



# Special Children

*Meeting Children's Additional Educational Needs*

- How to support children with dyspraxia
- Bereavement and SEND
- Overcoming language delay
- Developing vocational skills

## Learning with puppets

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**Bristol, 18 September 2018**

**Manchester, 4 October 2018**



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# Tackling the ‘opportunity divide’

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**Opportunity knocks? is the title of the first report of the Youth Commission, launched in July by the Learning and Work Institute.**

In this initial report, the commission looks at the ‘opportunity divide’ between different sectors of society and the barriers holding back the 700,000 16- to 24-year-olds not in education, training or employment. Over the coming year, it will explore the likely impact of future changes in the jobs market, including automation, and of current government reforms such as apprenticeships and T-levels. Its final recommendations for improving education and employment prospects for young people will be published in spring/summer 2019 (<http://bit.ly/sc244-34>).

One group facing more barriers than most are young people with physical and learning disabilities. On pages 11-13 a special school explains how it has tackled this head on by forging partnerships with local businesses and charities and setting up its own community enterprise where current and former students learn work-related skills in a meaningful context, with support tailored to their individual needs.

Another exciting initiative is purpleSTARS, an enterprise that grew out of a three-year sensory objects project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Find out how its team of disabled young enthusiasts are training museum staff to transform their collections to make them more engaging and inclusive on pages 20-22.

## Emotional wellbeing

It’s that time of year again and the National Autistic Society is inviting nominations for the 2019 Autism Professionals Awards (deadline 28 October). On pages 14-16, a former winner describes the preparation and outcomes of a German exchange visit for students with ASC. When young people who normally struggle socially are clearly enjoying themselves, making new friends and taking cultural differences in their stride, you know they are acquiring skills that will help them to lead happy, successful adult lives.

That is also the aim of a special school’s single-minded focus on safeguarding and emotional wellbeing. As reported in *News* (page 4), a large-scale survey of seven- to 16-year-olds’ online behaviour by the London Grid for Learning shows a marked growth in mental health issues arising out of their experiences online. Learn about this school’s proactive approach to pre-empting these dangers, nurturing students’ wellbeing and keeping them safe from long-lasting harm on pages 17-19.

On a slightly different tack, children experience bereavement in different ways, but ignore it and they can carry the burden for the rest of their lives. Turn to pages 8-10 for advice on supporting them through this difficult time.

## Communication is key to learning

Education secretary Damian Hinds has expressed concern at the parlous state of children’s language skills when they first arrive in school. ‘It is a persistent scandal that we have children starting school not able to communicate in full sentences, not able to read simple words,’ he told an audience at the Resolution Foundation on 31 July. His comments follow research showing that 28% of children lack the communication and literacy skills expected by the end of Reception.

The two Shine a Light award winners profiled on pages 33-37 demonstrate the crucial importance of early assessment and offer ways of developing children’s vocabulary and fluency as they progress through school. Meanwhile, the article on dyspraxia (pages 27-29) looks at ways of enabling better communication with children affected by this condition, while the feature on auditory processing disorder (pages 30-32) suggests accommodations that will allow students with APD to follow what is happening in class more effectively.

Communication is also the theme of *Talking Point* (page 48), which explores how puppetry can be used to facilitate self-expression in a variety of ways.

## A fond farewell

Finally, it is with heavy hearts that we have to report that this is the last edition of *Special Children*. With reader priorities changing, Optimus Education will be focusing on its digital SEND services, such as the Knowledge Centre, and the Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Inclusion Award.

We have found our role as co-editors immensely fulfilling, learning about the fantastic work our contributors and readers are doing to support children and young people with additional needs. It has been a privilege to share these stories, and we want to thank you all for your time and dedication in working with us.

Your unswerving commitment to your students in these challenging times is something that will stay with us forever and we wish you the very best as you continue your excellent work. We will miss you very much.

*Alison Thomas*

*Sophie C.*

# Inside

## Emotional wellbeing

### Childhood bereavement and SEND

Supporting children through the emotional turmoil of bereavement and loss

8

## Transition to adulthood

### Developing vocational skills

Opening up work-related learning opportunities for young people with physical and learning disabilities

11

## International links

### Willkommen in Ashley High

The benefits and challenges of taking pupils with ASC on a foreign exchange visit

14

## Safeguarding

### Keeping teenagers with SEND safe from harm

Safeguarding and emotional wellbeing go hand in hand at a school for students with learning difficulties and/or autism

17

## Learning outside the classroom

### Sensory expeditions

Making museum visits more engaging and inclusive for young people with learning disabilities

20

## Condition insight

### Dyspraxia

How to spot possible symptoms and support these children in the primary classroom

27

### Auditory processing disorder

What the condition entails and recommended accommodations

30

## SLCN

### Communication is everybody's business

The difference a citywide assessment initiative is making for children with speech language and communication needs

33

## Supporting children to learn new words

Three programmes that are helping to develop children's vocabulary and fluency

36

## Show preview

### TES SEN Show 2018

The latest innovations and some old favourites revamped at the UK's leading SEN show

38

## Regulars

### News

Dealing with fake news; embedding formative assessment; sexting danger is the tip of the iceberg; more use of audio description; preparing for literacy; autism-friendly shopping; autism diagnosis postcode lottery

3

### Pull-out resources

Engaging on a personal level with museum exhibits using all five senses

23

### Book reviews

Improving communication skills; managing bouncy pupils; autism and secondary school

40

### Tried and tested products

Moving more easily with a Mollii suit; the BBC's *Super Movers*; collaborative learning; consolidating maths learning

43

## Cover story

### Hand in glove

Tips on learning with puppets

48

### Cover picture:

Puppets can help children who need an alter ego to help them talk about issues in their lives



## Fake news



Only 2% of children have the skills to tell if news is fake

**The Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in School, run by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy, recently found that only 2% of children and young people in the UK have the critical literacy skills they need to tell if a news story is real or fake.**

It also found the following.

- 61% of teachers believe fake news is harming children's wellbeing by increasing levels of anxiety, damaging their self-esteem and skewing their world view.
- 49.9% of children are worried about not

being able to spot fake news.

- 53.5% of teachers believe that the National Curriculum does not equip children with the literacy skills they need to identify fake news.

Recommendations include the following.

- A whole-school approach to teaching critical literacy is essential to embedding critical literacy across the curriculum. Teachers and schools must be provided with the necessary CPD and resources to enable them to teach critical literacy actively and explicitly within the teaching of any and every subject.
- Schools should ensure critical literacy

teaching uses texts from a range of news sources, including online, that encompass a spectrum of journalistic approaches and viewpoints, to enable pupils to understand political bias.

Constructive dialogue, in a non-judgemental learning space, can help pupils to gain confidence in their views, as well as an increased awareness of the motivations behind fake news production and improved ability to identify such stories. Children and young people should be given regular time to read, hear and see current news stories in the school environment (for example, during PSHE or watching BBC's *Newsround* during form time) and at home.

- Children and young people should be supported to develop their knowledge and gain practical experience of the methods of journalistic enquiry and responsible news creation. This process demystifies how news is made, empowers young people and encourages active engagement over passive consumption.

Download the full report from here:

<http://bit.ly/sc244-08>

Find resources from The Literacy Trust here: <http://bit.ly/sc244-07>

## Autism diagnosis postcode lottery

**Children and adults face waits of more than two years for an autism assessment and over three years for a diagnosis in some areas, new research by the Liberal Democrat former health minister Norman Lamb MP has revealed.**

The National Autistic Society says that the 'shocking' findings should act as a wake-up call for the government and local services.

National guidelines state that people suspected of being autistic should start their diagnostic assessment within three

months of being referred to the autism team. Meanwhile, there is currently no benchmark for how long it should take to finally get an autism diagnosis – new data obtained through freedom of information requests revealed that this can take several years in some areas.

- 1,288 days for a child in Northern, Eastern and Western Devon CCG (3½ years).
- 208 weeks for an adult (4 years) and 196 weeks for a child (almost 4 years) in Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

- 1,070 days for an adult in Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (almost 3 years).
- 799 days for a child in Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (2 years).

Norman Lamb is demanding urgent action from the government to tackle this unacceptable postcode lottery in waiting times for an autism assessment and diagnosis, which is potentially leaving thousands of children without the right level of support.

## More use of audio description

**Over the summer, the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) supported a high profile advertising campaign aimed at helping people to use audio description on their televisions.**

Audio description is a free service that can transform TV viewing for people who

have difficulty seeing what's happening on the screen. Like a narrator telling a story, an additional commentary describes body language, expressions and movements, making the story clear through sound.

Eleanor Southwood, chair of RNIB, says: 'I use audio description when I watch TV and it makes a huge difference

– I'm able to be fully involved in what I'm watching because I know I'm not missing anything. I hope this campaign will encourage lots more people to give audio description a go. It is available on over 60 channels and across all sorts of programmes, from documentaries to reality TV.'

## Sexting danger is the tip of the iceberg

**The London Grid for Learning (LGfL) has called for technology companies to embrace calls for change and put the safety of children first in the light of findings from its latest report (<http://bit.ly/sc244-12>).**

One in 10 children who video chat with strangers has been asked to change or undress on camera. Pupils as young as seven are just as likely to be asked to get undressed as students in the first four years of secondary school.

These are just two of the startling statistics revealed in *Hopes and Streams*, the UK's largest nationwide online safety survey of 40,000 children aged seven to 16 published by LGfL DigiSafe, the safeguarding arm of the educational community.

In comparison to previous surveys, the 2018 results revealed a shift in risks from strictly contact-based to content-based. Sexting and child sexual exploitation via live streaming was flagged as a major issue by children and young people. Meanwhile, there is a marked growth in mental health issues, especially self-harm and distress, caused by sharing sexual and violent videos. There is a greater prevalence of violent or sexual content – whether sending or receiving, volunteered or coerced. Conduct – the third C of the 3Cs of online safety (content, contact and conduct) – remains as challenging as ever and shapes all aspects of online safety.

On experiences on apps, sites and games.

- Over 50% of pupils wanted privacy settings to be made better, easier and clearer.
- 18% of children said their online activities helped them make new friends.
- Nearly one in three pupils said it was hard to stop using apps, sites and games.



The dangers of the internet are real and serious and children need to be taught how to use it safely

On contact risk – making friends and meeting people online.

- One in three young people had made new friends online.
- Boys were more than twice as likely as girls to chat to people they had never met face to face or go on to talk to new gaming friends on other sites or messaging apps.
- Half of those who chatted to people they met on games went on to talk to them on other platforms.
- One in 10 seven- to 16-year-olds had made friends with an adult online for the first time.
- Of those who met an online friend in person, 81% took or told somebody else.

On seeing, sending and receiving content.

- 22.4% of all pupils and 41% of 15- to 16-year-olds had seen violent images/videos online.
- 12.8% of these young people had received the material from another young person, 6.2% from an adult.
- Boys were a quarter more likely than girls to see such content.
- 9% of those surveyed had received a naked or semi-naked image from another young person.
- 15.1% of secondary students had received a sexual message, 5.4% from an adult.

- 5.1% of secondary students said they had sent a sexual message themselves, 1.8% to an adult.

On online friendships, bullying and mental health.

- One in four pupils reported being bullied online.
- One in 13 pupils admitted to bullying others online.
- One in three pupils had witnessed bullying online.
- Almost one in six pupils had seen something that encourages self-harm.

Commenting on the survey, Mark Bentley, online safety and safeguarding manager at LGfL DigiSafe, says: 'The danger of meeting strangers online is often treated as the main online safety concern. This report shows that violent or sexual content has become far more prevalent. We are concerned by the mental health issues raised by the survey, particularly regarding self-harm.'

'It is, however, encouraging to see that so many pupils consider the internet a force for good. Comments on the things pupils love about their online lives included learning new skills, broadening their horizons and building strong relationships. Another huge positive is the fact that 73% of pupils said they trust parents on online safety, with 71.2% of pupils who spoke to someone telling a parent or carer and 36.1% telling a teacher about negative experiences.'

John Jackson, CEO at LGfL, concludes: 'The dangers of the internet are real and serious. However, so are the many opportunities – it's important we prepare young people to navigate the worst and thrive on the best of the online world.'

To access a full range of supportive material on online safety and safeguarding including teaching and classroom resources, visit <http://saferresources.lgfl.net>

## Preparing for literacy

**The Education Endowment Foundation's latest guidance report is designed to make sure all children start school with the foundations they need to read and write well.**

*Preparing for Literacy* offers seven clear and actionable recommendations

to support early years practitioners to improve their pupils' communication, language and early literacy skills. One recommendation encourages nurseries and early years settings to make sure three- and four-year-olds get eye tests. Another focuses on how to talk with

children to develop their communication and language through activities like shared reading. The free report also considers how a wide range of different activities – like singing, storytelling and nursery rhymes – help to develop children's early reading. <http://bit.ly/sc244-20>

## Embedding Formative Assessment

**Using real-time knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses to adapt your teaching style can boost Year 11 students' progress by two additional months, according to new research published by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).**

Embedding Formative Assessment is a professional development programme which aims to improve pupil outcomes by embedding the use of formative assessment strategies across a school. Schools receive detailed resource packs to run monthly workshops, known as Teacher Learning Communities, and teachers conduct structured peer observations focusing on the use of formative assessment strategies.

140 English schools and 25,000 Year 10 and 11 pupils took part in the randomised

controlled trial of the programme, building on existing evidence that it can improve students' learning. Many schools already prioritise formative assessment, but often report that it can be challenging to implement. The EEF funded this evaluation as it offers a scalable approach for schools.

One example of a formative assessment technique is checking on pupils' understanding by asking everyone to show their response to a question at the same time, perhaps by holding up their answers on a mini-whiteboard. Teachers can then decide whether they need to review the material with the whole class, identify a small number of pupils needing individual help, or ask pupils to discuss their answers with their peers.

Find out more: <http://bit.ly/sc244-09>

## £1.5 billion funding gap

**Research published by the Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) – a coalition of 60 charities – shows there is a £1.5 billion funding gap for services needed by disabled children.**

This investment shortfall and its consequences were highlighted on a recent episode of BBC 1's *Panorama: Fighting for my child*.

Richard Kramer, vice-chair of the Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) and CEO of Sense, says: 'There are over one million disabled children in the UK, 33% more than a decade ago. Yet we know that fewer disabled children than ever before are currently getting support. Our research shows there is a funding gap in disabled children's services which means tens of thousands of them are missing

out on vital help that enables them to do things other children take for granted, like eat, talk, leave the house, have fun and attend school.'

'This episode of *Panorama* highlighted the consequences of this – families at their wits' end having to go to court to fight for vital support with limited and dwindling resources. That's why we are urgently calling on the government to plug the £1.5 billion gap – just 0.2% of total government spending – to ensure disabled children and their families have a decent quality of life.'

The DCP's research, carried out by Development Economics, found a £1.1 billion shortfall in funding for health services for disabled children, and £433 million extra needed for social care.

Watch this episode of *Panorama*: <http://bit.ly/sc244-10>

education is rolled out. Materials to support schools will be available from September 2019, and will build on existing best practice shared by high performing schools.

Guidance will include topics like consent, staying safe online and LGBT issues. The compulsory health education curriculum will teach pupils about the benefits of a healthier lifestyle, what determines their physical health and how to build mental resilience and wellbeing.

## Anti-Bullying Week 2018



CBeebies star Andy Day and his band Andy and the Odd Socks are supporting Anti-Bullying Week 2018 by encouraging students to wear odd socks to school during Anti-Bullying Week

**The theme for Anti-Bullying Week 2018, which runs from 12-16 November, is 'Choose Respect.'**

Collecting data helps schools identify where bullying is taking place and spot trends, enabling them to develop effective anti-bullying policies. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has created a page on its website to help senior leadership teams use data more effectively to reduce bullying in their setting. This includes video case studies on the use of data and guidance on collecting it. <http://bit.ly/sc244-17>

The Department for Education commissioned a qualitative research report, produced by CooperGibson Research, which explores current anti-bullying practice in 15 educational institutions in England. This provides details of strategies that schools reported to be effective in combatting bullying, along with detailed case studies outlining practical actions taken by the schools. <http://bit.ly/sc244-18>

## RSE CPD

**From 2020, all schools will be required to teach children how to care for their physical and mental health, how to stay safe on and offline, and the importance of healthy relationships.**

Under the government's proposals, health education will be mandatory in primary and secondary schools from autumn 2020, the same time that the reformed guidance on relationships and sex

education is rolled out. Materials to support schools will be available from September 2019, and will build on existing best practice shared by high performing schools.

It will also make sure children and young people know how to recognise when they and others are struggling with mental health and how to respond. Meanwhile, the Sex Education Forum is running a course to help schools plan for an effective and inclusive programme (London, 13 September). To find out more about this and other courses, such as LGBT Inclusive Training and Teaching Positive Sexual Health, visit <http://bit.ly/sc244-14>

## Autism-friendly shopping

**Morrisons is introducing a 'Quieter Hour' in all its stores to help parents of autistic children and others who appreciate a quieter shopping experience. The initiative was created with the support of the National Autistic Society.**

During this period there will be no tannoy announcements, music or radio playing. The volume of the beeps from scanning equipment at the checkouts will be turned down, the lights will be dimmed to reduce sensory stimulus, and staff will aim to reduce the movement of trolleys and baskets. Trials revealed that Saturday between 9am and 10am suited most people best.

Angela Gray, Morrisons community champion at Woking, says: 'I was involved in the initial trial as my son is autistic and we found that these changes made a real difference.'

## A correlation between ADHD and exercise?

**Young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often have learning and behavioural control difficulties. A systematic review of intervention studies has recently been published looking at the impact of physical activity on cognition and behaviour in young people with ADHD. It shows the following.**

- 20–30 minutes of high intensity physical activity improves short-term cognition – processing speed, working memory, planning and problem solving.
- Five weeks of physical activity is enough to obtain long-term improvements in cognition and behaviour.
- No study reveals a negative association between physical activity and cognition in young people with ADHD.

However, more research is needed to identify the causes of these effects.  
<http://bit.ly/sc244-25>

## And finally...

### 2019 Autism Professionals Awards

These are now open for nominations. With 12 awards celebrating individual professionals and teams, including education-specific categories, this is an opportunity to share with the world the work that you, or your team, do to support autistic people. Nominations close on 28 October. <http://bit.ly/sc244-11>

### Careers resources

Muscular Dystrophy UK's employability project, Moving Up, has compiled a list of the best disability careers resources, projects and job sites that publish opportunities from employers looking to recruit more disabled people. It aims to make it easier for disabled people to access available support and find an understanding employer. Download the factsheet for more information:  
<http://bit.ly/sc244-28>

### Autism: GCSE maths and English

The Autism Education Trust was commissioned by the Department for Education to develop two pieces of work to improve the accessibility of GCSE maths and English for pupils with autism taking public exams in response to concerns about fair access. Free, they can be ordered from <http://bit.ly/sc244-13>

### Autism conferences

The Autism in Women and Girls Conference, from the National Autistic Society, explores the issues, shares recent findings, and offers tips on best practice. London, 30 October. <http://bit.ly/sc244-31>

The Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome Conference, also from the National Autistic Society, explores this lifelong disability. Delegates will gain a clearer understanding of the diagnostic criteria, and tools and strategies to provide targeted support. Manchester, 20 November. <http://bit.ly/sc244-22>

### New symbol-supported writing app for iPad and Chromebook

Crick Software has released a symbol-supported version of Clicker Connect, the company's popular writing support app for iPad and Chromebook users. The range of symbols included in the SymbolStix library, alongside the well-loved literacy support features of Clicker, make it even easier for pupils with additional learning needs to take their first steps towards independent writing.  
<http://bit.ly/sc244-16>

### The 2019 Shine a Light Awards

Pearson and The Communication Trust have launched the seventh Shine a Light Awards, which recognise the contributions of teams, schools, settings and individual people across England who champion innovative work and excellence in supporting children and young people's communication development. Nominations close in January.  
[www.shinealighthwards.co.uk](http://www.shinealighthwards.co.uk)

### No Pens Day Wednesday

This takes place on Wednesday 3 October. Unfortunately, due to funding cuts, The Communication Trust has not been able to produce new resources. However, there are plenty from previous years, which you can access when you sign up at  
<http://bit.ly/sc244-23>

### Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders

The Scotland branch of the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (ACAMH) is presenting a one-day conference to raise awareness and understanding of FASD and provide an overview of how individuals and families affected by the condition can be supported. Glasgow, 4 October. <http://bit.ly/sc244-26>

### Parental Mental Illness Masterclass

Also from ACAMH, this is aimed at practitioners who are in direct contact with children who may have parents with mental illness, and offers guidance on how to increase the children's resilience. London, 18 October. <http://bit.ly/sc244-27>

### Training for TAs working with children who have hearing impairments

This interactive two-day course from the National Sensory Impairment Partnership is for TAs and other school staff and will be led by two very experienced teachers of the deaf. The focus is on understanding the basic causes and impact of deafness, how technology can help, and developing practical strategies to enable the child to access the curriculum. London, 17 and 18 September. <http://bit.ly/sc244-15>

### National Numeracy Day

Over 25,000 people signed up to check and improve their numeracy levels in May. National Numeracy's resources for schools and work were downloaded nearly 8,000 times. These are still available from  
<http://bit.ly/sc244-24>



in partnership with



# Wellbeing Award for Schools

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

**Enquire about this award today at  
[oego.co/OE-WAS](http://oego.co/OE-WAS)**

**Completion of the award will help schools to:**

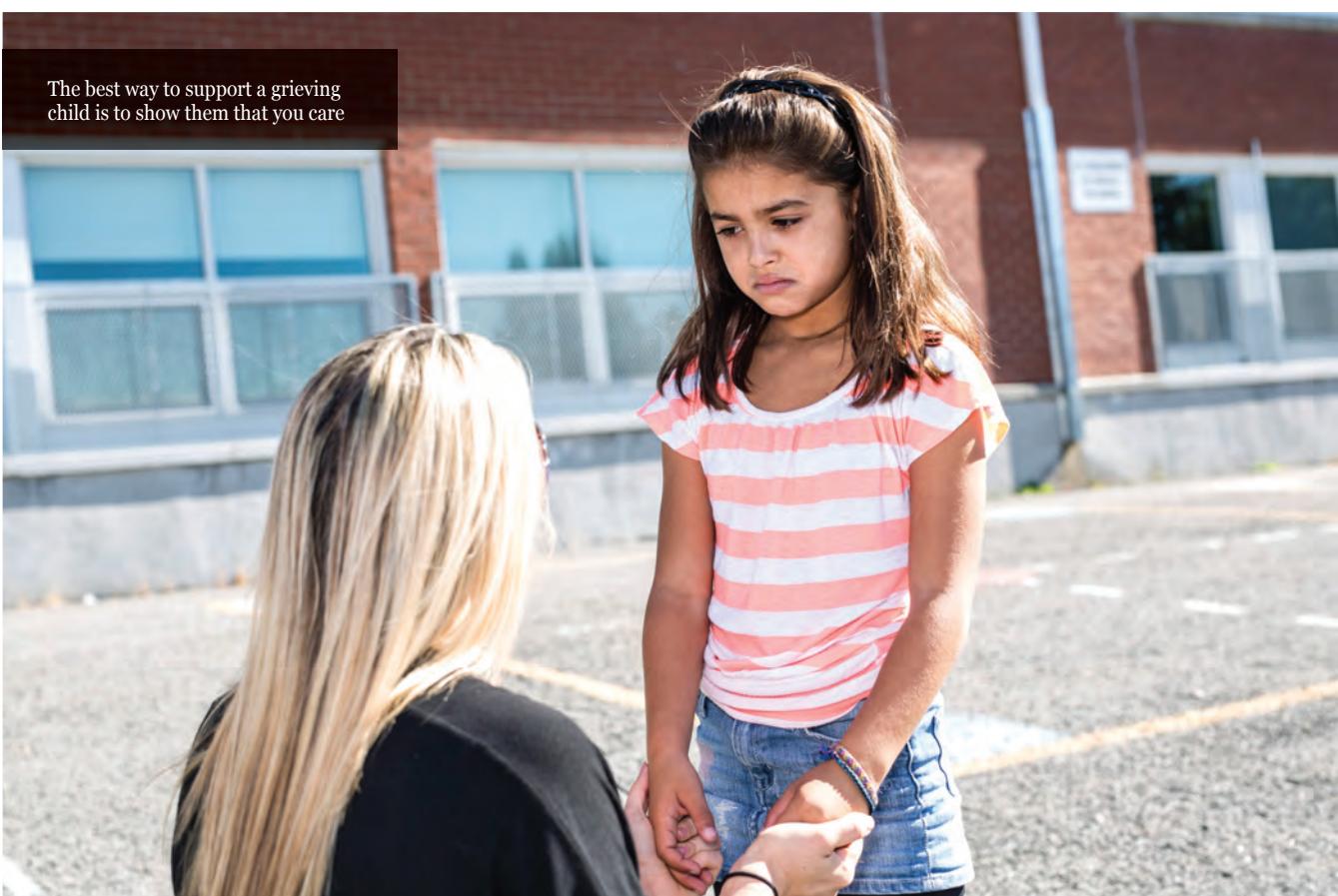
- develop their vision and strategy of how the school will promote and protect emotional wellbeing and mental health
- establish a culture that regards mental health as everyone's responsibility
- actively promote staff emotional wellbeing and mental health
- work with the whole-school community to make the school a place of emotional wellbeing and support.

*'We have noticed that staff are presenting as being happier and have seen a decrease in staff absences. The pupils are happy and engaged and are now able to recognise their thoughts and feelings and are able to ask for help.'*

**Headteacher,  
Lessness Heath  
Primary School**



The best way to support a grieving child is to show them that you care



# Childhood bereavement

**Sarah Helton** offers advice on supporting children through the emotional turmoil of bereavement and loss

**What would you do if you saw a child fall over? Would you ignore them? Just pretend you didn't see the accident and walk away? Of course not. You would run to the child to check that they were OK, and then you would probably shower them with comfort, reassurance and love.**

So do we adopt the same approach if we see a bereaved child? Or do we steer clear of the difficult topic of death with a child, especially if the child has a disability or special educational need?

### **Don't be afraid**

Many people avoid talking about death and grief with a friend or family member who has lost someone close to them for fear of saying or doing something that will make the situation worse. If we are fearful of discussing death with our adult friends, we will no doubt be petrified of broaching

the topic with a child.

But when anyone, regardless of their age, is bereaved, the worst has already happened – their loved one is no longer with them. It's virtually impossible for us to make things worse for them with our words. Instead, we can help them by acknowledging their loss and supporting

them with their grief.

In the case of a bereaved child, this is absolutely crucial, as children who are unsupported with their grief are far more likely to have emotional and attachment issues later in life.

And all it takes to support a grieving child is to be a caring human being.

### **Acknowledge the child's loss**

The best way to acknowledge a child's loss is by talking about the person who has died. Through the simple act of uttering the deceased person's name, we not only acknowledge the child's bereavement and show that we understand the impact it is having on them, we are also helping the child keep that person's memory alive.

So the first step in supporting a child who has been bereaved – or, indeed, anyone – is to be open and acknowledge the death and their loss.



Artwork allows children to create memories and express their grief

## Listen

Bereavement affects people in different ways and there is no way of anticipating how a child might respond, or how their emotions might fluctuate over time. However, if we listen to them, *truly* listen, they will tell us what they need and how they are feeling.

True listening involves more than just using our ears, however, and we need to use our eyes as well. Observing the child's behaviours will provide us with considerable information about their mood and level of resilience. Things to look out for include:

- what they are eating
- how much sleep they are getting
- who they want to spend time with
- what activities they are doing.

Careful observation by everyone involved with the child will give us a picture of how much their behaviour has changed from what we would normally expect from



Physical activities help a child to release their emotions

them. Too far from the norm and for too long a period of time will be an indication that extra support is required.

If the child is spending long periods of the day hiding in the book corner, this probably shows that they don't wish to talk right now. On the other hand, if they seek you out in the playground and stand next to you, possibly even without talking to you at first, this shows that they want to

be close to you and that they are looking for some interaction.

In the latter scenario, rather than asking the question: 'How are you feeling?' which typically results in an autopilot: 'I'm fine', say something like: 'It's good to see you, [name].' Showing the child that you think they're special and that you value them is far more likely to elicit a meaningful conversation.

## Talk to the child

By talking to a bereaved child, we are letting them know that they are not alone. Without these conversations they will become further embedded in their grief and struggle to move on.

In the busy environment of a school it can be hard to find a few minutes to chat with a child, but if they want to talk, we need to be able to do that for them right there and then – not in 15 minutes' time or at lunchtime. It is therefore vital that as soon as a child returns to school

## Bereavement and SEND

### Children with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties

Children who don't have the cognitive ability to understand the finality of death or the verbal language to express how they are feeling still need to be informed when someone close to them has died.

When a parent dies, a baby picks up on the fact that this person is no longer around, that they no longer see, hear or smell the person or feel their touch. Children with SLD and PMLD will experience these things as well. They will also react to the mood of the people around them and the atmosphere of the home and other grieving environments. If we don't talk to them to explain what is going on, it will leave them in a very anxious and vulnerable state.

When telling a child with SLD or PMLD about a death, it is crucial to have a photograph of the person who has died, so that we can make it very clear who we are talking about. Having a few personal belongings would be beneficial too. For example, if the person always wore a certain hat or had a favourite toy, show the child these things and let them explore them as you are talking about the person.

Use very simple and concrete language to explain who has died and how, and be prepared to reiterate this information many times. It may take weeks, months, even years for the child to understand that the person is not coming back.

### Children with autism

If it is important to use concrete language and avoid euphemisms like 'passed away' with any

bereaved child, it is absolutely critical when supporting a child with autism. Explain exactly what has happened and how it will affect them, right down to the specific details. For example: Dad has died and he always took you swimming on a Thursday afternoon. You will still go swimming on a Thursday afternoon. Uncle Mike is going to take you.'

Sometimes children with autism will ask questions that seem a little strange or morbid to us, such as: 'When Granny is buried, how long will it take for her body to just be a skeleton?' Like all questions, these must be answered, otherwise the child may become anxious and worried. If they ask you something you don't know, say so, and promise to find out.

### Children with limited communication

Children who can't talk or who have limited speech will be unable to clearly articulate how they are feeling. Ensure that you do lots of Intensive Interaction with these children so that they can let out their emotions. Shared Intensive Interaction conversations will also let them know that you are listening to them and that you care. (For information on Intensive Interaction, see [www.intensiveinteraction.org](http://www.intensiveinteraction.org) and *Special Children* 211.)

### Children with limited mobility

A child with limited mobility may not be able to get away from their classmates when they want some quiet time to grieve and think about the person who has died. If this is the case, you need to find ways

of giving them this opportunity and periodically ask them if they need some time alone.

Likewise, if they are unable to release their emotions in a physical way as other people do, like going for a run or kicking a football to death, offer them alternatives, such as popping balloons with a pin, throwing paint at a canvas or bashing play dough.

### Tips for supporting bereaved children with SEND

- Make sure the child has a photo of the person who has died to keep in their bag, so they can get it out when they want to talk about the person, or need to look at it for reassurance if they are having a difficult time.
- Let them keep something that belonged to the person in their bag, such as an item of clothing or a piece of non-valuable jewellery, that they can take out when they want tactile comfort.
- Have a spray bottle or pot that contains a smell associated with the person – for example their perfume or aftershave, lavender oil (if they grew lavender in their garden), or wood shavings (if they were a carpenter). The child can smell this special scent when they want help to remember the person or need some extra support.
- Involve the child in activities that bring back happy memories. For example, if their mother has died and they used to love baking cakes together, joining you or a group of children to do some baking may make it easier for them to talk about their mother and how her death is impacting on them.



A child reflects on the person he has lost and how dear they were to him

following a bereavement, there is a named person (someone they have a good relationship with) they know they can go to at any time.

Even in the middle of a lesson? Absolutely. Imagine you were immensely emotional and went to a friend or relative, who told you they couldn't talk to you until next week. You would feel very let down and would probably never turn to them for support again. The same applies to a child – if they want to talk, they need to be able to do so at that moment.

### Answer their questions

Let the family know that you want to support their child as much as possible, and that part of this will be to answer any questions they have. Very often, a bereaved child is more likely to ask questions of someone outside the family, as they don't want to upset their relatives.

If you are unable to answer a question straight away because you don't have the necessary information, be honest and say: 'I don't know, but I will find out for you.'

### Use concrete language

Children aren't born with a fear of death; it is something they acquire as they grow up from the adults around them and society as a whole. Currently the western world doesn't have a very positive way to talk about and deal with death.

If you ask children what words we should use, they invariably say 'dead', 'death' and 'dying'. They want the

information to be presented to them in a clear and precise manner – no fudging the issue and trying to wrap it up in euphemisms. Tell it as it is.

**“Even if a child isn't told about a death, they will intuitively pick up on it”**

If we say to a child: 'I'm so sorry, but we've lost your friend,' they could very well try and look for that person, or cling to the belief that one day we will find them again. Instead, we need to explain: 'Sadly, Jonny has died. He was involved in an accident walking home from school.' If the child then asks for more details, we must give them honest information (to the level that they are cognitively and emotionally able to handle), such as: 'He was hit by a car and died instantly. There was nothing that the paramedics could do as his heart had stopped beating.'

Even if a child isn't openly told about a death, they will overhear snippets of conversation and intuitively pick up on the emotions of the people around them. It is naive to think they won't know what has happened, even if they are not explicitly told.

Children who are affected by a death deserve to be treated with respect and

honesty. 'Telling it as it is' is a part of how we achieve this and ensure they get excellent support when they are grieving.

### Support the child to manage the change

When someone dies, the lives of those close to them are altered forever. We can't bring the child's loved one back, but we can help them to adjust to life without them. This means helping them understand that although their big brother is no longer around to play football with them, that their cousin is looking forward to doing so, as are their friends at school. Or helping the child develop the emotional vocabulary to express how they are feeling.

Supporting a grieving pupil to manage the huge change in their life following a death is a crucial part of our role, and one that won't be resolved in just a few months. A child who is grieving doesn't stop being bereaved at the end of the school year; it is ongoing, so we must help them to manage the change for the entire time that they are at our school.



*Sarah Helton is an experienced teacher, author and SEND consultant who specialises in advising and training school staff to support bereaved children with SEND, including those who are profoundly disabled, non-verbal or who have autism. Awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2018 to research best practice in supporting bereaved children with SEND, she will be travelling to America, Denmark and Norway later this year to gain different perspectives on the issue*

### FIND OUT MORE

Publications and resources by Sarah Helton

- **A Special Kind of Grief. The complete guide for supporting bereavement and loss in special schools (and other SEND settings)**, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- **Remembering Lucy**, Jessica Kingsley Publishers. An illustrated children's storybook about grief and bereavement in a school.
- **Bereavement and Loss Symbol Resource Set** designed in association with Widgit to help children, young people and their families through the process of bereavement and loss.  
<http://bit.ly/sc244-04>

For details of Sarah Helton's forthcoming training events, see [www.backpocketteach.co.uk](http://www.backpocketteach.co.uk) or follow @backpocketteach. Email her at [backpocketteach@gmail.co.uk](mailto:backpocketteach@gmail.co.uk) or call 01823 476958



## Vocational skills

The creation of a community interest company has opened up work-related learning opportunities for school students and young adults with physical and learning disabilities. **Alison Thomas** reports

**If you are into arts and crafts and you live anywhere near Chasewater Country Park in Staffordshire, Saxon Hill Craft Barn is the place to go.**

A huge array of textiles meets your eyes as you walk through the door, along with a plethora of ribbons and lace, buttons and beads, spools and reels and a host of other recycled items at knockdown prices. There are also a number of handmade gifts on sale, from soft toys, cushions and jewellery to gift tags, cards and ornaments, some made by local crafters, others by post-16 students from Saxon Hill Academy, a specialist provision for students with physical disabilities,

learning difficulties and complex medical needs in Lichfield seven miles away.

'What the students create depends on their physical capabilities and the stock that has been donated,' says the academy's principal Melsa Buxton. 'With new deliveries arriving all the time, we never know what will come in next or what the possibilities might be.'

Turning raw materials into attractive gifts is just one of the students' roles, and you will also find them stacking shelves, operating the till in the shop or working behind the scenes to sort new stock, price it and put together craft packs for the barn's loyal customer base.

Sometimes their duties demand a

mixture of skills, as happened recently when a local business donated a collection of old doors. 'The students took the handles off, priced them up and banked them ready for sale,' says head of post-16 provision Wendy Arnfield. 'Besides the practical aspects of the work, pricing the handles was quite a complex task. What is an old door handle worth? How much might our customers be willing to pay for one? We supported the students, but they did their own research to come to a decision.'

'Even just writing out a price tickets is a valuable exercise,' she adds. 'Making sure that the numbers are clearly legible and that the decimal point is in the right place. It supports their functional maths, but in a meaningful context.'

### **Filling a much-needed gap**

It was the lack of opportunities for students to develop workplace skills in a meaningful context, both during their time at school and afterwards, that led to the creation of Saxon Hill Craft Barn in 2012.

As an all-through school, Saxon Hill Community School, as it was then, offers a personalised and holistic developmental curriculum from pre-school right through to transition to adulthood. But when that key milestone arrived, young people often found themselves marooned at home with little to do because there were so few options available to them. They would contact the school, but its capacity to take on classroom helpers was limited and it wasn't in a position to develop the range of skill sets that might open doors in other contexts. If these young people were to be empowered to lead fulfilling adult lives and take their place in society, something had to be done.

Out of that resolution came Saxon Hill Connect, a community interest company which launched with the Craft Barn at Chasewater Park, followed a year later by Saxon Hill Community Café on the school premises. Together they provide varied opportunities for students to develop functional skills, improve their communication skills and gain practical experience in a real business environment while working towards accredited qualifications in independent living and preparing for work.

They also provide openings for that learning to continue into adulthood. A former Saxon Hill student works two days a week as a marketing assistant and operates the barn's membership scheme, and as the academy's number of vocational venues expands, its facility to offer supported placements for young adults with disabilities continues to grow.

### Saxon Hill Community Café

Serving a variety of drinks and snacks, such as soups, sandwiches, nachos and salads, the café is used by staff, students and visitors to the academy, as well members of the local community, who have access through a membership scheme.

One day a week, it is run by Catherine Care, an organisation that offers care and support for disabled adults, including some of Saxon Hill's former students. 'They bring these young people into school to work in the café and our current students join them,' says Mrs Arnfield, 'so we are building that link with Catherine Care for the future.'

For the remainder of the week, the café puts on a variety of events, such as afternoon tea for former school staff or local community groups, with the students serving. Younger children also come for milk shake and cakes mornings so they can practise their money skills



A member of staff helps a student to scan a bar of chocolate at Wyevale Garden Centre

when they are buying things, with their older peers calculating the totals and taking their money.

The sixth formers also help to plan the menus, keep the accounts and work out the profits. Where possible, they take the food hygiene safety qualification that is required of all the staff who work here. 'It is quite a demanding course,' observes Mrs Arnfield, 'but they seem to thrive on doing it and having that focus as well.'

In addition, some of the students get involved in food preparation, supported by a qualified chef employed by the school for two hours every morning.

'We have to let the young people go at

### Setting up and running a community interest enterprise

- When deciding what kind of business to set up, make sure that it offers a range of opportunities so that students with diverse needs can take part in a way that is meaningful for them.
- Be very clear who your customer base is and how they will access your service. The Saxon Hill Community Connect businesses operate through membership schemes because the school works with children and vulnerable young adults and takes its duty to safeguard them very seriously.
- Invest in specialists. A marketing strategy will be crucial to promote the enterprise and keep your customers up to date. Saxon Hill submitted a successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund to pay for specialist staff.
- Enlist parental support. You can't run the enterprise sustainably without a sizeable team of volunteers.
- Be mindful of the different needs of students coming up through the school and start planning for their work experience well in advance. For instance, Saxon Hill might have students helping with food preparation one year, but if the next cohort had physical needs that prevented them from doing that safely, they would shift the focus to a different side of the business.

their own pace,' explains Mrs Buxton. 'At the same time, we need to be sure that all the regulations are correctly applied and that the food is always up to standard. When setting up the company, we concluded that this was something we had to have – expert support from a trained professional.

'We also realised we would need to recruit lots of parent helpers. Food preparation is the most difficult thing and you have to get it right. The café is very staff reliant, so the sustainability of support is one of the things you have to plan for. That is our biggest issue.'

### The garden centre

The two businesses are not the only outlets where students combine learning with practical experience, and part of the inspiration for Saxon Hill Connect was a long-standing partnership between the academy and Wyevale Garden Centre in Shenstone. Mrs Arnfield takes different groups there twice a week, where they perform a variety of tasks depending on their individual needs and what the garden centre requires.

'It can be anything from deadheading, watering and unpacking plants in the outside area to stacking shelves, facing up and pricing up products, designing displays and scanning purchases at the tills in the shop,' she says. 'Again, it gives them a real focus, because the work is purposeful and they are supporting the garden centre. Wyevale employs someone full time to do the spring and summer watering, which shows what a massive job it is, and our students do it brilliantly. It's also nice for the garden centre to say: "We are struggling. We really need your help."

Meanwhile, working in the shop supports students' social skills and confidence when interacting with unfamiliar people. Mrs Arnfield illustrates this with the example of the day when all the tills went down. 'As the queue grew longer, a member of staff was getting very nervous, wondering how much longer the situation was going to drag on,' she says. 'Then one of our students said: "We're really sorry this has happened. We have a technical problem. We are trying to sort it out as soon as possible," establishing that connection with the waiting customers to ease their impatience. That sort of experience is really powerful for our students and gives them valuable skills for the future. Confidence in dealing with unfamiliar people is a huge part of it.'

In the early days of the partnership, the students had nowhere to call their own, but five years ago the garden centre



A student helps to tidy up the storage area of Wyevale Garden Centre

agreed to the installation of a cabin which serves as a classroom for written work, somewhere warm and comfortable for students to make drinks and have lunch, and somewhere private for staff to administer medication and do enteral feeding. The school is hoping that a Changing Places will soon be added to the facilities, so that young people who can't access a disabled toilet don't have to be taken back to school three miles away, allowing them to stay longer on site and gain maximum benefit.

But how has the school managed to forge such a strong partnership that

**“Being givers as well as receivers gives students a sense of value as citizens”**

developments like this become possible?

They are a very open group of staff and we have nurtured the relationship,’ replies Mrs Arnfield. ‘We have invited them into the café to have afternoon tea and our students have shown them round the school, so they have a good flavour of what we do here. We also share newsletters and invite them to events like open days and theme days. Last year they supported us by sending a member of staff to be Father Christmas for the day.’

Mrs Buxton adds that a partnership with a business often starts with an approach by an employee or a manager.

‘The door has to be open in the first place,’ she explains. ‘The management has to support what is happening, and agree to their staff spending time with the students or taking time off work to come into school. Or their part-time staff have to be willing to give up their own time to do these things. And at Shenstone they do. They have really embraced our students. Watching staff and students interact together is a joy.’

### The foodbank

The latest addition to the school's vocational provision is a much larger



A student helps to prepare bags of food and toiletries, which will be sent to one of the foodbank's distribution centres

wooden structure that stands in the school grounds. This is the new storage facility for the town's foodbank, funded by a grant from Shaw Trust, supplemented by money raised by Lichfield Rotary, the academy and foodbank volunteers.

‘The foodbank used to be run from the police station,’ explains Mrs Arnfield. ‘Our students were already supporting it there, but it had to be young people who were able to get out and about, which limited who could take part. As the foodbank increased in size, the police station was running out of space and asked if we could help.’

‘Saxon Hill Academy is a member of Shaw Education Trust,’ she goes on, ‘a subsidiary of Shaw Trust which works towards finding employment for young adults with disabilities and special needs. Their support has been fundamental, not only in terms of finance but in helping us to move things forward.’

Since the warehouse opened in October 2017, student volunteers, with and without mobility issues, have been working on the school site with the foodbank volunteers to sort the donations and put together food packages, which are taken to the police station and other distribution centres. They have also joined volunteers on supermarket collections when they approach shoppers to ask for contributions.

‘They have been absolutely amazing,’ enthuses Mrs Arnfield. ‘They are developing their social skills, including learning to cope with being ignored, which is probably the most difficult skill of all. The first time we went, I showed them what to do and they were astonished. “How do you stay so calm?” they asked. “That person just brushed past you!” I replied: “You can't expect everybody to give,” and they have really taken that on board. They are friendly, happy and engaged when things go well, but they have developed the resilience not to get upset when people behave as if they didn't exist.’

Students at Saxon Hill work with a number of charities, and for Mrs Buxton and Mrs Arnfield this experience is especially beneficial. ‘Our children are vulnerable,’ explains Mrs Arnfield. ‘They are battling every day with adversity, they do have significant needs. Working with charities lets them see that other people have needs too and how they can help to make their lives better. They can be givers as well as receivers, which gives them a sense of value as citizens. For us, that has been the most important thing.’



# Willkommen in Ashley High

**Diane Wilson** highlights the benefits and challenges of taking students with autism and/or social communication difficulties on a foreign exchange visit

**'It was a fantastic experience. You learn a lot of new skills that you don't learn in the classroom.'**

'I made a lot of new friends, with English and German people. It's usually very difficult for me to do that.'

'I was surprised at how nice the people were... all over Germany.'

'I thought the German people were very different but they're not; they're just the same as us.'

This tiny sample from the feedback we received following a five-day exchange visit to Germany in June 2017 demonstrates just how valuable such excursions can be. Foreign travel opens young people's eyes to a different way of life; it improves their language and communication skills, develops their cultural awareness and gives them a whole new perspective on life back at home.

These benefits would make all the effort worthwhile for any school, but for Ashley High School in Widnes they were doubly rewarding. Our students struggle in

unfamiliar environments; they find social interaction difficult, especially with people they don't know very well; their thinking tends to be rigid; they like predictability and routine.

Ashley High School is a specialist secondary school for students with high-functioning autism spectrum conditions and/or social communication difficulties.

## **Preparation is key**

Without careful planning, the outcomes could have been very different, however, and preparations began long before 10 students aged 14-16 set off on their travels, accompanied by myself and modern languages teacher Mike Jones.

The journey itself was a major undertaking – departure from Widnes in the middle of the night, a flight to Berlin, followed by a train ride and a bus journey, before arriving at our destination 12 hours later. Mr Jones and I discussed all of this in detail with the students beforehand, made arrangements with the airport so we

could board before the other passengers, and paid a preliminary visit to Germany to acquaint ourselves with the areas where we would be staying, collect local maps and information and scope out the hotels, explaining our students' needs to their staff and taking pictures so the students could visualise what lay ahead.

Crucially, the students already knew quite a lot about the places they would see and the people they would meet through an eTwinning project (see *Special Children* 241) they had been working on with their German peers. They were not venturing into the completely unknown.

## **Our partner school**

J. H. Pestalozzi Schule is a special school in Schönebeck, Saxony-Anhalt, whose vision, as expressed in the words of its founder, resonates with our own – to promote 'learning with head, heart and hand' and teach students 'how to make their own way in the world'.

Founded in 2015, the partnership

came about through an Erasmus+ project between the German school and Wade Deacon School, a local mainstream school that enjoys links with Ashley High. Knowing that J. H. Pestalozzi was keen to collaborate with a school whose student profile was similar to its own, Wade Deacon approached Mr Jones. This led to a professional alliance, with staff from both schools visiting the partner setting to observe how special needs provision is delivered in another country, share best practice and learn from each other.

As a result, we knew each other well and were in a strong position to devise a project that would fulfil our joint educational objectives, both for the students involved and the wider school community.

### **Our home region – a travel guide for visitors**

The format we settled on was the production of travel guides and brochures, where the exchangees would introduce their partners to life in their respective schools and outline the key features of the local area.

- This offered a number of benefits.
- The project's strong cross-curricular focus, combining elements of literacy, numeracy, history, geography, ICT and, of course, the language and culture of the other country, would support students' academic learning.
  - By sharing information online and communicating via email and video conferencing, participants would begin to get to know each other, helping them to engage more easily when they eventually met face to face.
  - The guides would inform their exploration of the local community and places of interest during the visits, including an interactive element where the foreign students would be challenged to find the answer to a question or supplement the information provided with some research of their own.
  - The combination of compiling the guides and making the trip would help to develop the core skills of social communication, teamworking and flexibility of thought.

The students spent 10 months putting everything together, starting with pen portraits where they talked about their interests, their likes and dislikes, their families and friends, and what they were looking forward to about the visit. This was followed by an outline of the geography of their home area, including information about the weather, topography, settlement, industry and population. The next section



The exchange partners visit Halton Stadium, home of Widnes Vikings

looked at major historical events, famous people, and changes over the years, and the guides concluded with a description of local attractions and their importance to the community.

The students conducted their own research and visited relevant locations to investigate these first hand, presenting their findings in a variety of formats, including documents, photographs and PowerPoint presentations. They also

prepared brochures about their school, with pictures of buildings and classrooms, people and activities, offering opinions as well as bare facts.

All of these materials were uploaded onto our TwinSpace on the eTwinning platform. In the case of Ashley High School students, the documents included leaflets about the school and local area they had produced as part of their ASDAN Personal Development Programme, another illustration of the project's power to give curricular learning relevance and purpose.

Finally, the two schools printed out their travel guides and booklets.

### **Our partners come to Widnes**

The Germans were the first to make the journey, arriving in Widnes on 24 April 2017. The programme for their five-day stay comprised a wide variety of social activities, both in and outside school, planned in collaboration with our students to reflect the types of activities that interested them and what they knew of their partners' interests from the pen portraits. With support, our students were also responsible for some of the logistical planning, including looking for suitable hotels and restaurants.

To break the ice, we celebrated the visitors' arrival with an afternoon of bowling and laser quest at the local Super Bowl. The following day, our students showed them round the school and then took them out on a geocaching tour of Widnes and Runcorn, returning to school for an English roast dinner they prepared together, before setting off again to visit Halton Stadium, home to Widnes Vikings rugby team. The remaining days included excursions to Manchester and Liverpool to see key attractions such as Old Trafford and



The partners pose for a picture in front of the brine tower of the salt works in the Bad Salzelmen district of Schönebeck

Liverpool World Museum and enjoy a ferry ride on the Mersey. To get a taste of our students' community work, the Germans also attended a session of the school council, and visited local projects, including wildlife shelters the students had helped to build and local parks where they had worked with the local councillor to enhance the environment through bulb planting.

The participants were a little reticent at the start of the visit, but it wasn't long before the shared activities loosened tongues and brought them closer together. By the time the German party left for home, tears were shed on both sides. They couldn't wait to meet up again when it was the turn of the English students to head for the airport.

### Ashley High School visits Germany

Our return visit was slightly different in that we spent the last day exploring the sights of Berlin. The time spent with our partners was organised along similar lines, however, a deliberate strategy to help the students feel more at ease as the activities would already be familiar to them, such as a geocaching tour around Schönebeck and a game of bowling.

One of the highlights was an afternoon in Magdeburg, capital of Saxony-Anhalt, taking in some of the sights and enjoying some leisure time together, including games of football and frisbee and a ride on the Sommerrodelbahn (summer toboggan) in the magnificent Elbauen Park.

Back in Schönebeck, our final day comprised an English class at school, an exploration of the town's salt history through a visit to the salt graduation works and the salt flower monument, a barbecue lunch and a farewell evening meal in a restaurant.

### Tips for a successful project

- Ensure that both sets of students share similar interests.
- Give your project the time it deserves on the curriculum.
- Even though only a limited number of students will take part in the exchange, ensure the project involves the whole school to maximise the impact.
- Give yourself plenty of preparation time to organise the exchange visit.
- Involve the students in planning any trips out when the visitors are in your school.

### The outcomes

The project and the exchange achieved all we had hoped for in terms of academic outcomes. However, for our students, the biggest impact was on the core skills that cause them difficulties as a result of their autism: social interaction, social communication and flexibility of thought. Watching them independently breaking down barriers in a foreign country to interact appropriately, using skills they regularly struggle with at home, was a joy.

They learned to accept and understand different cultures and communities, made friends with their German peers and learned to cope successfully with new situations, new people, a variety of teaching styles and the challenges of learning outdoors for extended periods.

Anxiety is one of the greatest barriers to social integration for people with autism and here too we had some remarkable successes. A student who had been extremely apprehensive about embarking on his first ever residential, and in particular about the sleeping arrangements, managed to overcome



Time for a spot of shopping in Schönebeck

his anxieties, even changing beds to be with different people during the visit. Another student, who joined the school fairly recently and who becomes very nervous in new social situations, really enjoyed the opportunity to socialise and demonstrated excellent teamworking skills. Likewise, a boy with high level needs who experiences such extreme social anxiety that he rarely ventures from home, also found he was able to relax, contribute as a team player and engage with both staff and peers.

### Maintaining relationships

Today, over a year later, the students are still in touch with their German friends via email and social media. Meanwhile, the partnership goes from strength to strength as different members of staff use our TwinSpace to engage in further collaborative work, including a history project, a literacy project and a sports project.

Only 10 students made the trip abroad, but the whole school was involved and continues to benefit.



Diane Wilson is assistant headteacher at Ashley High School, Widnes, winner of this year's NAS Autism Professionals Award for Inspirational Education Provision (secondary)

### FIND OUT MORE

- **NAS Autism Professionals Awards:** The closing date for nominations for 2019 is 26 October 2018. [www.autismprofessionalsawards.org.uk](http://www.autismprofessionalsawards.org.uk)
- **Erasmus+:** A European Union programme managed in the UK by the British Council in partnership with Ecorys UK: <http://bit.ly/sc244-29>
- **eTwinning:** A facility co-funded by Erasmus+: [www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net)
- **Funding:** The exchange visit was supported by a Challenge Fund grant from UK-German Connection, a bilateral initiative for school and youth links, funded and governed by the UK and German governments, the British Council and the Pädagogischer Austauschdienst: [www.ukgermanconnection.org](http://www.ukgermanconnection.org)



Amanda Cameron and students take advantage of the therapeutic resource offered by the school farm

# Keeping teenagers with SEND safe from harm

Safeguarding and emotional wellbeing go hand in hand at a secondary school for students with learning difficulties and/or autism. Principal **Amanda Cameron** explains

**Walton Hall Academy is a generic secondary special school with PSHE and student wellbeing at the centre of the curriculum.**

Our students have moderate, severe or complex learning difficulties and a significant number are on the autism spectrum. This can render them especially vulnerable to the complex pressures and risks that make teenagers' lives so difficult today. Comparing themselves unfavourably with the perfect personas other people create for themselves online, or allowing themselves to be manipulated by strangers they meet on social networking sites, can lead to horrendous consequences with life-long impact.

To enable students to navigate these challenges safely and grow up into happy, well-balanced adults, the academy has established a core team of four trained staff – one for each key stage and a member of the residential team – to support students with their mental health. Having undergone extensive training in attachment,

five to thrive (<https://fivetothrive.org.uk>), emotion coaching, mental health first aid and counselling, these staff are vigilant for the early signs of anxiety and skilled in directing students to external agencies where required.

Other members of staff have accessed a considerable amount of related training and have regular opportunities to further develop their skills. This was a key focus of last year's school development plan and has been embedded in performance management across the whole school.

In addition, a number of pilot schemes have been based here. Recently, the academy has worked in partnership with the Staffordshire learning disability team to deliver a series of emotional regulation workshops for students identified as struggling to deal appropriately with difficult personal issues.

Starting this term, we are also funding a health psychologist PhD placement to enhance the delivery of health-related education, support the emotional

wellbeing of students and staff, undertake individual casework and conduct projects on sleep and gaming addiction.

**Tackling cyberbullying head on**

It was a spate of cyberbullying incidents (and the emotional repercussions) that prompted us to instigate such a major drive on emotional wellbeing. We had a number of students targeting each other on social media, and occasionally their parents were also involved, making the situation 10 times worse. Being subjected to a never-ending stream of hurtful comments with no prospect of escape can destroy a child's self-esteem, leading to anxiety or depression, disturbed sleeping patterns, social withdrawal, academic underperformance – even self-harming behaviours, as we witnessed in some cases.

While nurturing wellbeing in the fullest sense was our long-term goal, in the short term, I delivered whole-staff awareness training about different forms of cyberbullying, how it takes root and grows,



The quality of relationships between students and staff is a key strength of the school



The school's garden centre provides opportunities for students to engage in activities that support their emotional wellbeing as well as their vocational skills

and the impact on the victim. We then held a series of assemblies with different age groups and as a whole school, followed up with further work through the PSHE curriculum. One of the resources we used was a moving video made by pupils from Culcheth High School for Anti Bullying Week. The mounting distress of the victim as the taunts and mockery pile up, spilling out from the virtual world of mobile technology into the reality of his everyday life at school, left a very deep impression on our students (<https://vimeo.com/144378929>).

We also facilitated a Time to Talk day, which included a café where students could chat to older peers about anything that was troubling them, or post messages in a box if they preferred to communicate in that way. The day was designed to support wellbeing in general, but if anything regarding cyberbullying came up, we would be able to tackle it head on – and sure enough it did.

### Internet safety

Cyberbullying is just one of the negative consequences that have resulted from the inexorable rise of social media. Our students benefit in many ways from their interactions online, but they need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to ensure that the activities they enjoy so much are not exposing them to potential harm.

The importance of keeping personal details private is something we are constantly reinforcing, yet still we find ourselves having to return to the theme again and again. Even parents need to be reminded from time to time, as I discovered recently when I shared photos of our tall ship expedition privately with the parents of the students involved. Before I knew it, some of these were on Facebook, with students tagged and the name of our

school displayed prominently in the text.

Just how easy it is for predators to use even a few pieces of information is brought home by a hard-hitting video called *Consequences: assembly for 11- to 16-year-olds* from Thinkuknow, the education programme of the Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command. Narrated by a young male offender, it shows how he meets a teenage girl on a social networking site and uses her profile to take and save images of her and find out

where she lives. He then uses these details to blackmail her into sending him more revealing images. Throughout the film, he speaks to the audience and explains some of the ways his victim could have made her profile private and how to get help from CEOP (<http://bit.ly/sc244-32>).

### Sharing inappropriate pictures

It's not always outside pressure that causes young people to share revealing images, and over the years we have had several instances of explicit pictures

## Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

### *Unprotected, overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation* by Anita Franklin, Phil Raws and Emilie Smeaton

Published with Comic Relief funding in 2015, this report demonstrates just how important it is that young people with learning disabilities receive high quality PSHE and sex and relationships education so they can grow up to enjoy healthy sexual relationships and protect themselves from the advances of those who can do them untold harm.

#### Vulnerability factors identified in the report

- Overprotection, disempowerment and social isolation of young people with learning disabilities.
- Society's frequent refusal to view them as sexual beings, making it harder for people to accept that they can be sexually exploited.
- Professionals' poor understanding of their capacity to consent to sex.
- Lack of accessible sex and relationships education, including information about how to stay safe online.
- Young adults aged 18 and older can fall through the gap between children's and adults' services.
- A lack of awareness and training of professionals, both in terms of sexual exploitation and learning disabilities.

#### Recommendations from the young people themselves

The participants in the research identified four key areas for improvements.

- Education and information on sex and relationships and exploitation.
- Earlier, child-centred support so that issues do not escalate and create risk; this includes being listened to by professionals.
- Support to meet their specific learning needs.
- Access to more CSE services.

#### Outcomes when their needs were addressed

- Increased understanding of CSE, risk and keeping themselves safe.
- Considering consequences and recognising healthy relationships.
- Improved relationships with family and better understanding of friendships.
- Improved mental, physical and sexual health.
- Engaging with education, moving into paid employment, or planning for the future

<http://bit.ly/sc244-33>

exchanged by individuals. With the onset of puberty, our students have the same urges as any teenager, but due to their learning difficulties, they may find it hard to understand what is appropriate and what isn't. This is especially challenging for students with autism, who struggle to interpret people's behaviour or make sense of social conventions. Sending sexually inappropriate images to someone who takes an interest in you can also be an indicator of low self-esteem and the desire for affirmation of acceptance.

We do a lot of one-to-one work with students, in conjunction with their families, but when a situation crosses the safeguarding threshold, it often requires a multi-agency approach to protect those involved and keep them safe. We have a duty of care to follow up really thoroughly due to our students' vulnerability. We ensure parents are fully involved and provide advice as to how they can support their child afterwards.

In the case of some of our more able students, who may spend significant amounts of time manipulating social media, the creation of multiple profiles has added to the complexity of tracking inappropriate interactions online. This has served to highlight just how easy it is for predators to create false profiles and infiltrate groups of vulnerable people.

### Gaming

If it's hard to keep tabs on children's activities on social media, it's even harder to police what they get up to through gaming. We recently discovered that some of our dedicated gamers are joining gaming parties with complete strangers, including highly dubious adults. The risks of grooming, exploitation and other malpractices these students are exposing themselves to are just as real as those they might encounter on Facebook, and the mechanisms for reporting abuse far less evident.

Gaming can lead to other indiscretions too. Caught up in the excitement of a gaming party, a student forgot all that we have taught him about respecting other people's feelings and right to privacy and broadcast highly sensitive information that another student had disclosed in confidence. He thought he was sharing this within the 'safe' little bubble of his online group, but it wasn't long before his disparaging comments and those of his fellow gamers were circulating round the whole school. The mental health of the victim was already extremely fragile, and the impact was devastating.

When we discussed the implications



All adults, including lunchtime staff, are trained to spot potential signs of safeguarding issues and report them immediately using MyConcern® software ([www.myconcern.co.uk](http://www.myconcern.co.uk))

of these casually disclosed remarks, the students involved were genuinely contrite and would have done anything to turn the clock back. The message did get home, but for how long? We revisit the same issues repeatedly; it's a spiral curriculum, woven into everything we teach. But if we take our eye off the ball for just a moment, we find the same mistakes made over and over again.

***“The importance of keeping personal details private online is constantly reinforced”***

### The importance of relationships

The Time to Talk day mentioned earlier is one of several we run throughout the year. This is just one of many ways we endeavour to create a safe and secure environment where students feel able to talk openly and honestly in class about sensitive topics that arise out of sex and relationships education (SRE), or share things that are troubling them with our wellbeing mentors.

It comes down to an ethos of empathy and trust, and the quality of interpersonal relationships across the academy. Students are not frightened to speak out in lessons because they know that their



Happy smiling faces during a musical performance reflect the ethos of the school

views will be listened to and respected without attracting negative comments from their peers. And they know that every member of staff has their very best interests at heart.

The same emphasis on openness and honesty applies if we have to reprimand a student, and we always tackle the issue head on. 'This is life. This is what happens. This is what you need to know to deal with life, lead a good quality life, and not become either a victim or a perpetrator.' We don't cocoon our students or make excuses because they have a learning difficulty. This is always acknowledged by Ofsted – the exceptionally strong relationships between students and staff that allow us to have challenging conversations when things go wrong.

At the same time, through our PSHE and SRE curriculum we endeavor to give students a very positive outlook on life. Even in Year 7, where they learn about the mechanics of sex in their science lessons, we encourage them to take it all on board without fear. 'This is a body, this is what happens, it is perfectly normal, not something to be ashamed of or hide away from.' And to understand that as they grow older, they *will* have relationships, and that their life won't end if one relationship ends – there are plenty of other people out there who may be even better than the one they have lost. They must not be afraid of what life has to offer, or of their own body, or changes, or their emotions. It is a natural part of life and everybody experiences it.

That said, I don't think a day goes past without my participation in some form of counselling session with students or their parents. It is part of a wider conversation about how you engage young people who have additional difficulties to contend with on top of the emotional turmoil that is an inevitable part of adolescence. We offer a highly enriched and therapeutic curriculum, utilising facilities such as the school farm, garden centre and mechanics department to offer alternative hands-on activities that boost self-esteem when students are having a difficult time.

Which brings me back to mental health. Supporting students with the day-to-day management of their emotions is an ongoing process. Ignore it and there will be serious repercussions. You can't just leave parents to get on with it or hand it over to outside professionals.

It is everyone's responsibility to mentor children through these difficult years.

*Amanda Cameron is principal of Walton Hall Academy, part of Shaw Education Trust*



# Please do touch

**Annie Grant** meets the purpleSTARS who are pioneering ways to make museums and heritage sites more engaging for people with learning disabilities

**On a hot July morning, a group of young people with learning disabilities are in a workshop with curators from the Museum of London.**

But it's not the museum staff who are leading the session, it's the young people. They are from a group called purpleSTARS, which brings together artists and technologists, with and without disabilities, to transform museum experiences. Using sensory objects and digital media, they create alternative interpretations of museum collections and also work directly with museums to encourage them to become more inclusive.

## **A new kind of exhibit**

As the workshop gets underway, Judith Appiah, a young woman with a learning disability, sits next to Sara Wajid, head of engagement at the Museum of London, and demonstrates how to make a 'sensory label'.

She asks Ms Wajid to select an object that means something to her and describe its significance. Ms Wajid's words will be captured onto a 'recordable postcard' so that they can be played back at the

press of a button. Ms Wahid rummages in her handbag and produces a set of earplugs, and after a quick lesson from Judith, makes a recording explaining that her earplugs are important to her because they help her get through periods of insomnia. Next, she decorates her postcard with a drawing of tired, drooping eyes following nights without sleep, and the purpleSTARS team display her object under glass, museum-style, along with the sensory label that describes it.

Her colleague Hazel Vernon, SEND schools programme manager at the museum, chooses sunblock because it protects her skin and its fragrance reminds her of holidays gone by. After recording her message, Ms Vernon's object is also displayed under glass, next to its sensory label, which she has decorated with shells, adding a squirt of sunscreen in a small plastic bag, to produce an evocative smell.

## **A sensory approach**

The sensory labels demonstrated to museum staff by the purpleSTARS are examples of the kinds of outcomes that people might produce after a 'sensory

expedition' around a museum or heritage site.

The concept was developed by young people with learning disabilities, their support workers, multimedia advocacy specialists, engineers and artists as part of a 'sensory objects' project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). It is a simple approach that can be used by people with learning disabilities when visiting any museum, gallery or heritage site, however formal or inaccessible it may appear at first. At the heart of a sensory expedition is the idea of engaging with and making a personal response to some of the exhibits on show.

Visitors explore the setting using as many senses as possible, looking out for things they find visually interesting or that have fascinating textures, sounds or smells. They then 'collect' these using, for example:

- photographs, video or sketches to capture images of interesting objects or things that might sound good, or that they might be interesting to taste, touch or smell

- a sound recorder to record intriguing sounds, e.g. footsteps on a wooden floor

- in a stately home, a clock chiming or a creaking door
- a simple water blaster or bicycle pump to suck up smells, which are then stored in a small plastic bag
  - rubbings to show texture.

Afterwards, they draw on the materials they have brought back to produce a tangible and very personal response to their visit, using art, craft techniques and technology.

### Ownership and inclusivity

Dr Kate Allen, associate professor of art at Reading University and one of the key partners in purpleSTARS, explains the power of the approach.

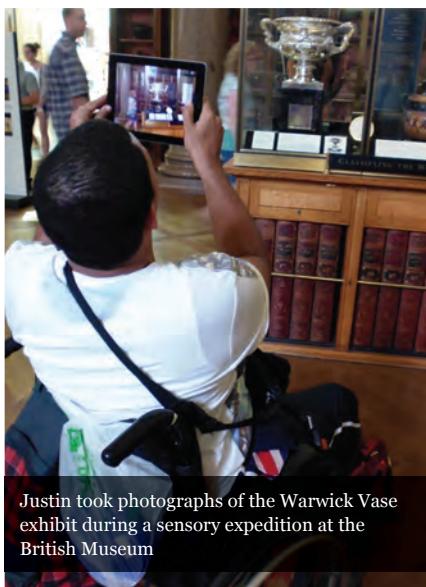
'Often, when people with learning disabilities visit museums, they are "done unto",' she explains. 'We asked ourselves: "Is there a way of giving them some sort of ownership?" and came up with an art workshop approach, where they collect their material, think about ideas, imagine things, and then try to make them.'

Over the three years of the sensory objects project, the purpleSTARS team developed and refined the approach working with three museums and heritage sites: Speke Hall in Liverpool, the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) in Reading and the British Museum in London. For those involved, the experience has been transformational.

During a sensory expedition at the British Museum, Judith Appiah, who is of Ghanaian heritage, was attracted by a pair of ancient slippers from Africa. She sketched and photographed them and carried out some research to find out more. In a follow-up art workshop with fellow purpleSTARS, she made a replica of the sandals in leatherette, adding a leather aroma to make them smell authentic.

She then worked with a technologist to introduce a sensor that triggered the sounds of walking in sandals and African music whenever the slipper was bent.

Professor Andy Minnion, director of RIX Research and Media at the University of



Justin took photographs of the Warwick Vase exhibit during a sensory expedition at the British Museum

**“Hold an exhibit, touch it and feel it, and the story begins to come to life”**

East London (UEL), another purpleSTARS partner, stresses the importance of sensory experiences when it comes to including people with learning disabilities. 'In many museums the exhibits are behind glass and their story is told using complicated written words,' he says. 'If I have a learning disability and reading is a challenge, I'll have a sense that the experience is not for me because I can't connect with it. But let me hold it, touch it and feel it and the story begins to come to life for me, and that sensory experience helps me step over the barriers to being included.'

### Sensory labels in action

As well as providing a multisensory way of describing museum exhibits, sensory labels can offer visitors with learning disabilities ways of expressing their

personal responses, just as curators from the Museum of London did in the purpleSTARS workshop.

'They offer new ways of interpreting objects,' says Professor Minnion, citing the example of football fan Justin, a young man with a learning disability, who was attracted to a silver replica of the Warwick Vase displayed in the Enlightenment Gallery, one of the most traditional rooms at the British Museum, because it reminded him of the European Cup.

'Following his visit, he made a tinfoil representation of the European Cup, which helped bring to life the association he had made,' he recalls. 'His sensory label captured his memories of his experience when Liverpool came from 3-1 down and won on penalties, with snippets of audio commentary and the smell of vinegar from his fish and chips.'

'The idea of sensory expeditions and the artefacts they inspire is to unlock just those sorts of personal responses, allowing people to present the story they want to tell,' agrees Dr Allen. 'For people with learning disabilities, a museum visit is often not about the history, it's about now. Obviously, some of the artefacts are incredibly old and very valuable, but the response of someone with a learning disability to an ancient Chinese bowl might be more about the way it makes them think about how they enjoy eating breakfast with their grandma.'

'We're not suggesting that one replaces the other,' she adds. 'But there are different ways of looking at objects, which makes it much more complex and interesting.'

At the end of their time at the British Museum, purpleSTARS presented their objects and labels to the public at a pop-up event in the Enlightenment Gallery. 'They were so confident,' remembers Dr Allen. 'They suddenly became really important, there was a shift in respect for them when they said: "I've got this amazing object and I can make you look at these exhibits in a different way if you come with me on my journey."



The creation of Judith Appiah's personal response to a pair of ancient African sandals, from first noticing the exhibit through to completion of her interpretation

## Learning outside the classroom

'The best response we got was from the museum itself,' she continues. 'Different members of staff kept coming up and saying, "We ought to do this more often. Why isn't this happening?" It shifted their attitude.'

### Changing museum culture

As part of the sensory objects project, purpleSTARS also worked directly with the three museums to help them rethink the curation of their collections to make them more engaging for visitors with learning disabilities.

Isabel Hughes, head of curatorial and public engagement at MERL, remembers their early visits. 'When the young people first came here they wanted to know what the things were and how do they worked,' she recalls. 'But when we started to talk about farming and food, they said: "Well, where are the smells? Where's the grass? Where are the animals?" And they were right!'

After experimenting with prototypes, including a wellington boot covered in 'cow hide' material that mooed when you rubbed it, the museum decided to work with the purpleSTARS to create more permanent interactive exhibits. These now include a sheep in a woolly jumper that baas as you walk by and an interactive cow that smells of milk chocolate and allows visitors to record and hear back their own mooing sounds. 'We also put soundtracks on black and white archive film of cheese-making, using bicycle pumps and water and that sort of thing,' remembers Dr Allen. 'It was a really nice way to animate the collection.'

More ambitiously, in response to the purpleSTARS questioning why they couldn't sit on the many vehicles in the collection, the museum has bought a quad bike and is working with the young people to create a virtual reality sheep-herding experience, that will be accessible by sitting on the quad bike or from a wheelchair. purpleSTARS and MERL are also working with Dutch film company, Shosho to transform a two-dimensional animation of the passing seasons that currently plays in the MERL introductory gallery into a 3-D virtual reality experience, including a range of animals and other features suggested by the young people.

'Going to the countryside is a very sensory experience and one of our challenges as a countryside museum is to reflect this,' says Ms Hughes. 'But this is not just about consulting a particular group of people and seeing what they



Hazel Vernon has decorated her sensory label with shells, reminiscent of seaside holidays in days gone by

would like, it's a genuine partnership that has made us think differently about how we do things. We now automatically consider multisensory possibilities as we carry out our work.'

Phillippa Heath, MERL's learning and engagement manager agrees. 'It has changed my practice,' she says. 'It has given us all the enthusiasm to develop this kind of work further because it has so much potential benefit, not just for visitors with learning disabilities, but for all our visitors.'

MERL has also extended its commitment to increasing the visibility of people with learning disabilities in museum settings by providing extended work placement opportunities for students from Reading College, enabling them to develop museum-specific skills, such as front of house, organising archives and looking after the chickens, as well as more widely transferable skills.

### Opportunities for enterprise

As news about the work of purpleSTARS spread, it generated a lot of interest within the museum sector, and the team, whose

grant funding had come to an end, started thinking about options for the future.

'We wondered if this was a service that museums might buy into and if we might have a viable enterprise here, where purpleSTARS brokers opportunities with museums and heritage sites, and provides the support framework and the creative methods and approaches,' explains Professor Minnion. 'That got us very excited because the range of employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities is so limited. We thought maybe there is another role, an advisory and training role around public culture, where people with learning disabilities who are "experts by experience" bring their multimedia and multisensory approaches to reinterpreting collections and making them more meaningful and more inclusive.'

Judith Appiah has clear ideas about what makes an inclusive museum. 'We need to be able to see and touch the objects,' she says. 'Maybe there could be more replicas. At MERL we couldn't touch things so we introduced virtual reality.' She also suggests that projections with sound could be used to provide more background about displayed objects, and visual information showing how historical objects relate to the modern context.

Although the purpleSTARS enterprise is still in its infancy, it is already working with new museums, including Glenside Hospital Museum in Bristol, the Ragged School Museum in London and the Museum of London, which is taking the opportunity provided by its relocation to Smithfields in 2021 to review the way it represents people with learning disabilities through its collections, and the way it welcomes people with learning disabilities into the museum.

'The purpleSTARS are exactly the kind of creative and interesting people that I want to collaborate with in developing the new Museum of London,' says head of engagement, Sara Wajid, enthused by what she learned in the workshop. 'Hopefully, the people I have met here are the museum workers of the future.'

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

### Taking children and young people with learning disabilities to museums and heritage sites

- Contact the museum and talk to staff about what you would like to do on your visit.
- Visit the museum and familiarise yourself with the opportunities and possibilities.
- Consider leading a sensory expedition (see pull-out resource pages 23-26) and familiarise pupils with the approach.
- On the visit, encourage pupils to develop personal responses to artefacts. Talk to them to help draw out their stories.
- Following their visit, consider how pupils can develop their personal responses, using the materials they have collected during the sensory expedition, through practical, creative projects.

### FIND OUT MORE

- **purpleSTARS:** <https://purplestars.org.uk>
- **Sensory objects project:** <http://sensoryobjects.com>
- **Recordable postcards available from TTS Group:** <http://bit.ly/sc244-30>

# Sensory expeditions

purpleSTARS offers ideas that schools might use to make their visits to museums and heritage sites more engaging and inclusive

**This selection of resources has been taken from the *Sensory Expeditions* book, created by purpleSTARS to help people with learning disabilities get more out of their visits to museums and heritage sites.**

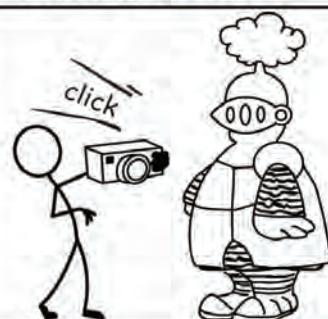
The idea behind a sensory expedition is that visitors explore the setting looking for items they find particularly

interesting or intriguing. Using all five senses, they collect material about the item, and use this as the inspiration for an artefact that captures what the item means to them on a personal level and memories that it evokes.

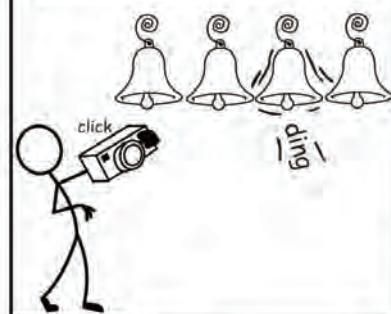
For a fuller explanation of the approach and examples of artefacts people have made, see *Please do touch* on pages 20–22.

## SENSORY EXPEDITION

LOOK AROUND AND TAKE PICTURES OF THINGS THAT INTEREST YOU



TAKE PICTURES OF THINGS WHICH MIGHT SOUND GOOD TO YOU



... THINGS WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO TASTE ...



... THINGS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TOUCH



... AND THINGS YOU LIKE TO SMELL ...



Match the symbols below to the comic strip. For example, in which frame is touch being used?





Taking a picture of afternoon tea in a Victorian museum

## which senses did you use?



Use this worksheet to make a note of which senses you used during the expedition, and where the senses were used. You can then use this worksheet to remind you of where you used your different senses for other activities.

	<b>What did you see?</b>	
	<b>Were there things you would like to have touched?</b>	
	<b>Were there things you would like to have smelled?</b>	
	<b>Were there things you would like to have tasted?</b>	
	<b>What did you hear?</b>	

**TOP TIP**

Make a sketch or take a photograph of where each sound came from



	<p>What sounds did you hear? Which sounds did you like the most?</p>	
	<p>What made the sounds?</p>	



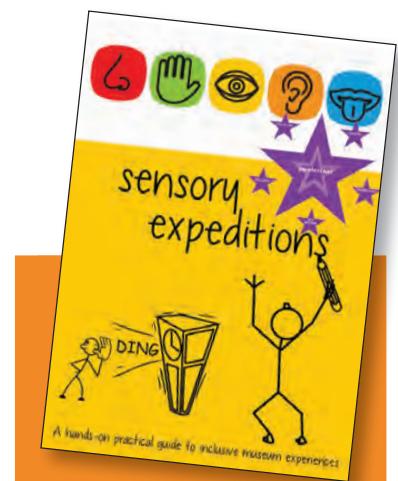
**MAKING SOUNDS**

YOU WILL NEED TO USE A SOUND RECORDER ...

... TO RECORD SOUNDS THAT YOU WILL MAKE YOURSELF.

FOR EXAMPLE YOU CAN USE COCONUT SHELLS TO MAKE THE SOUNDS OF HORSES HOOVES ...

OR BLOW THROUGH A STRAW INTO A CUP OF WATER TO MAKE THE SOUND OF BOILING WATER.



To obtain a copy of the full resource, which explains how to collect smells and textures as well as how to make sensory labels and movie sound tracks, contact:  
purpleSTARS  
RIX Research & Media  
University of East London  
4-6 University Way, London  
E16 2RD.  
Tel: 020 8223 7561.

### Ideas for sounds

**A crackling fire.** Squeeze bubble wrap or a piece of stiff cellophane. Hold it fairly close to the microphone for a clear effect.

**Walking on gravel.** Place a box of gravel on the floor and walk on the spot, or slip a pair of shoes over your hands and walk on the gravel that way.

**Sword fighting.** You can make realistic sword fighting sounds by hitting together a pair of large kitchen utensils, such as a soup ladle and roasting fork. They need to be metal for this to work!

	<p><b>What sounds did you make?</b></p> <p><b>Which sounds did you enjoy making the most?</b></p> <p><b>Play back the sounds on a computer and share them with others.</b></p>	 
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# Dyspraxia in the primary classroom

What is dyspraxia? What are the symptoms? How can we provide support at school? SEN specialist **Jacqui Strubel** offers some answers

**As our understanding of children with dyslexia and autism continues to grow, there has been a corresponding improvement in the support and training offered to those who work with them.**

Recently, however, I have been coming across more instances of children with dyspraxia and dyscalculia. Teachers do not have the time to individually assess a child they feel may have difficulties in a few areas and, while trying to accommodate them as best they can, often do not have the support to do so.

This article offers guidance on how to identify children who may need some extra support and those who would benefit from an alternative approach, tailored to suit their individual needs and learning style.

## What is dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia, or developmental coordination

disorder (DCD), affects fine and gross motor skills as well as concentration and organisation. It is a learning difficulty affecting how sequences of movement are planned.

Some children may get a formal diagnosis and others may demonstrate symptoms, but for one reason or another never obtain a formal diagnosis. It is therefore crucial to be able to spot some of the signs so that appropriate action can be taken.

## What to look out for

As with all learning difficulties, each child will present differently, with some having only a few areas of difficulty that require support.

## Concentration

Difficulty with concentration will affect memory, which can give the impression

that the child is not listening in class. Anxiety and stress can result from the child's constant struggle to concentrate. Concentration may also be affected on a sensory level by tight or elasticated underwear or clothing, in particular by tight or elasticated cuffs, tight buttons at the neck or elasticated edges on tracksuit trousers.

## Fine motor skills

Children with dyspraxia have difficulty manipulating classroom equipment, such as pens and pencils, rulers and scissors. This will have a big impact on handwriting, and is often a very strong indicator for dyspraxia being present. Handwriting will be poor in terms of letter formation, pencil grip and spacing of letters. The child who often has their shoes on the wrong feet, or who can't tie their laces, zip up their coat or fasten

their shirt buttons is often found to be dyspraxic too.

### Gross motor skills

Difficulty with coordination may lead the child to struggle with sports, particularly hopping, jumping and balancing activities, as well as riding a bicycle. They will also tire more easily, having weaker muscles due to low muscle tone and perhaps hypotonia. Poor integration between the two sides of the body will add to their tiredness. Changing for PE is another area where coordination issues will be apparent.

### Organisation

Difficulty with accessing memory will cause problems when the child needs to remember rules and sequences within school life. Planning difficulties are almost always present.

### Classroom work

The child may struggle to get ideas onto paper or copy from the board – there are a lot of processes going on for this to work efficiently. They may have poor listening skills, which again can be perceived as inattention, but which are more likely to stem from the distracting interference of background noise. In addition, they often have difficulties distinguishing certain words, such as ‘on’ and ‘in’, further impeding their ability to follow instructions accurately.

### Personal traits

They often present as untidy, which may be due to poor memory (they simply forgot to brush their hair) or sensory issues (they dislike the sensation of the hairbrush). Messy eating is another common trait, either as a result of coordination difficulties or the need to seek sensory fulfilment from the sensation that their food is giving them.

Quite often they are overly sensitive, also suffering from low self-esteem.

### Providing support in the classroom

Lots of children struggle to concentrate, so this in itself is not necessarily an indication of dyspraxia. However, if the teacher can find ways to aid the child’s concentration, it will allow them to see other difficulties more clearly.

A reduction in the amount of wall displays will help to cut down distractions, although this is not always possible.

A strategy I have found to be successful when setting longer pieces of written work is to break the task down into a series of logical steps as in the following example.



will need to be managed in keeping with their capabilities. The teacher may have designed the task to last for three lessons, but it may take the dyspraxic learner twice that amount of time. In my experience, it is more valuable for the child to understand the processes and know what is expected of them, rather than be required to complete the same quantity of work as everyone else.

One approach is to get them to present their findings in a multisensory way. Having conducted their research, they might print out pictures from the internet or photocopy them from a book, and stick them on to a poster as evidence of their argument. They could then make a presentation in class, or work in a group towards the same end. Some of the children could extend this by writing it up and others could have copies of the poster in their books.

Ultimately, it will depend on the learning objectives of the task. If the objectives are to understand Victorian education, compare it with modern times and formulate an argument, a poster will serve the purpose well. However, if the learning objectives are to construct a persuasive written argument, demonstrating an understanding of the layout, I would encourage the child to research fewer points, but still use the poster approach to provide a framework for their written response.

### Managing anxiety

Children become anxious for many different reasons. If we can try to establish where the anxiety is coming from, then it will be easier to work on this area.

Children with dyspraxia are usually very sensitive and experience heightened emotions, so something that might not affect another child may have a big impact. We are limited in the school environment as to how we can support an anxious child. However, bringing some aspects of one-to-one play therapy into a session will help to foster feelings of safety and security.

Building up the child’s toolkit of self-help strategies is also important. I recently worked with a child with severe anxiety who has found the following strategy extremely helpful, as it diverts his attention from the intensity of his anxiety and gives him an alternative focus.

- Check that your breathing is calm and regular.
- Name five things you can see.
- Name four things you can touch.
- Name three things you can hear.
- Name two things you can smell.

- Name one emotion you feel.

### **Addressing handwriting problems**

The issue of poor handwriting is often more of a problem for parents and teachers than it is for the child and can end up becoming the main area for concern. It can be readily supported, allowing the child to focus on other aspects of their learning.

If, at the developmental stage of baby and toddler, there have been limited opportunities for play, in particular with playdough, sand and balls, or performing songs with actions, this has an impact on the strengthening of the fingers. As a result, the child finds it hard to hold a pencil, and do so for any length of time. This can cause them to lose interest, or they may not be able to help it.

Fine motor skills exercises to strengthen fingers will help, as will pencil grips, stencils, and drawing extra lines between the original lines. Exercises to strengthen the arm and shoulder will also be beneficial.

Writing on a slope board helps some children, but the biggest support is allowing the child to use a laptop, if possible, so they don't have to think about the mechanics of writing and can concentrate on getting the words in their head onto paper. Not all children find typing easier than writing, however, so it doesn't always provide a solution.

Some children are referred to an occupational therapist for support with gross motor skills, especially if the core is weak. However, simply playing in the playground on a climbing frame, football (which will help socially and with coordination), skipping and swimming are all ways to support the core muscles.

### **Taking the stress out of changing for PE**

Children with dyspraxia often take forever to change for PE. Listening and understanding what is required of them, planning how to approach it, working through the plan, ensuring discarded items are placed where they won't get lost... this can be an enormous and stressful task for some.

Encouraging parents to buy them garments and shoes with Velcro fastenings will make the child's life much easier. Reminders to put clothes on with labels at the back and do a quick mirror check before leaving will also help. Alternatively, the child could be buddied with a classmate, so the two pupils can check each other. Giving some extra time

for changing will also make a difference.

### **Supporting organisational skills**

Poor organisation will always be improved through the use of visual aids to support memory. How these are presented will vary from child to child, whether through pictures or actual objects. (For an example of visual supports for the PE changing room, see *Pull-out resource, Special Children* 243).

Visual timetables in class are often helpful to provide clarity and support planning. However, ensure that pupils don't rely on them too much and appreciate that sometimes things can change without warning – for example, because of an unexpected fire drill or a teacher absence.

Visual timetables can also be used at home, to bridge the link between school and home and to demonstrate that planning is useful in lots of contexts, not just in school. Board games can really help with understanding this concept, in terms of setting up the board, allowing each player to take a turn, rolling the dice and so on.

## **‘An untidy personal appearance may be due to poor memory’**

### **Clarifying instructions**

You have five minutes to finish the sentence you are writing, put your books in a neat pile on the table, collect your snack and line up at the door.'

Lumped together like this, what appears like a simple instruction can be a huge challenge for the dyspraxic learner. This can be addressed by breaking it into the separate components after you have issued the complete instruction to the class.

'Jack,' – wait for eye contact – 'you have five minutes to finish the sentence you are writing.' Wait for his verbal or non-verbal response.

A few minutes later, if he hasn't picked up on what the others are doing, add: 'Jack, put your book in a neat pile on the table,' followed by, 'Jack, collect your snack,' and finally, 'Jack, please line up with everyone else at the door.'

How many separate instructions you issue will depend on the child. The key is not to expect them to absorb, understand and process the original request in its entirety and then execute it exactly as

required. In extreme situations, I ask the child to repeat it back to me, so there is clarity for us both. And I always congratulate them afterwards. There can never be enough praise!

Checking for understanding is always crucial. So much of what we say in the classroom is based on assumptions and we then wonder why the child doesn't comply. I was once working with a child and had been asking him for some time to open his exercise book, but without success. On further questioning, I discovered that he had no idea what an 'exercise book' was because his regular teacher always referred to it as his 'book'. My error, and I am always mindful now to take nothing for granted!

### **Enabling social interaction**

Social interactions involve a lot of things happening at once, which can be overwhelming for a dyspraxic child. Self-esteem is frequently low, making it hard for them to make friends and build enduring relationships.

Sometimes it is worth encouraging them to get involved in sports and activities they might not naturally choose as this can help with their confidence. Lego® Therapy is a very useful support for lots of friendship difficulties at school, with its focus on turn-taking, working together and following rules. Social stories can also help to overcome difficulties, as well as role-playing.

### **Last but not least**

Finally, it is important to stress that children with dyslexia can have many strengths. They are frequently big-hearted and full of affection and empathy for others. Many of them are hardworking and creative thinkers. They are often highly motivated to do well.

We owe it to them to make that possible.



Jacqui Strubel is a SEN consultant who specialises in dyscalculia, dyspraxia and autism. She is currently working as interim SENCO at Heathside Preparatory School in Hampstead

### **FIND OUT MORE**

- For more detailed advice about the issues in this article, contact Jacqui Strubel at [jbella@associates.aol.com](mailto:jbella@associates.aol.com). She also offers consultancy and support services to schools in Greater London.
- The **Dyspraxia Foundation** website offers lots of advice and resources for schools: <https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk>

A TA can write down instructions for a child if noise levels or reverberation in a classroom make it hard for children to hear what is being said by the teacher



# Auditory processing disorder

Professor **Doris-Eva Bamiou** outlines what this condition entails and recommends accommodations

**Deafness occurs when one or more parts of the ear or auditory nerve do not function as they should. However, the ability to listen to sounds also involves memory, learning, vision and attention, as well as hearing. If any of these functions are impaired, then hearing and listening may be affected.**

## *The intricate process of interpreting sound*

Both passive hearing and active listening rely on conduction of the sound signal through the middle ear to the inner ear cochlea, where it is analysed in terms of frequency, intensity and time aspects, and amplified by the function of the outer hair

cells. From here, it is further conducted by the auditory nerve in a synchronous manner across all its fibres and enters the brainstem.

At this point, information transferred via the right and left auditory nerves is processed together and we start experiencing the benefits of binaural hearing (hearing with both ears), which improves the localisation of sounds when there is background noise.

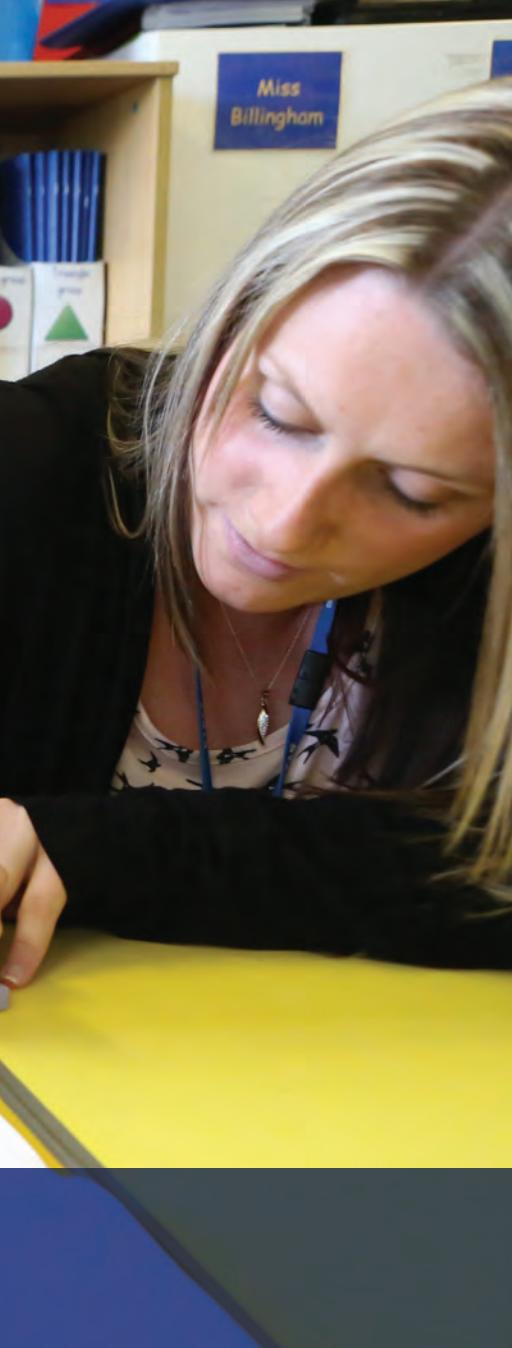
From the brainstem, the sound signal continues its journey up the auditory pathway to the auditory cortex, where perception of sound takes place. The right auditory cortex is better for musical and prosody cues perception, which conveys the emotional state of the speaker,

the type of the utterance (statement, question, or command), whether the speaker is using irony or sarcasm, and other elements of language that may not be encoded by grammar or by choice of words. The left auditory cortex is better for language-related processing, and the two parts connect and exchange information important for language understanding via the corpus callosum.

The auditory cortices also connect with those parts of the brain that are involved with cognitive and language processing, such as attention, memory, learning for sounds and linguistic decisions. There is also extensive connectivity of this entire pathway from higher cortical levels to lower brain levels: hearing is a dynamic, bidirectional process.

## *The impact of APD*

Auditory processing disorder (APD) refers to difficulties in the perceptual



processing of auditory information in the central nervous system, i.e. after it enters the brain.

This may manifest in several ways. Children with APD may have difficulty with listening or making sense of speech when there is background noise, including the sound of other people talking. They may also experience difficulties understanding speech in acoustically challenging environments, such as classrooms where high ceilings and lots of hard surfaces create reverberation, or when the speech quality is degraded, for example, when someone speaks too fast or does not enunciate clearly.

Children with APD may also have problems localising where sounds are coming from, difficulties remembering speech (e.g. instructions), attending to sounds, or hypersensitivity to loud sounds. Some may also experience

disproportionate (for their cognitive function) learning or language difficulties (Iliadou et al., 2017).

### **Adapting the classroom environment**

Classrooms can be particularly challenging listening environments for all children, let alone those with APD, and acoustics can play a large part in teaching and learning.

Newly built classrooms are more likely to adhere to the UK Building Bulletin 93 Regulations (Shield et al., 2015). In older classrooms, there should be sustained efforts to improve the acoustics. Closing the doors, carpeting the floors or replacing old windows can help (see pages 54 and 55 of the BSA APD *Practice Guidance* at <http://bit.ly/sc244-02> for additional information).

At present, half of school classrooms in the UK fail to meet the standard required by the acoustic regulations, and even in those that do, noise during teaching activities may still exceed the optimum levels for learning, even if the child is sitting near the teacher (Persson et al., 2015). It is recommended that the difference between the teacher's voice and the background noise level (i.e. the signal to noise ratio) should be at least +15 decibels (dB) at the child's ears (<http://bit.ly/sc244-03>). In reality, noise in UK primary school classrooms ranges from 56 dBA for quiet activities to 77 dBA for the noisiest activities, with 65 dBA being the most common level of sound (Shield et al., 2015). This means that teachers would need to almost shout for the best part of the teaching day. Unsurprisingly, in approximately 40% of mainstream classes, there is at least one child who will report difficulties hearing what their teacher says and, in 88% of the classes, at least one child who will report problems concentrating in noise (Persson et al., 2015).

### **Using remote microphones**

In these challenging circumstances, children with APD are reported to improve their listening when using personal frequency modulated systems or remote microphone hearing aids (RMHAs) (Reynolds et al., 2016). These systems include a microphone that the teacher wears on their clothes, and two earpieces that the student wears behind and inside their ears. The teacher's voice is transmitted wirelessly from the microphone into the student's ears, and it can be amplified if the ambient noise levels are high.

These devices are often recommended for students with APD who show deficits

in speech-based assessments that usually require repetition of speech (words or sentences) in background noise. Abnormal results in these tests require a performance on the first or second percentile, so it is fair to assume that these children will be at a significant disadvantage in noisy environments compared to their classmates.

Anecdotally, parents of children with APD report that their child will be very tired at the end of the school day. This may be because, when they listen to speech in background noise, they rely more on their cognitive resources, including memory and attention, to listen well (Schmitzorst et al., 2011). Use of RMHAs over a period of weeks to months by children with APD and a range of other developmental disorders is reported to improve the child's classroom listening behaviours (Reynolds et al., 2016; Johnston et al., 2009), such as making an appropriate response to a question. They improve speech perception and recognition when there is background noise, as well as academic performance, as reported in the majority of studies performed in children with APD or related developmental conditions (Reynolds et al., 2016). They can also improve the child's psycho-social function, with students who use them reporting better locus of control and less depression (Johnston et al., 2009).

There is also emerging evidence that children who use RMHAs alongside additional APD management interventions outside the classroom, such as language strategies or auditory training (see below), do better than students who receive only the interventions (Sharma et al., 2012), with some evidence showing improved brain function (Hornickel et al., 2012).

However, as children grow older, they become more aware of being different from their classmates. Children who use RMHAs will require sustained support from teachers to help them – and their classmates – accept and destigmatise these devices. Older APD students may need to learn to choose when to use them, depending on teaching styles and lecture delivery.

Meanwhile, a drawback of RMHAs is that while they improve access to the teacher's voice, they do not help the child hear another student asking a question.

### **Auditory training**

A child's brain becomes overall cognitively more efficient over the period of postnatal development due to physical development and maturation, but also as a result of auditory experience (e.g. exposure to

different sounds such as speech and music) and auditory training.

Auditory training (AT) involves giving listening exercises to the child in order to improve the auditory brain's function (Loo et al., 2010) and to achieve long-term improvement of auditory perception and related behaviours (Fahle & Poggio, 2002). AT can be informal, for example school- or home-based or speech-language exercises that usually include language-based tasks that may tap into a number of different listening, attention, memory and language skills. Prosody training, phoneme discrimination, vocabulary building, musical game activities are all examples of informal AT.

Formal AT involves the use of acoustically controlled training tasks, and the level of the difficulty of the task can be varied to match the child's performance so that the task is neither too difficult nor too easy to perform. Formal AT can be done at home, on an app, on a desktop computer via a CD or via an internet connection. It may include both speech and non-speech stimuli. Improvements after auditory training can be observed in a range of measures that include listening behaviours (as assessed by questionnaires) as well as language-related and auditory measures (Loo et al. 2010; Sharma et al., 2012; Loo et al., 2015).

### Supporting the child in class

Practical classroom strategies (Bamiou et al., 2006) include preferential seating, although this may not be enough to make a significant difference when noise levels are high (Persson et al., 2015). Teacher-based adaptations include clear delivery and a relatively slower rate of speech, gaining the student's attention before

speaking so they can use lip-reading cues, chunking information and frequently checking for the student's understanding.

Visual cues, for example providing key words or a written example on the board for classroom-related work, could also be of help, particularly when the teacher gives multi-step instructions.

In some cases, pre-teaching information may be useful, for example, teaching new vocabulary before it is introduced in a classroom setting. Provision of written handouts before class for older students, and, for younger pupils, of handouts or other support materials to take home to parents after the class, could also be of benefit.

**“Classrooms can be particularly challenging listening environments”**

Older students should be allowed to record lectures or use note-takers or laptops in the class. Students should be encouraged to ask questions for clarification, whether during or after the class. They should also be taught the difference between passive hearing and active listening (i.e. paying attention to the sound), and how to use their eyes (by looking at the speaker) and the rest of their body (by keeping still, avoiding chewing or doing unrelated motor tasks such as tidying up) to become good listeners (Truesdale, 1990). By making students aware of good listening behaviours and rewarding these, students learn to self-monitor their listening,

which is necessary for learning.

The impact of APD may be reduced with the use of auditory training and other metacognitive and learning strategies. This kind of support is usually recommended following an APD assessment and diagnosis (Bamiou et al., 2006), when specialists will also recommend ways to support the child's listening and learning. This will help the child and their family understand how they listen, and how listening can be improved. In some cases this information will be incorporated into the child's EHCP.

### Supporting the child through transition

Finally, it is important to appreciate that every time the student transfers to a more demanding academic environment, for example, from primary to secondary school, or to university, the listening difficulties become more acute for the student and more noticeable by their teachers. To support students with APD to learn in the classroom environment, teachers will need to understand their listening needs and address these with different tools and strategies.



Doris-Eva Bamiou is professor in neuro-audiology at University College London Ear Institute and does APD and other clinics at Great Ormond Street Hospital and University College London Hospital

### FIND OUT MORE

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  - See Cued Speech: a speech perception too, *Special Children* 241.
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Children from The Willows Primary School stand at the front of the class and describe their cards. Eliza says: 'Jake is in the bath.' Olivia says: 'Jake is wearing pyjamas.' Harry says: 'Jake is in bed.'

## Communication is everybody's business

**Janet Cooper** outlines the difference a citywide initiative is making for children with speech language and communication needs

In 2004, 64% of children starting nursery with poor language skills in Stoke-on-Trent were identified as having SLCN of some description, whether this was delayed speech and language or more complex difficulties.

The Stoke Speaks Out initiative was subsequently set up to train and support parents, carers, practitioners and anyone in contact with families to make communication 'everybody's business'.

### **Establishing the true picture**

Challenges identified in the early stages of the initiative included assessing the level of a child's difficulty in the first place, and lack consistency in assessment outcomes – different settings used different tools, each applied in a different way depending on who administered the test.

In addition, in areas of high deprivation, it is sometimes hard to see what typically developing looks like. Furthermore, nursery practitioners don't necessarily have the level of expertise required to identify specific areas of



Imaan from The Willows Primary School uses the feely bag to find pictures of a chicken and an elephant after she said: 'The chicken is little and the elephant is big.'

difficulty without calling in specialist services for support.

In 2014 the local authority commissioned a group of speech and language therapists from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership Trust to develop a school readiness programme.

Part of this work was to develop a universal screening tool, the Early Communication Screen (ECS), for all children in the city.

The ECS allows any trained practitioner to assess any children in a consistent way to give an independent, unbiased baseline for the stage they have reached and then measure their progress.

### **Greater insight**

Feedback from the early trials included comments like: 'I just thought that child was a little quiet; I didn't realise he couldn't understand.' Conversely, some chatty children presented as typically developing, but when they were assessed, it was found that they were using words they did not really understand.

Since then, Stoke Speaks Out has trained more than 1,800 early years

practitioners across Stoke-on-Trent, including TAs and support staff, to administer the assessment, so that whoever administers the screen is delivering it in the same way and thus the results are reliable and accurate. At the same time, practitioners were trained in how to address language difficulties that were identified, and given pointers for which children would need referral on to specialist services.

### **How the tool works**

Paper based, the assessment comes with a set of questions, graded in six-month blocks from two- to five-years-old, designed to test both receptive and expressive language. The practitioner selects the questions that match the child's chronological age irrespective of any cognitive difficulties they might have.

It takes between five and 10 minutes to administer an assessment. The



Harry from The Willows Primary School describes what he sees on the card. 'Tizzy is under the table.'



Olivia from The Willows Primary School says: 'Tizzy is under the carpet.'

child responds to the practitioner's questions by pointing, naming or placing an item in the correct place. The first three questions deal with fundamental language development, and if children don't score here, we know they have a specific problem. The remaining questions test understanding vocabulary and pronunciation. Further insights into pronunciation, clarity, fluency, voice projection are obtained through a questionnaire completed by the practitioner.

### **Interpreting the results**

The child's answers produce a score out of 10, colour coded for ease of identification. Green (7-10) shows that they are on track, amber (4-7) indicates that some support is needed, while red (0-4) highlights a more severe need which may require specialist intervention from an SLT. We are fortunate in Stoke-on-Trent to have funding for SLTs to go into schools to help staff interpret assessment results.

**66** Children with SLCN or language delay are being identified as young as two

Children who have a developmental delay, perhaps through lack of stimulation at home, are likely to score in the amber range and their needs can usually be met in the setting with targeted support, like the use of Talk Boost (see *Special Children* 220).

Children with SEN often have an associated speech and language difficulty. All children with SEN are screened alongside their peers, which puts their speech and language into context with the rest of their cohort.

This may mean that their needs are addressed earlier than might otherwise have been the case because their scores are more likely to stand out.

### **Accelerating progress**

When we introduced the ECS to half the city in 2016, 35% of children assessed were on track. Ten months later, after putting targeted interventions in place, this percentage rose to 54%, meaning a lot more children were able to fully access the curriculum from the day they arrived at school.

Stoke-on-Trent now screens whole



Children from The Willows Primary School talked about all the different types of fruit they liked, made a chart and then posed for a photograph which was later stuck up on the classroom wall

cohorts of children aged two to five no matter what the setting. This includes 71 primary schools and 82 private nurseries – over 8,000 children a year.

### **The benefit of citywide assessments**

The data is also analysed to identify hot spots. Breakdowns by geographical area, ethnicity, gender, SEN and pupils on the pupil premium enable the city to target early interventions where they are most needed.

In the past, it was not until children arrived at school aged five that any SLCN was identified. Today, thanks to Stoke Speaks Out, children with SLCN or language delay are being identified as young as two, and nursery practice is changing to address the majority of those children's needs before they start school.

In recognition of the impact the ECS is having across the city, Stoke Speaks Out received the SLCN Innovation Award and the Pearson Outstanding Achievement Award at the 2018 Shine a Light Awards, sponsored by The Communication Trust and Pearson.



*Janet Cooper is the clinical lead for speech and language at Stoke Speaks Out, Stoke-on-Trent*

### **FIND OUT MORE**

- The ECS is £140 and includes an assessment book and photocopiable screening records.  
Email [eyqi@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:eyqi@stoke.gov.uk)

### **ECS in practice**

Teachers from two different settings talk about the impact of the assessment on their pupils

**Rosy Cheeks Nursery was among the first settings to try out the ECS when it was rolled out nearly two years ago. We use it across all four of our sites with all of our children.**

It enables us to identify specific areas of difficulty and put interventions in place. Sometimes children we thought might have SLCN get a higher score than we expected, which enables us to step back a little, knowing they are on target.

To support children in the amber group, we use the Stoke-on-Trent Time to Listen, which focuses on the pre-verbal elements of speech and language, such as listening and concentration skills. Then we move on to Stoke's Time To Talk, which introduces the basics of language, followed by More Time to Talk with children who do not need to be referred to an SLT but who still need a little bit of extra support to keep them on target.

We find that around 50% of children starting with us need support. This percentage has been reduced to about 20% by the time they are ready

**We carried out our first baseline ECS test at The Willows Primary School in the autumn term 2017 having received training on it that summer. We retested all pupils in Reception in spring, and nursery and Reception children again at the end of the summer term.**

The results give us a good idea of children's speech and language abilities and we support the amber group with in-class provision. For example, all staff know to enhance the language they use with them. They model good language practice and encourage children to speak in full sentences and to add detail. Children might sit in a circle with their key adult and be shown a picture of, for example, a goat, and have to say something about it. Some start off saying: 'It's hairy.' By the time they finish the session they will be saying: 'The goat is hairy,' and some pupils will be able to extend that to: 'The goat is hairy and has four legs.'

If a child has an extremely low score (0-1), we do not necessarily move them straight into interventions. This could be less about language ability and more about confidence. Or they may need more time to settle in to the new setting before we start formal group interventions with them. In some cases, they may have developmental delays in other areas.

In October, the baseline for children in Reception was 11% red, 33% amber and 56% green. In spring, the red group was down to 8%, amber down to 22% and green had risen to 69%. The summer tests showed a further reduction in red (6.8%) and amber (7.2%), while green had risen to 86%. Out of the 18 children taking part in the interventions, 17 had made progress.

for school – we pass the scores to the next school during transition.

We also send information home to parents – the test results show clearly which areas their child needs to work on. In addition, we usually make suggestions, such as asking parents to read with their children or to do some flash card work.

When asked to describe the ECS, one of our nursery teachers, Shelley Badderley, said: 'The tool is very prescriptive – either a child can do it or they can't. Nothing is left to a practitioner's professional judgement, enabling non-specialists to administer it. The instructions are equally prescriptive, so I can't point or gesture or lead a child into an answer. I almost have to sit on my hands when I ask questions. This does, however, give us complete confidence in the child's score.'



*Rose Dingle is head teacher at Rosy Cheeks Nurseries Ltd, Stoke-on-Trent*

In nursery, the interventions are about developing good habits in listening and communicating, so we reinforce the basics, like sitting still to be able to hear what is happening, and go over these fundamentals at the start of every session. Teachers work with groups of six to eight children at a time, during which time they will play two games, sing a song and listen to a story. This format is repeated over three days with the same song and story. At the end of three sessions, the children know the story well. If they get a little stuck, they know how to use all the illustrative clues to tell the story. After this, they take the storybook home to share with their parents and keep it for the weekend. They return to school the following week having read it quite a few times, keen to share their new ability with their parents.

The nursery baseline in October was 14% red, 49% amber and 37% green – 59 pupils in all. The second assessment took place at the end of June and the results were as follows. 5% red, 25% amber and 70% green. Even before retesting, we could see a big difference in the children who had been taking part in the interventions. They were using fuller sentences, their vocabulary had expanded, and their understanding of prepositions had improved, as had their understanding of positional language.

The ECS gives our staff a precise understanding of every child's speech, language and communication needs, enabling them to help pupils overcome developmental delay sooner.



*Amanda Ball (right) is the assistant headteacher and Wendy Gibson (left) is a Year 1 class teacher at The Willows Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent*



## Supporting children to learn new words

**Sophie Chalmers** investigates three programmes that are helping to develop children's vocabulary and fluency

**'I love watching children flourish and being able to communicate and make and keep friends,' says Pip St John. 'Communication is a fundamental skill that enables children to interact with other people and express themselves, while allowing them to fulfil their potential.'**

Over the years she has been instrumental in developing the language and communication of children in the Blackburn area, and developing interventions to help her do this. Typical of the many schools she works with is Wensley Fold Primary School, a Schools Direct provider offering initial teacher training in the area of speech and language in conjunction with Cumbria University. In the course of their training, student teachers at the school spend a day with Mrs St John learning how to develop children's

speaking, listening and expressive language in a mainstream setting.

### **Assessing need**

95% of pupils at Wensley Fold speak English as another language. Deprivation is also a significant feature of the Blackburn area. 'We have lots of issues with speech and language,' says headteacher Donna Simpson, 'regardless of what language children speak as their mother tongue.'

When the children first arrive in school, their receptive vocabulary is assessed using the British Picture Vocabulary Scale and other language assessments to ascertain their verbal understanding. Most have delayed language and quickly catch up with their typically developing peers, so that by the end of Reception, those who continue to have speech, language and communication difficulties tend to be those with SEND.

### **Pre-Teaching Vocabulary**

One of the tools that has enabled children to progress so rapidly is the Pre-Teaching Vocabulary (PTV) programme, an evidenced approach to teaching children how to learn new words. PTV was created by Mrs St John and is listed in The Communication Trust's What Works database at indicative level. It provides a

formal framework to ensure children from Foundation to Key Stage 4 understand new words and then learn them well enough to be able to recall and use them effectively.

Mrs St John was working as an advisory teacher for the borough when she developed the approach. She used it with a child at Wensley Fold who was severely impaired by developmental language disorder and the results were so impressive that the school bought into the concept.

PTV involves the use of symbols and pictures on visual prompt cards, and children are systematically supported to learn aspects of words (both phonological and semantic). As a targeted intervention, the programme is designed to be delivered at least three times a week, using key words from one topic area, to groups of around six children. At a universal level, the PTV principle is generalised into all curriculum areas to reinforce the acquisition of new vocabulary. It is not long before children have the tools they need to learn new words on their own.

'Every child at Wensley Fold accesses PTV in Reception,' says Mrs Simpson. 'While the intervention groups get smaller over time as children's language skills improve, teachers continue to model the approach to the whole class for the Word of the Week, so that all children

get regular practice. In Year 1, we continue to use it in universal provision, particularly for technical language and the “Goldilocks” words (Beck, McKeown & Kucan 2002), which are needed to access the curriculum. These include words like assess, analyse, compare and contrast.’

Karen Jack, SENCO at Wensley Fold, explains how it works. ‘Essentially we look at a word in detail for 10-15 minutes as part of literacy teaching. For example, what letter does the word start with? Is it short, medium or long? We clap out the syllables, which are each colour coded and stuck into children’s books. Categorising the word is really important because this is where children are taught how to file and retrieve information in their brains, which might be different from the way teachers do this. With older classes, we include additional information like antonyms and synonyms, and children might make up their own actions for the word.

‘For the next part of the session children play games with the sounds and the word, and put the word into sentences. Finally there is a song to help them lock the word into their memory.’

Children who are brought out of lessons to work on PTV as an intervention are also assessed using the Word Learning Score. Prior to working on topic words, the children are asked individually to say everything they know about a word, ahead of small group intervention. Once the topic is covered, this is repeated and any improvement shows that the child has internalised the word knowledge.

### **Chatty Hands**

Another programme developed by Mrs St John in conjunction with school staff is Chatty Hands. ‘In one of the schools I was working with, some of the children had quite extensive language difficulties and they were trying Makaton to see if that would help,’ she says.

Using Makaton to augment spoken language supports children who are not physically capable of making sounds that people can readily understand. ‘It reduces their frustration at not being able to communicate clearly with speech,’ says Mrs Jack. ‘What we don’t want is for children to think: “I can’t speak clearly; nobody listens to me so I won’t bother saying anything.”’

‘We identify children who have a need in Reception,’ she continues. ‘The Chatty Hands Club takes place on Thursday while the rest of the school is doing Wake and Shake. Parents attend the group every week and learn Makaton alongside their



A pupil discuss a possible ending to a story with Mrs St John

children. The school is starting to involve siblings as well. The group learns a new Makaton sign in each session, and sings a Makaton-supported song or rhyme to reinforce learning. Sometimes we pick a song or a rhyme from Singing Hands on YouTube and watch it together before we practise signing it.’ As pupils’ fluency improves, the Year 1 group might model a song to the Reception group.

The lesson is reinforced through parents practising with their children back at home,’ says Mrs St John. ‘Some of the children I worked with in September had no speech, and by Easter they were trying to verbalise alongside their Makaton. It has made a huge difference to them, as well as their parents.’

In the same way that staff make PTV universal, they will introduce an element of Makaton throughout the day, sometimes in a song, linking signs to the curriculum wherever possible. All the staff have basic training in Makaton although their fluency depends on how much they use it.

‘Parents love Chatty Hands and understand that this is something that we have put in place to bring on their children’s language skills,’ says Mrs Jack. ‘They want to help their children so there has never been an issue with parents not turning up to a session. The model is so successful that we are aiming to roll out the programme year on year so that we end up with a Key Stage 2 Chatty Hands Club.’

### **Oracy**

Another important communication strand rolled out across all the years is oracy. Paul Simpson, a trained actor and an associate of Mrs St John, is a peripatetic oracy teacher who teaches children at Wesley Fold how to speak in public.

‘He introduces them to the social rules of communication: making eye contact, looking around the room, speaking in a clear voice,’ says Mrs Simpson. ‘He also runs the school’s debating club, where they learn how to put an argument

together and how to counter an opposing point of view.’ Pupils compete with other schools that he works with across the borough.

Mr Simpson does a lot of work around developing inference and understanding through poetry, and teaches the children to deliver a poem expressively, which has boosted their comprehension skills.

In Reception, he runs a programme based on storytelling where he records a story, which the children recount back to him and act out. This has done wonders for their confidence in terms of the spoken word and being able to stand up and present their ideas to the class.

A touch that goes down well with all the pupils are his prizes for speaking out – he takes about 40 pineapples into school a week, which he gives to children to take home for being, say, the best speaker in their group, for just being brave enough to have a go, for speaking up in assembly or being Speaker of the Week. ‘He calls it the Pineapple of Bravery because it wears a crown on the top,’ says Mrs Jack. ‘The thinking behind it is that pineapples are brave and strong and sweet on the inside, always wear a crown and always stand tall, which is something pupils really relate to. They also get a badge to sew on to their jumper called the Pineapple of Bravery Badge.’

### **Lifetime achievement**

Mrs St John’s passion and expertise in developing children’s communication skills, and in particular the huge impact she has had on children and staff in the Blackburn area, earned her the accolade of Communication Champion at the national Shine a Light Awards this year.

‘She is only here one day a week, but you would think she was here more because she’s everywhere,’ observes Mrs Simpson on the video Wensley Fold submitted to support her nomination. ‘Her knowledge around speech and language and oracy work is phenomenal and I think her mantra of never giving up on children is something I will always follow and keep in my heart.’

### **FIND OUT MORE**

- Pre-Teaching Vocabulary is free from <http://pipstjohn.co.uk>
- Nominations for the Shine a Light Awards 2019, sponsored by Pearson in partnership with The Communication Trust, are now open. <http://bit.ly/sc244-06>
- The British Picture Vocabulary Scale (3rd edition) is used to assess a child’s receptive vocabulary from age three to 16. <http://bit.ly/sc244-05>



# Must-sees at the 2018 TES SEN Show

John Galloway takes a look at some of the resources on offer at this year's show

**It is that time of year again, when the TES SEN show opens up in Islington, offering something for everyone: new products from established companies, updates from others, suppliers with fresh ways to do established activities, and some innovations.**

## Mental health

With children and young people's mental health and welfare needs given particular prominence at this year's show, a good place to start your visit could be with GL Assessment to pick up a copy of its report on *Children's Wellbeing* (Stand 175, [www.gl-assessment.co.uk](http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk)). This draws upon data from 850,000 responses to its online PASS resource (Pupil Attitude to Self and School) to create a picture of the situation nationally.

Having read the research, you might then want to know what to do about it. The London Grid for Learning has brought out its Healthy Minds resource, which, unlike most of the LGfL content, requires no subscription to access (Stand 3, [www.lgf.net](http://www.lgf.net)). This has been created in partnership with national charity Young Minds to provide both CPD and classroom resources for teaching and learning. It includes a section devoted to self-harming entitled *No Harm Done*,

which is also aimed at parents.

Another useful tool for working with parents is the Care Diary from Tapestry (Stand 167, <https://tapestry.info>). This is an online means of logging personal care in school, such as medication, feeding, and even incidents, that can be shared with home, and which parents can also use to record information. This is part of the company's wider offer of recording and monitoring tools, including their own SEND framework developed from the Development Matters statements.

## Assessments

Other frameworks at the show come from the perennial BSquared (Stand 279,

[www.bsquared.co.uk](http://www.bsquared.co.uk)) and, new to the show, Earwig (Stand P13, [www.earwigacademic.com](http://www.earwigacademic.com)), both of which have developments in response to the Rochford Review. The former brought out Engagement Steps and Progression Steps a little while ago, and is currently promoting Evisense, its evidence-gathering tool, with an ongoing series of webinars.

Earwig has developed an evidence-gathering and monitoring resource based on the engagement steps as outlined by Professor Barry Carpenter. However, the framework is flexible enough to enable several different frameworks to be used simultaneously, offering a holistic approach to recording, reporting, and evidencing progress.

## Screening tools

Along with tracking assessments, you can also use technology to support making them. QB Tech, in conjunction with the ADHD Foundation is introducing QBCheck, an 'online ADHD test' designed to 'inform referral decisions by teachers and by qualified healthcare professionals' (Stand 193, [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk); see also the *Pull-out Resource, Special Children* 240).

The Foundation will also be showing Braingaze,



which uses eye-tracking technology to determine whether or not a pupil has the condition.

A more established use of eye tracking is on show at Tobii-Dynavox (Stand 159, [www.tobiidynavox.com](http://www.tobiidynavox.com)). It will be demonstrating its Ecosystem which brings together the symbol software Boardmaker with the communication resource Snap+CoreFirst, along with Access, the eye-gaze system. There are also developments in its range of communication aids, including the Speech Case which turns an iPad7 into an augmentative and alternative communication device.

## Reading

Eyes are also the starting point for Dyslexia Gold (Stand 54, [www.dyslexiagold.co.uk](http://www.dyslexiagold.co.uk)). This innovative approach to dyslexia is based on the idea that most children and young people identified as dyslexic have issues with convergence, that is, getting both eyes to work together effectively when reading. Using this online resource can help to remedy this, enabling the child's reading to improve. Dyslexia Gold has some very convincing statistics for its efficacy, which are worth taking a look at.

A similar effect could be behind the impact on reading that Lyfta found by coincidence when using its website with secondary students with literacy difficulties (Stand 172, [www.lyfta.com](http://www.lyfta.com)). When immersed in a virtual reality environment, these pupils' reading abilities improved markedly. This is now the focus for ongoing research to determine what factors might be at play.

Even without this outcome, Lyfta's mixed media resource combining text, video, and virtual reality is an interesting idea. It provides deep insights into the lives of people from around the world, including the inhabitants of an Ethiopian village, the people who work behind the scenes at the Helsinki opera house, and a Lebanese taxi driver and single father. The attraction of Lyfta is in the way it helps develop a better understanding of humanity through presenting diverse experiences in accessible ways.

## Other literacy skills

Other, well-established approaches to supporting learners with literacy difficulties are well represented at the show, with exciting developments for some of them.

Widgit has now introduced speech to text into the online version of its ever-popular symbol-supported software (Stand 133, [www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com)). This works very well, so that not only will staff be able to create symbolised resources by dictating from anywhere on any device that will run the website, but students will also be able to tell their stories and deliver their reports to the computer and have them created with the symbols to help them read back their text.

There is also a major change coming for Wordshark, which will shortly be going online, meaning access from many places on most



devices (Stand 229, [www.wordshark.co.uk](http://www.wordshark.co.uk)). The product isn't launched yet, but a preview will be available at the show, and there may even be opportunities to try it out with learners.

New offerings from Crick are less exciting than last year's introduction of DocsPlus, but nevertheless still welcome (Stand P31, [www.cricksoft.com](http://www.cricksoft.com)). Clicker Connect, the iPad and Chromebook app that helps with creating sentences, now has a version that uses Symbolstix symbols. This is a welcome addition that goes beyond the already useful image bank to provide representations of abstract concepts, such as emotions or prepositions.

Another tool for supporting writing is Scribeeasy (Stand P17, [www.scribeeasy.com](http://www.scribeeasy.com)), designed to provide a starting point for those who find it hard to get going. By using the various resources as stimuli, pupils are given a scaffold to help them take the initial steps of creativity.

Also aimed at children who struggle with literacy is DocLexi, which has only recently arrived in this country (Stand 221, [www.doclexi.com](http://www.doclexi.com)). It is an app that takes a game-based approach to developing skills. Children are given a mission to travel the world to retrieve parts of a machine that helps with reading, writing and spelling.

## Exciting gadgets

If you prefer your machines real to virtual, then have a look at the Juke24 from Drake Educational Associates (Stand 8, [www.drakeed.com](http://www.drakeed.com)). While this will largely be used as a personalised jukebox for playing music, it also takes any



sort of recording, so it could double as a communication aid. There are 24 buttons, each with a transparent, snap-on cover to take images or symbols, with the capacity to take up to 48 hours of sound files from any source, including CDs and USB drives. These are then played back when a button is selected, and the provision of a microphone means users can sing along.

Gadgets are also available at Special Direct, the SEND arm of TTS (Stand 269, [www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk)). Sound Lights are an addition to its range of devices for recording and playback, which have built-in LED lights to make use easier. With red for recording and green for playing back, pupils will have a visual cue to let them know what is happening. The company is also introducing Easi-timer, a way to help learners to maintain their focus by providing a visual prompt to tell them how long they have left to complete a task.

Other innovations might be found at Sensory Guru, which has been working on a virtual reality template into which you could drop your own content. This is great for creating virtual, safe spaces – such as a child's own bedroom, which they could visit when they find their anxiety levels rising in school (Stand 85, [www.sensoryguru.com](http://www.sensoryguru.com)).

## CPD opportunities

As usual there is a comprehensive range of workshops and seminars. Exhibitors will be talking about the impact of their products in classrooms, and a number of seminars have a technology focus.

The ever-engaging Carol Allen will be providing advice about *Getting started with assistive technology* on Friday afternoon, closely followed by John Rack from Linnaeus University in Sweden looking at *Assistive technology for writing, theory and practice*. And if you are around on Saturday morning at 11.00, you can hear me talking about some of the latest developments in technology and SEND, and providing a glimpse of what's to come with *Horizon Scanning – what's just arrived and what's on the way in technology for SEND*.

But the liveliest CPD event is usually the Teachmeet on Friday afternoon after the show closes, with refreshments provided, a free raffle with prizes from exhibitors, and a lucky dip to see who gets to talk about what technology is doing for them and their learners. It would be great to see you there.



*John Galloway is a consultant and writer. He advises on ICT, SEND and inclusion in Tower Hamlets*

**The TES SEN Show takes place on Friday 5 and Saturday 6 October at the Business Design Centre, London. [www.tessenshow.co.uk](http://www.tessenshow.co.uk)**

# Improving communication skills

**Time to Talk: Implementing outstanding practice in speech, language and communication – 2nd edition**

By Jean Gross

Published by Routledge

ISBN: 9781138280540

£22.39

*Reviewed by Saira Pester*

**As the government's former Communication Champion and leading on many national strategies, Jean Gross seeks to improve children's language and communication by sharing the wealth of good practice that she has picked up over the years.**

This 2nd edition, which now incorporates sections on the pupil premium, special needs reforms and curriculum changes, is aimed at practitioners from early years through to secondary education. Case studies are helpfully colour coded by age range. Chapters include how to create effective places to talk, with some brilliant examples of how to develop language within role-play areas and outside spaces. Other examples, such as whole-school immersion days, fit perfectly with Ofsted's favourable comments on role play in Key Stage 2.

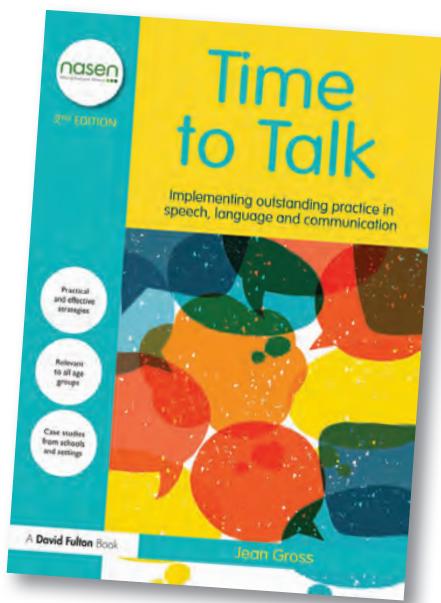
Chapter 2, which looks at ways to improve and extend vocabulary, hit a chord with me as I have seen first hand the decline in vocabulary for several years now. Finding out that a child needs to hear a word around six times (more if they have language difficulties) in a range of contexts before they can remember it,

is something I will immediately take back into schools to highlight its importance.

Other chapters cover whole-class strategies for developing speaking and listening skills, intervention and differentiation strategies, ideas for supporting parents, and advice on developing effective partnerships with specialists to support children with more severe needs. Chapter 5 includes some excellent examples illustrating the importance of giving pupils a reason to talk, along with some useful internet resources.

The research cited is often hard-hitting and will encourage all educators to look closely at their own practice. Two pieces of research that particularly struck me are that early spoken language skills are the most significant predictor of literacy levels at 11 (Moss and Washbrook, 2016), and two thirds of pupils at risk of exclusion have SLCN. Given that SLCN was the most common type of SEN identified in the 2016 census, it would seem that we could all benefit from some shared knowledge.

This isn't the easiest book to dip into – I recommend reading it from cover to cover. I made a note of useful resources as



I went through it, but had a strong urge to highlight all the salient features, of which there were many.

I found it an inspiring read and also came away with a very extensive list of websites and resources to check out for further reading.



*Saira Pester is a specialist teacher with 28 years' teaching experience in mainstream and special schools. After 14 years as a learning needs teacher for her LEA, she set up her own company providing specialist teaching and advice to schools*

## Managing bouncy pupils

**Winston Wallaby Can't Stop Bouncing: What to do about hyperactivity in children including those with ADHD, SPD and ASD**

By K.I. Al Ghani and Joy Beaney

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishing

ISBN 9781785924033

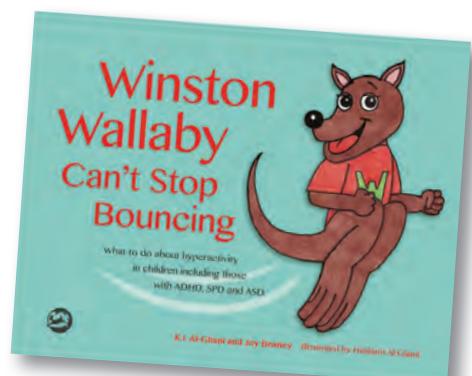
£13.99

*Reviewed by Helen Punter-Bruce*

**There is no shortage of books outlining diagnoses, conditions and difficulties for the benefit of adults. However, not many incorporate this information into a child-friendly, accessible and relatable story format.**

Winston Wallaby is the main character

of this story/information book. He can't stop bouncing and the story describes a week at school, highlighting all the challenges he faces, with the mantra of 'I won't bounce, I won't bounce' running through his mind to the point that his concentration suffers and he finds settling in class a tricky experience. Gradually,



as the days go by, his teacher finds lots of different strategies to help Winston with his bounciness and his concentration. He ends the week feeling

much happier, and shows off his skills on school sports day.

The story is followed by pages of rich information and commentary explaining sensory seeking and sensory processing difficulties for children who may have ADHD, ASD and similar conditions. Herself the mother of a child with an ADHD diagnosis, the author has written the book primarily for parents, although she has successfully combined information for children (through the story and illustrations) with helpful advice and insights for parents and professionals regarding how they might help children who may display these traits.

The section at the end includes biological and psychological descriptions for children's ADHD-type behaviours, along with diagrams for sensory calming

activities that can be used with children in any setting. The ideas are photocopy friendly, and include some blank forms to fill in with children to enable teachers to tailor the activity to each child's specific sensory needs.

**I have also recommended it to some parents**

I believe parents and children alike will identify with the many behaviours described and hopefully the information will help alleviate any worries they have, reassuring and supporting them at the

same time. Meanwhile, children should feel comforted that these behaviours can be supported and are not unique to them. The story also serves to remind all children that everyone copes with school in different ways, and that 'bounciness' comes with its own sets of skills.

A great book which has already been shared in my primary school within whole-class PSHE sessions. I have also recommended it to some parents who are enthusiastic about working through the story with their own 'bouncy' children.



Helen Punter-Bruce is a specialist leader for additional educational needs and an inclusion manager at Parkside Primary School in East Sussex

## Autism and secondary school

### How to Support Students with Autism Spectrum Condition in Secondary School

By Lynn McCann

Published by LDA Learning

ISBN 9781855036031

£17.99

Reviewed by Martin Edmonds

LDA Learning has published a significant number of *How-to* books and I doubt there are many SENCOs without a few of these on their bookshelves. The best in the series offer the concise and constructive advice that can only be gained through considerable experience in the classroom.

Lynn McCann is an experienced SENCO who specialises in meeting the needs of children with autism. Here, she provides a clear overview of many of the areas where children with autism may require additional strategies, support and teaching to ensure they meet their full potential. Her chapter on homework is a good example of the way she works: a firm focus on high expectations and clear and consistent strategies lead to approaches that will support autistic students in engaging successfully with extension work.

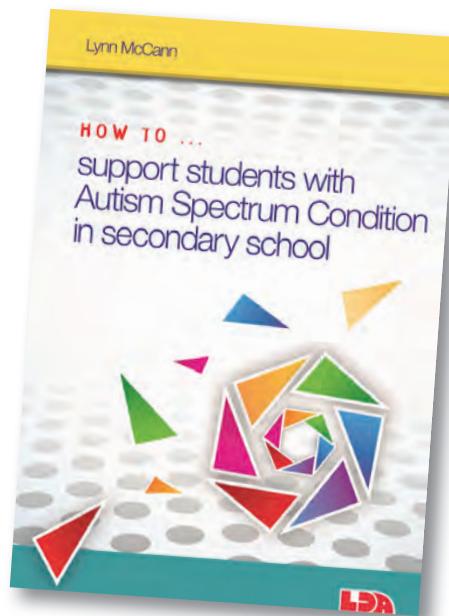
Particularly useful chapters include those on tests and examinations, sensory regulation and specific advice for subject teachers. The suggested student passport presented on page 13 is a good template for supporting transition and

**A wealth of strategies for the classroom**

for disseminating information to class teachers. Moving from the smaller, and generally more socially structured environment of a primary into the larger, busier secondary school can create significant difficulties for many students. Ms McCann devotes three chapters to issues of sensory regulation, bullying, and sex and relationships. Again, these sections contain the highly practical advice of an experienced practitioner and offer a wealth of strategies for the classroom.

A final section focuses on the transitions between key stages 3 and 4, and 4 and 5. As we all know, the school year passes with startling rapidity and it is essential that transition planning is started early, and structured carefully to ensure a smooth transition for children with ASC.

The book includes a CD-ROM



containing additional resources and exemplars. There are several items on this, including a social skills checklist, a social story, a student behaviour questionnaire and body and emotion mapping templates.

I highly recommend this book to both secondary teachers and to primary school staff working with Year 6 students and supporting their transition to secondary school.

Martin Edmonds is a secondary school SENCO and also manages an enhanced specialist provision for children with a diagnosis of high functioning autism

# SEND Inclusion Award

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**Headteacher,  
Harris Academy  
Beckenham**



## Moving more easily with a Mollii suit – Calli Pellegrini and Orsi Farkas

**The Mollii suit is an assistive device that helps improve movement and muscle control in people with spasticity, movement disorders or abnormal muscle tone.**

Designed at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, it is suitable for children, young people and adults with neurological conditions such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, stroke and traumatic brain injury. It can improve the speed, accuracy and fluidity of voluntary movement. In a nutshell, it can help a person move more naturally and with less effort.

When someone suffers brain damage, the way their brain communicates with parts of the body may be partially or completely interrupted. At a simplistic level, muscles work in pairs – as one contracts, its partner will automatically relax to allow this to happen. For example, when you lift a bag, the biceps contracts and the triceps relaxes in response, and when you put the bag down again, the roles are reversed with the triceps in the active role. If the appropriate signals are not getting through, the biceps may become spastic (tight all the time).

The Mollii suit can help activate parts of the body that are inactive or help reduce involuntary movements such as spasms.

It comprises a jacket and trousers that contain 58 strategically placed electrodes connected by silver threads. It comes with a control unit that is individually programmed to the specific needs of each user, and which can be easily updated when required.

Each electrode sends electrical impulses to the central nervous system at the rate of 20Hz, which the brain can recognise when it is awake. The signal is undetectable to the user, although a few occasionally feel a tingling sensation. Mollii does not directly stimulate the muscles like a TENS machine; it simply sends a signal that the brain can register, allowing it to communicate with the part of the body it was failing to reach before and start working reflexively with it.

Mollii is designed for home use. When people first get their suit, we recommend they wear it for an hour a day for the first three weeks, reducing this to an hour every other day once the brain has become



Savannah works with two therapists to improve her coordination

attuned. This is because the suit is only opening up communication channels and not repairing brain damage. The signal is like a song that sticks in your head: once Mollii sends a signal that the brain can hear, the 'song' sticks for a while and then fades. Donning the suit again re-establishes the signal.

With regular use, the wearer can increase their range of movements and do so with more comfort. For example, by improving their muscle tone, the suit can help them gain more control over actions such as sitting, reaching, standing or walking.

As children with cerebral palsy experience more movements, they learn what it feels like to move their bodies more naturally. This learning



Savannah's Mollii suit is made from light, stretchy material similar to a swimsuit

stays with them even if the connection, brought about by Mollii, needs to be reawakened every 48 hours to help with the ease of movement. So, for example, if a child has not yet learned to walk and Mollii has eased their spasticity, they can access that part of their body and learn the required movements faster. A person recovering from a stroke has already experienced these movements and is not therefore starting from scratch; the suit simply

improves their ability to relearn things they were able to do in the past.

The suit is easy to look after and can be washed on a gentle cycle. Children and young people are likely to need a new suit every year as they grow. There is a replacement scheme for children to help make this more affordable for families.

The level of support children get from the NHS can vary and some children find themselves on a long waiting list just to get a diagnosis, let alone any support. An appointment in a private practice with a Mollii assessor will typically take about 90 minutes and cost around £100. The UK charity CPotential offers free assessments, which last a little longer to allow the family to discuss all the child's needs in detail. The charity also offers a free speech and language clinic with its specialist speech and language therapist, which parents can attend at the same time as they come in for the Mollii assessment.

Like many assistive devices, Mollii is not cheap and the decision to invest in one should be considered carefully. To help with this, CPotential videos the assessments and gives parents a copy to play at home and show to other professionals supporting the child, so that they can make an informed decision. For parents with limited means, the assessment video can later help them fundraise for a suit.

Mollii is not suitable for everyone. By offering parents a free assessment for their children, CPotential offers a risk-free opportunity to try it out.

Outcomes are very individual. The major differences we see include improved posture, better control of movement,

better range of movement overall, improved gross and fine motor skills, and better coordination, all for less effort. This means that the user can do more, more easily, and is generally less tired. As their coordination improves, they grow in confidence and achieve more within their peer group while being better able to access the curriculum. For example, their writing skills may improve thanks to better control of fine motor skills.

Mollii users time their use of the suit to fit in with family routines as well as their own needs. For example, some children wear the suit at school; others will wear it in the early evening before bed, helping them (and their parents) get a better night's sleep.

Inverntions, the Swedish company

that developed Mollii in 2009, introduced it to the European market in 2012 after winning support on the Swedish version of *Dragons' Den*. Mollii suits have been available in the UK since 2015. They can work amazingly well and lead to life-changing impacts, which may seem trivial to the outside world, such as being able to play with a sibling, but which are massive to the family.

**CPotential is based in London and offers Mollii assessments to customers in London and the surrounding counties. To book an assessment, email [mollii@cplondon.org.uk](mailto:mollii@cplondon.org.uk) or visit <http://cpotential.org.uk/services/mollii>**

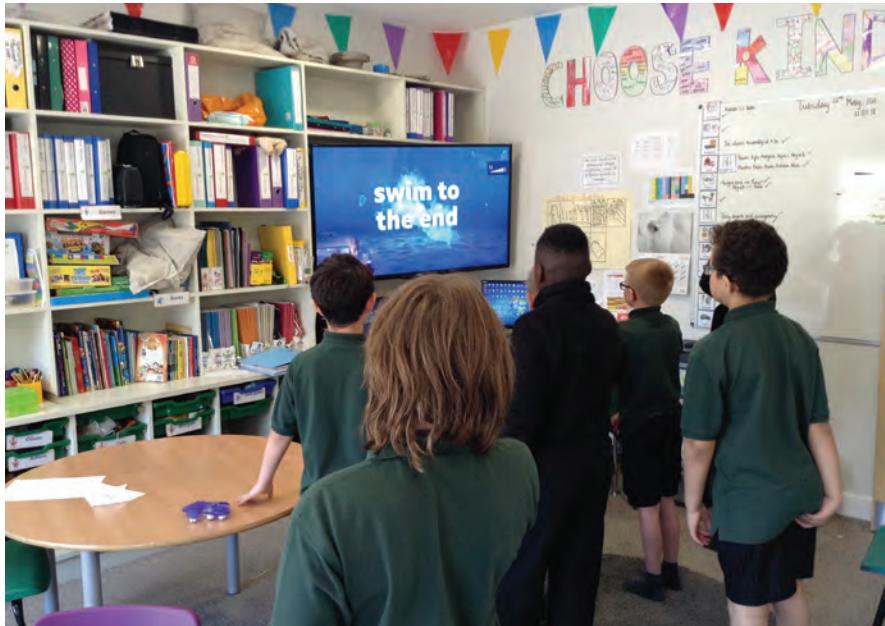
**For Mollii assessors in other parts of the UK, contact the UK distributor, Remotion Ltd. A Mollii suit costs £4,100, which includes rechargeable batteries and a charger. Replacement suits for growing children, if bought within 12 months of the previous suit, are £960.**

[www.remotion.co.uk](http://www.remotion.co.uk)



Calli Pellegrini is head of development and Orsi Farkas is a Mollii assessor and a conductive education professional at the charity CPotential

## Making a difference with the BBC's Super Mover – Sal McKeown



Pupils wait in anticipation for the Super Movers video to begin

**Year 4 pupils at Meadow View Farm School make good reviewers. When asked for their opinions of the Super Movers, an initiative developed by the BBC in conjunction with the Premier League, one pupil said: 'Let's do this every day after dinner,' and another reported: 'I'd give this two thumbs up!'**

Meadow View Farm School is an independent school catering for 35 children who have social emotional mental health needs, and, in some cases, autism spectrum conditions.

As a small school, it can't provide the range of sporting opportunities

available in bigger schools. However, it is developing five-aside football alongside a junior school and offers rugby coaching, while local Leicester City footballer Matt Piper has been doing football training with the children. Swimming is a regular feature and horse riding is available as a good way of improving core stability.

The setting – a farm in the Leicestershire countryside – is a huge incentive for the children and teachers to be physically active and the benefits of this spill over into the classroom. So when they were approached to see if they would like to try out the BBC *Super Movers* free online resources designed to get pupils

moving energetically while accessing learning, headteacher Ryan Kilby had no hesitation in accepting. 'We are always looking to challenge the tradition of chalk and talk lessons with creative opportunities,' he says, 'so we try to break up the lessons with different activities and change the pace of learning.'

Recent research shows that fewer than a third of primary age children in England meet the guidelines of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical exercise per day, including school-based activity, according to the Health Survey for England published in 2016. The guidelines have been unchanged since 2011 but were given fresh impetus and direction in the government's *Childhood Obesity – A Plan for Action* of January 2017.

Mr Kilby believes that just five minutes of moderate exercise can significantly improve children's participation in lessons: 'On a couple of occasions pupils have not been responsive to questions at the start of the lesson, so we have put on a *Super Movers* video and they became more engaged afterwards.'

The videos provide visual explanations of difficult concepts. One teacher was introducing adjectives to a Key Stage 1 class and found that her explanations met with blank faces. She then showed the *Super Movers' Adjectives and Adverbs with Jonny and Inel* and the lesson took a sudden upturn; the pupils were energised and engaged, and following the input, their understanding and ability to identify and use adjectives exceeded her expectations.



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PSHE Lead, Queen Alexandra College/SENSRE



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### **STATUTORY GUIDANCE**

Understand the new government guidance

### **CURRICULUM**

Build an age-appropriate curriculum

### **WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH**

Create and embed a whole-school approach to RSE

Some clips have proved a little too stimulating for some children because of sensory overload from lighting and colour, as well as the repetitive language and pounding rhythm of some of the raps and songs. As a result, staff have had to think carefully about how and when to use them so that children focus on the learning goals and are not getting overexcited. It seems that, as with all resources, teachers need to plan ahead, especially if they are working with children who have specific speech and language difficulties.

However, across the school they have seen benefits in using Super Movers to help children learn new skills. One teacher found the alphabet song for KS1 particularly useful as it featured both

lower and upper case letters and she could pause the clip to consolidate letter recognition.

The clips have also built pupils' mathematics skills so that after watching the video, children knew which objects would be measured in centimetres and which would be measured in metres.

The participation of celebrities and football stars in the videos has a massive impact in motivating the children. Mr Kilby noted that the boys spotted the players straight away: 'They loved the fact that there were people they knew on the screen, and the same went for David Attenborough too. When they were introduced to his Blue Planet videos, these quickly became a favourite.'

Even the less star-struck pupils are not immune to the pull of celebrity status: 'I'm not a Leicester fan but I've seen the real Filbert Fox,' said one Year 3 pupil.

**Super Movers, from the BBC and Premier League, has over 60 free videos teachers can use in the classroom. Visit the website to find out more [www.bbc.co.uk/supermovers](http://www.bbc.co.uk/supermovers)**



*Sal McKeown is a freelance journalist specialising in disabilities, education and technology*

## Collaborative learning – Joe Blaney

**Unio By Harness is an interactive and collaborative tool that enables teachers to load lessons onto pupil devices and see each child's level of engagement and understanding of a subject at a glance. It also improves and speeds up the process of giving them feedback.**

Normally, when you ask a question in class, you get only one answer because children's responses tend to reflect what the first child has said. As a teacher, I want to know the extent of everyone's knowledge and understanding. Unio allows me to see their answers as they work, mark these in real time with stickers and thumbs up, and add a comment if I choose. It works in reverse too. Children can ask for help without having to put their hand up, which is more subtle for those who are less confident.

The children can respond in a variety of ways. They each sit at their own tablet or computer wearing headphones with a built-in microphone, and can choose to type or verbalise their answers, drop in photos and draw pictures as they work through the activities at their own pace. When it comes to children with SEND, the software is simple to use, so they are able to work completely independently, giving them a feeling of success.

I generally create topic frameworks, either loading an existing resource, such as Google Slides or a PowerPoint presentation, or creating a new lesson in Unio. The program allows me to load



Teachers can see every student's screen at a glance

different types of file, including photos, text, audio, videos and links, while making it easy to create polls and questionnaires. Then I simply click on Share Lesson and pupils use a four-digit code to access it.

As they work away, the Student Tab gives me an overview of how every child is progressing through the topic, and I can give feedback to an individual or pause the lesson and give whole-class feedback. In fact, Unio allows me to run as many classes as I like concurrently, which supports differentiation. I can even have one group working on one set of questions on tablets in the classroom while another tackles a different set of questions in the computer suite. The software lends itself to history, geography and science, where pupils can explore ideas and work independently.

They research at their own pace. While I can monitor everyone's progress, I tend to focus on between six and 10 children at a time, jumping in and out of their systems to listen to their responses and

maybe post supplementary questions to extend them or help clarify their thinking, tailoring their learning on the fly. In the next lesson I will focus on a different group of students.

I have been using Unio since 2017 and it suits my teaching style, which is cross-curricular and topic based, although I am sure other teachers use it in different ways. I use it two or three times a month. What I like is the way it allows me to continually surprise children, unlike worksheets, where they can instantly see the start and end point. I design my lessons so they never know what is coming up on the next slide – I get a great deal of pleasure from pupils' wonder at the unfolding images and questions as I lead them deeper and deeper into a topic, really challenging their thinking and assumptions.

I can't measure if they are learning more when they use Unio because their answers are qualitative. I use it because I am looking for a more extended and different kind of response and understanding than I would get when using pen and paper.

**An individual teacher's licence for Unio By Harness from Harness Handitouch UK is £800+VAT. You can try it for free for 45 days. <https://uniobyharness.com>**



*Joe Blaney is deputy headteacher of the Royal Kent CofE Primary School, Leatherhead*

## Consolidating maths learning – Sophie Chalmers

**timely practice from SRS**  
**Learning is a web-based app that helps students from years 7 to 11 practise foundation maths questions in a methodical way that enables them to consolidate and master the various skills involved.**

The best time to revisit something is just before you have forgotten it. The app monitors students' progress through sets of daily, personalised assignments. Teachers set the topics their group is working on in the system, and the app works out the ideal frequency for different types of question for each individual based on their performance in previous assignments. This requires teachers to mark students' work before generating the next assignment, which makes the app better suited to groups of fewer than 20 students.

That said, marking is simple. If a student requires support to answer a question and subsequently gets it right, the teacher can mark it correct on their worksheet, and indicate in the program if a small or larger amount of help was given, so the system knows to keep the interval between those questions short until mastery is achieved, when the revisit interval might stretch to over a year.

'I can mark 12 sets of assignments from students in the Year 7 nurture group in about 15 minutes,' says Jeff Hughes of Parliament Hill School in London. 'The work that would normally take up my time – analysing who needs to practise what, and how much – is done for me by the program, which automatically produces personalised assignments, complete with the student's name at the top. I use these as a 10-minute starter activity alongside my normal teaching, although I can vary how many questions I include. If students have a big stack of questions they need to work on, I might devote more of the lesson to timely practice to ensure smooth consolidation.'

The questions are based on the National Curriculum and are broken down by topic. Each topic is split into between four and 12 bite-size chunks of learning, including word-problem questions, allowing easy differentiation. What the worksheets all have in common, however, is that they practise just one thing at a time. 'It's not about problem solving but about developing knowledge and routine skills,'

A sample worksheet and its associated marking scheme

Mr Hughes comments. 'It makes planning easier because I can see exactly what each child needs to work on.'

Kirsty Behan, another maths teacher at the school, says: 'Last year, all my students took the Entry Level Certificate in maths. When they sat their mock GCSE in April, they could see that many of the one-mark questions were similar to what they had been working on in timely practice. They performed significantly better than the previous year's students, who hadn't used the app. This could be for a number of reasons, but student feedback indicates that timely practice really supported their ability to access the exam and remember things well enough to get the answer right.'

When she started using the program, Ms Behan wasn't convinced of its efficacy because the methodology is so different from her normal practice. 'If I am working on fractions with a middle set, I will spend a whole week on it and cover all four functions. However, the timely practice developer recommends that I focus on just one function for one or two lessons, and then move on to a completely different topic, while the students consolidate their learning with timely practice. I have found that this pedagogical approach suits the lower sets so well, I am redesigning the school's maths schemes of work to incorporate it into lessons for lower ability students all the way through the school.'

Paul Williams at Crofton School near Fareham uses timely practice as an

intervention for two one-hour sessions a week, in addition to students' normal maths lessons, taking them out of other lessons to facilitate this. 'We identify up to a dozen students who are struggling and they work on timely practice practice-learn worksheets and assignments for half a term. As the weeks go by, these groups get smaller as the students grow in confidence, although there remains a small core group for whom maths continues to be a significant challenge, and they stay on the intervention for a longer period.'

'The school has been using timely practice for about a year. Children work on a wide variety of skills in each session, and work is individualised based on previous learning. As students get more confident with aspects of maths, they repeat the same learning less often and start more challenging questions. This way, they quickly work their way up to quite complex skills.'

'I can see that it will have an impact over the years,' he concludes. 'Even after just a year, we can see children who were struggling in lessons starting to succeed. The system won't let them move on until they have mastered a topic, something that is really difficult to achieve in a whole-class setting. This is where the intervention comes into its own.'

**timely practice and its accompanying resources from SRS Learning Limited are free until July 2019. In return, the developers ask for comparative data and access to schools to offer training.**  
[www.timelypractice.com](http://www.timelypractice.com)



*Jeff Hughes is the Key Stage 5 coordinator and a maths teacher at Parliament Hill School in London*



*Kirsty Behan is a maths teacher at Parliament Hill School in London*



*Paul Williams is SENCO and director of inclusion at Crofton School in Stubbington, Fareham*

# Hand in glove

**Ted Collecott** reveals a few tips on learning with puppets

**Puppets can be a fun and enjoyable addition to any classroom. They can also be an effective resource in helping children and young people to engage with difficult issues and to develop their social skills.**

One of the world's oldest art forms, puppetry has a rich legacy and a broad range of techniques that can be used to support learning across the curriculum. Using a puppet to communicate is simply that: another method of communication. I work in a secondary school where many of the students have significant difficulties in social communication and sometimes use of puppets can help to support these needs. Puppets can also be a useful addition to the teacher's repertoire of classroom strategies.

If you are intending to use puppets for teaching and learning, decide what it is you actually want to achieve. Are you:

- performing to entertain the children?
- teaching children about the techniques and art of puppetry?
- using puppets as a way of engaging with difficult issues?

It is easy to confuse the different ways puppets can be used in the classroom and that never ends well, as each approach requires distinct objectives. You can certainly combine these three objectives in any session, but it is important to keep your main objective front of mind at all times.

Let's take Punch and Judy as an example. Probably the most famous glove puppets in the world, they made their first recorded appearance in London in 1662 and are still going strong today. Performing a good Punch and Judy show to children requires considerable skill and practice as well as access to a set of good quality puppets and show booth. However, teaching children about the tradition and performance of Punch and Judy can easily be done in class thanks to some high quality resources available from the Punch and Judy website ([www.punchandjudyonline.com](http://www.punchandjudyonline.com)).

## **Supporting SEND students with puppets**

Puppets can be patronising, childish and alarming to children. They can also be funny, kind and supportive. It all depends



Speaking through a puppet may be easier for a child than speaking as themselves

on you, the puppeteer.

If you make it clear through your actions that the fur-covered glove is a living creature that you respect and engage with, then your audience will start to do so too (regardless of whether they are infants or sixth form students). We would not take a live rabbit and push it on an unsuspecting child – so why should we do so with a puppet rabbit?

**“It is more important to be clear and understandable than to sustain a comic voice”**

Rather, practise making the puppet rabbit slowly become aware of the other people in the room, peering shyly at them from between its paws, before gently and carefully uncurling and starting to engage.

Remember, you are not a teacher with a glove puppet but an actor performing with a puppet animal.



It is when puppets are ‘alive’ that they have most power to engage

## **Tips when working with puppets**

- Be clear about your aim. If your goal is to teach your students about the history and techniques of puppetry, then a visit from Mr Punch is essential. However, he may not be the best role model or the most tolerant character to work with for vulnerable children with social difficulties. Having said that, I was working with a child recently who had become very withdrawn. One day he took Mr Punch down from my shelf and used that noisy, confident and boisterous character to begin to explain the chaotic situation he was living through. Mr Punch may be more than 350 years old but he still has new tricks up his sleeve.
- Choose the right puppet for the job; a fluffy rabbit glove puppet may be ideal for infant and primary settings but may be less effective with Year 10 boys.
- Keep the puppets alive: people and animals are never entirely still and puppet representations of them shouldn't be completely still either. A motionless puppet looks dead and lifeless. It is vital that, whenever a puppet is in view, it is always moving slightly and presented as a living being. If you are talking to the class, make sure the puppet is watching you or the children and shifting its position and eye contact.
- Maintain eye contact: check that the eyes of the puppet are looking at the eyes of the children. If we want children (and adults) to engage with the puppet, then the puppet's eyes should make contact as often as possible.
- If your puppet speaks, then make it speak clearly. It is more important to be clear and understandable than to sustain a comic voice. Perhaps it is shy and will only whisper into your ear for you to repeat to the children.
- Be clear about the point of the activity: puppets can add colour and interest to any storytelling session but cannot make a dull story interesting.

*Ted Collecott is a puppeteer and a member of the actor's union Equity. He has worked with puppets in primary and secondary schools for two decades*

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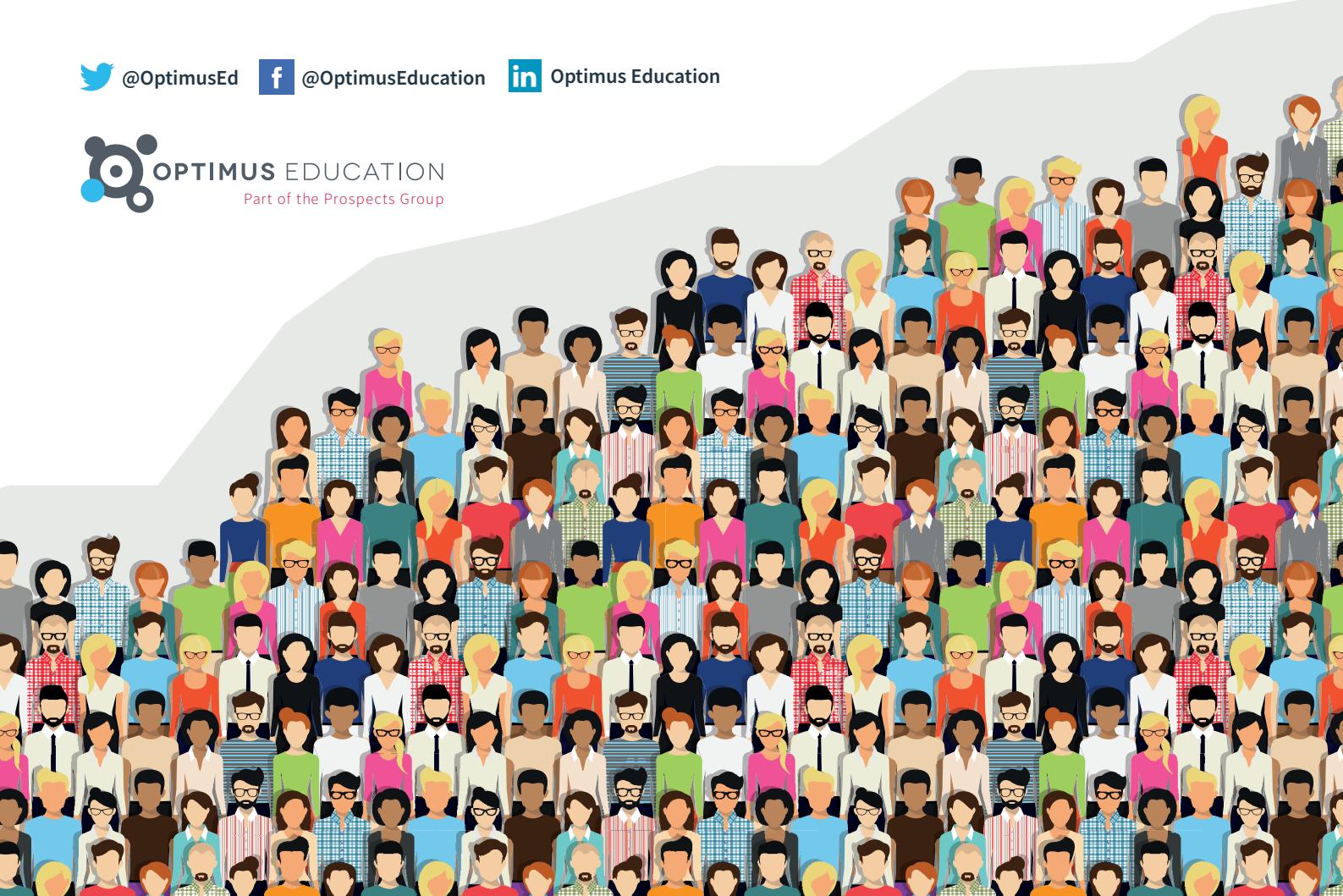
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