge (to give the system added worth, we had decided that lost badges would have to be re-earned). Eventually, if a child retains the badge five times, they get a sew-on badge for their uniform. That is a considerable feat and nobody has made it yet, although one child is very, very close.

Pulling it all together

Meanwhile, Mrs Hendy and I were so enthused by growth mindset that over the year we put on five staff training sessions. Today, you will see growth mindset being promoted in every classroom, not just on the walls, but by the language and the approach of the teachers. At the same time, you will see our values displayed everywhere, with the children's rewards beneath. And you will see children wearing badges.

Even the glass roofs above our two quads have been refitted to feature rainbow motifs, so that when the children walk round school there are reminders of the values wherever they go.

Moving forwards, this year we introduced mindfulness sessions in years 3 and 4. We also invested in having Mrs Hendy trained in attachment disorder. We know you can't wave a magic wand and expect children who have experienced huge trauma to suddenly become happy, and we already provide counselling. However, if we can change some classroom practice, we hope they will gradually become better able to embrace some of the values of school and have a more positive outlook.

In addition, we have been working closely with a local counselling service to provide a transition club for children who might find the move to secondary exceptionally difficult and help them carry our values with them. So it is very much a joined-up approach.

And finally

Returning to the theme of resilience, when we did a repeat pupil voice session at the end of last year, the transformation was fantastic, not just inside school but outside too. One child told us: 'I am the captain of my cricket team and I make sure that we all try hard and encourage each other.' Other children made similar comments about their house or their football team. Out of the 12, not a single person suggested giving up as an option when presented with something difficult. They all talked in some way about trying harder, working harder, going away to think about it and coming back to try again.

Meanwhile, our PSHE coordinator,



Pupils, staff and parents dance together at a 'Glastonbilly' summer community event

who steers our Brilliant Schools project, has introduced some lovely things for staff, including a shout-out notice board in the staffroom where people can anonymously write positive things about each other. Like our rainbow displays,

that board is full to brimming.

It is no coincidence that Brilliant Schools fitted so well with our values and vision. When we took over, we already had a certain positivity about how we wanted to approach our work. Meeting

Andy Cope at that conference encouraged us to believe in that approach and want to further it. Then when one of the values we came up with as a staff was happiness, we went back to him to help us drive it forwards.

The Art of Brilliance group prepare resources for the feeder school conference



Students take the lead

Martin Burder describes the impact of Art of Brilliance in a secondary school where it has been embedded for several years

Like most schools, King Edward VII Science and Sport College in Coalville, Leicestershire, puts on induction days to welcome next year's new students – in our case Year 10, as we are a 14-19 school.

But that's not the only thing that sets us apart. At King Edward VII, the Art of Brilliance Year 11 group is in charge, supervised by the Year 13 group who ran their own programme two years previously.

Hitting the ground running

The purpose of the day is to introduce the new intake to the ethos of our school before they come to us, so they can hit the ground running. Over the course of five hours, over 300 Year 9 students from different feeder schools come together to be instructed in the six Art of Brilliance principles (see page 16) by our Year 11 experts. Tutors and pastoral staff also attend, giving them a valuable

opportunity to build relationships with their new tutees and enjoy some refresher training themselves.

It is a major undertaking, and the Art of Brilliance group spends the whole year gearing up for it. This is their conference, so how they allocate the themes and strike a balance between theory and practice is entirely up to them. My role, along with the pastoral and progress leader, is to organise the logistics, such as venues and catering, and ensure that it all goes smoothly, but the rest is their responsibility. They will come to us for advice, checking the availability of staff or resources or asking if we think one of their planned activities is likely to work. We often encourage them to run little pilots to find out, so they feel confident on the day.

Last year one of the tasks they designed for bounce-back-ability required Year 9 to work in teams to build a tower out of paper and straws, only to have it knocked

down again just as it was reaching completion. 'You've ruined it!' the students would exclaim, to which their 'teachers' would respond: 'Yes. Life's like that sometimes. What are you going to do now?' Having already been introduced to the principle of bounce-back-ability at the start of the session, Year 9 took it in their stride and set to work again, working more efficiently this time by collaborating better in their teams.

The day concludes with a celebration assembly with certificates and prizes for the people who have exhibited positive behaviours most consistently throughout the day. It is also a great chance to recruit new members to the Art of Brilliance group. 'Did you enjoy today? Would you like to take our place in two years' time? Come to our lunchtime meetings next year and you can become a happiness expert too!'

Reciprocal learning with business leaders

The other big project we have involves Year 10 and, like the conference, is supervised by students who have done it before, this time Year 12.

Working at six-monthly intervals, two groups go into CEVA Logistics, one

Mental health

of the largest logistics companies in the world, to run a little programme for its leadership group. These are aspiring leaders following a five-day management training course who have no idea what lies in store on their final day, as previous participants have been sworn to secrecy. When the day comes, they are met by our 'positive psychology consultants', who explain our philosophy and then set them challenging tasks. Later, the business leaders return the favour by coming into school to deliver a lesson on work-related topics, such as interview technique and dealing with difficult workplace situations.

Both parties find the prospect terrifying. Our students look at these people who are at the top of their game in a massive international company and wonder how they will cope, but when the logistics people discover they will have to lead a lesson with 14-year-olds, they are equally phased. It takes everyone completely out of their comfort zone. When they follow some of the behaviour patterns of 2%ers, it all works out in the end and rich learning takes place.

2%ers

Andy Cope's research analysed the behaviour, mindset and habits of the top 2% of the population who are really positive most of the time and lead successful lives as a result. Does that mean it can impact on grades? To find out, we are currently doing our own research through a competition we run at the end of each term.

We remind the students of how 2%ers behave, how they come into class prepared to grasp opportunities, what they do when the going gets tough and how they support those around them by being upbeat and encouraging. Then for two weeks staff make a note of the most consistent 2%ers and log the top two in each class in our data system. We also do a termly grade sweep, and I put the two figures together to see if there is a correlation.



Year 10 devise and deliver training for aspiring leaders at CEVA Logistics



Two students deliver a workshop on 2%ers and mood-hoovers

The evidence to date shows that the students who like being at school are performing the best. It sounds obvious, but it raises the question: what are we teaching our students? Are we just focusing relentlessly on grades, which is fine because grades will go up? But would a simpler and more fulfilling way of achieving the same objective be to make sure they are enjoying school?

Persuading the reluctant few

There will always be some students who resist – 'I've just spent a day learning about positive psychology. What is the point of that?', a classic mood-hoover response – but they are few and far between. Meanwhile the impact on the self-confidence and self-belief of the others is phenomenal.

A shining example is a girl from a very poor background in the Art of Brilliance group. She is extremely bright and very conscientious, but she's not the coolest kid – she can't afford to be – and she used to keep her head down. When she talks to people now, her confidence has just blossomed; it has transformed what she thinks she is capable of. Other students see that and think: 'If she can do it, why can't we do it?' Once they have bought into the idea that they can be as positive as anyone else, then it really works.

The important thing is putting it on the agenda and making clear to the reluctant few that relationships go two ways. 'If half of why you are fed up with school and not progressing is your fault, can you do anything with that half? You have a choice of how you enter a lesson. You have a choice of how well you do your homework. You have a choice to say nice things to people and celebrate their achievements. Making it as hard-hitting as that sows a seed: 'What if I just try this for one day, for an hour, for just the first part of the lesson as I walk through the door?'

Additional support

Some students are still going to find life hard, and this year eight members of staff have been relieved of normal tutor group duties to become wellbeing tutors instead. We all have different specialities and mine is mindfulness. In half-termly blocks, I spend an hour a week with students who have self-selected or been encouraged to try it, showing them how mindfulness and meditation can help them control stress and banish negative thoughts.

I also spend 10 minutes a week mentoring two vulnerable students; a boy who is falling well below his target grades and a girl who has issues outside school that are causing her distress. It's like a brief counselling session, a chance for them to offload their concerns and feel they are being supported. In the girl's case, I give her little Art of Brilliance homeworks, such as writing down for a week the best thing that has happened each day, which really helps to boost her morale. When you look for positive things in the world, your brain gets better at seeing them, and the more you see, the more positive you become. When she tells me all about it the following week, that doubles the impact because she is reliving these moments.

Initiatives like these cost money and time, and I feel privileged to work with a headteacher who really appreciates the importance of a focus on wellbeing and mental health. Should we be diverting these resources to extra English or maths? Given the pressures young people are under today, I think we are on the right path. If we can get students feeling they are in a good place, especially the most vulnerable, success will come in time.

Martin Burder is head of psychology at King Edward Science and Sport College and part-time positive psychology speaker



Fostering wellbeing

Assistant headteacher **Steve Rippin** talks about the many small steps his school has taken to improve general mental health and wellbeing

Back in 2015, the senior leadership team at Tapton School, Sheffield, was well aware of mental health issues in the school. These manifested themselves in a variety of ways, including behaviour, attendance, relationships issues and, inevitably, underperformance – our annual review of exam results demonstrated a strong correlation between students who failed to do as well as expected and evidence of current or past mental health difficulties.

Consequently, when the Department for Education and NHS England set up a national pilot programme in 2015 to promote collaborative working between schools, CAMHS and other relevant services, we signed up immediately. The outcomes of that pilot informed the recommendations of the green paper on children's mental health published in December 2017.

Assemblies and PSHE lessons

The starting point proved very basic: before we could tackle mental health and wellbeing in school, we first had to raise awareness of what mental health entails and remove the stigma that surrounds

it. We also realised that students were not aware of the signs that can indicate mental health difficulties and did not know what to do if they, or a friend, started exhibiting these.

“Students were not aware of the signs of mental health difficulties”

To address this, we embarked on a series of assemblies that got the message out really effectively. At the same time, we reviewed the PSHE programme and decided that covering mental health as a single unit of work in Key Stage 3 was too little and came too late to have much impact. So we radically revised the programme, threading mental health into every unit. For example, in the Year 7 session on transition to Tapton School, we now start with a discussion about students' emotional wellbeing as they settle in. The unit on sex and relationships offers another opportunity

to discuss mental health, as does the one on internet safety.

In this way, mental health is no longer seen as just an isolated topic to be covered at some point in Key Stage 3 but touches every aspect of our lives.

Creating a whole-school policy

Regular discussions on mental health led by form tutors in an extended tutor time have further helped to increase students' awareness and understanding. Holding these on the same day across the school means that everyone is talking about mental health at the same time, which spurs other initiatives.

Underpinning our approach is a set of values developed by the senior leadership team to encapsulate what we are striving to achieve. These are linked to the school ethos: valuing everyone, caring for each other and achieving excellence. We revisited these soon after we signed up to the pilot project, and subsequently included a focus on destigmatising mental health and raising awareness of it in a way that builds students' emotional resilience and wellbeing, and hence their capacity to learn.

Upskilling staff

A staff survey at the outset showed that people were aware of mental health issues in the school but were reluctant to get involved because they felt they did not have the right skills and worried about getting things wrong.

We asked CAMHS to come in and run a twilight training session to allay their fears and promote the idea of 'attunement' – tuning in to students' feelings – which is very powerful and links into a number of behaviour management techniques.

The session focused on communications and relationships, emphasised how important it was to listen to students, and suggested that staff deal with serious concerns in the same way as they handle safeguarding issues, by reporting them to an appropriate person who would follow them up from there.

Understanding pressure points

Meanwhile, our survey of students' perceptions found that the top trigger for mental health difficulties was exams – no surprises there – and another big concern was sleep deprivation. The latter had not occurred to us before and is now being addressed in PSHE.

The survey findings also made us realise that we could do more to support students through exam stress. We began by mapping out each academic year in

Key Stage 4 Pressure Points 2017-2018

Key Stage 4 student voice informs us of potential pressure points throughout Year 10 and 11. Knowing the ebb and flow of the year helps to ensure you organise yourself to manage these busy periods. Recognising that you are entering an increased pressure point which you know will only last for a short period of time before subsiding is also an important strategy in coping with challenge. Tapton School staff are aware of these periods of intensity and are there to offer encouragement, guidance and support. Further support is also available on the school website.

	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
10	Transition		Tracking			Tracking			Practice Exam Week	Tracking	Fort Tutor Reviews	Parents Evening
11	Transition	Tracking	Parents Evening	UCAS	Tracking	UCAS progress		Practice Exam Week	Tracking	EAANUS	EAANUS	EAANUS
												Results

High pressure	Increased pressure	Reasonable pressure	Low pressure
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We routinely evaluate each academic year and gather staff and student voice to inform next year's calendar.

Taken with permission from the Tapton School website

terms of pressure points (see above) and initiated a series of form discussions at the start of each year. The chart shows that school life is a series of reasonably predictable ebbs and flows of pressure, and serves as a stimulus for exploring how students might prepare for an approaching pressure point. Advice usually includes: start preparation well in advance, get some sleep, understand that there is an end point, get past this and treat yourself for getting through it.

The thinking behind this is that if we can get students to understand the ebbs and flows of pressure while they cope with small but gradually deepening cycles of pressure in years 7 to 10, they will be psychologically more resilient when the real pressures of GCSEs and A-levels hit them.

In addition, last year CAMHS helped us put together an evening presentation for parents to explain how they might support their children during the pressure points. Around 80-90 parents attended and we plan to make this an annual event.

Turning off staff email

When we started out in 2015, we were focused on student welfare but realised quite quickly that it was vital to promote staff wellbeing too: they are on the frontline and will be better able to support students if they themselves are in a good place.

One early action to demonstrate our commitment was to switch off the school email server between 7pm and 6am Monday to Friday and suspend it completely at weekends.

At first, a few staff were anxious about

this but now they appreciate the benefits of being able to focus on planned work, such as marking and lesson preparation, without the constant distraction of incoming emails. As a result they arrive in school less tired, more relaxed, and better able to respond to the day's challenges in an emotionally intelligent way, which helps to de-escalate situations and allows the school to run more smoothly.

A central hub for information

A lot of work has gone into collating advice on mental health and wellbeing, which is stored on the school website for everyone to access – visitors will see a big blue button on the front page entitled *Mental Health and Wellbeing*, which takes them to a page with three more buttons: one each for students, parents and staff.

The students' pages are broken down into year groups, and include the charts of academic pressure points by year group, top tips and useful links. The parents' pages include the school's



Tapton School's assistant headteacher Steve Rippon visited Buckingham Palace on World Mental Health Day to speak to the Duchess of Cambridge about the work the school has been doing. Sixth form student Lara Ferguson also attended the reception on 10 October, and spoke to Prince William about her work on improving mental health for young people

mental health and wellbeing statement, overviews of various manifestations of mental distress, such as self-harming, and lots of useful links ranging from apps to support groups.

Other schools are welcome to have a look at this and incorporate any sections they feel might be useful into their own websites. (For some samples, see pull-out resource on pages 23-26.)

The impact

Although we don't have concrete data to evidence the progress we have made, it is clear that people are generally more willing to talk about mental health than before. Students are much more aware of the signs of mental

health difficulties, and are asking for help at an earlier stage than they used to. Even parents are beginning to come forward and ask for help.

When planning initiatives, the senior leadership team has begun to consider their impact on mental health and wellbeing from the start instead of as an afterthought. I think that is because we have subtly changed the culture and ethos of the school, which now considers mental health and wellbeing as a fundamental pillar of all we do.

Staff are more confident about helping students with mental health difficulties. After one particular training session, I asked for volunteers to act as mental health and wellbeing champions. More than 30 volunteered! Today their names are prominently displayed around the school, offering students a wider choice of people to turn to when they feel the need of a sympathetic ear. At the same time, we also have a small group of students called 'epic friends', who meet regularly to discuss mental health issues and act as a support group for others.

The snowball effect

My advice to other schools is to consider mental health and wellbeing as a journey not a destination, and to start with small, simple steps. When I look back to where we were just three years ago, I couldn't have imagined then how far we would come. One thing led to another and it snowballed from there.



Steve Rippon is assistant headteacher at Tapton School, Sheffield.
www.taptonschool.co.uk

Elements of a presentation to parents about exam stress

Parents can find exams just as stressful as their child. The section below is aimed at helping parents to support their child.

Working together as a team

Students are responsible for maintaining good attendance and actively engaging in lessons and their learning. Also for seeking help and guidance when needed.

School will deliver the curriculum and stretch and challenge students in their learning so they are well prepared for exams as well offering guidance and support.

Parents are there to reassure their child but also challenge them when they are overconfident and give them a gentle nudge in the right direction when needed.

Ever had that feeling? Some symptoms of exam stress

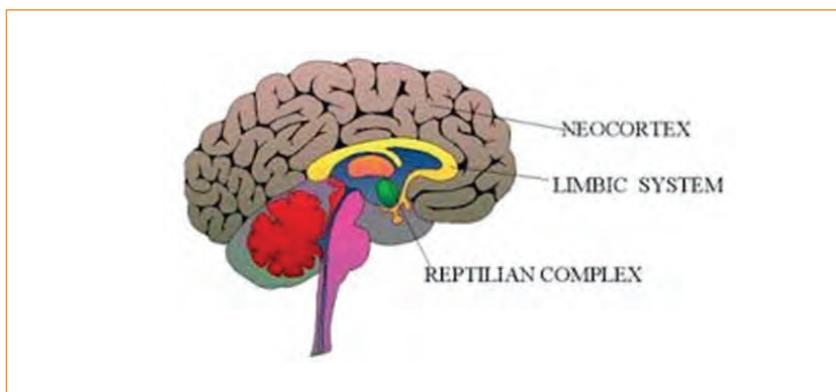
Physical sensations

- Nausea (feeling sick).
- Tense muscles and headaches.
- Pins and needles.
- Feeling light-headed or dizzy.
- Faster breathing.
- Sweating or hot flushes.
- A fast, thumping or irregular heart beat.
- Raised blood pressure.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Needing the toilet more/less frequently.
- Churning in the pit of your stomach.
- Experiencing panic attacks.

Psychological sensations

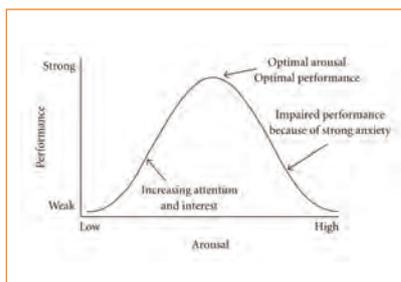
- Feeling tense, nervous and on edge.
- Having a sense of dread or fearing the worst.
- Feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down.
- Feeling like other people can see you are anxious and are looking at you.
- Feeling your mind is really busy with thoughts.
- Dwelling on negative experiences or thinking over a situation again and again (called rumination).
- Feeling restless and not being able to concentrate.
- Feeling numb.

Helping children to access their thinking brain

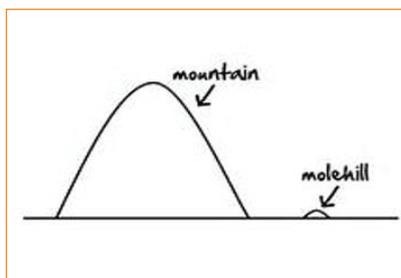


The reptilian brain is good for survival but lousy for exam success!

Are anxiety and worry helpful?



As with everything in life, a little bit of stress is good for you.



When we're overwhelmed with stress or worry, we tend to:

- go on the defensive
- think only about ourselves
- think only about the here and now
- become critical and judgemental
- remember disasters and predict catastrophe
- lose focus
- feel that our brains are in a jumble.

Why does the brain offer such suggestions at such an unhelpful time?

Because the older part of our brain is

trying to keep us safe. It relies on the following.

- Overestimation of danger – it's going to be a catastrophe!
- Fast generalisation – worst scenarios!
- Reading other people's minds – everyone thinks...

What we actually need is the logical part of our brain to function so we can think rationally and decide what to do.

Top tips for parents

The parents' role is to be there to offer reassurance and tackle self-deception.

- Acknowledge, acknowledge, acknowledge – let your child offload, process their feelings, feel heard and understood. You don't need to rush in with advice or reassurance.
- Support your child to adopt a calm, rational, constructive approach.
- Take your time to work out the best approach.
- Think about your own stress levels and emotional regulation – notice if you or your child's alarm system has been triggered.
- Notice the tone of your voice and what your non-verbals are communicating.
- Start each day afresh.
- Have fun.
- Use 'I' not 'you'.
- Use 'and' not 'but'.
- Give choices.
- If your child is feeling overwhelmed, help them to choose one 'doable' activity for the day.
- Support them to feel confident about the 'can dos' and taking small steps.

Elements of a Year 10 PSHEE lesson plan

TASK ONE
Write around the **outline** of the head, issues that can put pressure on us and make us feel stressed. These can be big or small/trivial. They could be issues that other people do or say to us or what we hear in the media.

TASK TWO
Now write **inside of the head** what thoughts appear because of the pressures you have stated.
An example:
1. 'I'm never going to do this in time'.
2. 'I can't cope if it goes wrong'.
3. 'I'm going to enjoy this'.
Positive and negative thoughts are both OK.

TASK THREE
In a different colour **fill in the body** with feelings (both emotional and physical) that can be a reaction to these thoughts and pressures.
An example: A headache, stomach ache, tiredness, anxious, over-excited, sweaty, panicky etc.

TASK FOUR
Now go back over everything you have written and underline things that are out of your control.
Extension:
Underline the ones that we can control.

With your table, discuss two of the questions...

How did it feel when you realised a few of your points were out of control? Why?

How can these external pressures impact on your examination week?

Why is it important to write down what we are thinking and feeling?

Why is it important to focus on what we can control?

Be prepared to share your answers.

There are stresses in life which we have control over.
When we have control, we can look at ways to solve the problem.

There are also stresses we can't control.
Although we can't change the stress, we can change the way we think about it and react to it.

So what can you do next?

With the person next to you, write down three strategies on how we can deal with the issues that are under our control.
(Add these somewhere on your personal sheet.)

There is a link between our thoughts, feelings and what our body does. In the age where we had to fight with animals, our fear told us to fight or run away. Today we have different fears and worries, but our thoughts and feelings are still very real and can be difficult to cope with.

How we react to a stress can depend on how much control we feel we have over what is happening. When things feel really out of our control it can be harder to deal with them.

A key factor in problem solving is often finding support.



These points were given to us by Year 11s last year.
Do you agree with these points?
Why are these points a worry to students taking exams?

If these are your stresses and worries, you should ask yourself

- 1) Could you realistically do any more?
- 2) Are you doing too much?
- 3) Are you putting too much pressure on yourself?

An example of a tutor time discussion in Key Stage 3

Get into groups of three and allocate roles. Remember: irrespective of your role, you must play your full part in contributing ideas. **The leader** will encourage everyone in the group to get involved and add in ideas. They will stop arguments and allow one person to speak at a time.

The scribe will write down all the ideas put forward.

The spokesperson will share these ideas with the rest of the class.

In our student survey, six key issues emerged as having a significant impact on students' mental health.

Task One:
On your tables discuss the meaning of each point.

Task Two:
Discuss and write down

- What the positive strategies would look like
- What the negative strategies would look like when trying to deal with this situation.

(Try for at least 6 points for each)

REMEMBER YOUR ROLES!

Extension: When discussing each strategy look at short-term and long-term effects.

Academic/exam pressure

Sleep difficulties

Anxiety

Low mood

Friendship issues

Family stress

Beyond these four walls

Identify an excellent strategy you have discussed in your group.

Your emotional health and wellbeing

Which helpline have you looked at?

Identify a strategy that has been shared from a different group.

Exit card
State one thing you are going to do to improve your emotional health and wellbeing.

From what you have heard in the discussion, complete these two boxes on your worksheet; try to add in as much detail as possible.



in partnership with



Wellbeing Award for Schools

Take the next step to changing the long-term culture of your school and embed an ethos where mental health is everyone's responsibility.

Join nearly 400 schools currently working through the award framework to ensure effective practice and provision is in place to promote the emotional wellbeing and mental health of pupils and staff.



Moje imie
jest Hania.
Ja mam 7 lat
i ja ide do 2
klasy.
Ja gram w
tennisa.
My name is
Hanna.
I am 7 years
old and I
am in year
2.
I also go to
tennis.

Engaging children through cross-border collaboration

SENCO, class teacher and eTwinning ambassador **Kate Keaveny** explains how she uses eTwinning to promote inclusivity, broaden horizons and support learning in her primary school

The picture above is the opening page of an ebook that one of our Year 1 pupils sent to our partner class in Poland in the course of an eTwinning project we ran last year. She also made a video in three languages, as the Polish pupils were learning Spanish with their foreign language assistant and we sometimes joined in their lessons over Skype.

For Hanna, the project provided an opportunity to share experiences with children of her own age from her homeland as she adjusted to life in a new school and country. For her classmates, it opened their eyes to a world beyond their immediate surroundings and helped them appreciate that Hanna's cultural background was a little different from

theirs, something they had not quite grasped before.

Indeed, the first time she spoke in Polish during a Skype call, a little boy on the autistic spectrum was completely thrown. 'Why is Hanna not speaking English?' he asked, so we explained, and the next time he was prepared for it, saying: 'Now Hanna is going to speak Polish.' But even for the others, it brought home that she could actually speak two languages and made them reflect on how hard that must be.

Learning together

eTwinning.net is a vast online community that brings together teachers from all over Europe to share ideas, learn from each other and develop collaborative projects for their pupils. Open to all types of school

and all age groups from three to 19, it is free to join, safe and easy to use. I have used it in three different settings over the last nine years as a way of engaging pupils in purposeful learning. It has worked superbly in every case.

My current school is All Saints Church of England Primary School in Coalville, an ex-mining town in a deprived part of north-west Leicestershire. A lot of our children have never been into Leicester, let alone further afield. Others might have travelled abroad, but only to resorts geared up for British tourists where they will have seen very little of local life. Then there is a third group who have come to us from European countries like Romania, Turkey and Poland – we have a few Nepalese children as well – and who speak English as their second language.

But the others didn't really recognise that these children might speak another language or have things to share about their homeland. eTwinning has helped them to understand how their new their classmates might feel and raised their awareness of the wider world.

It has also ignited a real interest in learning, helping to drive up standards

in a school where results had been disappointing and engagement levels quite low.

Inclusivity

Around 35% of our pupils have identified SEND, including autistic spectrum disorder, ADHD, dyslexia and global developmental delay, and some have additional medical needs as well. As the SENCO, I am very keen that our projects are inclusive for all children without exception. So where some schools might see the platform as the ideal vehicle for bringing foreign languages alive, while I see it that way too, I always make it clear to prospective partners that my primary objective is to develop our pupils' language skills in English, and that by sharing their work with others, that will help them to engage with learning.

I always start with the spoken language, developing children's vocabulary and making sure they understand that for somebody who doesn't understand English, we have to speak slowly and clearly. For children who often come to us with poor communication skills, developing better listening and speaking skills as early as possible is a priority and eTwinning helps with that.

“Children can see the purpose of using a word bank because they want to get it right”

On my arrival two and a half years ago, I introduced Widgit symbols across the school to help the children to communicate, as well as Makaton in Early Years Foundation stage and in whole-school assemblies. We incorporate those into our projects as a way of showing the children that there are many different ways of communicating, not just by knowing a person's native language. When we do shared stories, for example, Widgit symbols help our partners to follow the story line we have started and develop it further using a mixture of language and symbols.

Exchanging a toy

The projects that work best in our setting are those where we send a physical object to our partners. A format I have used many times, here and elsewhere, is to



Bob the bear visits All Saints Primary School from Italy

exchange a class teddy bear, who serves as a stimulus for making the children think about and discuss what it might feel like to travel to another country. That then opens that door to talking about those pupils we have arriving from elsewhere who perhaps don't understand the language and how we can make them feel more welcome. This in turn leads into conversations about other ways of communicating and how we actually learn and develop our language within school.

It also sets the context for exploring what we have in common with our partners abroad and how our lives are different. We take it right down to the basics. The fact that we wear a school uniform and they don't. That our class sizes are similar but the school day may be organised slightly differently. We look at school holidays as well, sharing Christmas and Easter traditions and what we do to celebrate.

When the bear arrives from the other school, we let different children take it home for the weekend and ask them to keep a diary. A number of parents don't have particularly good writing skills and

would feel quite anxious about coming into school to share something they had written. So to begin with we ask them to record the weekend's highlights through pictures, recordings and videos. When a teddy bear arrived from Italy, one family welcomed him by having pizza for tea and took a photo of the meal, with the bear in pride of place. Another child baked cakes with the bear and brought them in to share. It is a lovely way of building bridges with parents and getting them involved in their children's learning.

Writing for an audience

When we move on to writing, it's great to be able to tell the children: 'These children or their teachers are going to translate what we write, so we are going to have to make sure that we get all our spellings right and check that no mistakes slip through,' and really encourage them to think of their audience. It works, and they take meticulous care.

They are also motivated by what our partners send in return. For example, one of the older classes exchanged Christmas cards, and when they saw the beautiful cursive handwriting and fine detail of the cards they received, it inspired them to think more about their own presentation. No matter how often the teacher tells them that presentation matters, it is only when they see an example of superb work done by a child of their own age that they think: 'Wow. That is amazing. We need to make ours even better.'

Supporting inclusion

How we approach preparing the materials we send to our partners is based on children's needs. Quite often, we get them



Hanna teaches her classmates how to count up to three in Polish



Children in the Netherlands record the highlights of Sam's visit from England

Advice for schools starting out

- Start with something small and simple, and find just one good partner. Managing a big project with multiple partners is much harder.
- Take advantage of the professional development opportunities available for free, both online and face to face. An eTwinning conference, in the UK or abroad, is a great place to meet potential partners, as well as introducing you to the key principles underpinning a successful project.
- Make use of the abundant resources available online, including tried-and-tested project kits covering different areas of the curriculum for different age groups. These can be used just as they are or adapted to suit your context.
- Seek advice. eTwinning ambassadors are people who have run numerous projects themselves and been trained to support others. Don't be afraid to contact them.
- Don't feel overwhelmed by the technology side. Twinspace, the shared secure space where you run your project, might appear off-putting at first, but it is actually quite straightforward when you get the hang of it.
- Be realistic. One of the greatest challenges you might face could be managing the expectations of a partner who has more time to dedicate to eTwinning than you do. Make clear from the start what you are hoping to achieve through the project and how that fits in with your everyday practice.
- That last point is probably the most important. Don't see eTwinning as an additional extra. Use it to help the children to make progress in a specific area of teaching and learning and incorporate it into your scheme of work.

to work in pairs, which can help them to produce something a little more extensive as they can support each other. However, some children much prefer working on their own, which is fine. We use iPads for some of the work, which allows them to combine text with images and spoken language.

A lot of planning goes in beforehand to work out how we can support those children who could perhaps find it more difficult to access what they need. We use all the good practice things you would expect to see in a classroom, such as writing frames to provide scaffolding and banks of vocabulary. The crucial difference is that they can see the purpose of using a word bank because they want to get it right; so they became better at using the additional tools we give them to support their finished product.

Jokes, university and cultural diversity

In my first year at the school, Year 2 joined a huge joke-telling project linking 28 schools from all over Europe that went on to win the eTwinning award for child-centred learning for that year. One boy with ADHD absolutely loved it – it really appealed to his sense of humour. What made it especially good from our point of view was that even children who struggle with reading and writing can become superb joke-tellers if they master the secrets of good delivery, like facial expression, voice projection and timing – more useful skills.

The teacher who led the project, who works in a predominantly Muslim inner-

city Leicester school, also got in touch with De Montford University, who arranged for two comedians to run a workshop with the children. There were three Leicestershire schools involved, all very different in terms of the makeup of the school population. The boy with ADHD and a number of other children were hugely excited. If a visit to Leicester city centre was already a novel experience, setting foot inside a university was something they couldn't even begin to imagine. Afterwards they described it as 'the best day ever that year'. They had met two professional comedians, told jokes and interacted with children they might otherwise never have met, helping to counter racist attitudes that might set in as they grow older. Given the largely white community they belong to, helping them to understand that we live in a diverse country is tremendously important.

Extending eTwinning across the school

In that first year, besides joining in the joke-telling project, I ran a teddy bear project for years 1 and 2. The following year, a Year 1 class did a puppet exchange based on the bear model and a Year 6 teacher developed a lovely new project of her own, where pupils interacted with their counterparts abroad to see if they shared the same concerns about moving on to secondary school. This year, a Year 3 class is engaged in a Flat Stanley project with schools in Poland and France and a Year 1 teacher is running her own adaptation of the bear exchange with another French school. It is important that eTwinning is not just seen as something you do with Ms Keaveny. Ultimately, I would like to see every class taking part and enjoying the benefits.

I am very fortunate, as I now know a number of teachers across Europe, people I know I can trust to commit to a project and not let things begin to drift halfway through. Developing those relationships is a skill in itself. But it means that I can get other teachers working with reliable teachers, which gets them off to a good start.

FIND OUT MORE

- **eTwinning** is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and managed in the UK by the British Council. For general information, case studies from a wide range of schools and advice on getting started, see www.eTwinning.net
- **Other international education programmes from the British Council:** <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org>



Jamie and some of his team out fundraising in the local community

Confidence, self-belief and challenge

The National Citizen Service offers teenagers a unique opportunity to live away from home, develop life skills and interact with young people from different backgrounds. **Karen Russell-Graham** investigates how accessible it is to young people with SEND

Imagine a team of 15- to 17-year-olds working together. Far from school and home, they take part in adventure activities, meet new people, develop new skills and manage a project. Confidence and employability increase; they learn to get along with people who are different from themselves. All for a maximum cost of £50.

That is the essence of National Citizen Service (NCS), a government-funded programme which aims to improve social cohesion by 'fostering understanding between young people of different backgrounds', as well as increasing social mobility and promoting social engagement. Spread over four weeks during the summer holidays (or two weeks for the shorter half-term programme), it combines personal development and team-building activities with the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills and make a contribution to the wellbeing of the wider community.

Working in mixed teams of 12-15, participants embark on a journey of exploration comprising three phases. Phase 1 is Adventure: living at an outdoor activity centre, they challenge themselves to try out exciting activities like abseiling, rock climbing and canoeing while getting to know their team. After a weekend at home, they move on to Phase 2, Discovery, designed to develop life skills like confidence, leadership and communication in a university-style environment. During Phase 3, they put their newfound skills to practical use to design and deliver a social action project in their local community, from conception to planning, fundraising and putting their vision into practice.

Their journey culminates in a formal graduation ceremony, but it doesn't end there. Once they have their certificate under their belt, the young people become part of an alumni network, opening up opportunities to build on what they have learned to develop further projects with their new colleagues and friends.

NCS for all?

Annual evaluation reports show that the overwhelming majority of participants enjoy the experience, are proud of what they have achieved and feel the programme has helped them to develop skills that will be useful for the future. They also feel they have gained a better understanding of their abilities and, crucially, discovered they are capable of more than they had realised.

Such outcomes would be especially valuable for students with SEND, but how easy is it for these young people to take part? The NCS website makes its intentions clear: 'The NCS is committed to being open to all. We will look to accommodate young people with disabilities wherever possible, and all NCS providers are trained to a high standard to be able to assess individual needs and help everyone enjoy the NCS experience.'

One young man who thoroughly enjoyed taking part is 16-year-old Jack Mitchell, who has ADHD and autistic traits. While sociable, he struggles to interact



NCS gives Jamie the confidence and skills to make cakes independently from start to finish

appropriately; he found it difficult to fit in at school and establish a friendship group. His mother was attracted to the NCS after hearing how a friend's daughter had become more confident and self-assured. 'Jack was very sceptical at first,' she says. 'He told me he was nervous because he didn't know anyone, but I knew that if we could encourage him to give it a try he would really enjoy it.'

Jack undertook activities such as helping his team pitch their idea to a *Dragon's Den*-style panel and working for a charity. 'By the end of the first week he was buzzing,' Ms Mitchell recalls, 'full of excitement and stories of new friendships and a social trip that he had planned. He didn't want to come home!'

Embedding inclusion

The NCS is delivered by a variety of partners in different parts of the

Jamie's story

A student in the Aylesbury Vale area who has benefited enormously from participating in NCS is Jamie Potton. Jamie has Down syndrome and struggles to articulate his views, but is unequivocal in his endorsement of the programme.

'I liked playing games best, but disliked walking up hills,' he says. 'I learned to help with animals, and raised money for Tiggywinkles [Wildlife Hospital Visitor's Centre]. I feel more grown up, and was very happy to receive my certificate. If someone was worried about doing NCS, I would tell them that it was fun.'

His mother Helen describes his experience in more depth. 'Jamie came home from school very excited about an NCS talk in assembly,' she recounts. 'He kept saying: "I want to do this!" He was excited about the activities, but also the idea of doing things in a group and helping one another.'

Although the NCS assured his teachers that it was possible for Jamie to be safe with extra cover, his parents still had reservations. 'In Year 5, his school and classmates were able to support his "foibles" on a residential trip,' Ms Potton explains, 'but he is now in Year 11 and his sense of danger isn't as fully developed as other students of his age. We felt he might run off and hide and we were terrified they would lose him, or that he would hurt himself or be bullied.'

'However, communication was good and school was clear about provision. We highlighted concerns about him sleeping in a tent with others: he might take or hide something he liked, even though he knows it is wrong, or walk out in the middle of the night. Having his own tent and extra supervision solved the issue.'

The introductory team-building events (bowling and waters sports) also helped Jamie to settle in, although his father watched from afar as a precautionary measure. In the event, the family's fears were unfounded. 'The kids took Jamie to get his shoes and helped him bowl,' Ms Potton explains, 'but not in a "mothering way" so he still had to things for himself. Meanwhile, at water sports he did things we thought might have scared him. I think this came from having the extra freedom.'

Increased self-confidence and independence

After NCS, Jamie was significantly more confident and independent. 'For example, he had cooked and learned to make a cup of tea,' his mother says. 'Now he makes tea for me from start to finish. He puts his hand in mine less often now. He is more conscious of his appearance and will choose things to wear, which he didn't do before.'

It wasn't all easy, however, and on one occasion the nature of the day's activity meant that Jamie had to stay at home. 'It was the right decision,' Ms Potton recalls, 'but difficult for him to handle. We also had one phone call while he was away; Jamie needed to talk, the staff recognised that need, and afterwards he was fine.'

'My high point was Jamie making fundraising cakes independently. Previously he had only stirred the mixture but I made myself sit back while he weighed things out. They have to make mistakes themselves; for parents, that can be the hardest bit.'

When asked for advice for other parents she has three top tips.

- Ask lots of questions, even if they sound silly.
- See it as an opportunity.
- Stand back, be brave, and let them get on with it!

Social cohesion

Alison Moor, Jamie's team leader from Action4Youth, found her job '10 times easier' because the group took Jamie under their wing. 'There was a learning curve, but never a problem or issue,' she says. 'He struggled with some things, such as coasteering in Devon, but every young person will find some part of the programme a challenge, so Jamie was no different in that respect. He had huge stamina, gave everything a go. He did the programme as well as anyone else.'

And, of course, when students leave school they have to integrate with other people, whether or not they have special needs. 'I am biased,' she admits, 'but I think it's a brilliant opportunity. It's such a buzz seeing them on their journey. The majority are nervous about meeting their team, but by the end of the first event they are fine.'

Meanwhile, for the rest of the group, having Jamie as a member of their team was an enriching experience. 'Everyone taking part benefits from learning to work together,' she notes. 'Jamie's group had to learn to be more patient, but they willingly accepted him into their midst and took a genuine interest in him as a person. I think young people are often unfairly criticised, but in my experience NCS reinforces the positive attitudes they already have.'



During the Adventure phase, participants challenge themselves to try out activities they may never have done before

country, each offering a slightly different experience, but there is a universal commitment to inclusivity and a desire to improve access. This is reflected in the latest figures, which show a 53% increase in the number of SEND participants since 2015, with more than 10,800 undertaking the programme between 2015 and 2017.

‘The NCS helps to tackle some of the biggest social challenges in the country,’ says NCS director of impact Naim Moukarzel. ‘As a network that cares about being inclusive, we help participants develop key skills and build self-confidence for their future and we want to make sure all young people have the opportunity to benefit.

‘We have initiated a project to identify and share best practice across our network, and scope how we can further develop and embed inclusion in our future delivery, so that we continuously improve how we make it easier for those with additional needs to access NCS.’

Linking up with schools

Emily Davis is project manager of Action4Youth, the NCS provider for the Aylesbury Vale area in Buckinghamshire which is home to two special schools. Although families are free to enrol their child independently online, to ensure the best possible outcomes, she delivers presentations in schools to clarify what the programme entails, outline its aims and objectives and answer questions. Even when parents of SEND students complete the application form themselves, she requests additional information about the child from the school.

‘A parent may not include much detail or have difficulty due to language,’ she explains. ‘If we are unsure, we phone them. The more we know about a child’s difficulties, the better we can support them to access all that the programme has to offer.’

Last year, about 40 young people with varying degrees of SEND, including autism, Asperger syndrome, Down



NCS graduate Jack Marshall has Moebius Syndrome, a rare neurological condition that makes it difficult for him to walk without assistance; he is blind in his left eye, has no facial nerves, and has difficulty pronouncing sounds. As the programme got underway, it wasn’t long before Jack was inspiring his peers and leading by example. ‘There was one girl who was scared of heights and wouldn’t do the activity,’ he says. ‘So I did it myself, and she realised she could do it too. I think I really opened their eyes.’ (NCS annual report 2016-7)

syndrome and social interaction difficulties, took part in Action4Youth’s summer courses. She believes that NCS is of special benefit to these young people. ‘Lots of SEND children have not stayed away from home before, or have always had someone to speak for them,’ she explains. ‘They get to meet different people, become independent and have to look after themselves.’

Not every child’s needs can be met, however. All participants have the same funding allocation, and although initially there was an additional access fund to support high-level requirements, this has subsequently been withdrawn. Ms Davis recalls a wheelchair user requiring one-to-one care who successfully completed the course. ‘That same lad could not take part now,’ she says. ‘We can do a lot, but we cannot support nursing and full-time caring needs. We do not have that expertise.’

A national institution grounded in the local community

Since its launch as a pilot scheme by a group of social entrepreneurs in 2009, NCS has grown exponentially from 8,000 participants in its first year to 93,000 in 2016-2017, a 22% increase on the figures for the previous year. Originally run by the Cabinet Office, as it continued to expand, management was devolved in

2012 to the NCS Trust, a not-for-profit social enterprise which has established a vast network of grassroots partners, each with their own area of local expertise and a passion for inspiring young people.

With cross-party support, the programme was put on a permanent statutory footing with the National Citizen Service Act of 2017, which sets out ‘to build a movement over one million strong by 2020, with a goal that NCS becomes a celebrated right of passage for young people across the country.’

Perhaps the last word should rest with NCS graduate John Wilson, who admits to having been ‘constantly in detentions’ and ‘messing around’ before he joined the programme, so much so that he didn’t even think he would last to the end of his GCSEs. ‘Since NCS, it’s been a massive change,’ he says ‘It’s changed the way I see things, the way I see people, the doors that are open to me and my whole future. NCS has brought all of those things together.’

Karen Russell-Graham is a freelance writer

FIND OUT MORE

- **National Citizen Service:** www.ncsyes.co.uk
- **NCS annual report 2016-2017:** <http://bit.ly/sc241-05>
- **Action4Youth:** www.action4youth.org

Rebecca Ward is adept at engaging pupils' interest in learning



Becoming an HLTA

Why might a TA consider going for HLTA status and what's in it for the school? We spoke to the 2017 Outstanding Higher Level Teaching Assistant of the Year, **Rebecca Ward**, and her headteacher **Lee Earnshaw** to find out

Courtlands School is a special school in Plymouth for children aged four to 11 with moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health needs and a range of other needs such as ADHD and dyspraxia, mild autism and speech and language difficulties.

Rebecca Ward joined the school 11 years ago. Her children had just started school and she was looking for a job she could fit in round family commitments and she thought she would enjoy. After

gaining some experience by working as a volunteer, she was put on the supply list, where she completed her NVQ levels 2 and 3. She was subsequently appointed on a permanent contract and three years later, along with three other TAs, was offered the opportunity to train as an HLTA.

Why did you want to become an HLTA?

I knew I didn't want to become a teacher, but I wanted to go beyond being a TA, to

better myself and get a mixture of both worlds.

I especially enjoy the teaching side of it. If the teacher's not there, I know the routine, I know what is expected and I know the children, so they get continuity and the standard of teaching and learning the teacher would expect.

It is just brilliant working alongside the teacher rather than being a TA. Last term I was supporting a teacher in the senior leadership team, who taught in the morning and handed over to me two and a half afternoons a week. I found that very rewarding. We both felt the same way about education, we both had the same values, so we worked really well together.

She is out on maternity leave this term and I have been able to help her replacement to settle in because I know the class and the work they have been doing so well.

The HLTA professional standards cover a huge range of skills. How have you acquired these?

They are mostly things you are already doing and through the preparation process you identify the gaps and address them, with support from the school. I have been very fortunate. The headteacher is hugely supportive and we get a lot of support from teaching staff as well. We attend Inset days and other training events, work with the teachers on resource development and lesson planning – everything really.

Some of the training comes from outside providers, but a lot of it is provided in-house by staff who have a particular area of expertise. In addition, if there is course I am interested in, or the head sees something he thinks the four of us would find useful as HLTAs, he arranges for us go.

While we were preparing our evidence for HLTA status, he let us have time out simultaneously so we could work together and support each other. That was very helpful too.



A pupil takes great care with his work as Rebecca Ward looks on

I think you learn an awful lot from the children themselves. I have been here 11 years now, and you pick up a lot over time.

Have you any idea why you won the award?

I think it was probably for the work I do supporting families.

Once a month on a Saturday I run a

club called Great Escape, which gives parents a welcome day off and provides the children with fun activities and life skill experiences – from learning to ride a bike, building camp fires and climbing, to quieter pursuits like arts and crafts. I am responsible for organising it all and managing the six TAs who come in to support me.

The scheme also runs during the summer holidays for two weeks, when we include all sorts of trips, such as cinema visits, outings to the bowling alley or a day at Paignton Zoo.

In addition, I provide respite with a couple of children in my own home. I collect them from their homes and take them out for a day at the beach or on the moors, which allows their parents to have some time to themselves or spend quality time with siblings.

Another of the extra things I do is to organise lunchtime arrangements for the whole school. I manage clubs for the children and arrange rotas for the staff who support the children in the clubs and outside, as well as those of the mealtime assistants.

Encouraging ambition

Lee Earnshaw explains why he believes in developing his staff and the rewards he reaps in return

When I came here nine years ago, the structure was very flat. All the TAs were paid the same, regardless of experience or qualifications. There was no career structure, nothing to raise aspirations or encourage ambition.

I have always favoured a ladder approach for people who come into our profession, perhaps not through a university route, but through a vocational route. I want a pathway that lets them see that they can progress in their careers through taking on additional responsibility and additional training. That benefits them as professionals but, most importantly, it benefits the children.

Today, people can join the school as an apprentice TA, gain their level 2 and level 3, and then their level 4 if they have HLTA status; we've also had people go on from there into teacher training. That wasn't possible before. In order to get to the point where you could consider

teacher training, you had to leave us and go elsewhere.

I always felt that wasn't necessarily the best approach, either for the individuals concerned or for us, especially in a specialist environment where the skill set required is quite different from what it would look like in a mainstream school. I wanted to be able to develop specialist support staff who would each have an area of expertise within our setting that they could then share around the rest of the school.

Distributed leadership

It is also about supporting distributed leadership. Traditionally leadership in schools was very hierarchical, with the head making all the decisions. I was keen to get away from that by gaining everyone's views and developing people's leadership skills. That is why Ms Ward is on our senior leadership team in her capacity as an HLTA; it allows me to have

a direct voice from our support staff in every senior leadership meeting, and a direct practitioner's voice back, ensuring high quality communication between senior leaders and staff throughout the school.

It sends a bigger message as well.

Because we are entrusting people at different levels with quite a lot of responsibility, it values everybody. It shouts out that no matter who you are, you can be the person who comes up with the genius idea that solves a problem for everyone. That in turn boosts people's confidence and raises their aspirations.

Four HLTAs in one go

Ms Ward was one of four HLTAs we appointed at the same time. That might sound a lot and initially I was only looking for two. But when I offered the opportunity, four people put themselves forward, and I thought: 'Why not give them all the chance to develop their skills and expertise, and when they have completed the process, select two for the posts?' In the event, we changed the structure, so that instead of having two full-time HLTAs, we ended up with four

Career development

part-time HLTAs to take on different roles around the school. That has been absolutely fantastic.

The added advantage of having four people prepare their application together was that they could bounce ideas off each other, support each other and have different projects that all led to the same end goal. In effect, it combined individual challenge with mutual support.

Extra responsibilities

As the support staff member of the SLT, one of Ms Ward's responsibilities is to make sure that lunchtimes are appropriately staffed and our pupils are happy and safe. We only have three mealtime assistants, whose role is mainly to set up and clean up afterwards, and our staff take care of the rest. A lot of our pupils struggle at lunchtime, so the specialist skills of our staff are just as important in the playground as they are in class. Obviously everyone needs a break, and sorting out the rota is incredibly complex. Ms Ward takes it in her stride and does a superb job.

Teaching and learning

Ms Ward demonstrates exceptional skills in the classroom, helping our pupils overcome their difficulties and gain a love of learning.



Rebecca Ward stands by in the playground to ensure all pupils are happy and safe

We use her as a cover teacher for part of the time. We don't expect her to start from scratch and plan and assess the children in the same way that a teacher would do. The last thing I would want to do is take advantage of my HLTAs and say they are effectively replacement teachers. They are not.

But they are very skilled at supporting classes and they are already very familiar to the children. That is really important in a special school. If we call in a supply teacher, our support staff pretty much do everything anyway and the children's

anxiety levels go shooting up. 'What will this person react to? What will they expect me to do?' So it is better in many, many ways to have someone within the school who is able to step in, deliver the teacher's planning and support the children from a perspective of really knowing both the school and the children. Moreover, it's quite difficult to find a supply teacher with the expected level of SEND understanding. So the children benefit however you look at it.

Over and above

I think the reason Ms Ward won the award was the added value she brings. It is not just that she is fantastic as an HLTA in meeting the standards and fulfilling her job description. It is that going above and beyond, going the extra mile.

She offers respite care in her own home for some of our children. She also runs our weekend and holiday activity club, predominantly for our own pupils but other children come too from the city's other special schools. We piloted it together because there isn't anything in Plymouth for our kind of children. If you have severe learning difficulties, or you are physically impaired, there are things for you. If you are a mainstream child, there are things for you. But there is nothing in the middle.

Ms Ward has taken our pilot and run with it, establishing a highly successful club. We have around 30-35 children each time and they love it.

At the same time, she is super humble and has been completely taken aback by all the attention she has attracted. Moreover, because she is such a lovely, approachable person, she inspires everyone else to do that little bit extra. She expects it, but not in the sense of demanding it. She just expects it, and therefore it happens. She's a gem.

Applying for HLTA status

While the role of TAs is to support students in the classroom or work with individuals and small groups, HLTAs are more proactively involved in the delivery of teaching and learning by:

- providing assistance in planning lessons
- having a role in producing support materials
- leading a whole class under the direction of a teacher
- specialising in a given subject or learning need
- taking responsibility for other support staff.

To apply, you need to already be working as a TA and have support from your headteacher. Schools and local authorities no longer receive government funding to train HLTAs, so you must discuss funding with your school. It is also up to headteachers to approach relevant training providers and organise assessment.

Skills and experience required

You need to:

- demonstrate that you meet the 33 HLTA professional standards
- have English and maths skills at level 2 or equivalent
- know how to use ICT to support your work
- be trained in relevant learning strategies, e.g. literacy
- have specialist skills training in a curriculum area, e.g. sign language.

The process

Training needs analysis. It is important to identify any gaps in your experience, knowledge or skills which might prevent you from gaining HLTA status. These must be addressed before you start the preparation process.

Preparation. You will attend a three-day course to explore the 33 standards and reflect on how you meet these in your various roles within your setting. You then spend several months completing eight assessment tasks to demonstrate that you fulfil the requirements of each one.

Assessment. The assessor will visit the school for half a day to explore the evidence you have provided in more detail through discussions with you, your headteacher (or a representative) and a nominated teacher.

Outcome. You will be informed of the outcome up to eight weeks later. If you have failed to meet the requirements in a few minor respects, you will be advised on appropriate next steps and, once you have carried these through, may be able to gain HLTA status through a partial reassessment rather than going through the whole process again.

For detailed guidance, see <http://hlta.org.uk>

Students inspect a frame of honey from the flow hive



Beekeeping in the curriculum

Berenger Allee explains how a fascination for bees is opening up the curriculum for pupils at his school

Some schools keep a hamster in the classroom, a few keep chickens or rabbits in the grounds. Here at Charlton Park Academy we keep bees.

This may seem counterintuitive in a special school: unlike animals, which usually relax when you stroke them, bees require the beekeeper to be calm first, and to remain calm even if the bees start flying around in their thousands. People working with bees find this out quickly. For children and young people with learning difficulties, beekeeping helps them learn the importance of maintaining a calm demeanour no matter what the bees are doing. The calmer they are, the calmer the bees.

Beekeeping at Charlton Park began two years ago following a discussion about how to include more outdoor learning into the curriculum. As a beekeeper, I had recently visited nearby Charlton Manor Primary School where they keep bees and was inspired to follow their lead (see box overleaf).

Choosing the right bees

Charlton Park is a special school for students aged 11 to 21. About half the students have ASD, a few have severe physical disabilities, including cerebral palsy, some have specific learning difficulties, such as dyspraxia and dyslexia, and some have severe learning difficulties.

Some experience and/or knowledge is required to keep bees; there are currently two of us in the school who qualify in that respect – me and my colleague, Vitor Lopez, who went on a course run by our local beekeepers' association. Other staff are keen to learn – it is not a difficult skill to pick up.

After much thought, we decided to use flow hives, the latest design in hives from Australia, combined with a strain of bee called Carnolian, which is typically docile. Nevertheless, opening up a hive can make even these sweet-tempered bees irritable, particularly when we are 'stealing' their honey, which can make the whole environment quite stressful. This

is where the flow hive comes into its own, because it allows us to take off the honey without opening it up. The hive also has observation panels in the sides through which students can see the honey and the bees working.

We now have three hives, two flow hives and a traditional hive called a National. This year the students assisted me in two small honey harvests from the flow hives. This involved simply cranking a handle and within seconds honey poured out of the hive through a tube. It took two and a half hours to take off a bucket and a half of honey. The hive's design is such that all the manipulations are done at the back, away from the main entrance, so, while the bees were attracted by the smell of honey, they were not aggressive because the hive was still closed.

Beekeeping in the curriculum

Beekeeping lends itself to cross-curricular learning – the students are absolutely

Outdoor learning



Berenger Allee and a student consult the plan for building a hive



A student helps Berenger Allee construct a new hive

fascinated by the bees, which means that they are really engaged in anything to do with them. In literacy, they might read or write poems about bees. The Year 7s are doing a topic around puppets – naturally the subject is beekeeping – and they made a queen bee and some worker bees. In maths, we can talk about shapes and measures and weights. For example, we can weigh the hives in the morning and evening and consider the many reasons why the weight might be rising or falling. The science angle is obvious. If teachers

want to take their students to look at how the colony works, they can go down to the hive and view them through the observation window without disturbing the bees.

Beekeeping as an activity is open to everyone in school – from next year, it will form part of our curriculum for Key Stage 3 students when we will introduce the British Beekeepers' Association Junior Certificate, which is well suited for our students. This comprises four elements: oral questions about beekeeping, demonstrating how to examine a frame

of bees, a small piece of course work and keeping a beekeeping diary. Meanwhile, the British Beekeepers' Association is launching a new teaching pack for primary schools this spring which we intend to buy.

Getting parents on board

Not one parent balked at the idea of keeping bees at the school. On the contrary, many were keen for their children to benefit from the experience. Naturally there were anxious questions at the start about whether there would

Beekeeping as a confidence builder

Tim Baker, headteacher of Charlton Manor Primary School, talks about the difference beekeeping has made to pupils.

Our school has kept bees for seven years. It began when a swarm alighted at the school entrance. The children were fascinated and wanted to get closer to look at them while the staff anxiously tried to keep them away and wondered if we should close the school.

This rocked me. Not a beekeeper at the time, I still thought it muddle-headed that we teach children about how good bees are for the environment and then panic if we come across a swarm. Consequently two members of staff and I went on a



Nick Shelley, the school beekeeper and gardener, opens up the observation panels for children to see inside the hive

course at our local beekeepers' association and set up the school hive the following summer.

Beekeeping is a summer activity. The school gardener manages the bees during the holidays. He happened to be on the same introductory course as my staff and me and now keeps his own bees.

The hive is set up next to a bus shelter-like structure which allows children to visit it any time to observe the bees flying in and out without the need to get dressed in protective clothing. Our hive also includes glass panels that can be uncovered, enabling pupils to see right into the hive without disturbing the bees. The main beekeeping sessions are carried out after school and everyone involved is fully suited up.

The activity is open to all pupils, but each year we end up with a core of around 15 pupils who are particularly keen. They take part in weekly inspections on a rota. They practise their skills on a virtual hive until they feel ready to work with bees, and we keep the group that is handling the bees small – just three or four pupils at a time.

Beekeeping allows staff to expose children to risk in a safe way. Meanwhile, when it comes to children with SEND, beekeeping is a hugely inclusive activity and a great leveller. Helping with the colony has made a difference to two children in particular, one with ADHD and one with ASD, both lacking in self-esteem and confidence. I don't know



Pupils assess this year's honey harvest

what it is about bees, but the children's difficulties seem to fade when they work with them. They behave responsibly and take the risks in their stride. They have blossomed so much that they were able to give a really good presentation to members of the local beekeeping association recently, as well as to the local MP and dignitaries.



Tim Baker is headteacher of Charlton Manor Primary School, London



One student controls the smoker as the other starts to remove a frame of honey



Zippering up carefully to keep bees out of suits is part of the drill

be bees in the classroom and where we planned to site the hives. In fact, these are kept well away from the playground and properly fenced off. To date, the only grievance is that there is not enough honey for everyone.

We took time to explain to parents how their children might react to bee stings and the possible danger of anaphylactic shock. Meanwhile, the school completed reams of risk assessments and staff received training on what to do if someone had a bad reaction to a sting.

In the event, only one student was stung last year. I called his parents straight away, anxious that they might stop him taking part in the activity. As it turned out, they were more worried that I might exclude him from the bee club.

Developing confidence

The students' reactions to bees surprised me. They are captivated by these busy little creatures. A few, who used to be scared of any insects, have turned out to be my most enthusiastic assistants. Everybody is anxious about things they do not understand, and every parent tells their child that bees sting, so at first students were really, really careful around the hive, walking slowly and close to each other. Now they are fearless. There may be lots of bees flying around them but they don't get alarmed any more.

It's a question of teaching them to be steady and sensible around bees. I model calm behaviour and show them that if I don't flap my arms and behave aggressively, the bees remain calm too, and that provided students are properly protected, it is acceptable, and indeed interesting, to have bees land on them.

The school has invested in a range of bee suits in different sizes so that almost everyone can take a turn to gather

around the hive to observe. For children in wheelchairs, dressing up in a bee suit is a lengthy process, and yet two of them regularly come down to visit the hives with us. The rest of the students wear veils and stand further away.

“ *The students are captivated by these busy little creatures* ”

Working in small groups

Students have really taken to beekeeping. Right from the start they helped unpack and assemble the flow hive. I work with groups of three or four students at a time down in the apiary. They are learning how to inspect a frame of bees, and what to look for in terms of pollen stores, honey and brood. They are always mesmerised by how the bees continue to go about their business on the frame when I do this, maybe even doing a waggle dance to communicate to other bees the location of a source of forage.

One student will be in charge of the smoker and will gently waft smoke over the colony. Bees' reaction to smoke is to drink honey so that they have a supply of food with them if the 'fire' forces them to evacuate their nest, so they are more intent on feeding than flying around. Another student will be in charge of taking lots of pictures, which I put up on the whiteboard later to stimulate a discussion with the rest of the students about what we saw in the hive that day. We'll talk about the different jobs bees have, such as nursing the brood or standing guard to protect the colony from wasps, and how every bee has an important and valuable role in this community.

From time to time, I might encourage students to pick up a drone and pass it around – drones do not have stings. Until now, I carried out full colony inspections on my own; this summer, I plan to invite one or two of the keenest and most confident students to help me with this.

As a special needs school, classroom learning does not suit our students. They do best when they are active, on their feet and with their eyes popping out in excitement. Keeping bees offers us endless possibilities to harness their fascination in these social insects.

Tips for other schools

- Contact a local beekeeper or your local beekeepers' association. If no one at the school is a beekeeper but you feel it would be a good addition to your curriculum, getting some training in beekeeping is easy.
- Consider the environment. You need an accessible outdoor space away from classrooms and the playground.
- Get your colleagues on board – beekeeping offers a lot of scope for learning outside the classroom while making learning about nature, flowers, pollination and the environment more tangible and memorable.



Berenger Allee is head of design and technology and head beekeeper at Charlton Park Academy, London

@CPA_Beekeepers

FIND OUT MORE

- Flow hives: http://bit.ly/flow_hive
- The British Beekeepers' Association will put schools in touch with local beekeeping groups. This spring, it is launching an education pack especially designed for primary schools. www.bbka.org.uk

Timely support for dyslexia

Dyslexia in the Early Years

By Gavin Reid

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN 9781785920653

£14.99

Reviewed by Helen Punter-Bruce

Quite simply, this is a brilliant book whether you are an early years teacher, parent, therapist or special needs practitioner.

Gavin Reid is a renowned expert in the field of dyslexia and writes in great detail, backed up with research and practical experience. He includes a wealth of information which takes the reader through identification, assessments and screenings, interventions and individual and whole-class strategies for children who may be at risk of dyslexia. Several chapters provide vital contextual and specific information about the range of difficulties children may face, and how best to try and support these in a quality first teaching and inclusive manner.

Mr Reid also explores specific issues children may encounter as a result of social and emotional issues connected with dyslexia, information processing difficulties, poor working memory and metacognitive confusion.

One insightful chapter reviews current interventions and assessments. In keeping

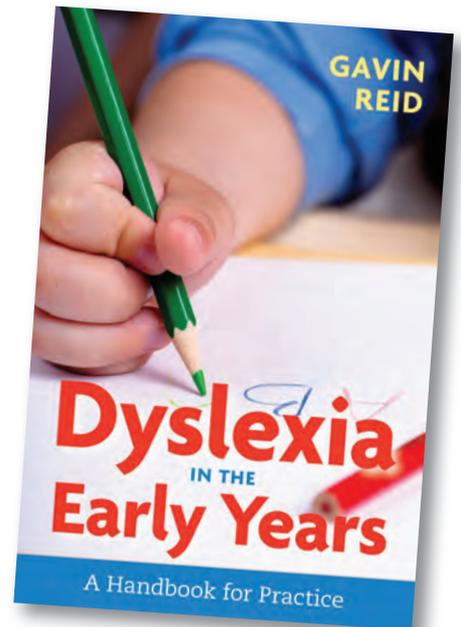
“A wealth of information”

with the rest of the book, this is thorough and an interesting read. Ideas for possible next steps and information about wider issues that may affect children’s academic development are covered in a clearly constructed and instructive way.

The book includes observation checklists, case studies, signposts to research and online material, a glossary and chapter summaries – the latter are useful for readers who do not have time to read the whole book.

As a former specialist early years SEN teacher, and now a whole-school primary inclusion manager, this book has provided me with a lot of useful information. I have already summarised the most valuable and practical parts to cascade to staff and parents.

It is refreshing to find dyslexia covered



in such an in-depth and contemporary manner, with the focus on early development – something I advocate.



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

Primary School in East Sussex

Insight on autism

How to support pupils with autism spectrum condition in primary school

By Lynn McCann

Published by LDA

ISBN 9781855035997

£17.99

Reviewed by Cate Wood

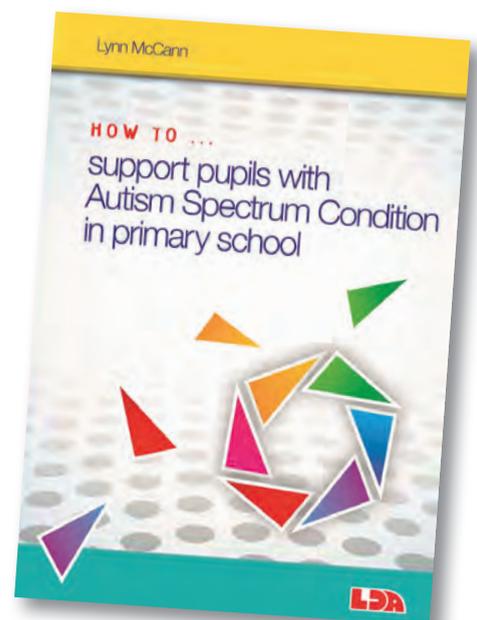
It is probably true to say that, of all the areas of special needs, autism is the one that is written about most frequently.

Bookshop shelves positively groan with material by parents, teachers, celebrities and people with autism; mainstream TV has featured dramas about living with the condition, and magazines and newspapers discuss the issue in two-page features.

So it was with some trepidation that I opened this book. I need not have worried. Lynn McCann has produced a lovely publication that does exactly what it says on the cover.

“It would also make insightful reading for secondary teachers and TAs”

The design uses a well-spaced font, plenty of headings and black and white illustrations. The chapters are cumulative, although there is enough information in each for ‘dipping in’ if a teacher has a specific need; for example, to understand



the link between behaviour and autism.

I particularly like the chapters on accessing the curriculum and supporting sensory processing – both are great reminders of simple strategies that can be used in a busy classroom environment. In fact, the chapter on sensory processing could be used as training material for anyone working with autistic children.

A CD-ROM containing supporting material accompanies the publication, and includes a range of documents, plans

and photocopiable activities.

Although the book is aimed at primary school teachers, and the chapter on accessing the curriculum uses primary school examples, in all honesty it would also make insightful reading for secondary teachers and TAs. The chapters on supporting change and transition, behaviour, supporting sensory processing and elements of accessing the curriculum would be particularly useful.

This is one book on autism that

has earned its place on the heaving bookshelves of your local bookstore. Ms McCann has written a useful, accessible, informative volume that even the busiest of teachers could read in a couple of evenings.



Cate Wood worked in SEN for almost 30 years as a teacher and a trainer. She now offers training around all aspects of special needs, and works for a children's charity

Which research has relevance for me?

What Does This Look Like in the Classroom? Bridging the gap between research and practice

By Carl Hendrick and Robin Macpherson

Published by John Catt Educational Ltd

ISBN 9781911382379

£18.00

Reviewed by Helen Curran

There is a growing number of movements seeking to engage teaching practitioners with educational research.

Events such as researchED and researchSEND, alongside weekly Twitter discussions that include #UKEdResChat, seek to engage wider audiences through presenting, exploring and discussing current educational research with a clear focus on relevance and impact within the classroom.

What Does This Look Like in the Classroom is a well thought-out book which endeavours to make the link between classroom practice and educational research explicit. A key challenge when reviewing any research is not only appreciating the potential flaws or bias, but equally the contradictions. The question that triggered the book is: 'How can busy teachers know which research is worth investing time in reading and understanding?' To address this, Hendrick and Macpherson asked 18 of 'today's leading educational thinkers to distil the most up-to-date research... in 10 important areas of teaching.' Contributors include Daisy Christodoulou, David Didau and Tom Bennett. Essentially, the sifting has been done for the reader.

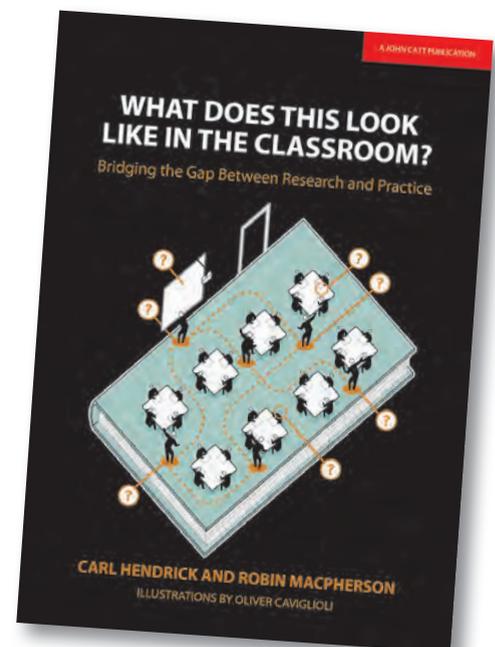
Topics include assessment, behaviour, SEN and motivation. Following an introduction to a topic, each chapter is essentially a conversation between two researchers discussing and responding to questions regarding a specific issue.

The authors have managed to distil complex and often confusing research areas into manageable chunks

The benefit of such an approach is that it allows different perspectives to be advanced, vital when discussing research, but equally it addresses the issue of teachers' lack of time to digest research.

Thanks to the layout and format, it is possible for a teacher to refer to a particular chapter of interest and read just a couple of the questions. The questions themselves are varied and address some fundamental and often controversial issues, as well as some of the common concerns. For example: 'I have heard a lot about the power of the testing effect. How can I best harness it?' and 'Is motivation a heritable trait like intelligence or can it be manipulated?' Other questions are more practical, such as: 'Can you give me three simple tips to support a child in my class with dyslexia?' with Maggie Snowling responding.

The authors have managed to distil complex and often confusing research areas into manageable chunks. The result is thought provoking and, as such, a resource I will be sharing with my students, in the hope that they will begin



to add their own answers to some of the questions.



Helen Curran is a senior lecturer in SEN at Bath Spa University. A former SENCO and LA SEN advisor, she recently submitted her PhD which explores the impact of the SEND reforms

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Creating prolific writers – Jo Neale



Night Zookeeper has partnered with Edinburgh Zoo to teach children amazing animal facts

Night Zookeeper is an online literacy tool that allows primary pupils to engage with a wonderful, magical world where anything can happen. I use it to inspire and engage a class with writing.

I came across it eight years ago. The starting point is a story about a boy transported into an enchanted world where he becomes the night zookeeper, responsible for looking after magical animals – this captured me from the start, along with the bright illustrations. While the website has developed and grown over time, one thing has remained constant: at every stage of its development, it has inspired my classes to write. We use it in years 4 to 6, with pupils spending a lesson on it once a week.

Pupils find the site super-easy to use and quickly learn to navigate around the different areas. We have our own blog – a strange mix of independent and teacher-led writing – which they contribute to from both school and home. It is also safe: everything is moderated by class teachers before it is published.

Somehow Night Zookeeper ignites a passion for creative writing, particularly

in reluctant writers, while it fosters the desire to be more creative in enthusiastic writers. There is lots of scope for free writing in addition to well-supported genre writing. The website supports pupils in many different ways, including advice on formatting, word banks, writing prompts and even a league table for those who are a bit more competitive.

“The website ignites a passion for creative writing”

It stimulates different types of interaction – pupils are encouraged to draw pictures and can play games. Boys in particular enjoy battling monsters from Nulth, sometimes creating their own creatures to do this, or weaving in characters from comics, TV and even YouTube, often with a twist of their own.

What I had not anticipated at the start was how many children would become prolific writers, writing in their free

time in the evenings, at weekends and even during the holidays. The site makes it easy for them to engage with each other's stories, with the result that they start feeding off each other – characters from one child's story might appear in pieces by other children.

As important, they take extra care with their writing because it may be published for friends, family and classes around the world to read

– they get very excited when their work is commented on or features in the site's weekly bulletin, *Night Times*. Meanwhile everyone at the school is proud that the work of one of our writers will be included in a book of stories, which Night Zookeeper will be publishing soon.

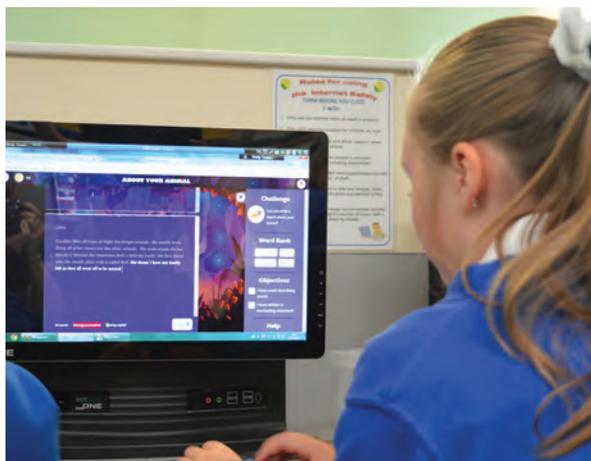
I can see their writing, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure improve over the months – in fact they enjoy reviewing old work to see how much they have progressed. It really boosts their confidence. Teachers can give feedback in a comments section. If pupils publish something, we can give them feedback online and they can go back and edit their piece to improve it.

The most exciting part is the pleasure they take in publishing to a worldwide audience. They also log on to read other children's stories and leave comments, so they are learning how to critique work. These comments are published, making Night Zookeeper a useful tool for teaching pupils how to use the internet safely and respectfully.

Features I like include the Lesson Hive, which gives teachers access to thousands of free interactive lessons and the facility to create lessons of their own. The tracking and assessment tool saves me hours of marking time. I also use Classroom Connect, which pairs teachers up with a different class somewhere in the world each week. Using this, classes of different nationalities can write together, comment on one another's work and share ideas about creative writing – it is a lovely way to forge international links with other schools.

There is something on there for every writer and every teacher.

Access to the Night Zookeeper website for a medium-class plan (16-34 children) is £12.00/month or £120/year + VAT a year. Register for a 30-day free trial at www.nightzookeeper.com



Some children spend hours writing on the site



Jo Neale is the Year 6 teacher at St Nicholas and St Laurence Church of England VA Primary School in Weymouth,

Dorset.

See an example of independent free writing: <http://bit.ly/sc241-04>

See a link to last year's class blog: <http://bit.ly/sc241-03>

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Teaching phonics using well-loved storybooks – Caroline Rea



Michelle Larbey reads a story to a class – the pack contains videos of her modelling teaching techniques

StoryTime Phonics is a programme from TTS Group which uses well-loved storybooks to help children learn their phonics and ultimately to read.

Aimed at Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, it follows the Letters and Sounds framework. The pack arrives in a huge box and includes 60 storybooks, 60 reading comprehension bookmarks and an endearing puppet called Tricky Word Troll, who really spurs the children on to practise their phonemes. The resources also include 52 tricky word cards, 100 high frequency word cards, an action card for each sound and editable, daily lesson plans, as well as a teacher's guide containing a hard copy of all the lesson plans. There are even little packets of fairy glitter dust.

The programme was created by Michelle Larbey, aka the Phonic Fairy, and is designed to inspire a love of reading and improve outcomes for children by developing their phonics knowledge in a fun and creative way. We trialled it last year with pupils in the additional resource provision of our school, many of whom have speech and language difficulties or autism spectrum



The pack contains all teachers need to teach phonics

disorders, and who find reading difficult. They really enjoyed it.

The lesson plans were excellent and saved me time and energy, providing all the information I needed to be able to adapt the lesson for our particular pupils. Teachers of a mainstream class might cover a new sound every day, but this would have been too much for our pupils, so we worked on just one sound a week. This allowed us to consolidate and embed each one, with pupils enjoying the process.

“The activities were very hands-on”

The resources are high quality and very child-friendly. In circle time, for example, pupils could easily see the pictures in the big, colourful storybooks, and loved it when I played the video of the Phonic Fairy herself reading it. While the stories are not specifically focused on a particular sound in an artificial way, the children encounter each phoneme naturally as the story unfolds. We read each one to them over and over so they got lots of repetition, which enabled many of them to read it on their own by the end of the week, clearly able to recognise words and understand the story. Halfway through the year, we found that the children were reading the book to each other.

The Tricky Word Troll puppet came out every day and was a wonderful prop. One child really took to it; he found it hard to sit still on the carpet for any length of time, but if Tricky was 'listening', he was able to sit quietly and listen to a whole story.

By the end of the year, we were looking at massive progress in reading compared to the start of the year. Pupils were able to recognise words, including tricky words, which was a real boost to their self-esteem. The programme's impact went further. Some children, who started the year with no speech, were able to voice some of the sounds thanks to the regular repetition. Other children were afraid to get up in front of other people, but gradually their confidence built to the level where they were able to read aloud and join in some of the games.

The pack includes teacher training videos linked to each book. In these, Michelle Larbey, as the Phonic Fairy, models teaching a particular phonic to a real class, demonstrating lots of different techniques, ideas and activities to help struggling readers as well as more advanced learners. I found these helped me be more creative in the way I taught phonics. The approach is less pens-and-paper and more multisensory, which really suited my pupils. In fact, the support team would often act stories out, sometimes dressing up, or going out to the woods to recount a story.

The activities were very hands-on. In one of these, we laminated lots of little cards with the letter 'd' and words beginning with 'd', and stuck these onto diamonds, which we buried in the allotment area of the school grounds for the children to dig up. When they found a diamond, they had to tell us the letter or word on it, never realising they were learning to read; they were just digging for diamonds.

The programme has changed the way I think about children who have difficulties with literacy – I am able to approach phonics from many more different angles now. It's a wonderful programme that really engages children who find reading and learning difficult.

The StoryTime Phonics programme from The TTS Group is £2,500 +VAT. <http://bit.ly/sc241-29>



Caroline Rea was a class teacher in the additional resource centre for Key Stage 1, and is now a Year 2 class teacher at Rushall Primary School, Walsall

No more isolation – Elisabeth Thielemann



Although the children could not see their friend, the robot was a good proxy in the classroom, and its endearing facial features made it easy to interact with her

Long-term illness prevents thousands of children and young people taking part in school every day.

To overcome the feelings of loneliness and detachment that can so easily arise, the Norwegian company No Isolation worked closely with Norwegian cancer charities and hospitals to create the AV1 – a small, white, plastic robot-like device loaded with a camera, microphone and speaker combined with built-in wifi and 4G. When connected to the internet, it allows a user to log in from anywhere, watch what is happening in the classroom and interact almost as if they were there.

We used it recently with one of our pupils whose immune system was compromised and who could therefore not attend school. She used it mostly to keep in contact with her classmates.

At home, she would open up her tablet or phone and log into the AV1 via an app (available on iOS and Android). The telepresence was one way – she could see the class but they could not see her, which gave her privacy combined with inclusion, although she often used Facetime for face-to-face contact with individual friends, and they regularly visited her at home.

The AV1 enabled her to have a permanent telepresence in the class – even when she was not logged in, it acted

as a proxy for her, keeping her front of mind. When she did log in, the robot's LED eyes would light up and it would lift its head, which was very endearing. Her peers used to keep an eye out for this, and greet her as soon as it sprang into life, making her feel involved with them.

“ **The AV1 enabled her to have a permanent telepresence in the class** ”

The camera is just above the robot's eyes and by swiping right and left in the app, the pupil could turn the AV1 through 360°, with 40° movement up and down, enabling her to see the whole classroom and talk to all her classmates, no matter where they sat. It was also sensitive to variations in volume, so she could speak loudly to address the whole class, or if it was sitting on one pupil's desk, lower her voice and talk to that person alone. Sometimes her friends would carry it around to give her more views of the classroom and school.

When she wanted to contribute to what was happening in class, she would activate the blinking light on the top of

the robot's head. If she was having a bad day, she could change this light to solid blue, indicating that she was happy to be present, but preferred to be a passive observer.

Our school was among the first to trial the AV1, and we worked closely with the developers to smooth out early teething problems and then rented it on behalf of the pupil, who used it for about a year. It operated using a rechargeable battery that lasted about eight hours.

Often, children with long-term illnesses can end up out of sight, out of mind, but the robot allowed us to give her a strong presence in class. Meanwhile, the AV1 made a huge difference to her life.

The AV1 from No Isolation is available to rent or buy. Renting starts at £840 for three months. The purchase price is £2,200+ £90 a month (for 4G, support and warranty).
www.noisolation.com



Elisabeth Thielemann is headteacher of St Eystein Skole in Bodo, Norway

Sensory teaching and learning – Sue Horn

Birkett House School is situated in brand new premises which include three sensory rooms – a studio, an immersion room and a multisensory room, all from Osborne Technologies.

The school is for children aged four to 19 with a range of SEND, including MLD, challenging behaviour, autism and sensory learning needs; these rooms are designed to help them develop their sensory literacy.

The immersion room has plain white walls. Four projectors on the ceiling cast images onto three walls and the floor, allowing us to create an immersive environment. A rumble floor gives the sensation of vibrations, say for a roller coaster or waves on the sea shore. A smoke machine, wind machines and a scent machine add to the rich potential of the resource. You'll typically find a teacher working on a sensory story using different sounds, images and smells with small groups of students in here.

The studio is a larger room with the same features. This is mainly the domain of our specialist music teacher who uses it when taking whole classes for music and drama. In addition, class teams use it when working on topics like the rain forest or Armistice Day, for which we can download images using the Tango Teach software, giving pupils a good idea of what the real experience might be like. The technology lends itself to cross-curricular learning, including geography and history – for example, maps, sounds and images of World War 1 – and literacy where the teacher will set a scene as a stimulus for writing about, say, a journey into space.

Finally, the multisensory room is about the same size as the immersion room and is fitted with equipment like bubble tubes and tactile lighting – many of our students have specialist or sensory learning needs.

Each room uses a bespoke app on an iPad to operate the hardware and Tango Teach to present visual content. We have also installed Tango Teach in all the classrooms. This multitouch software enables teachers to group and store media, such as images, interactive maps and PowerPoint presentations, and then deliver these to a multitouch screen without having to switch between applications.

Tango is easy to use – Osborne came to one of the school's training days to teach all the staff how to get the most out of it. Now everyone feels confident about uploading a set program, choosing



A pupil is transported by what she sees in the immersion room



The controls make it easy for teachers to change scenes at the tap of a button

a scene from the library, or downloading images from the internet. Meanwhile, Osborne maintains the rooms, sorting out upgrades as necessary and automatically topping up consumables, such as scents, as required.

“The most immediate outcome is more creative teaching”

The developers have been good to work with: they understood us and our students, and they worked closely with us to make sure not only that we got what we wanted, but also that we could use all the equipment proficiently.

It is too early to ascribe particular outcomes to our new sensory rooms, but we monitor progress closely with the aim of developing good practice to help students learn a range of skills, such as

how to respond in different situations, or to help them understand differences in feelings such as calm and not calm.

Many of our students with autism spectrum disorders find it challenging to go to the supermarket, dentist or hospital, so a teacher might film some footage using a phone or video camera of one of these settings. They can then load this into Tango Teach to play back in the rooms for students to explore on their own terms before venturing out to the real thing.

The most immediate outcome is more creative teaching. The sensory rooms allow teachers to provide fantastic learning environments and creative learning opportunities. As for the students, they love the rooms. The technology enhances what they are doing in the classroom and their behaviour is improving because they are so thoroughly engaged.

Osborne Technologies Ltd creates SensoryPod, SensoryClass and SensoryMobile – immersive spaces that include interactive floors and multitouch screens. Pricing depends on each client's specific requirements. The starting price for an immersive room is £50,000.

www.osbornetechnologies.co.uk



Sue Horn is headteacher of Birkett House School in Wigston, Leicestershire

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Children in care: more than a label

Headteacher **Tim Rogers** offers insight on supporting looked after children

It is hard for some looked after children to get over the neglect and abuse they have faced, even if this was in early childhood.

As one of several regional residential schools for looked after children and children with SEMH run by the Outcomes First Group, Hillcrest Jubilee School tries to help them come to terms with their past and find a way to thrive in the world.

However, most looked after children attend mainstream schools. What is the best way to support them?

Every child is different

Before we even consider issues that have arisen as a result of early life experiences, such as depression, anxiety, social isolation, and increased safeguarding vulnerability, the first thing to realise is that the emotional impact of being looked after can be significant. Many children lack self-belief and self-esteem – they do not feel valued, with many having experienced high levels of rejection, disappointment and breakdowns in relationships with adults.

Many children are unable to deal appropriately with their emotions and communicate this through negative behaviour, making good pastoral support essential. For instance, they may need a safe place to go when they are struggling. Others are much more troubled than they may present, having become expert at hiding their needs and insecurities.

The key is to 'see' the individual child. They don't wear a sign, so it is important that every teacher understands their background and needs and, as important, their dreams and aspirations.

Build trust

These children need to feel secure, so relationships must be founded on positivity and trust. Celebrating their achievements and having a fresh start to each day will help them overcome feelings of rejection and negativity.

Of course, all pupils in a school want to feel they have a voice, but this is even more important for looked after children, who have a driving need to be heard, respected and see the teacher or the school respond to what they are saying.

On the other hand, just because they are looked after does not mean that



Looked after children need to feel secure but it takes time to build trust

teachers should not expect the highest levels of behaviour, effort and outcomes from them, although they may need more support than other pupils to attain these.

Ideally, schools need to provide social, personal and emotional literacy learning opportunities in order to develop the whole child. These have to be more than quick interventions; pupils will need support after programmes have ended so that they are not left feeling abandoned once again, and become disaffected.

Work as a team

Unfortunately, many looked after children suffer from inconsistency – if, for whatever reason, their placement is repeatedly changed, they may never get the chance to settle. This makes consistency another lynch pin in supporting them.

SENCOs will need to work closely with all the professionals supporting the child, including the child's social worker, CAMHS therapists and carers, to ensure that these children receive the same message from all parties.

The termly team around the child meetings will offer a good opportunity to discuss the child's ECHP, reflect on progress and identify what needs to change or be put in place to make the plan more effective.

Meanwhile, in school, it is essential that this plan is communicated to everyone and consistently followed. One member of staff, for example, might think they are rewarding a child for good behaviour by letting them play with the others at break time when they usually go to the nurture area. However, this kindness can result in such emotional overload that the child loses control and could end up with a fixed-term exclusion. In short, it is fine to adapt the plan, but it must be done in consultation with the rest of the team, so don't allow staff to go off script!

Tips for managing behaviour

- **Disassociate behaviour from the child.** If feedback is always negative, the child's identity and self-image can be damaged and they end up thinking they are bad and worthless. It's not the child who is 'bad' but the choice they have made. With support and the time to reflect, they will hopefully make a better choice next time.
- **Start each day afresh.** Staff need to deal with mistakes a child has made on the same day, which will allow the child the opportunity to start with a blank slate the following day. This is one of the key ways we have turned children around at Jubilee School – we want pupils to feel positive about coming to school each day.
- **Consider therapeutic approaches.** Especially good is PACE, developed by Dan Hughes to help adults work with children who have experienced trauma in their early years. PACE – playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy – is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that helps troubled children start to look at themselves and start to trust (<http://bit.ly/sc241-02>).



Tim Rogers is headteacher of Hillcrest Jubilee School, Waterlooville, Hampshire

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