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VOL1 ISSUE1

# SENCo

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diagnosed  
until  
2004"*



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## Our experts IN THIS ISSUE



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**Gordon Cairns** is an English and forest school teacher who works in a Language and Communication Resource.



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**Dr Rona Tutt OBE** is an author on SEND and inclusion, and a former chair of the NAHT Special Education Needs committee.

## Welcome...

...to the first edition of *SENCo* – a new publication from the makers of *Teach Primary* and *Teach Secondary* written specifically for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators.

With this magazine, we want to celebrate the vital work that SENCos do, dispense practical advice, make sense of the developments currently shaping the profession, and chart a path through the challenges that those serving in the role can expect to encounter.

Over the following pages, you'll hear from former and practising SENCos, teaching staff,



authors, consultants and other voices who are well-versed with what supporting students with SEND in both mainstream and specialist settings involves – as well as from parents and former pupils, whose experiences have not, historically, perhaps always been given the space they deserve in discussions relevant to them.

The notion that mainstream schools must be able to offer SEND provision is now an article of faith, but it wasn't always thus – and some of the school recollections starting on p41 give a sense of how far we've come within the last several decades. Of course, thanks to the revised SEN Code of Practice, teachers in mainstream settings are now directly and explicitly responsible for the progress of all students in their class, including those with SEND. This is a development to be welcomed, notes NAHT Edge director James Bowen on p6, but also something that presents SENCos with a whole new set of demands. Working in partnership with the whole school community has never been so critical to the success of what they do.

With that in mind, we hope that you find plenty here to share with your colleagues as well as inform your own practice; because when it comes to supporting children with SEND, the idea that we are 'all in this together' is no empty slogan, but a clear and present reality.

There have been significant changes over recent years – and under a government administration that's changed completely since Nicky Morgan's white paper was published earlier this year, it's yet to be seen how things will finally shake out. SENCos can expect to face challenges, demands and some uncertainty for a while yet, then – but in the meantime, we aim to provide a wealth of illumination, engaging commentary and inspiring ideas to help make sure that you're supported, too.

Joe Carter, Helen Mulley & Callum Fauser,  
Associate Editors

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# Help every teacher be a teacher of SEND

With SEND expertise no longer a specialism but something all staff need to know about, **James Bowen** looks at how schools and SENCos can go about bringing them up to speed...

**I**n many ways, the latest SEND Code of Practice is as much about a shift in culture for schools as it is about changing specific practice.

At the heart of the reforms is the premise that every teacher should be responsible and accountable for the progress of all children in their class, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. Whilst many would argue that in the best schools this has always been the case, the new reforms make it clear that this must now be the norm across the board.

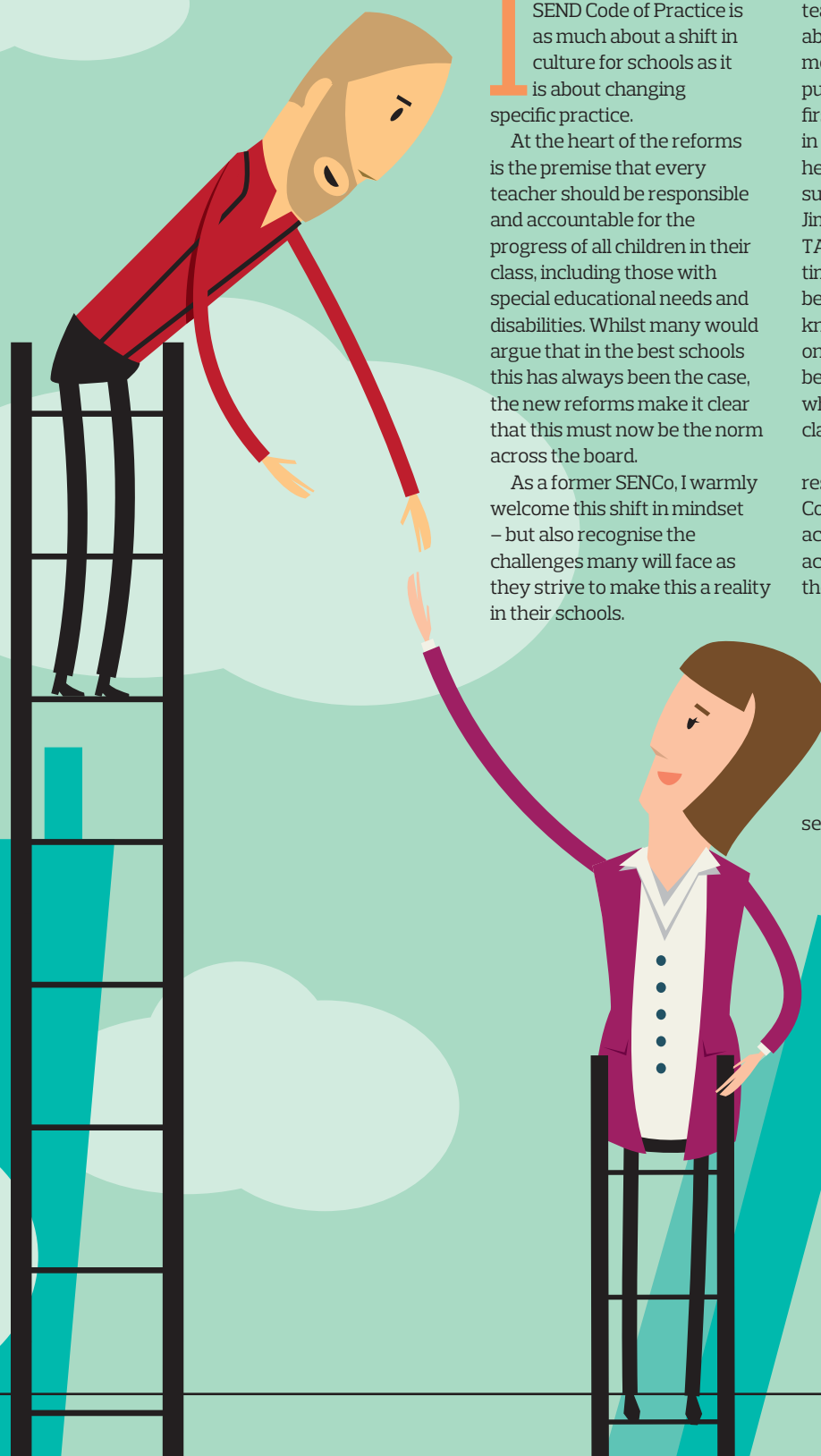
As a former SENCo, I warmly welcome this shift in mindset – but also recognise the challenges many will face as they strive to make this a reality in their schools.

I don't believe there are many teachers who will deliberately abdicate responsibility for meeting the needs of SEND pupils, but I have had sobering first-hand experiences. I've sat in pupil progress meetings and heard teachers say they're 'Not sure what happens when little Jimmy disappears off with the TA for 15 minutes a couple of times a week'. Other times, I've been told 'If you really want to know how young Jane is getting on with her writing, you'd be better off speaking to the TA who works alongside her in class each day'.

I never felt happy with such responses at the time, and the CoP reinforces that this is not acceptable. So how can SENCos achieve such a cultural shift in their schools?

## ***Establishing expectations***

Every teacher needs to be very clear about their responsibilities under the CoP. SENCos would be well advised to share some key sections from the Code, and



then explore with the staff what this looks like in practice in their school.

This presents a great opportunity to establish clearly that teachers have a responsibility to know about any additional support that children might be receiving, the progress they are making during such sessions and how they relate to their day-to-day classroom teaching. It is also an ideal time to reinforce that all children should have fair and equal access to the class teacher during lessons.

TAs can make a fantastic contribution to children's learning, but teachers must know that ultimately, they are responsible for the progress of all children in their class. Expert support from TAs should supplement, not replace, the class teacher.

### **Training and CPD**

Sadly, too often teachers still enter the classroom with only minimal training in how to meet the needs of children with SEND. One of the key roles of the SENCo is to therefore identify staff CPD needs, and put an appropriate training plan in place.

An audit can be a great place to start. You need to find out what skills and knowledge the staff already have and build on this. This will not only allow you to prioritise what training needs to take place, it may also help you identify where there is already expertise in the school that you can draw on when supporting others.

When organising training, it is unlikely that a one-size fits all approach will work. Teachers will want to access the training

that is most relevant to them based on their existing skill levels and the needs of the pupils in their current class.

With that in mind, consider preparing a 'menu' of SEND training opportunities that staff can dip into over time. Some teachers may want to start by attending a session focused on supporting children with literacy difficulties, whilst others choose to learn more about social communication difficulties.

SENcos shouldn't feel they themselves have to deliver all the training. SEND is such a broad and complex area, it's almost impossible to be an expert across all areas. There are times when it may be far better to bring in outside specialists, or to draw on online materials to support staff development.

### **Improving communication**

It is absolutely vital that teachers are fully involved in planning, tracking and evaluating the impact of any additional support children are receiving. Gone are the days when SENcos plan interventions away from the teachers, and rightly so. This means that teachers need to know what additional support is available, what the support entails and who it might be most appropriate for.

We once had a fantastic staff meeting where the teaching assistants explained the various intervention programmes that were being run, and the teachers had the chance to try out some of the materials for themselves. As a result, the teachers became far more confident in identifying children who would benefit from specific programmes and how they could link these to their daily lessons. The SENCo still has a strategic role to play in terms of co-ordinating the support, but in this model there is far greater responsibility on individual teachers.

For this approach to work really well, there needs to be sufficient time for teachers and TAs to discuss the progress pupils are making, and to

ensure that there is a close link between classroom practice and any additional support that the children receive. Some schools have now changed the timetables of their TAs so that there are specific points in the day or week for these conversations to take place.

A word of warning here – if you do decide to do this, everyone involved must be clear as to what this time is to be used for, and there must be a clear expectation that teachers and teaching assistants are available to have these crucial learning conversations. The support of the headteacher and senior leadership team is critical.

### **Providing advice and information to teachers**

Whilst every child is different and has a unique set of strengths and needs, some simple guides to the most common areas of need that teachers are likely to come across can be really useful. Short information booklets on topics such as speech and language, social communication and numeracy/literacy difficulties can outline some of the common difficulties that children might face, accompanied by a list of suggested strategies for teachers to try. This is a good way of giving teachers access to a toolkit they can use in their classrooms before seeking more specialist support.

These guides can also signpost teachers to other useful websites and resources that they can access if they need further information. Ultimately, there will still come a point when teachers need ask for more specific advice and support, but the first question a SENCo should ask is 'What have you tried already?'

The CoP is clear – all teachers are teachers of children with special educational needs. SENcos will continue to play a vital strategic role and provide much-needed advice and support to teachers, but the responsibility for the learning and progress of all children quite rightly lies with the class teacher.

## **USEFUL RESOURCES**

### **INCLUSION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

A suite of materials aimed at supporting teachers, TAs and trainee teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in working with children and young people with a range of SEN [idponline.org.uk](http://idponline.org.uk)

### **SEND GATEWAY**

An online portal offering education professionals free and easy access to high-quality information, resources and training for meeting the needs of children with SEND. [sendgateway.org.uk](http://sendgateway.org.uk)

### **GUIDE TO THE 0 TO 25 SEND CODE OF PRACTICE**

A useful guide for schools intended to help staff understand their responsibilities as outlined within the new SEN Code of Practice [tinyurl.com/SEN-CoP-Guide](http://tinyurl.com/SEN-CoP-Guide)



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**James Bowen is the director of NAHT Edge and a former subject leader, SENCo and deputy head teacher; for more information, visit [nahtedge.org.uk](http://nahtedge.org.uk)**



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# "The Asperger brain is just differently wired"

Writer and illustrator **Melanie Walsh** tells us how she set about demystifying Asperger's for children, with a little superhero inspiration...

In the picture book *Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers!*, Melanie Walsh presents her young protagonist, Isaac, as a superhero whose powers include an aptitude for retaining facts, a close affinity with animals and heightened senses.

Through big, bold illustrations and first-person narration, the book works to bring young readers into Isaac's world and explain why he is the way he is.

We spoke to Walsh about what inspired the book, how it came together and the response it's had...

## IS ISAAC A PERSONAL STORY?

I have a son who was diagnosed with Asperger's at eight and is now 20. At the time we found it difficult to explain his condition to other young children, who even at that age started noticing differences in his behaviors and speech. That led to misunderstanding,

ignoring and bullying, so this was the sort of book I would have wanted to have when he was young to explain the condition to him, other classmates, families and even teaching staff.

## DID YOU HAVE A GOAL IN MIND?

The first idea was to highlight all the positives of having Asperger's, but it eventually developed into a more rounded book explaining, simply and gently, that the Asperger brain is just wired slightly differently – how Asperger children perceive the world, and what special qualities an Asperger child may have.

## THE BOOK'S ILLUSTRATIONS ARE OFTEN SPARSE, BUT VERY STRIKING – WAS ANY OF THE IMAGERY INFORMED BY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?

Isaac isn't my son, but many of the book's situations and behaviours are very familiar to me and other parents of children with autism. All children are different and

autism manifests in a whole range of different ways, so I had to pick situations that were recognisable.

Sensory difficulties – touch, taste, noise, visuals or smells – are very common with children with autism. Any one of them can trigger anxiety or even meltdowns, so autistic children may avoid or actively seek out sensory stimulus.

My son always used to chew plastic things, but it was difficult explaining to one of his teachers that he needed to do it. It was just thought of as unacceptable behavior at 11.

## HAVE YOU RECEIVED ANY FEEDBACK FROM SCHOOLS, PARENTS OR CHILDREN?

I've had some lovely letters from a whole class at a school and some good feedback from teachers. I was recently contacted by someone who was trying to get the lighting changed in public spaces because of the adverse reaction she and others had with it.

It's also been great getting feedback from professionals; they're sometimes hard to please, as they know so much about the subject.

## IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAIN MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING CHILDREN WHO HAVE ASPERGER'S, AND HOW MIGHT SCHOOLS GO ABOUT TACKLING THEM?

Perhaps the main misconception about Asperger's is that it's a 'hidden' disability, when it's not. Another would be thinking that AS children are just being naughty, particularly when they are experiencing a sensory overload. Thirdly, it's not true that ASD children don't want friendships – they do!

The autistic community has given the world a great deal of talent over the years, so it's important to be respectful of people who are non-'neurotypical'. To achieve their aims, they may need to take a different kind of pathway through education.

My own children eventually moved to a lovely, highly inclusive primary school which was great at celebrating difference and achievements, but it didn't really 'explain' my son's condition to other children, or give it a name.

I think it's important to normalise autism within schools, so all children can recognise it and understand their classmates. This takes more than a book, of course; it needs a well-trained and understanding teaching staff.

*Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers!* is available now, published by Walker Books; for more information, visit [melaniewalshbooks.com](http://melaniewalshbooks.com)





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With children now expected to know more vocabulary than ever, how can schools see to it that less able pupils aren't permanently left behind?

**Stephen Parsons** and **Anna Branagan** offer some advice...

### When children struggle with reading comprehension, how can I help them?

Many children learn to decode well, but then struggle with comprehending what they read. One skill underpinning reading comprehension is the ability to infer, or understand what has not specifically been stated. 'Language for Thinking' is a structured intervention for small groups that targets children's ability to answer increasingly complex questions (from 'here and now' to 'why and how'). Teaching assistants love this resource, as it provides clear structure and progress and is easy to track.

### In my school many children are starting without the speaking and listening skills they require. What can be done?

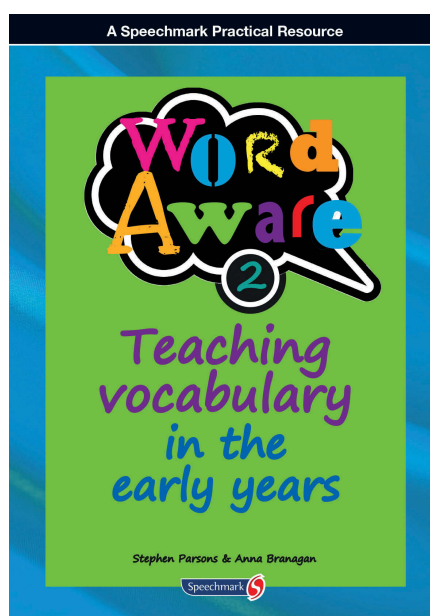
High quality early intervention is essential if these children are to close the gap between themselves and their typically developing peers. If they don't have the vocabulary they need to access the curriculum, this delay in spoken language will soon become an insurmountable academic issue. Use a joined up approach with parents to improve the quality and quantity of child-directed language. Make sure it is at the right level, though – you don't want to overwhelm them.

### In the recent Key Stage 2 SATS, my class did not have the vocabulary to access the papers. What can I do to avoid that happening again?

The 2016 SATS papers were undoubtedly challenging, with complex language and vocabulary. If you have a student in Year 3 who is in the lowest achieving quarter and want to get them to average by Year 6, that student will need to learn 10 words per day for three years. In our book *Word Aware: teaching vocabulary across the day, across the curriculum*, we provide tools that whole schools can use to promote vocabulary acquisition.

### The 2014 primary curriculum talks about developing vocabulary actively and 'building systematically on pupils' current knowledge' but I don't know where to start. Is there any guidance?

Vocabulary is important for reading



**“Above all, ensure that learning vocabulary is made fun, because words are a joy**

comprehension, writing, maths and science, but there is very little guidance about how to develop it. It is undoubtedly a mammoth task, requiring a whole school approach and all subject leads to work together, since the vocabulary in question will come from across the curriculum. Make sure that children's vocabulary acquisition comes from independent strategies as well as direct teaching – but above all, ensure that learning vocabulary is made fun, because words are a joy.

### How can I encourage the whole school community to think about language more?

**Idea 1:** Organised by The Communication Trust, 'No Pens Day Wednesday' is a national initiative whereby schoolchildren don't write anything for a full day, and instead focus on speaking and listening activities. This year's event takes officially takes place on 5th

October 2016, but with a set of supporting resources and lesson plans available from the Trust all year round (see [tinyurl.com/TS-No-Pens-Wed](http://tinyurl.com/TS-No-Pens-Wed)), you can run the day whenever suits you best.

**Idea 2:** Hold a 'dressing up as a favourite word' day. The children could wear grey clothes and describe themselves as 'mundane', for example – or perhaps attach pink balloons to themselves and comes as 'bubblegum'. The options are endless. You can find many great examples on our Pinterest page – see [tinyurl.com/speechmark-pinterest](http://tinyurl.com/speechmark-pinterest)

### We have many EAL learners – should we be encouraging their parents to use English with them at home?

Research shows that children with a strong first language go on to learn subsequent languages better than those with a weaker first language. Encourage parents to use their home language, but to also enrich it by telling traditional tales and songs and inviting other native speakers to interact with their children. This will set the children up with strong cultural connections and provide a solid foundation for learning English in school.



**Stephen Parsons and Anna Branagan are speech and language therapists with extensive experience of working in schools. Their new book, *Word Aware 2: Teaching Vocabulary in the Early Years*, is full of inspirational ideas and**

**contains a number of tools that whole schools can use to promote vocabulary.**

### Further information

For more details and ordering information, visit [tinyurl.com/Word-Aware-2](http://tinyurl.com/Word-Aware-2); Teach SENCo readers can receive a 20% discount by entering the code 'TP01' at checkout



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# ONE SIZE *doesn't fit all*

Differentiation should help prepare every child for their own, personal future, says **Cheryl Drabble**

**D**ifferentiation is sometimes a thorny issue. There are those who say it is not necessary, or 'lazy' teaching. According to them, all teachers should teach the top children in their classes and support the rest accordingly.

Then there are teachers who believe there should be one learning objective, and that differentiation occurs in the way the children are supported to reach that objective.

I have a slightly different view.

Differentiation is simply what teachers do all the time. Every adjustment they make to their classroom counts as differentiation. Whenever they move a child nearer to the IWB, make a wall display less busy and bright, or move a learner away from the window or some other kind of distraction, they are differentiating.

See also the use of visual timetables for children with an autism spectrum condition, talking more slowly for a child with speech and language challenges and making bullet point lists for a child with dyslexia. All this is differentiation – teachers do it all day, and barely give it a thought.

There are, of course, several official methods of differentiation. There's differentiation by outcome, which is where all children are given the same task and objective and complete it at their own level. I'm not a fan of this, but it's quick and easy to do, so I appreciate its appeal.

With differentiation by support, all children have the same task but some receive more support than others. My concern with this is that it can lead to too much support being given if the work is too hard.



Differentiation by group work is also popular, but it lets a child who might be struggling with the work hide within the group.

Differentiation by task involves children being given different tasks based on their ability. This is better, since you can see the work achieved and personalise it for each child. It takes a long time, however, and isn't popular with busy mainstream teachers.

For me, differentiation is about Quality First Teaching. Every child has the right to achieve their personal best and be the best that they can be. It's about skilling every child for their own personal future. It isn't about neglecting whole class teaching, but rather doing what's best for each child.

So how do we differentiate for each child and ensure they have the opportunity to achieve success at their own level?

Let's take literacy. For some children, it involves studying different genres and improving their reading, writing spelling and grammar. It's about ensuring they possess enough knowledge to continue on to higher education, gain degrees and possibly add new knowledge to the world.

For other children, literacy is about becoming functional readers and writers who can hold down good jobs, buy their own houses and be independent adults. Then there are some children who are in a different category. They may have SEND, or learning difficulties – either way, they will need a personalised literacy objective.

If we use the example of a non-fiction instruction book, the most able children in the class will be quickly writing their own manuals, using lists, directives and time

connectives to illustrate their growing knowledge.

The children with SEND or a learning difficulty, on the other hand, could be working on instructions seen in the real world. Their remit might be to follow instructions around a supermarket in order to find the fruit department. They would be looking for signs pointing to the trolleys, the fruit aisle and the cashiers and navigating via the store's overhead displays.

This type of learning objective is incredibly relevant to the child, as we are skilling that child for their own personal future. A future that won't include them reading instruction manuals, but may well see them attempting to do their shopping independently. These children want to be with their peers. They want to listen to the same books as their friends and experience, where possible, the same things. To deny them this opportunity is to exclude them while attempting to practice inclusion.

Keep your expectations high for all children. Remember – differentiation simply means 'one size doesn't fit all'. Include everyone in your basic lesson, and ensure your objectives are relevant to that child's future.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cheryl Drabble is acting assistant head at Highfurlong School in Blackpool; her latest book, *Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities*, is available now, published by Bloomsbury; follow her blog at [cherryld.wordpress.com](http://cherryld.wordpress.com)**



# “All my life I have struggled with retaining information”

Actress **Zoë Wanamaker's** dyslexia means that learning lines is especially challenging – but it's also given her the determination to succeed

I was officially diagnosed with dyslexia relatively recently, in 2004. Giving my problem a name was something of a relief and somehow I felt exonerated. All my life I have struggled with retaining information. When I went to be tested for dyslexia I found that I could remember the first paragraph of what I was reading and after that the information became blurred. This is what seems to occur when learning lines. Sometimes I remember a sentence but then conjunctive words slide off into a void. Consequently, I sit with a script for a very long time.

Theatre and television are completely different animals. The turnover of scripts is far speedier with television. With *My Family*, for example, a new script would arrive on a Friday and there would be a read-through and rehearsals would start. On Monday there would be rewrites and on Wednesday we would pre-record the scenes which couldn't technically be performed in front of an audience. On Thursday, along with the dress rehearsal, the whole script was shot and filmed in front of an audience; then a new script would come on Friday and the whole process would start again. Consequently, I was

confronted with having to learn a new script every week, which made me feel under enormous pressure. At times I felt the dialogue was lacking in imagination or rhythm; sentences short and sometimes inconsequential, sometimes out of character. Dialogue is easier to learn when it's well written. For example, I find Shakespeare with his innate rhythm relatively easy to learn. Because it is iambic it is in our DNA.

The job of any creative human being is to make it look effortless. For me it is cripplingly humiliating not to know my lines and to go wrong in front of an audience in any situation. Sometimes I had lines written on my wrist or on a chopping board in the kitchen on set, or on any bits of furniture the audience didn't see.

When researching a character, ironically I do a lot of reading. I've learnt more about history, sociology and the human psyche because they give context to my work. I've always been very visual and I look at a lot of imagery and photography. I also listen to the music of the period – all of this builds up character.

## ***Flying high***

I was miserable at school and felt I had no right to be. My

parents had worked hard and spent a lot of money on my private education and I was screwing up and must have been a disappointment. My father always told me I had the attention of a flea and my mother was worried about me. I think the teachers saw me as another creature. I couldn't understand English grammar and still don't. But there are many people in the arts who are dyslexic and who have many different forms of dyslexia. It's extraordinary how many people have surmounted it without really knowing it. A focus on the arts develops a vital muscle in the brain.

Dyslexia has made me want to achieve more in what I am good at, but I also know my limitations in a much healthier way. However, like many people, I will do the gardening or the cleaning or anything rather than sit down and look at the text I am meant to be learning (which to me is like doing homework).

I became patron of a school which specialises in working with children with dyslexia. At a prize-giving there a young man, an ex-pupil, spoke. He gave this wonderful speech about how he thought he could never be a pilot and he now flies for British Airways. That summer on holiday I met a young boy

who was at another school for dyslexic students and desperately wanted to fly. His parents were very concerned about it but I told them about this extraordinary speech I'd heard and told him, 'You have to do it.' Eighteen months later I heard that he had flown solo.

The staff at Dyslexia Action who tested my for dyslexia advised me to think not that 'I am dyslexic', but that 'I have dyslexia'. I think it's a wonderful thing that if you accept dyslexia and what it means for you, it can make you very determined. It won't stop you.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Zoë Wanamaker is an award-winning stage, film and television**

**actor; star of *Harry Potter*, *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, *Mr Selfridge*, *My Family* and more. This article was adapted from her contribution to *Creative, Successful, Dyslexic - 23 high achievers share their stories*, by Margaret Rooke (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £8.99)**





Photograph: Nicky Johnston

# Playing with NUMBERS

Pupils with dyscalculia aren't simply 'bad at maths', says **Judy Hornigold** – and games like these can help them develop in the specific areas where they struggle

**I**t is thought that around 6% of the population have dyscalculia, a similar percentage to that for dyslexia. Given that this is roughly 1 in 20 people, you are likely to find at least one learner with dyscalculia in every classroom, with boys and girls being affected equally. The following games are some of the best I've found for engaging, developing and supporting these students – and can also benefit learners who struggle with maths for other reasons, including dyslexia:

## 1 **The Staircase Game**

**AIM:** To develop an understanding of the sequence of numbers from 1 to 10.

**YOU WILL NEED:** Cuisenaire rods 1–10, one of each colour; a 1–10 die.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Two players take it in turn to roll the dice and place the corresponding Cuisenaire rod on the table to create the 1–10 number sequence. If your number is repeated when the die is thrown you miss your turn. So, if player one throws a 2 they will place the red rod on the table. If player two throws a 7, they have to decide how far to the right of the 2 to place the rod in order to make a Cuisenaire Staircase.

## 2 **Clear the Deck**

**AIM:** To develop instant recall of number bonds to ten. This game is useful at the beginning of a lesson as a warm-up activity, or at the end for revision or consolidation.

**YOU WILL NEED:** Four sets of digit cards from 1 to 9.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Shuffle the cards and place them face up on the table in three rows of four. Players take it in turns to pick up pairs of cards that add up to ten. The gaps that are left are then filled with cards from the remaining pack. The idea is to take it in turns and spot the pairs that make ten as quickly as possible.

## 3 **Estimation Game**

**AIM:** Dyscalculic learners find it hard to appreciate and compare magnitude in number and this is a motivating and multi-sensory way to help them do it. It requires visualisation, too; another key skill for them to develop.

**YOU WILL NEED:** 10 dried beans/buttons/glass nuggets; a box to use as a shaker.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Without letting the pupil see, place a small number of the beans/buttons/glass nuggets in an opaque box with a lid. Shake the box and ask the pupil to guess how many items are in it. Then empty the contents onto the table and count the items to see how close the guess was. Encourage the child to place the items in a line. Repeat with smaller and larger numbers of items.



## 4 Ten-frame Game

**AIM:** To develop conservation of number through reorganising number formation on a ten-frame. The game builds a strong visual image of numbers and helps visualise bonds to ten by showing both spaces and filled squares in each arrangement of dots.

**YOU WILL NEED:** Ten ten-frames with each dot arrangement from 1–10; a blank ten-frame; counters to place on the ten-frame.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Pick a ten-frame card at random and show it to the pupil for five seconds. Then remove it and ask them to reproduce the image on their blank ten-frame using the counters. Can they tell you how many counters there are? Can they tell you how many spaces there are? Can they make a number story linking the two?

## 5 The Nasty Game

**AIM:** To develop an understanding of place value. To make the largest four-digit number from rolling a 0–9 dice four times.

**YOU WILL NEED:** A thousands/hundreds/tens/units grid for each player, and a 0–9 die.

**HOW TO PLAY:** This game is for two players. They take it in turns to roll the die and write the number in their opponent's grid until each player has generated a four-digit number. The 'nasty' element is that because you are completing your opponent's grid and not your own, the focus is on getting your opponent to lose. So, if you throw a 1 you would place it in your opponent's thousands column, whereas a 9 would go in their units column.

## 6 Trains

**AIM:** To develop estimation and mental arithmetic skills. This makes a good starter activity, requiring visualisation, prediction, estimation and mental calculation.

**YOU WILL NEED:** One Cuisenaire rod of each length between 1 and 10.

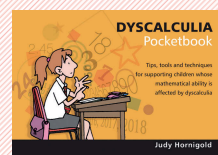
**HOW TO PLAY:** This is a game for two players. Decide who goes first and choose a 'distance' between 11 and 55. Let's use 25 as an example. The aim is to make a 'train' that is exactly 25 long. Each player in turn puts down a Cuisenaire rod, laying them end to end to create a single train. The person who puts down the last rod to make 25 exactly, wins. If a player puts down a rod that makes the train longer than 25, the opponent wins.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Judy Hornigold is an independent educational consultant specialising in dyscalculia and dyslexia. She is the author of the *Dyscalculia Pocketbook* (one of 40 titles in the Teachers' Pocketbooks series, available at £9.99 each from [teacherspocketbooks.co.uk](http://teacherspocketbooks.co.uk)), from which this feature has been adapted, with permission.



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# "What happens to kids who can't achieve 100%?"

**Elizabeth Harris** recalls how a recent dispute with her son's school suggests that children with SEND are being let down by rules regarding attendance...

**W**hen a parent is told that their child will live with a disability or medical issue for the rest of their life, you accept that there'll be challenges along the way – but as a parent to a partially sighted 6-year-old-boy, I didn't expect to encounter our first hurdle at his school.

Last year, my husband and I received a letter from the school in relation to our son's attendance record. He'd been in hospital for a week recovering from an eye operation, of which the headteacher had been made fully aware and was supportive of. It was a standard absence form letter, with our son's name added in a different font. The letter seemed threatening, making reference to 'welfare action' if his attendance didn't improve.

To receive a letter based on the same template the school uses for unauthorised absences was devastating, after what we had already endured over the previous few months. So why did our son's school feel it appropriate to send out a letter about his attendance?

I'm a legal advisor by profession, so it's in my nature to continually question everything. The model policy provided to schools in Essex by

the local education authority suggests that they should offer attendance incentives to children who are present in school for 100% of a term or academic year. But what happens to the children who simply cannot achieve 100%, due to absences necessitated by their disability or other medical issues?

I raised the issues of threatening letters and attendance incentives with both the school and the Department of Education. The school's response cited a 'government requirement' to send template letters to parents when their child's attendance drops below 98%. However, the Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, confirmed that there was no requirement for schools to send such letters to parents – but that if they chose to out of genuine concern, they should be personalised and also non-threatening.

The DfE doesn't provide guidance for incentive schemes, but it expects schools to be "Appropriate and inclusive", and run them in line with the Equality Act.

In the end, our son's school confirmed that we would receive no further attendance warning letters, but refused to amend the existing attendance rewards scheme to include children with disabilities, since it felt that healthy children who had attended school for 100% of the time should be rewarded for this "Considerable feat".

I then turned to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Its guidance confirmed that the LEA's model policy was failing to make 'reasonable adjustments' for children with disabilities

under the Equality Act 2010.

According to the statutory advice from the government for school leaders and managers, "It is not generally acceptable practice to... penalise children for their attendance record if their absences are related to their medical condition, e.g. hospital appointments".

I then took my concerns directly to Essex County Council, which agreed to amend its model policy in time for the next academic year. The amended model policy, which will be shared among all schools in Essex, now includes advice on how to ensure that attendance reward schemes are inclusive of children with disabilities and serious medical conditions.

While this is great news for pupils in Essex, my experience of speaking with hundreds of other parents across the rest of country paints a frightful picture.

One of the saddest examples

I encountered was from a mother whose daughter is currently in remission from battling cancer. As a direct result of her being absent from school for life-saving treatment, she wasn't allowed to join her friends on the playground for a bouncy castle event.

How are parents supposed to comfort their child, when all they see is that their medical issue is preventing them from joining in the fun? Imagine being told as an adult in the workplace that you can't attend this year's Christmas party because of your disability?

As long as these clearly discriminatory policies continue, children with disabilities and serious medical conditions will not be treated on equal footing with those who don't live with health problems. The law is perfectly clear – it just needs to be applied throughout our education system.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Elizabeth Harris** is a legal advisor and campaigner, calling for greater SEND inclusion within schools



# Different **FOR GIRLS?**

Autism isn't just a 'boy thing', says **Gordon Cairns** – but you might have to work harder to spot signs of it in your female pupils

**I**n the supermarket queue when the boy has a tantrum because the shop doesn't have the exact brand of sweets that he wants, or when we hear the child describing a scene from his favourite cartoon in forensic detail without realising he has lost his audience, we give a knowing nod, pleased that, rather than being judgemental, we think we have identified another child with autism. Since the turn of the century we have been living in an autism-aware world. Whereas in the past we would have reduced children's behaviour to being either wilfully naughty or a product of bad parenting, we now quite confidently deliver these long-range diagnoses of children we see acting inappropriately as having an ASD, blithely ignoring 50% of the population. Yet, while most adults are aware of the behaviours which might categorise a boy with autism, even the experts are missing girls who have the same condition.

A survey by the National Autistic Society in 2012 found that half of the males who had an ASD, were diagnosed by the time they were about to leave

primary school. However only one in five girls were similarly diagnosed by the same age. Furthermore, 42% of girls are misdiagnosed with another condition, compared with 30% of boys.

This undiagnosed group of girls and their families are not receiving the information and support to help them understand why they behave the way they do. Furthermore, a class teacher can't adopt strategies to support girls with an ASD if they don't know they are sitting in front of them. In the longer term, undiagnosed women on the spectrum can develop a range of mental health problems. This can manifest itself in eating disorders, self-harm or depression as they struggle to cope with understanding themselves. Some adult women with autism only receive a diagnosis when attending mental health clinics to deal with anorexia or depression, whilst others discover they are on the spectrum when their own child is going through the process of being diagnosed.

As the identifying process is so difficult, so too has it been very difficult to find a ratio

of male to female autism on which everyone agrees. Figures range from at one extreme, a 2:1 male preponderance, while others believe only one girl to every 16 boys has the condition. Whatever the true figure, it is clear that thousands of primary school girls are living with the condition without receiving any support or understanding.

## **Lost in the crowd**

Girls of all ages with autism tend to be harder to identify than boys because they are less disruptive and have a strong ability to mimic the more socially acceptable behaviours of their non-autistic female peers. In fact girls on the spectrum have been described as 'research orphans'. Whereas a classic identifying feature of autism is lack of imagination, for example, primary age girls on the spectrum often love fiction and drama, interests which allow them to imagine themselves as others, while their male counterparts focus could be on science or maths. This stretches to obsessions with people and animals rather than objects, which many girls have. As these fascinations are no different

from the neurotypical primary aged girl, it is hard to classify whether an eight-year-old girl's absorption with pandas is a sign of her autism, or a sign of her being an eight year old girl. However, the girl with autism's obsessions with One Direction, Frozen or Hello Kitty will be exclusive, intense and dissected in great detail.

**“ Undiagnosed women on the spectrum can develop a range of mental health problems**





Another identifying factor is that there may be a sense that she is stuck and unable to move on, even in the small things in life. At home, she might want to hang onto clothes she has long since grown out of, while at school she may bring in books that are no longer age appropriate. This desire to cling onto comforting elements of her

past can reveal her difficulties with change.

In fact, in my experience working in a unit for secondary aged pupils with a communication disorder, the girls who are identified as having autism tend to show characteristics of other conditions which stop them conforming, unlike the more

## HOW TO SUPPORT A FEMALE PUPIL WITH AUTISM

- Offer a quiet place to act as a refuge during breaks and lunch time. Girls with an ASD can find relationships with other pupils difficult during periods of unorganised time.
- Avoid asking questions directly, as girls on the spectrum may struggle with either the fear that their teacher is trying to embarrass them in front of

- the whole class, or that their understanding is being questioned if they do know the answer.
- Be aware that girls with autism can struggle with group work as they may not like to share knowledge.
- Rules should be applied consistently and instructions delivered clearly.

typical picture of a child with autism that is now emerging. The pupils who are being referred onwards to units after primary school seem to be displaying features of attention deficit disorder, attachment disorder or pathological demand avoidance, which cause them to appear on the Educational Psychologist's radar.

However, autism does become more obvious the older a girl gets and as she moves onto secondary school, because she won't have younger children to play with and the protective shield of a nurturing primary school. In addition, external and internal influences will further disrupt the adolescent girl with an ASD, from riotous playgrounds to menstruation, heightening her anxiety as she no longer feels she has control over her environment or her body. This makes it all the more important that they get an accurate diagnosis as early as possible. Signs to look out for include the following:

- Females on the spectrum tend to be more socially interactive than their male counterparts. However, this can be fraught with the fear of failure as girls struggle to achieve and then maintain sustainable friendships.
- Their preferred social role is

to be in the middle; they might gravitate towards older girls, who tend to mother them but then may prefer to play with much younger children who will let them be the organiser. This position gives them both protection and control.

- In a classroom situation, both boys and girls with ASD can engage in repetitive questioning at an age when they would be expected to move on from this. This practice can offer security in times of stress, as they have learned questions tend not to be ignored. Conversely, children of both sexes struggle to engage in small talk with their peers as they find it pointless.

- A girl on the spectrum may act in an overly familiar manner with her teacher. While this may appear to be rude, she is simply struggling with the idea of social hierarchy, which causes her to respond inappropriately to people in authority.

- She may complain of feeling ill rather a lot, as a means of controlling the situation and getting her own way.

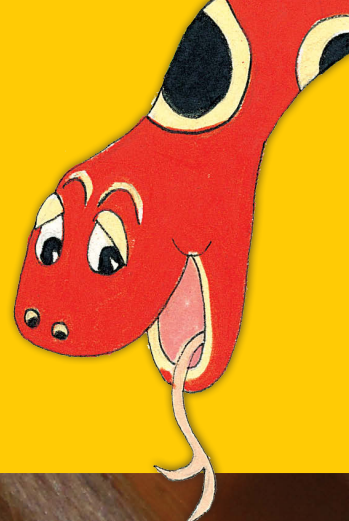


### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gordon Cairns is an English and forest school teacher who works in a language and communication resource. He also writes about education, cycling and football for a number of publications.**



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# Jolly Phonics

# “The SENCo is more pivotal than ever”

Changes in society are affecting childhood, and it matters, says **Rona Tutt**...

**P**eople sometimes say that the needs of children have not changed. This is true in the sense that they still need to be fed and clothed, to feel safe and secure, and know they are loved and cared for. What has changed is the world around them, which is now having an impact on their childhood and development in ways that are both exciting and alarming.

Traditional family structures have given way to a situation where families come in many different shapes and sizes, and where children increasingly have to adapt to changing circumstances. The support once offered by an extended family is far less common as people move around, not just within countries, but between them as well. It may not be a coincidence that during the same period there has been a growing interest in understanding attachment disorders.

Feeling secure enables most young children to be well grounded and able to enjoy interacting with both adults and their peer group. If they are upset, they will go to a caregiver for comfort. In contrast, those who do not trust adults to keep them safe may not turn to them for reassurance.

As there are many types of attachment disorders, the symptoms children display will be very different. Some will use attention-seeking behaviour to receive the notice they crave, while others will be quiet and suffer in silence.

Another change has been the prevalence of drinking among women. This has caused some children to be born with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) – a condition that is



entirely preventable. It's worth noting that the majority of children with FASD do not stay with their birth mothers, but are taken into care. Press reports often focus on the damage that female heavy drinkers may be doing to their own health; the damage to any unborn children is seldom mentioned.

## **Technology and medicine**

Advances in technology have done much to improve everyone's lives – not least for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities – but there is increasing concern about the negative effects of too much screen time, particularly on the young.

For years, using televisions as babysitters has been queried, given the language a child may hear and how the

visual presentation of modern broadcasting seems to assume – even encourage – shortened attention spans. Yet we now have children arriving in school knowing how to swipe but not speak – which may partly account for a rise in people who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The latest SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) replaced the term 'behaviour, emotional and social development' (BESD) with 'social, emotional and mental health' needs (SEMH) in recognition of the growing concerns over children and young people's mental health, and to encourage teachers to look behind outward behaviour and consider what might be causing it.

The impact had by advances in medicine are clearer to see. The rate of premature births has remained at much the same

level in recent years, but what has changed is the increase in survival rates of the very early-born group. Today, one in 100 babies is born alive between 22 and 28 weeks of pregnancy, overlapping with the age at which a baby can legally be aborted. Although some escape unscathed, the earlier a child is born, the more likely they are to have special needs and/or disabilities.

## **The SENCo's role**

All the above makes the role of the SENCo more pivotal than ever, though at times it may seem like a daunting task. Support from the school's SLT; a willingness from all teachers to take responsibility for the progress of all their pupils; the vital role played by teaching assistants – we need everyone to work as a team, with the SENCo at the helm.

There is a more complex population in our schools, including children born before the completion of brain development that should have taken place in the womb.

SENcos cannot know it all, but sharing knowledge within schools and beyond can help fill in the gaps. Be assured that SENcos can and do make a real difference to the lives of those children who are most in need of understanding and support.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Dr Rona Tutt**  
OBE is a former chair of the NAHT Special Education Needs committee; her latest book, *Rona Tutt's Guide to SEND & Inclusion*, is available now, published by Sage



# Tents, Booths and TUTTING CHAIRS

Too often, the way in which schools respond to difficult pupil behaviour risks making things worse for everyone, writes **Paul Dix**...

**T**here are many children whose behaviour perpetually communicates an unmet need. All too often it is wrongly interpreted as simple defiance. Children who are screaming for help can find themselves in an ever increasing cycle of punishment.

As their options become seemingly limited, schools scream for help, too, only to find that their external support services are now reduced to a phone perpetually ringing in an empty office. It may be desperation, or perhaps part of the frantic search for 'solutions', but schools are coming up with increasingly perverse ways to punish SEND children.

## Booths

A room with 'isolation booths' is the bleakest sign of a school giving up. It shouts 'WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO' at children who often don't know what they've done.

Look inside any 'inclusion room' where children are separated for long periods of time from the rest of the school. I would bet good money that more than 80% of the children

in there have additional needs. Some will have a diagnosed SEND, while others will be struggling with hidden needs that are all too obvious to those who work with them everyday – trauma, anxiety, attachment, grief or plain old fashioned neglect. The sins of the adult world are soaked up by a minority of children. We then stick them in a booth and call it 'educating'. The booths are a shame on all of us, not on the children who sit in them.

Children are being incarcerated in schools in a way that would be illegal in a custodial setting. You might be interested to know that even in a secure training centre where young people have been sentenced for terrible crimes, there is a limit of just three hours for isolation.

In an open classroom, a small low-folding screen can help children with sensory issues deal with sensory overload and personal space issues. Children who struggle to integrate should be helped to integrate; not removed to isolation, even if they seem to be happier there. Teachers who put students in isolation because they 'prefer it to the classroom' need to look instead at how they can make the classroom environment kinder and more inclusive to those children.

## Intense in tents

Have you heard of children with autism being put in tents erected in classrooms? Yes, you read that correctly. I was shocked too, but it is more common than I thought. Routine segregation of children within a school is not 'inclusion'. It is a cruel separation, laced with high risks. A classroom with a tent is

not an inclusive classroom. The tent is just an isolation booth moved to a more convenient space.

Can you imagine trying to extract a child from the tent who didn't want to come out? The safeguarding issues with having an adult and child alone in the tent, and the message that sends to the rest of the children? These tents are polyester palaces with 'Different' above the door, yet the practice is spreading unchecked.

Whom is a tent really for? The child inside or the 29 outside? What does this teach children? Schools build society; we should be slower to segregate, and cautious about products that promise easy answers.

## Tutting Chairs

Putting children on chairs the corridors, outside the staff room or by the head's office is humiliation dressed up as inclusion. Again, the clock is rarely recording the time spent on such punishments, which are often for crimes of movement in lessons. Children who find it difficult to control the urge to wriggle can find themselves welded to the chair at play time.

Now, no adult will have been asked or trained to do this, but every adult who passes the tutting chair goes through the same routine. They catch the child's eye, raise their eyebrows and perhaps tilt their head in a 'What on earth are you doing there?' way. They will then walk past in silence, giving it the full nutty 'tut tut'. It is a pantomime of humiliation that has a counteractive effect.

Most children sitting on the chair will feel a perverse sense of importance. Everyone knows their name and their status.

## FIND OUT MORE...

The Pivotal Curriculum is a licensed trainer scheme that allows every school to deliver Pivotal Behaviour, Mental Health and Inclusion Training. Find out more on [PivotalCurriculum.com](http://PivotalCurriculum.com) Join the discussion with Paul on @PivotalPaul

Smaller children will run to them in quiet moments to enquire with wide eyes, 'What have you dooooooonee?' The tutting chair follows a Victorian idea that bad children should be displayed for all to see. We used to put children who couldn't read and write in the corner with a dunce's hat on. Now we put them on show in the vain hope that they might feel some genuine shame.

They won't, aside from their performed response. If children need to stay in at play, why would any other child need to be able to see them?

## What works

### LIMITING SEPARATION

Sometimes children have to be separated, but the key is to monitor and record the duration of this, every time. Without time limits, a short walk to cool down can turn into a leisurely stroll. Two minutes on the 'thinking spot' can slip to 10, and a 'Leave him, he's happy' attitude can easily end up wasting hours a week.

### CONSISTENT UNDERSTANDING

Build a consistent understanding between all adults that children who present challenging



## ABOUT THE EXPERT

**Paul Dix is a behavioural specialist and CEO of the education consultancy, Pivotal Education; he is also co-host of the weekly Pivotal Podcast, details of which can be found at [pivotalpodcast.com](http://pivotalpodcast.com)**



behaviours are not defined by their behaviour. Foster a determination to separate the child from their behaviour and deliberately teach new routines. Teach all adults that recovery time after a period of crisis is, on average, 40 minutes.

Highlight the diminishing returns of anger and punishment. Did you know, for instance, that each time a child recovers from a full of loss of control, it gets harder for the child to compose themselves?

#### **TRAINING YOUR OWN LEARNING MENTORS**

Develop your TAs, LSAs, governors, parents, or perhaps even older children as learning mentors, and make sure each child has a mentor to work with. A mentor should be someone with no connection to sanctions or managing behaviour incidents, but a trusted person for the child to lean on.

#### **EXPLAINING THAT WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND**

Refocus on natural consequences, including restorative conversations, reparation and 'paying back'. Hold a mirror up to the child's behaviour. Sit and play with LEGO, or talk to them while walking, gardening, cleaning or sorting. Take the focus off the conversation and allow time for pauses and silence. Talk through the incident and reflect on who has been affected. Use behaviour incidents as teaching moments and an opportunity to teach new responses.

#### **THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT**

Develop your school's capacity to deliver therapeutic interventions and focused programmes within schools and across clusters. Get properly trained – don't just rely on worksheets and hope. LEGO therapy is a great place to start, but find out what fits

the needs of your children and devise a way of funding it.

#### **SAFE SPACES**

Establish a safe space for children who need a more nurturing environment at playtime and lunch. Make sure there is somewhere for them to go, with someone who has time for them. Too often, the children who struggle most at playtime end up stood at the side of the yard, staring at a wall.

After all, an outstanding school is a school that can succeed with all learners – not just the compliant ones.



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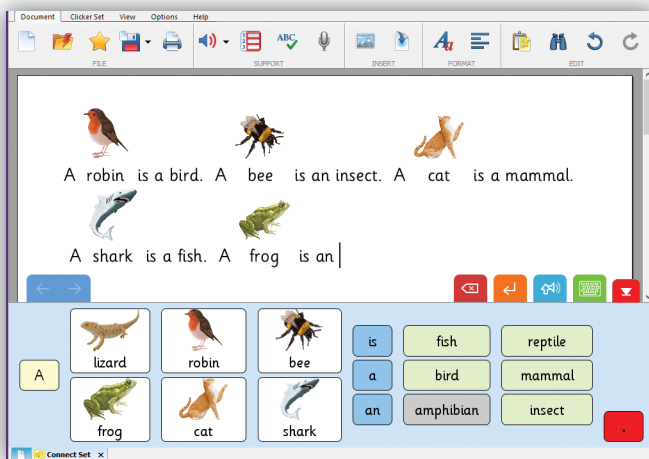
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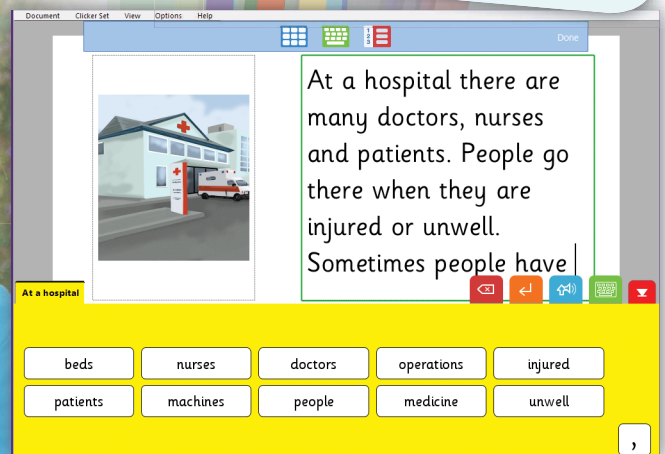
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# Is it SEND – or *something more?*

When the focus is on diagnosis, we risk children's mental health needs going unmet, warns **Julia Clements**

**T**he mental health of children and young people with SEND is all too often overlooked. In the past, the focus has tended to be on identifying and meeting the needs that arise from a child's diagnosis or type of SEND. If a child has reading or writing difficulties, for example, then support may be focused around literacy programs. If a child has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), social skills interventions are often put in place.

Yet how often do we stop to consider and address the self esteem needs of the child with learning difficulties? Or the anxiety that can threaten the wellbeing of the child with ASD?

This tendency to focus on the child's SEND as the explanation for most or all of their behaviours can mean that mental health needs go unrecognised and unmet. Research indicates that children with SEND are particularly vulnerable to experiencing mental health difficulties.

For instance, a child with a learning difficulty is six times more likely to experience a mental health difficulty over their lifetime than a child without one (*Emerson and Hatton, 2007*), while 70% of children with ASD will have a mental health difficulty, such as anxiety and depression, at some point in their life (*National Autistic Society, 2010*).

Recent research further indicates that 14% of children with autism consider suicide (*Autistica, 2016*), and that children with SEND are thought to be particularly vulnerable to problems with their mental health due to risk factors such as social exclusion, lack of



verbal communication skills and low cognitive ability (*Emerson and Hatton, 2007*).

So what can be done? Firstly, it is important for schools to establish a 'good mental health for all' approach and embed this into their culture. This will include introducing mental health into existing whole-school activities such as the PSHE curriculum, and adding the new character curriculum dimensions of 'developing me' and 'managing my relationships'. Class or group Circle Time and assemblies present other opportunities for schools to start exploring mental health with all their pupils, including those with SEND.

Schools are also well placed to support children with SEND to develop good mental health through facilitating their positive relationships with others. Research indicates that children who develop at least one stable, caring, supportive

relationship are more likely to be able to adapt to situations of stress and adversity, and be able to recover sufficiently from such experiences (*Harvard University, 2015*). All adults working with children in schools can have a role in offering children with SEND experiences of healthy relationships with adults and peers alike.

It's important that all children, including those with SEND, know that there is at least one adult to whom they can turn at times of difficulty, such as when they feel lonely, experience bullying or find social interactions stressful and difficult to navigate. This adult could be a class teacher or a TA who gets to know the child well, is regularly available to them, 'checks in' with them (especially at the beginning and end of the day, week and term) and offers appropriate, sensitive and timely support.

When supporting children

with SEND to develop positive peer relationships, it's important for school staff to consider the opportunities available at school for developing friendships, and check that the children in question are able to access these. This might include ensuring that children with SEND have access to any clubs, lunchtime activities and extra curricular activities the school might offer.

If children with SEND are not represented in these activities, greater inclusion could be facilitated through peer mentoring, mediation and counselling in order to encourage healthy relationships amongst children. For some children, specific interventions to help develop their connectedness and sense of belonging will be needed. This could be inclusion in a nurture group or setting up a Circle of Friends for a particular child.

**Place2Be provides free resources to schools for use during its annual Children's Mental Health Week (6-12 February 2017), which are also available to download throughout the year; for more details, take a look at [tinyurl.com/TSplace2be](https://tinyurl.com/TSplace2be)**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Julia Clements** is principal educational psychologist (south) at

**Place2Be** – a national charity that provides emotional support to children in schools.



# THE RIGHT TRACK

If an intervention isn't working, it shouldn't be happening, says **Meriel Bull**

**A**s a modern SENCo you will, of course, regularly update the availability of interventions in your school, train your team of teaching assistants to implement them, and add them to your Provision Map. However, any intervention is only as good as its

outcome. If a pupil is on the wrong one, they will not make progress, and both time and finances will have been wasted. Effective monitoring and tracking of interventions to identify which are working and which are not is, therefore, an absolutely crucial part of the SENCo's role.

Many intervention strategies are introduced as a reaction to slumps in assessment results or concerns raised by teachers or support staff. In fact, they should be in place for all students with learning or behavioural needs, as the true purpose of intervention with

SEN pupils is to prepare and equip them with the skills they need to face the barriers to their learning. It is always preferable if any additional support that's required is put into place before a pupil experiences problems with their learning or their peers. Ideally, a SENCo will have intervention plans in place from the beginning of a new



term, for periods of transition, and whenever change is on the horizon.

### Four steps

SENCOs will have been familiar with the mantra 'Assess – Plan – Do – Review' since before the Green Paper came out and simply waving a magic wand (or putting an intervention in place) was officially no longer enough to demonstrate effective provision for students with SEN. As human resources and budgets become increasingly stretched and questioned,

12 and 20 weeks are best for maintaining impact), and how it will be monitored. Full understanding and consent of the parent or carer is paramount. They are the expert on their child and their opinion is the most important one. They will look to you for support and guidance, but for your strategy to be successful, they must be supportive of it. Ensure the plan is recorded and everyone concerned has a copy. It does not have to be complex, and should be linked to your provision map and your records for that pupil. If

you do not have a template document already, then may I suggest *"Beating Bureaucracy in Special Educational Needs"* 2nd Edition, Jean Gross (2012), which has many useful templates that can be easily adapted as needed.

**DO:** Whoever carries out the intervention, ensure they are fully trained, have all the resources they need, and are clear about the objectives. Observe and monitor the sessions regularly to offer further support.

**REVIEW:** Without checking effectiveness, the intervention could be draining both time and resources and be of no benefit to the pupil, which is demotivating to both the child and the TA or whoever carries out the intervention. However, tracking does not need to be time consuming. The specific intervention may have its own methods of monitoring, but even so, it is advisable to check progress early on, and at regularly stages (at least at mid-point) as well as at the end of the given period of time. Methods of tracking effectiveness will often match the assessed need, for example:

- > Teacher assessed literacy level
- > Improved spelling scores
- > Reading age or level assessment
- > Improved mental maths scores

the effectiveness of every intervention must be robustly assessed; so it's worth reviewing how this process should work in practice.

**ASSESS:** What does the pupil need? It is important to be clear about the outcome you are looking for them to gain. Learning interventions should be specific, such as to move up a reading level or achieve 8/10 or better spelling scores; social interventions may be to improve behaviour in unstructured time, or increase social skills such as turn taking.

**PLAN:** As SENCO, use your judgement to decide which intervention is likely to be best fit. However, the pupil will be best supported as part of a team. Have a short but structured meeting with the class teacher, nominated teaching assistant, the parents, and where relevant, the pupil, to discuss the assessed need, and to structure a plan of what the intervention involves, who will implement it and when, length of sessions and programme overall (it is thought between

## INTERVENTIONS: THE DOS AND DON'TS

**ONCE YOU HAVE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE FOR ALL CHILDREN IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE AS MUCH USE OF THAT SPACE AS YOU CAN. HERE ARE A FEW TIPS AND SOME USEFUL INFORMATION TO HELP YOU DIFFERENTIATE:**

### Do:

- > Consider interventions before they become reactive.
- > Engage parents and ensure they are informed and their opinions considered at each stage. This is key to a successful home school partnership.
- > Monitor the intervention sessions and ensure that they are well supported.
- > Reflect and respond to the impact of the intervention through tracking at regular intervals.

### Don't:

- > Allow an intervention to be carried out without the correct training and support. The success of many interventions depend on their accurate execution.
- > Put an intervention into place without the parent's knowledge and support. Nothing less than this is acceptable practice.
- > Put the intervention into place and leave it to run indefinitely. Impact is suggested to be higher for 12 to 20-week intervention periods. If the process becomes too familiar to the pupil they may become complacent and make little or no progress, which is demoralising for the child and the professional.

- > Changes in reported behaviour incidents
- > Observations of classroom behaviour, as well as during unstructured time
- > Pupil's self-assessment (this could be through a verbal or non-verbal diary or a mood-board)
- > Peer assessment (recording of informal conversations)
- > Parental feedback
- > Key-worker feedback
- > Changes in attendance/punctuality
- > Timely task completion
- > Improved fine/gross motor control (handwriting, PE activities)
- > Boxhall Profile (this is best for major social or emotional interventions and carried out by fully trained individuals)

Recording the progress and feeding back to everyone involved in the 'Plan' stage is essential, not least if it is to establish that no progress has been made – in which case a different intervention can be identified and a revised plan agreed. Just as we evaluate

our teaching, we must also assess the strength of the interventions on an individual basis. Even if one intervention program helps a pupil to make remarkable progress, it may not have the desired effect on another, so don't hang on to one that is ineffective – changing direction through tracking is key to a sound intervention strategy. When you've found a good fit, the progress your pupils make will reward that flexibility.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a well-qualified SENCO, Meriel Bull has taught in the West

Midlands and Norfolk for over 12 years. She is now using her experience and passion for Special Educational Needs to write full time.



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# Why won't they play with me?

Negotiating friendships can be tougher than many academic challenges for children with SEND, says **Liz Gerschel** – but there are ways to make it easier for everyone

**I**t's playtime in a primary school: laughter and activity, games and chat. Watching particular children, the observer sees that their attempts to interact with their peers are largely ignored or rejected, not with open hostility, but with indifference. Many pupils with SEND experience this painful social rejection, lacking the skills to interact with others, communicate effectively and form friendships. We are not talking here about deliberate bullying, just the casual exclusion of children who don't seem to 'fit in'. It is still hurtful to the recipient and destructive to the social fabric of the school.

For children with speech language and communication difficulties, playtime can be particularly isolating and unhappy. Research evidence<sup>1</sup> suggests that communication difficulties have considerable impact on children's ability to form friendships, on their self-confidence and on their self-esteem. Many want to join in with their peers, they just don't know how to do it. Their social interactions frequently end in frustration and disputes. The DfE has suggested that the lack of positive friendships is an 'at risk' factor for developing mental health difficulties<sup>11</sup>. Social isolation and friendlessness may also affect learning and attainment, and have a negative impact on adult life. So, what can we do to improve social inclusion?



## Case study: Tower Hamlets

Vicky Absalom, is a SENCO in Tower Hamlets, east London, in a primary school where core values are communication, community, well-being, health and a growth mindset. She introduced a 'Friendship Group' to improve social interaction for two Year 3 boys with moderate learning difficulties. Following an action research model, she observed the children at play, and talked to them and to the Midday Meals Supervisors (MMSs). The children used 'Talking Mats'<sup>iii</sup>, with clear visual symbols, to express their views. This proved to be a powerful starting point, with pupils sharing strong opinions and showing a willingness to engage. Both pupils found it difficult to join in a conversation or game and felt that they were not understood by others: Pupil A declared simply that he 'had no friends'; Pupil B that he didn't like noisy children joining in his games. Observations revealed that Pupil A interacted inappropriately with his peers, grabbing at them or shouting

at them in close proximity. Pupil B remained largely alone, once briefly joining in a running game but without making eye-contact or conversation. Neither pupil appeared to understand the social skills needed to build friendships. Pupil B didn't seem to value friendships or see his peers as potential friends. The MMSs added that Pupil A made teasing comments, did silly things that others told him to do and then got into trouble. Pupil B was withdrawn and unwilling to speak.

So what to do? Vicky's aim was to develop social skills in these two, explore the qualities of friendship with them and enable them to put their new learning into practice in the playground; and she wanted the boys themselves to monitor progress. Selecting and modifying materials from 'Talkabout Relationships'<sup>iv</sup>, she and the Speech and Language therapist (SALT) devised a twice-weekly programme led by the SALT and a teaching assistant (TA). Reasonable adjustments accommodated



the children's difficulties with working memory, attention, auditory processing and self-regulation. Role play, group writing tasks, turn-taking, sentence starters for spoken language, and visual supports involved pupils in practical and enjoyable activities. Each boy had a book with clear visual reminders of the learning, to refer to between sessions.

Both pupils demonstrated in sessions that they knew some of the qualities of a good friend and what they could do to be a good friend; for example, Pupil B said he needed to tell others what he was feeling.

After eight weeks, there were some playground successes: Pupil A thought other children understood him better although his friendships hadn't improved. He described wariness between himself and his peers and he hadn't considered letting other children join his game. Pupil B was willing to let other children play with him – even noisy ones. Both children identified continuing difficulties with joining in with someone else's conversation or game and

talking to new people.

Nevertheless, playground observations showed significant improvement in Pupil A's purposeful play, including a full ten minutes in a shared game with peers, facilitated by a nearby adult. There was no inappropriate social interaction or physical aggression: he was, in fact, interacting successfully with his peer group. Pupil B smiled at a MMS and responded to her question, although he still played alone. The MMSs suggested that they play group games and used the visuals and verbal cues with which children were familiar, as reminders. Key rings with visual reminders of what to do to be a good friend have since been introduced as prompts for children and staff. More opportunities to relate the learning directly to the playground, such as through problem-solving in 'real-life' situations, are helping to further develop and embed skills and build confidence.

## The bigger picture

But this issue is not simply about developing social skills in



pupils with learning difficulties. It is also about the values we attach to successful inclusive and holistic education that promotes democracy, equality, care and justice and is not simply standards-driven<sup>v</sup>. Inclusive schools which claim to 'accept and value diversity' need actively to demonstrate this through curriculum policies and whole school practice, including frequent opportunities to make social contact inside and outside the classroom. Emotional intelligence, personal and social development and the increased focus on staying emotionally and mentally healthy are currently widely seen as intrinsic to the development of the whole child and to providing a foundation for academic and creative learning and achievement. Class teachers, TAs and MMSs have an important role in identifying and modelling social skills and demonstrating respect, care and kindness. Training and peer support will offer staff opportunities to share good practice and hone their skills. The context for inclusion must be dynamic.

Important as it is to empower

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Liz Gerschel is an educational consultant who has trained school leaders and staff for over 30 years, and co-author of *The SENCo Handbook* (Routledge, £24.99). She currently teaches the NASENCO course, which she helped develop for the IoE UCL. Vicky Absalom is one of her students.**



those children with SEN to develop skills to join in, equally critical is work with the peer group, so that they do not reject such attempts and are willing to initiate inclusion themselves. Regular reviews, involving the children, of playground and classroom practice, should lead to modifications such as introducing paired and peer work in the classroom, more structured games or reconsidering the transition to larger playgrounds. Curriculum initiatives that focus on

# 10 THINGS YOUR SCHOOL COULD DO TO SUPPORT SOCIAL INCLUSION

- 1 Establish a recognised whole-school ethos, supported by visual and verbal reminders, that values diversity, kindness and friendship. Use assemblies, poster, poetry, drama or rap competitions to publicise this.
- 2 Encourage children to accept responsibility for their relationships, share their concerns, self-refer for help and to listen to, and support, each other.
- 3 Ensure the trust that children put in adults in the school to help them, is well-founded.
- 4 Train all staff (including MMSs and TAs) to model and support social skills development and communication. Ensure all staff are informed about children with SEN and how to meet their needs.
- 5 Use the curriculum to recognise and value diversity, as appropriate to children's age and context, e.g. in families, geography, animal world, current events, famous people
- 6 Create curriculum opportunities to develop social skills and collaboration, e.g. role play; social stories, problem-solving; structured group discussions; collaborative work e.g. in music, art, games, sports; peer and paired activities, including assessment
- 7 Involve parents: many worry about their children's friendships. Offer training for parents so that they can support the social and communication skills, using visual and verbal supports familiar to the children
- 8 Factors such as transition to a bigger playground can exacerbate the isolation and confusion children experience. If there is to be transition to a larger playground, e.g. at Year 3, gradually familiarise them with it.
- 9 Regularly observe what is happening in playground, tracking particular children: are they having fun? Regularly review the playground, with the pupils: what would improve it?
- 10 Introduce a buddy system for the playground, with clear aims and job applications, interviews wherein children explain why they want to do this, visible indicators of buddy status, e.g. a cap or sash, limited terms of office for each buddy, certificates for good practice and a clearly articulated and visually-supported whole school approach to playground behaviour.

developing social skills and understanding friendships are included in PHSE, circle times or buddy systems.

Ultimately, it is the inclusive and supportive ethos of a school that enables children to take ownership of their relationships, self-refer for difficulties and feel confident that help is available, that will make a significant difference to the inclusion of all children.

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## TEXT TO SPEECH

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Text to speech technology continues to grow increasingly sophisticated with each passing year – but how can it be best used to improve learning outcomes for SEND pupils? **Roy Lindemann** from ReadSpeaker explains more...



### ReadSpeaker TextAid employs 'Universal Design for Learning' – can you describe what this is and how it is used?

Every learner will have his or her favoured method for obtaining, comprehending, and retaining information. Some are visual learners, some are auditory learners, and some are kinaesthetic learners. Most, however, learn best through a combination of all these three. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a plan for teaching which, through the use of technology and adaptable lesson plans, aims to help the maximum number of learners comprehend and retain information by appealing to learning in different ways.

UDL is a set of principles that provide an instructional framework for a flexible approach to individual learning needs. TTS is a key element to UDL, and ReadSpeaker's technology makes it easy and cost efficient for both institutions and individuals to integrate it into their learning environments.

### Are you aware of any notable examples of good practice in relation to ReadSpeaker TextAid?

Many studies, such as the one cited in an article by Dr Michealann Parr in the journal LEARNING Landscapes (see [tinyurl.com/TS-LL-Par](http://tinyurl.com/TS-LL-Par)) show how audio can be successfully used to support learning, and struggling readers in particular.

Numerous teachers, including Dr Trish Trifilo, are avid supporters of UDL, and using audio to enhance learning and accessibility (you can see a video explaining this via [tinyurl.com/Dr-TT-UDL](http://tinyurl.com/Dr-TT-UDL)). However, there's nothing quite like hearing the thoughts of students themselves – you can read what some of our users think about ReadSpeaker TextAid at [tinyurl.com/TS-RS-SS](http://tinyurl.com/TS-RS-SS)

### In what ways can text-to-speech be helpful for schools and SENCOs?

The task of helping struggling readers stay motivated and working at peer level is a difficult one. Text to speech (TTS) helps teachers and institutions resolve accessibility challenges with audio reading, writing, and studying tools, helping students with learning disabilities become confident, autonomous learners. This acquired independence will not only improve their comprehension and learning outcomes, but also boost their confidence, motivation and self-esteem.

### Is there a 'right way' and a 'wrong way' to use TTS applications in a learning context?

It is important to educate both students and parents on how to use TTS tools effectively. It should not be seen as a crutch or as 'cheating' – the solution to which is to make TTS support available to all students. Not only will this combat negative stigmas, but other students who respond to auditory learning will also be able to benefit from bimodal presentation of content (having written text read aloud while the words simultaneously highlighted).

### What are some commonly encountered issues with TTS applications and devices?

With a web-based service such as our own ReadSpeaker TextAid, you'll be able to use TTS audio tools at any time, anywhere and on virtually any device. If you require the tools to be available offline – away from a Wi-Fi signal, or in a poor reception area, for example – you can download the audio files you'll need ahead of time with the aid of ReadSpeaker TextAid's download feature. The service itself is continually updated to correct any pronunciation errors and reflect the various changes that happen to any language over time.

### Are you aware of any research that shows TTS tools having a positive impact on the outcomes of SEND learners?

A project by the Missouri Assistive Technology Study (see [tinyurl.com/Missouri-TTS](http://tinyurl.com/Missouri-TTS)) evaluated the impact of TTS technology on the academic outcomes of high school students with learning disabilities. It found that 95% of those using the tools had graduated on schedule, and that 85% had improved their grades. 55% increased the amount of time they spent in mainstream education rather than separate SEN provision, and 95% had decreased their reliance on assistance from others.

### Further information

**Find more information on how TTS may be able to help you and your students at ReadSpeaker's resource library – visit [textaid.readspeaker.com/library](http://textaid.readspeaker.com/library)**

# Let TAs take flight

Rather than shackling additional adults to a single SEND pupil, it's better for everyone to have them patrolling the skies, argues **Garry Freeman**



In 2015, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) published its Teaching and Learning Toolkit for practitioners, indicating which interventions appear to lead to the greatest progress for pupils. In it, teaching assistants (TAs) scored considerably lower than might have been thought ('low impact for high cost, based on limited evidence'), prompting a number of authorities and universities to investigate how better use could be made of TA support, under the project heading 'Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants' (MITA). The associated website, [maximisingtas.co.uk](http://maximisingtas.co.uk) continues to publish guidance and tools to this end – and of course, the same approaches also apply to any other additional adults (AA) you have in your classroom to support learning.

Promising in-class interventions using TAs in respect of the months gain in learning made by pupils

1:1 Feedback; prep for homework; metacognitive approaches; enabling; peer-tutoring

"May be worth it" in-class interventions using TAs in respect of the months gain in learning made by pupils

AfL; reflection on learning styles; 1:1 tutoring; support with ITC; parental involvement

"Not worth it" in-class interventions using TAs in respect of the months gain in learning made by pupils

Teaching assistants fixed working 1:1; after school clubs; performance pay

The EEF conclusion was that when TAs are simply used as 'whispering radiators' – in other words, sitting next to the same child all the time – not only are they unlikely to improve that pupil's attainment, their impact often leads to regression, rather than progress. There are various reasons why this might be the case:

Your TA could feel that because the pupil is only making slow/very little/no progress, or is off-task, then it reflects poorly on them, and they should be more active in terms of completing the work with or for the child.

Your TA could become over-reliant on the TA to guide them through the task(s), tell them what to do next, do their thinking for them or to actually do the work for them. The issue here is that this runs the risk of removing independence from the child's learning, making them largely or wholly dependent on the adult working with them. Equally, if your TA frequently tells pupils what they should be doing next, without first giving them a chance to work it out or reflect on it for themselves, they are subconsciously denying them the chance to develop metacognitive approaches (thinking how best to learn).

The pupil(s)' understanding of and responses to your expectations of them do not develop as they should, because they come to expect the TA or another adult to do their thinking and possibly their work for them.

The challenge, of course, is to develop and embed the effective use of any additional adults (AAs) you have in your classroom, in order to enable all pupils to be more independent in their learning. Here are six steps to get you started:

1 Use your AAs as helicopters rather than velcroing them to an individual pupil. Work together with other adults in the room, making clear to them where and how you need them to support learning. Show them how to check pupils' understanding of their work, how and when to move away and then check back with the pupil(s) every so often to assess their progress and understanding. This approach can have a hugely positive effect on SEN pupils who may lack self-esteem and self-confidence; you are subtly telling them that you believe they can make progress with work on their own.

2 AAs can support pupils in making sure that they understand the most important pieces of equipment/stationery to have on their table so that there are no distractions from effective learning. Of course, you might need to make an allowance for a pupil who has ASC or ADHD to have a stress ball or similar aid with them, but this should only be after seeking advice from your SENCo.

3 AAs can check that individual pupils understand what they have to do, and what you as the teacher expect from them by the end of the lesson. Ask your colleague(s) to get learners with SEN to explain the task to them to show understanding, and then discuss how they can demonstrate what they have learnt in the most effective way. Once they are satisfied that these children are clear about what needs to happen next, additional adults can move away and check in similarly with other students.

4 AAs are invaluable when it comes to helping pupils with SEN to manage their time effectively, focus on a task and be able to show their learning in the time given in your lesson. They can use online timers, verbal reminders and 'start' phrases rather than admonishing learners for being off-task. This is especially important with SEN children – you should always have the same expectation for them as for their non-SEN peers, in respect of how they must be able to show you their learning over a given time period.

5 AAs can help your pupils to practise using dictionaries, internet search engines, glossaries and other resources. Encourage an atmosphere of peer working based on mutual assistance, only initially supported if necessary by an adult. A useful motto to follow here is "Ask three, then me!" In other words, only after your pupil has gone to three other students for help should they come to an adult for support. Most questions will thus be resolved amongst the pupils themselves. This can also help to keep the class focused, and foster group work.

6 AAs can support pupils to reflect on their learning, using Dedicated Improvement, Reflection and Thinking (DIRT) time to improve what they learn and how they learn it. You could show your AAs the 'Mistake Detective' approach to share with pupils:

#### The 'Mistake Detective' Method

1 What was I thinking when I made this mistake?

2 Did I get confused in some way?

3 Did I overlook something?

4 What can I do to prevent this from happening again?

\_\_\_ Concentrate better

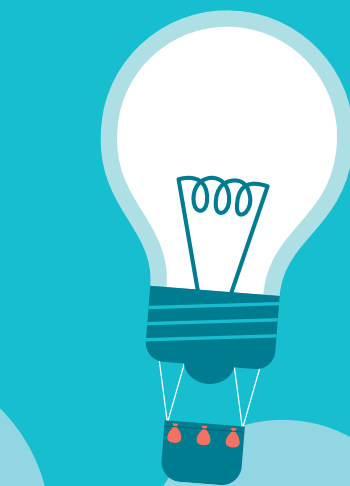
\_\_\_ Read more carefully

\_\_\_ Write more clearly

Make sure I \_\_\_\_\_

Calculate differently: \_\_\_\_\_

Repeat: \_\_\_\_\_



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garry Freeman is director of inclusion and SENCo at Guiseley School in Leeds, lead SENCo for Leeds North-West and an associate of Leeds Beckett University, where he contributes to the National Award in SEN Co-ordination.



# Forced **TO FIT**

Could a well-meaning focus on 'inclusivity' actually be depriving some children of their entitlement to effective education? **Jarlath O'Brien** thinks so...

**T**he school that I serve is very non-inclusive. We are unable to effectively educate the overwhelming majority of children in this country. To me this is a statement of the obvious, but how many headteachers do you hear saying something similar? It's easier for me to make such a point as the leader of a special school, a sector which educates 1.1% of all children in this country (how can I be inclusive with a stat like that?) But the DfE's latest statistics on SEN in England show that 14.4% of all children – that's one in every seven – have some form of identified

special educational need. Children with SEN are in pretty much every classroom in the land. It is one thing for me to say that my school is non-inclusive, but a mainstream headteacher saying the same thing would be regarded as elitist or selective.

In this piece I am going to argue that focusing on inclusion leads us to consider how we can best fit the child(ren) into the system as it exists now, leading, perversely, to exclusion and an over-reliance on the special sector. Instead, I will argue that we need to focus on how we can provide that to which each child is entitled to in order for them to thrive.

I claim a wide perspective on schools. I started life as a science teacher in a comprehensive, have been employed in an independent, selective boys' school and, for the last 10 years in three very different special schools. I have worked with young people from the age of 2 to 19, young people who have gone to Oxford and Cambridge, young people who have gone to prison and young people who have died due to a life-shortening condition. With the sole exception of the independent school, which made no secret of the fact that it selected by academic ability (and ability to pay), all the settings had limits, whether

they were prepared to admit it or were even aware of it, on whom they could educate well.

Each of them, and this applies to *all* schools, has their niche, their official (or unofficial, in some cases) admissions criteria. It is easy to find children whose needs fall outside of those criteria. Given that, it is no surprise that I see the current system as one in which the child – the one yet to develop fully and with a set of complex needs to boot – has to fit in order to be accepted into the school, that organisation of well-trained, grown-up professionals.

## **What's possible**

Let's go back to the beginning – when we claim to be inclusive the same question always pops into my head: "Included in what, exactly?" How are children being included? What are you trying to teach them? Is the way you are trying to teach

**“ It's time we stopped talking about inclusion and started talking about entitlement. Can you provide what these students are entitled to? ”**





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jarlath O'Brien** is headteacher of Carwarden House Community School in Surrey



the way they learn best? Is this appropriate for their stage of development whilst being age-appropriate, too?

The ideal for inclusion is that all children should be taught well in their local mainstream school and have their associated needs met. It is their basic entitlement, so the argument goes, and anything different is to deny them at least some part of their human rights.

This is not something that I believe is possible. It is not possible because there are some children, a very small number, whose needs are so complex and/or require such specialist skill and knowledge from staff and/or some specialist equipment and/or can exhibit extreme behaviours that they cannot be meaningfully included and well educated in a mainstream school. This is not the problem. The problem

is expecting the children with SEN in a school to simply fit in to what the school is doing without any depth of thought as to what it will take for these children to be successful adults.

To pretend to include this group in the life of a mainstream school without any meaningful adaptation to their provision is far more damaging and, in my view, robs them of their entitlement. This is fake inclusion and it is something that I see regularly. It is not necessarily deliberate. In fact, the vast majority of fake inclusion I see is carried out by extremely hard-working staff in great schools doing their absolute best for a child; nonetheless, the child is effectively in a school of one, and just happens to be surrounded by hundreds of other children with whom they have very little to do.

This becomes critical when we take a look at some of the life outcomes for children with learning difficulties:

- > *They will die at least 15 years younger than you.*
- > *They are twice as likely to be bullied at primary school.*
- > *They are seven times more likely to receive a fixed-term exclusion from school.*
- > *They are seven times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion from school.*
- > *They are seven times less likely to work than you.*

> *If they do work, it will probably be part-time. It will probably be poorly paid.*

> *They are twice as likely to live in poverty as you.*

> *They are over four times more likely to have mental health problems as a child.*

> *They are more likely to have children with their own learning difficulties.*

> *They are at least three times more likely to end up in prison.*

Once we have absorbed the enormity of these statistics we can begin to focus on the heart of the matter. For me those stats are professional background; imagine what it feels like as a parent to read them. The current system does not work for these children – simply shoe-horning them into our schools to appease our consciences is not good enough.

It's time we stopped talking about inclusion and started talking about entitlement. Can you provide what these students are entitled to? If so, great. If not, don't waste their time and yours pretending that you can.



Jarlath O'Brien's book *Don't Send Him in Tomorrow* is published by Independent Thinking Press.

## IT STARTS HERE

To improve the dire set of outcomes for children with learning difficulties, we have to address the causes of the problem. In my view the main obstacles to tackle are:

- > **The culture of performativity and the end-point narrative.** This leads some schools to avoid any perceived risks to school performance indicators, their outstanding status or their Teaching School status.
- > **Money and support - the two biggest sources of concern** noted by The Key's recent survey of SENCos. The diminished role of LAs will do nothing to help this.
- > **The view that the child with SEN reduces the chances of the others -** read Dyson et al (2004) to be disabused of this notion.
- > **A lack of understanding** that negative behaviours communicate an unmet need and that these behaviours can be improved over time.
- > **Systems designed to meet the needs of adults** such as inflexibility over uniform, an insistence that all children have school dinners, or a stance that all children will do GCSEs.



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# School of HARD KNOCKS

How does modern-day SEN provision in schools compare to decades past?

Four people share with what they remember of their education, including memories of segregation, low expectations and bullying - but also lasting friendships, supportive teachers and learning opportunities that made them who they are today...

“ There was a culture of simply encouraging you to get by, to not have ambition



Penny Pepper is a writer and performance poet

The school was grey bricks and lots of glass. A school for the physically and mentally handicapped.

As a child diagnosed with a rare form of arthritis, it was deemed appropriate for me to go there. Such schools were seen as progressive in the 1960s, even if the experience from the pupils' perspective meant they left a lot to be desired.

My father had taught me to read and write before the age of five, and I enjoyed learning, but as the years passed it became clear that there was to be no long-term focus on our academic achievement. I remember one kid in our school, Dave, was held up as a shining beacon of intellectualism - he was doing an O level. I can't remember what this sacred O Level was, but it set him apart and he was spoken about in hushed tones.

It wasn't that the teachers were incompetent, but there was a culture of being encouraged to simply get by, to not have ambition. I remember the horror when I learnt from some older girls - clever girls - about the work placement they were on, which

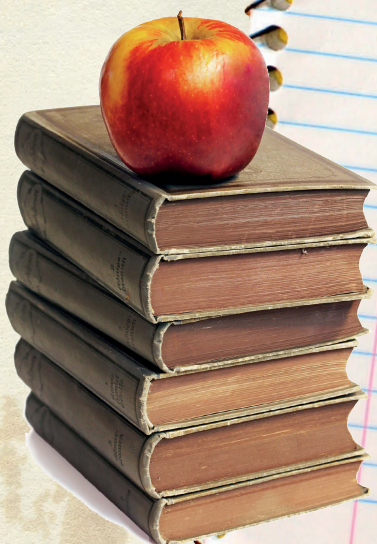
involved packing tampons into boxes. This was seen as 'being useful'.

There was no one-to-one care support, and as my medical condition deteriorated, this took a great toll. My hips seized up by the time I was 12. There were always queues for help to use the loo, and that grotesque interpretation of 'independence' - an insistence that you do everything yourself - caused endless tears before bedtime.

Special school - segregated school - had scant pluses. There was the bonding with your peers, who understood exactly what you were going through. There were friendships that would last, including one with a teacher who I'm still in contact with today.

But overall, it was an experience I hope is not being inflicted on disabled children in the 21st century.

To find out more about Penny's writing and upcoming performances, visit [pennypepper.co.uk](http://pennypepper.co.uk)



“ It was the personal touches that made my experience bearable



Amy Trigg is a trained actress and theatre director; born with spina bifida, she is a full-time wheelchair user

When I was 11 I went on a tour of the secondary school I was hoping to attend that September. It was a two-minute walk away from my house and my brother was already a student there.

I discovered it was inaccessible in more ways than one, which meant I had to go to a school on the other side of town. This other school was all on one level and accessible throughout. I would be the only wheelchair user there, and hardly any of my friends would be joining me, but that was okay, because it was a performing arts school and college.

I looked forward to being able to take drama classes and attend after school clubs, and received help in many ways. I got a taxi to and from school, one-to-one help when I needed it and a counsellor.

It wasn't all rosy, though. I was bullied, struggled to make friends and my confidence plummeted. I loved learning, but didn't enjoy eating my lunch in the disabled toilet to avoid the bullies.

Things started to change in year 10 once I began taking drama more seriously and made friends

at after school clubs. I stayed on at my secondary school for sixth form and went on to a top drama school in London.

The secondary I attended is now an academy and has doubled in size. I'm not sure how I would have coped in such a big school, because it was the personal touches that made my experience of school bearable. Teachers helping me catch up on work I'd missed because of a hospital visit; my drama teacher making the stage accessible and my 'special helpers', who gave me extra time when they knew I was having a bad day.



“ It was nice to be able to escape that 'special needs bubble



Lee Ridley is a former journalist turned full-time stand-up comedian, performing under the name 'Lost Voice Guy'; born with cerebral palsy, he has no speech and uses a Lightwriter and an iPad when communicating and performing his sets

I did not want to be 'normal', so I chose mainstream



I was born in 1974, in a very different political and social environment for disabled children compared to now. The first school I remember, aged 2, was the local mental hospital, where the children's unit was in the process of transitioning into a school in its own right. It would eventually be named after, and opened by, the Queen.

When I started school I was given the label of SLT or whatever it was at that time. Within a few weeks, my teacher realised not only was this label incorrect but that I was bright. In 1979 there was an effort to integrate me in my local village primary school. This was handled as well as Wurzel Gummidge attending a tea party.

In 1981 I attended a physically handicapped (PH) unit of a mainstream school in another town. Because I was the brightest pupil still, I was very much learning along from American

textbooks and last night's Countdown puzzles.

In 1985 it was decision time for big school, special or mainstream. I did not want to be 'normal', so I chose mainstream. It was a local all-boys school. It was a cultural shock for everyone involved, I think because of my speech impediment, drooling and that I could not write. According to the 'old school' headmaster, bullying was a part of my education as I needed to know my place!

By 16, I learnt how to deal with adults and when it came to college, I was going to the local 6th Form College whatever. College helped me grow in a bully-free environment.

Going to University was natural to me and my escape from an abusive family. I picked Coventry University and still live, very happily, in that city.

Further details of Simon's work can be found at [www.simonstevens.com](http://www.simonstevens.com); you can follow him at @simonstevens74



Simon Stevens has cerebral palsy and is a disability consultant, activist, writer and performer

I was quite lucky with the schools I went to, as both of them really knew what they were doing in terms of special needs education. In my primary years I went to Percy Hedley School in Newcastle Upon Tyne, then switched to Barbara Priestman School in Sunderland when I started secondary school. It was agreed by Percy Hedley and my parents that my education would benefit more from being at Barbara Priestman, as they could help me reach my full potential. Don't get me wrong, going to Percy Hedley gave me a great start in life – but they felt that the change would benefit me in the long term, since Barbara Priestman had links to a mainstream school over the road where I would be doing some of my lessons.

I wasn't keen on moving. I'd spent nearly all my life at Percy Hedley and had made lots of friends. It was hard leaving that all behind, but in hindsight it was the right thing to do.

Barbara Priestman was a very supportive environment, but the staff weren't afraid to push you if they knew you could do better academically. Being there definitely helped my education, but it helped me socially as well. I got to mix with able-bodied people on a daily basis for the first time. It was nice to be able to escape that 'special needs bubble' once or twice a day, and I'd like to think it helped the mainstream students have a better understanding of disability too.

I still keep in touch with some of the staff, and I'm still very grateful for what they helped me achieve. I honestly think I wouldn't be where I am today without them.

For more information about Lee's upcoming gigs, visit [lostvoiceguy.com](http://lostvoiceguy.com)

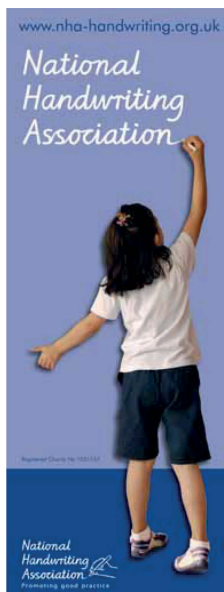


*I shared at me I went up to  
Ston it but I finished  
it was a small cat even  
though it was as big as my  
dog.*

## Does this concern you?

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# “Hold me or I’ll HURT SOMEONE!”

Some children with ASD go to extreme measures to get human contact, even if it means being restrained. **Steve Brown** explains why we need to adopt a reasonable, hands-on response...

I have supported children who have approached me and other staff members informing us that they need to be held or they will ‘hurt someone’.

This may appear strange to people who have never worked alongside children with SEN and behavioural difficulties, but if staff do not give certain children with ASD reassurance through physical touch, they will continue to need restraining because the restraint will be the only time they get to experience the comfort of being held by consistent and reasonable adults.

No adult wants to restrain a child unless it is absolutely necessary. But if staff were to use physical contact as part of a planned and coordinated approach with certain children (obviously not children with ASD who are hypersensitive to touch), it would help to reduce the number of restraints that can be more traumatic for both child and adult. It would reduce the risks involved in administering holds, prevent emotional stress and reduce the likelihood of injuries. More importantly, staff can promote positive interactions that will create a safer working environment.

My autistic nephew, who is 13 years old, needs physical touch and always craves hugs. He sits close to people and leans on them. He feels safer and conveys his feelings about the person through his contact. He gets feedback from physical touch, and it helps him relate to other people.

This is not too dissimilar to how children and adults without autism receive their feedback. If a person has not seen a family member or friend for a very

long time, the hugs seem to be deeper and longer, which can be difficult for some people who are averse to touchy-feely interactions. Here, however, we are considering children who may be vulnerable and in need of reassurance; this is a professional approach that acts as a strategy.

For those who are immediately thinking about child protection issues and increased allegations, let us think again! If there is a genuine need for physical contact, let’s write it on the child’s risk reduction or restraint reduction plan. Share it with everyone – parents and carers, staff and outside agencies. Write it into the setting policies. Make this the normal ethos of the setting.

This is not something to do as an alternative approach. It is a strategy to keep children safe and reduce anxieties that can affect a child’s learning and development. At the moment, I am giving outside support and advice to several children. I am encouraging staff to use the same physical intervention prompt and guide when the child is doing well and engaging positively as when they need to be kept from trouble, or safe.

I feel that staff need to use physical touch as a strategy in a matter-of-fact way when the child is going through a range of emotions so that it becomes consistent, normal practice that reassures and supports emotional development. Some of these children – especially those with severe learning disabilities and others with limited communication – will experience negative interactions, so physical contact will be a positive

connection with other people.

I have worked with children who have actively sought an adult to hold or restrain them. As adults, we are often trying to steer away from holding, so it can feel strange when children want to be held. My experience is that some children feel comfortable, safe and secure through close physical contact. Very often, the adults will receive verbal abuse, such as, “Hold me or I’ll hurt someone”. I have also heard accounts where children have deliberately engaged in unsafe behaviour which they know will lead to being held.

When physical contact such as guiding, firm squeezing across the shoulders with both hands, a friendly tap on the arm, arms across the shoulders and firm handshakes is made throughout the day, it can help to avoid children ending up in restraints. The child is receiving the physical interaction he or she is seeking in an assertive and non-threatening manner.

Children with ASD, or those who are

hypersensitive to touch, can seek the feedback they crave or need to experience. This is about adults taking initiative and pre-empting what the child may need.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Steve Brown is a senior Team Teach tutor and has been the Care and Control Coordinator for Birmingham City Council. He is also the author of *Autism Spectrum Disorder and De-escalation Strategies* published by Jessica Kingsley, from which this extract is taken.**



# Perfect PARTNERS

When parents and schools are on the same page, children with SEND can soar, says **Sylvia Edwards** – so here's how to get there

**A**ll teachers know the value of strong parental engagement – however, the Lamb Inquiry (2009) highlighted significant dissatisfaction with how schools and Local Authorities have interacted with parents and carers of children who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Amongst its recommendations for more equal partnership were:

- > A stronger parental voice
- > More effective communication
- > Improved access to information.

Whilst educationalists agree that parents make that essential difference, especially for children with SEND, do families know how much they matter? Perhaps schools should tell them. Research by Harris (2012) suggests that major barriers to parents' educational involvement are neither apathy nor lack of time, but rather a self-perceived lack of school experience (26%) and the skills needed to support their child's schooling (18%) – both of which schools can address.

## **Aim right**

For parents to engage effectively, they must understand what their child is aiming towards. Do the parents

of children with SEND in your school know how aspirational outcomes (for leaving school), expectations (for each year or key stage) and targets (termly goals) interact through long, medium and short term planning? They may be aware of targets – but do they understand how these extend into longer term, futuristic steps along their child's school journey? Parents should be at the centre of provision-mapping processes and policies. Ensuring they have the necessary knowledge can be time consuming, certainly, but it will prove rewarding – and all staff members should be aware of that, recognising parents as the ultimate solution to under-achievement.

Schools are expected to 'aim high' for all children, including those with SEND, but it's important to put this concept in context, and identify aspirations that are just right to ensure individual success. Aiming too high risks failure if a child cannot reach the goals. When targets must be repeated on IEPs parents feel disappointed, learners become demotivated and teachers feel frustrated. So parents must understand how 'aiming high' is targeted towards their child's personal potential, why class activities are differentiated and how setting realistic goals ensures that each

step leads towards planned outcomes. When targets match individual potential – and result in learning – schools, parents and pupils can celebrate together and feel success at every step of the way.

Independence is key to measuring achievement. Skills and knowledge can only be measured by what learners do themselves, without adult prompting. Parents can benefit from training on how to:

- > Support reading and comprehension – the difference between tricky words and phonics; how to support both; how to question their child's understanding of texts.
- > Support spelling – techniques for learning (look, say, cover, write, check); how to respond in encouraging ways.
- > Help with writing – models of grammar and different text types; the handwriting system.
- > Support motivation – praising strengths before offering sensitive feedback.
- > Develop independence – never never helping unnecessarily.

## **True targets**

All parents want their child to succeed – but it is not always easy is it to talk about success for children with severe levels of cognitive impairment. Measuring individual achievement is difficult and



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sylvia Edwards** is author of *The SENCO Survival Guide: The nuts and bolts*



*of what you need to know* (2nd edition: published by Routledge, March 2016). She has worked in primary, secondary and special schools across four Local Authorities, and as Manager of the SEN Support Service for East Riding of Yorkshire, trained schools in SEND policy and practice.

**“ Parents need to know whether their child can achieve average levels with the right support, or whether they are aiming for a personal best**

often sensitive for schools. The majority of SEND learners, once personal barriers are removed, should reach most key stage expectations, depending on their types of need. So parents need to know whether their child can achieve average levels with the right support, or whether they are aiming for a personal best – and if so, what that personal best is.

With regard to those (few) children from whom schools seek a personal best, these will by definition be below average in comparison with their peers. Teachers and SENCos often have the difficult job of collaborating on outcomes in ways that enable parents to remain futuristically positive and hopeful. Children with severe cognitive difficulties have often languished within low aspirations, but no longer. Achievement for All (2014) relies on the accurate assessment skills of teachers and SENCos to tease out each child's personal best and communicate aspirational, yet realistic, expectations to parents within an atmosphere of mutual trust.

Honesty is the only basis on which home-school collaboration thrives. I remember talking to a parent who had just discovered that her child had dyslexia, having been constantly reassured that he was 'doing okay', and told not to worry about the poor levels of writing that she observed.

When the truth finally came, it hurt. And that parent's offer of valuable support, over many years, had been wasted.

### **Personal touch**

Achievement for children with SEND also rests on personalisation – towards which schools need to work with parents. It is easy for institutions and external professionals to place individuals into boxes according to common diagnoses. Yet pupils with autism do not all have the same needs, nor do all young people with SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) difficulties respond to exactly the same strategies. Indeed, I believe that there are far more differences than commonalities within any identified SEND group. We might also reflect that a 'whole child' is the sum of both its school and home parts. Given that children with SEND are individuals first, only genuinely personalised approaches will enable them to achieve planned outcomes – and for this to work, parents must be givers as well as receivers of information. Two-way partnerships enable vital knowledge about children's learning styles and characteristics to be shared, effectively and productively.

## **KEY POINTS FOR A PRODUCTIVE PARENTAL PARTNERSHIP:**

- > Remove communication barriers; ensure parents know they matter
- > Help them to 'aim high' – towards what is realistically achievable
- > Collaborate on personalised aspirations, targets and strategies
- > Offer training in how to support basic skills and independence
- > Show parents how to recognise achievement in small steps
- > Celebrate success together!

How do parents feed personalised learning from home? From the learner's perspective, a target of 'personal best' requires motivation, spurred on by sensitive guidance and encouragement. Children who sense that their parents are on the same wavelength as their teachers benefit from that combined strength. They get away with nothing, and there are no gaps to fall through. Knowing that their parents have been trained, not only in what to expect from home and school work, but also how best to achieve it in terms of learning styles and strategies, inspires learners to try harder – and achieve, even against the odds.

Finally, it's worth exploring ways in which parents can become more involved in the life of the school more generally. Whilst families at one end of the spectrum may need help to support their child with homework or to encourage independence, others might welcome opportunities to get on board in more extensive ways, such as at policy level or on committees. In whatever form it takes, though, parent power is always worth harnessing, for the benefit of schools and learners alike.

# SHOW *and tell*

Keep the learners in your classroom informed, grounded and reassured with these 10 ideas for great visual supports from **Adele Devine...**



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**T**hink about what keeps commuters on trains calm and reassured during rush hour. Visual information is displayed inside the carriages and stations, showing where they need to go and how many stops they need to travel. Commuters have motivation and a reason for being on the train in the first place, of course – a desire

to reach their destination – and many will also have a distractor of some kind on them, such as a book, phone or tablet.

Like those travelling commuters, children with SEND in particular can benefit from the use of visual supports in the classroom – and when used appropriately, the following 10 ideas can ultimately help *all* learners.

## **1 ORDER THE ENVIRONMENT AND REDUCE VISUAL CLUTTER**

Ensure that classroom displays do not bombard or overwhelm. Consider turning out or dimming the lights. Define areas for working, choosing and resting to reduce movement and noise. Provide a visual volume control for students to communicate their comfort level. Create a sense of order with clear visual

labels for each area and item.

Plan your seating. Some students will work better at the front, others at the back or the sides. Some benefit from a screened space when completing individual work.

## **2 THINK ABOUT DISPLAYS**

Imagine being that student who is always at the bottom of the behaviour tower, or the one who hasn't

## VISUAL SUPPORT CHECKLIST

*A checklist of steps you can take to make your classroom more welcoming and friendly*

- > Maintain a calm, uncluttered environment without overwhelming displays
- > Ensure there's a way to dim the lighting or shade windows from the sun
- > Keep a whole class timetable and individual schedules (if required)
- > Use visual timers to indicate how long activities will last
- > Assign tasks that are differentiated and broken down into clear steps
- > Organise a 'sensory bolthole' to which students can escape when overloaded
- > Arrange seating so that individual needs are met
- > Make sure there staff who continually smile, offer support and love

made any progress on the reading tree. Displays must be used to enhance the learning environment and build self esteem.

Classroom displays can teach and encourage staff to use certain strategies, such as Makaton signing (see makaton.org). Add photos of wanted behaviours, such as sharing or team work, and use a program such as Symwriter (tinyurl.com/symwriter) to add symbols above the words.

Avoid over stimulating, bombarding or creating sensory overload. Simplify.

### 3 DISPLAY VISUAL TIMETABLES AND SCHEDULES

Display a visual timetable, ensuring that it's accurate, up to date and presented in a way that all students can access.

Some students may further benefit from a 'Now and Next' schedule, an individual schedule

or their own ticklist.

Break down the structure of a lesson structure by drawing up a schedule or tick list on a dry wipe board and cross things out as they are completed. It's easier to stay on track when expectations are clear. When employed correctly, visual supports such as these can help to encourage independence and personal organisation.

### 4 USE VISUAL TIMERS – AND AVOID MAKING FALSE PROMISES

How long will the lesson last?  
How long is it until lunch?  
How long until home time?  
Use timers or time symbols to provide students with this information; egg timers are good for those not yet able to read clocks.

Never remove a timetabled activity, such as playtime, as a punishment – this breaks a promise and risks breaking trust. Similarly, do not make false promises. The student may comply at first, but will remember any promises that weren't kept next time...

### 5 BREAK DOWN EXPECTATIONS AND SHOW STEPS

Some students may respond to a visual token system which shows expectations and leads to a reward. Visuals showing those expectations will help – for example, 'Good sitting', 'Good looking', 'Good listening' or 'Good waiting'.

Some students may feel overwhelmed by tasks, as they do not yet see that we learn in stages. They will expect instant perfection, but will not achieve it, so set them up to see success by providing a visual breakdown of tasks.

Visual schedules for personal care routines, such as washing hands and getting changed for PE, can help to illustrate the smaller steps that make up these tasks.

### 6 USE SOCIAL STORIES AND COMIC STRIP CONVERSATIONS

The idea of using social stories and comic strip conversations for visual supports was first

developed by Carol Gray. Social stories should be child specific, use individual interests and provide a consistent, calm way to explain or prepare, explain and prevent anxieties.

Comic strip conversations start with a simple stick figure drawn on paper, and can help a student explain their perception of a situation, allowing us to find the roots of anxieties or misunderstandings.

### 7 ADOPT THE 5-POINT SCALE

The 5-Point scale allows a student to explain anxieties. For example, a sound sensitive child may be able to show that for them, the hum of a classroom strobe light sounds worse than a firework display. Being able to communicate problems such this will develop teacher empathy, build trust and can be the starting point for reaching a compromise or finding a solution.

Using a 5-Point scale promotes understanding of different perceptions. It can be a useful way to explain sensory issues to other students, helping create allies who understand and may be willing to support them.

### 8 TRAFFIC LIGHTS

Traffic light systems are used in all sorts of ways because they are quick to understand. An obvious application is behaviour reminders – think footballers and those yellow or red cards.

Traffic lights can also help students to subtly ask for help and promote independence. The student can learn a system to suit them – perhaps holding up a red pencil, or turning their pencil case over to communicate anxiety.

Traffic light systems should not be used to single out students. Think how you might feel, being the student who is 'always on red'.

### 9 SAFETY

Images and symbols are quick to understand, which is why they are often used on safety signs.

Imagine looking through eyes

that interpret the world literally. If you want to communicate that students shouldn't run, do not just display the words 'no running' with symbols above – a non-reader may simply see the 'running' visual and miss the important 'no'. A red circle and a line through a running symbol will be clearer.

When tackling unwanted behaviours, be aware that a 'no biting' symbol may serve as a reminder to the student – 'Oh yes, I bite'. Show the behaviours you want to see.

### 10 POST BOX

A communication post box can give students a voice and alert schools to issues such as bullying. Make available a set of sheets showing different faces and sentence starters – 'I feel worried because...', 'I feel angry because...', 'I feel sad because...' or 'I feel happy because...'

Teach all students to pass on messages using this method, and let parents know about it too. Students can dictate their feeling, whilst a parent, classroom assistant or teacher does the writing.

Posting a problem away in the knowledge that it will be addressed can significantly reduce anxiety.

### Last words...

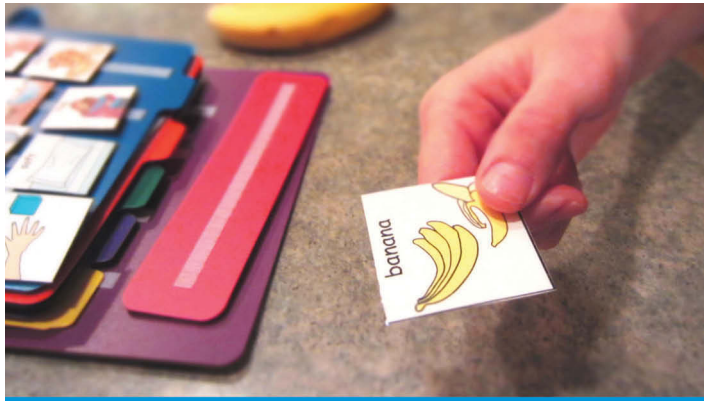
Finally, and most importantly – remember that staff must smile. Children are instinctive. They thrive in a loving atmosphere, where calm, happy adults continually build their trust and self esteem.

Compare the typical school day to that difficult commute. It's up to us to provide visuals to ease the journey and enable every child to stay on track.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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at Portesbery  
School and the  
director of SEN  
Assist – see [senassist.com](http://senassist.com)  
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# "ORACY COMES FIRST"

With the right support, even children with severe communication difficulties can access mainstream education, says **Jacob Stow** – just look at what's going on at Aerodrome Primary Academy...

'Children should be seen and not heard' – was ever a proverb more inaccurate or unwelcome? But while it's tempting to dismiss such sentiments as products of a bygone age, that would be to ignore the growing evidence that more and more of this country's children are struggling to communicate. Whether that's a symptom of society embracing technology at the expense of conversation, or a sign that we as adults aren't so rid of the

desire for domestic peace and quiet as we might pretend, or that we are simply too busy to talk like we once did, is hard to say. But it's a state of affairs of which staff at Aerodrome Primary Academy in Croydon are acutely aware.

"We used to rely on children coming to school speaking, but that's not always the case now," headteacher, Zoe Foulsham, tells us. "It's increasingly a problem. Every year there are more cases of speech and language delay, and in some cases disorders.

It's the biggest need in Croydon today, and it's been a hidden need for many years. It's causing issues across the country."

Zoe points to a range of contributing factors – amongst them, those touched upon above – but while prevention is always better than cure, Aerodrome's response to the challenges their children face is a fantastic example of the impact determined schools can have when faced with such issues. So impressive has it been, in fact, that the school

was named 'Primary School of the Year' at the 2015 Shine A Light Awards, which recognises excellent practice in supporting children and young people's communication development.

"We've set up the whole school for oracy," says Zoe, summing up Aerodrome's approach. "Everything we do, from early years all the way through, is based on talking." To back up that claim she can point to a host of initiatives that are making a difference in the classroom, as well as a dedicated Speech & Language Resource Centre, created to support those with specific needs, but which is also helping to disseminate excellent practice throughout the school. Even the learning environment has been resourced with the need to get kids chatting firmly in mind.

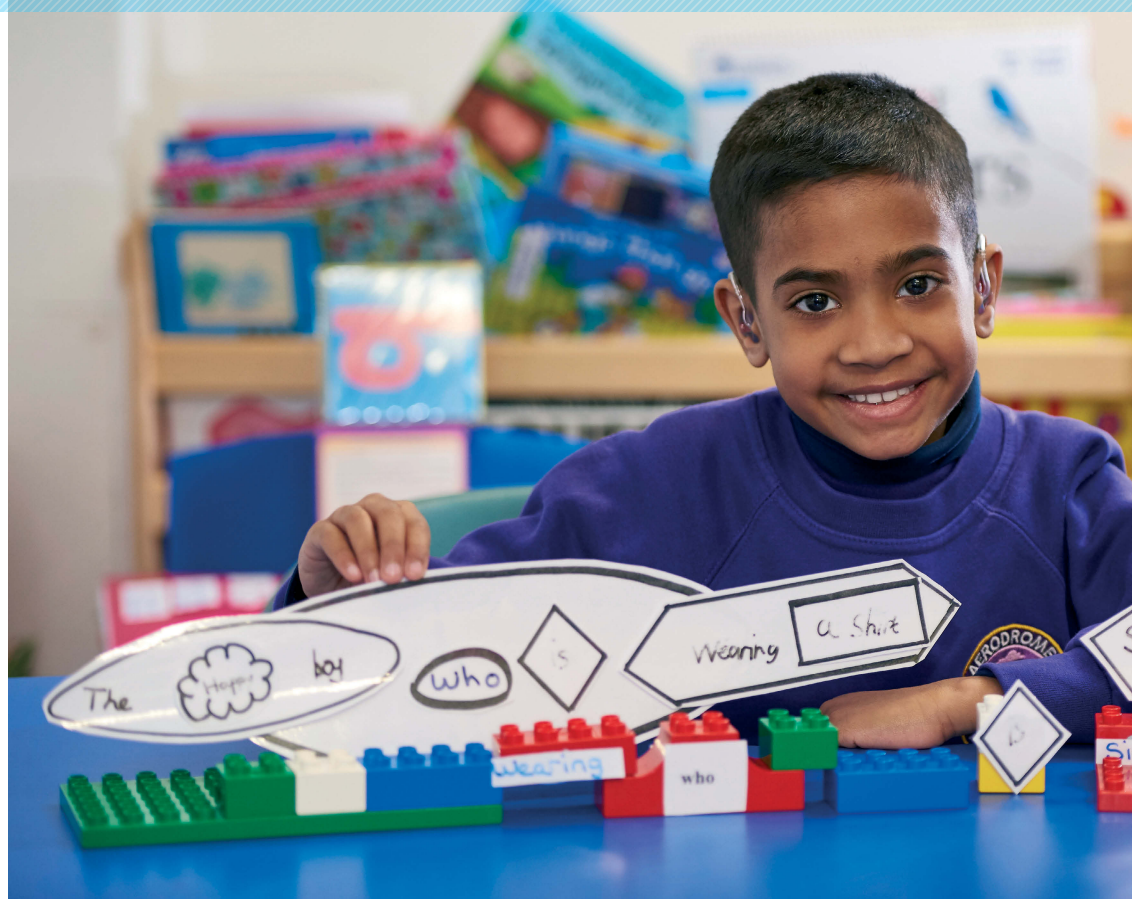
## 1 Challenging circumstances

The diverse community Aerodrome serves means many children here have English as an additional language (EAL), while the proportion of children

with special educational needs (SEN), and in particular speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), is well above the national average – as indeed is the number of disadvantaged children.

"This is a really tough school in terms of the deprivation our children experience," Zoe notes. "We have a job to do, in terms of teaching and learning, but we do it by having great fun, albeit fun with a huge amount of pace and rigour. How children respond to learning, how they feel about it is the most important thing. If they're feeling positive, they're likely to learn a lot more than if they're being done unto."

In keeping with those sentiments, there's more than a hint of the early years about Aerodrome's approach to teaching and learning, as well as a focus on developing independence, which Zoe stresses can be all too easily closed down by overly academic pedagogies. And through everything runs the focus on oracy, addressing the real need in the school's intake. It's a focus that acquired considerable momentum early on in Zoe's tenure with the creation of the school's Speech & Language Resource Centre, otherwise known as its Enhanced Learning Provision Base.



**2 Specialist support** "We were asked to have the Base here by the local authority during my first year at Aerodrome," Zoe explains. "I think they realised the school could do really great things because we had the right team in place, and after our Ofsted it was clear that we could really move forward with these children. Although it's a fully integrated part of the academy, it's funded by the LA and children come from all over Croydon. We only support a relatively small number of children with more pronounced speech and language difficulties – we have 17 at the centre at the moment, though there have been up to 19, which is based on adult ratios, and what we can manage in terms of giving them the best support – but we've come to apply a similar approach to that used in the Base with all the children in our school."

Those who come to use the Base itself benefit from a sizeable, open learning environment – "It's not just an add-on room," Zoe stresses – that's very much in keeping with the aforementioned early

years influence. Here a specialist team, led by assistant head Vicky Prigg, provide the support necessary to help individuals develop the skills they need to succeed in mainstream classrooms. There's no question of a 'one size fits all' approach; each child receives a bespoke curriculum tailored to their needs: "If a child is really strong at maths, for example," Zoe says, "they might be taught that subject in the mainstream classroom while spending time in the Base to work on the communication skills. Of course that means that all of our staff have to be really skilled in teaching communication; we have to have a whole-school view on it."

Within the Base, the focus is firmly on speaking and listening, with priority given to the development of functional language skills and the confidence needed

for communication, while mums and dads are invited in to regular parents meetings, at which staff model specific strategies that can be employed at home. Staff here regularly provide training to NQTs and students, too, aiding early identification and support strategies for pupils with SLCN within Aerodrome and other mainstream schools in the locality.

The flow of knowledge from the Base to other teaching staff is enhanced by the fact that specialists, such as Vicky and speech and language therapist Maxine Whitmore, are to be found working across the school, particularly in the early years, in an effort to minimise the impact poor communication skills have on children's education. As a result, many strategies initiated in the Base are today benefiting children far beyond its four walls.



*"All the way through the school, where reading and writing issues are predominant, oracy comes first. Always."*

**ZOE FOULSHAM | HEADTEACHER**





### 3 Classroom strategies

There's no escaping the fact that oracy is a cornerstone of teaching and learning at Aerodrome. The focus on communication begins at the earliest point possible – even before children reach school age, thanks to the academy's attached children's centre, which hosts EAL groups designed to encourage language development through stories, songs and creative activities – and continues unabated until children leave in Year 6. Much is targeted at those with SCLN, but all children are reaping the rewards.

In nursery, for example, 'Bucket Time' employs toys to teach prepositional language and develop the attention skills of children with severe SCLN; then later, in Reception, following screening for speech and language delay, those with the greatest need benefit from a 'Just Arrived At School' oral language programme – there is an awareness that time is of the essence, and communication issues are not allowed to slip.

Phonological awareness is given a high priority from nursery onwards, and staff

utilise a technique known as 'Cued Articulation', which unites sounds and gestures to help children learn where the sounds they are endeavouring to make 'come from'. "Kids can't automatically make certain sounds, but by showing them where they come from, using gestures and vibrations, they very quickly grasp the understanding of sound that underpins our phonics," Zoe explains. "When it comes to teaching phonics, they motor very quickly, as a result. Not all children get as much exposure to talk at home, and this gives them that sound solid base at school."

Then there's Communicate: In Print – a computer programme that produces instructions for children in pictures and words. "If there's a task to do, there'll be a sheet on the tables for children. It's written in English, but at the top, the instructions are given pictorially as well," Zoe tells us. "All year groups use it – even the little ones can read the pictures, right from the word go. But then Communicate: In Print supports them as they begin to look at the text as well. It's fabulous for EAL children, but we also use it for behaviour and for ASD children, on little signs which the teachers wear around their necks. It's very intuitive."

The list of communication friendly initiatives goes on and on, and the emphasis on speech even extends to furniture choices – Zoe points to the circular tables in the school's ICT suite, chosen to help children talk to each other, and the 'pods' installed in the Base's playground, which stop children dispersing, leading to them sitting in a circle and having a chat. "The school's provision for SCLN pupils, while having a whole-school holistic approach for all pupils, is a strong example of how all pupils' speech, language and communication needs can be integrated with success," noted the organisers of the Shine A Light Awards – the evidence to support that statement is overwhelming.

## MEET THE STAFF



### Vicky Prigg, Assistant Head

"Historically for SEN children in mainstream schools, independence hasn't been great. Children become very reliant on having an adult sat next to them all the time. Long term that doesn't do them any favours at all. But if you can scaffold it in the ways we are using here, it supports their independence and self-esteem."



### Katie Barrett, KS2 Teacher

"I really enjoy lesson study – you identify something you want to investigate as a group, then plan a lesson that one of you teaches and the others watch. Afterwards you come up with some 'what went wells' and some 'even better ifs'. You repeat that process three times, and by the end you have some really solid findings in answer to whatever you were questioning."



### Anna Woolston, Nursery Teacher

"Last year we had a number of children coming in with quite severe speech and language difficulties. They weren't really able to cope with the nursery setting, but we have two indoor rooms, so we made one into a nurture space for them. We set it up completely differently, and planned separately for that space to include more speech and language activities."



### Maxine Whitemore, Speech & Language Therapist

"We are proud of our work on helping teachers to identify speech and language difficulties early on. There's little emphasis on it in training, and yet they could be faced with half a class having speech and language difficulties when their children enter at Reception. The more they know about identification and support, the better."

# Keeping the **DOORS OPEN**

Exclusion should always be a last resort, says **Carol Frankl** – but it's a process that often starts much earlier than you may think

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**E**xclusion is a many layered concept that can be seen along a continuum. At one end, we may observe a child who is 'excluded' from an activity in the playground by classmates, while at the other is the youngster who is permanently excluded from a school or setting. It may seem at first glance that there is

little relationship between the two extremes, but on close examination, small social exclusions can grow into a series of behaviours that can culminate in a formal and permanent one. Our role as professionals in schools is to notice, record, modify and differentiate all of the offerings both inside and outside the classroom. We must ensure

that every pupil is included successfully in all aspects of school life, so that behaviours that lead to exclusion at any level are minimised. And while this may seem an enormous task, this article is aimed at helping practitioners think through some of their options.

The SEND Code of Practice recognises that poor behaviour in itself is not by default a

special educational need. This is acknowledged in its renaming of this area of need as social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). It is worth noting that children with SEN are six times more likely to be excluded than those without SEN.

It is not always possible to avoid permanent exclusion from a school or setting, but it is a very grave step to take.

Children generally want to learn and like being with friends in the classroom and playground, although their words and actions may sometimes make you feel very differently! If we start from the position that 'all behaviour has meaning', it may be possible to reframe some of our thinking. We can be curious as to why a child behaves in a particular way, and this curiosity can lead to the generation of some very intriguing questions, which in themselves can lead to innovative ways of managing and changing unwanted behaviours that have a negative impact on pupil progress. Permanent exclusion is almost always a culmination of many events and incidents, leading to a point where the school feel they cannot effectively continue to meet a particular child's needs. Tackling incidents of unwanted behaviour early can prevent such an escalation and enable inclusion to be a reality.

## Environmental issues

Most teachers and TAs work hard to create classrooms where children feel safe to learn both in groups and individually. We know that all learning involves risk-taking, and in order to take risks, children need to be able to trust that they will be 'held' along their learning pathway. Vygotsky, the famous Russian child psychologist of the mid 20th century, understood the importance of the relationship between teacher and learner. The former provides the correct scaffolding for the latter to take the next steps, and understands the prerequisite skills a child will need to succeed. These factors, coupled with planning for learning that takes account of differing needs through effective differentiation, are the cornerstones of good inclusion practice in the classroom and create an environment where children

can be curious and tackle new learning with confidence.

All children work well with consistent structure both in and out of the classroom. Setting clear expectations and applying them consistently is a key component of safe learning and play.

We know that children come to school from a wide variety of contexts, bringing with them different experiences, and it is important to recognise and understand these differences as part of planning for learning. Integrating learners' experiences into teaching at whole class level, group work and partner work helps children recognise that their life experience is valued and they are being listened to.

## Listen and learn

Attachment theory explains that unless a child is 'securely attached' to the significant care giver (often the mother) within the first two years of life, then learning and emotional development can be affected for the rest of that child's life and into adulthood. We know from Jenny Dover's research at the Caspari Institute that 64% of children have secure attachment going into school. There is much that can be done to support the 36% that do not, helping alleviate the difficulties they may develop in a learning environment, which are often manifested through poor behaviour and an inability to focus.

Teachers and TAs, in understanding the impact of poor attachment, can provide a secure learning environment where the child feels safe and able to learn. The key is to 'keep the child in mind', by attending to what children say and remembering what is going on in their lives outside school. They need to feel a sense of nurture and belonging to become successful learners.

Children with low self esteem find learning hard for many reasons, including a fear of failure. Teachers and TAs can provide an environment where it is safe to learn and where 'mistakes' are seen as learning opportunities. Strategies such as a 'no hands up' policy or the use of 'traffic lights', where children can indicate when more support is needed. Enable children to make choices in their learning, which is an empowering experience.

Finally, it is worth remembering that poor behaviour often feels very personal to others. It can impact negatively on the emotional wellbeing of teachers and TAs, too; adults may need be supported through difficult times with peer support groups or non managerial supervision.

There is no simple right or wrong answer to pupil exclusion. We do know that most children have good intentions in relation to learning. It is our job as adults to focus on these and provide an environment that feels safe and values individuality. Listening carefully to children, planning how to react to unwanted behaviour and thoughtful reflection are the key to minimising incidents of exclusion for all pupils, including those with SEND.

**Further information about the Southover Partnership can be found at [southoverpartnership.com](http://southoverpartnership.com)**

## ABOUT

**Carol Frankl is founder of The Southover Partnership, a regular SEN speaker, and a provider of SEN training and consultancy**



## PLANNING: AN ABC

Challenging behaviour may serve one of several functions for children: it can be an escape from an unwanted or difficult situation, an attention seeking device, a way of getting something that a child wants, or a sensory experience that satisfies an internal need and is rewarding. Recording behaviour allows an objective analysis to take place, so planning can be more carefully targeted for pupils at risk of exclusion, tailoring the next learning experiences appropriately.

Reviewing behaviour sometimes focuses on blame and sanctions, which isn't very helpful in addressing the next steps and gives little opportunity for repairing relationships. Using an ABC (antecedents, behaviour and consequences) sheet can improve understanding of behaviour, and lead to more effective planning as a result.

The antecedents are the things that happened immediately before the unwanted behaviour or developments over a longer period of time, say at home. The behaviour is a description of the unwanted behaviour, and the consequences are the results of the behaviour. If an ABC is completed after each incident, it helps build up a picture which can demonstrate patterns in behaviour and enables adults to identify these and plan to reduce incidents.

# Danny is DANCING

A child might have the weight of the world on his shoulders, but with careful mentoring he can find freedom, confidence and self-expression in music, says **Phil Mullen**

**D**anny is dancing. At eleven years old he spends much of his time in trouble. In fact, more often than not, any disruption is his doing – swearing, destroying property, and fights in the playground are all part of his daily routine. But today he is dancing.

The morning started somewhat differently when the SENCO popped her head into my music mentoring session. "Have you seen Danny?" she asked. I hadn't – he was somewhere in school, getting up to who knows what.

Danny has his reasons for trying to escape. His mum is seriously ill and the situation at home is difficult. What's more, he knows he will be moved to a special school next term with other children who struggle with difficult behaviour. It's hard to know what effect this will have on his life – just thinking about the future must be scary. Sometimes it seems as though he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Later that morning, Danny is found and he comes to do some music with me. We have been writing dance tracks using the computer and, in this session, we're going

to put all his work onto a CD.

Danny has written seven tracks across the half term, all with a funky groove and strong bassline; his music has a hip-hop style – a relaxed, melodious feel. He is fast and precise in putting tracks together, leaving space in his arrangements and dropping in little textures and fills at just the right moments to keep the listener interested. In some songs, he has played his own solos using the computer keyboard.

I've never had a moment's trouble from him. He stays focused throughout: curious, musical – deep in creation. Our relationship is more producer and artist than teacher and student and, to me, is all the better for it. Danny has, I am sure, learned more about music by trying things out, listening back and talking about the results than if I had delivered a set class.

Because he feels in control and we are working with his ideas, it has been easy for Danny to trust and listen to me as I talk about the technical aspects of each piece, and what steps can be taken to improve the raw material. We discuss staggering the entrance of instruments, having

'breakdowns' (where most instruments drop out of the mix to provide space before the excitement starts to build once again), and doubling up certain lines on different instruments to increase their impact.

Today we spend our time checking if the volume levels on each instrument are right, if Danny is happy with the combination of sounds, and where the instruments come in and out. Finally, we decide what order to put the tracks in. He is excited he will be able to play the CD for his mum to hear that evening.

When everything is agreed, we burn the tracks onto a CD. As we listen back, Danny starts dancing – not showing off, it is as if I'm not there. He's just into his grooves, using the music he has created to let himself go, forget his past and future, and shed the troubles of the world from his shoulders. He is not aggressive, stressed or agitated, just completely immersed in his own world of sound.

Danny is dancing.

## **Hazel and Charlie**

"Op!" She definitely said "Op!" Hazel's key worker is certain. "It's because you were saying 'Stop' – she is trying to copy you!"

Hazel is a 5-year-old who does not speak. She comes to my music mentoring session for 20 minutes a week, along with a little boy called Charlie.

Charlie wouldn't come into the room with me for the first three weeks: he dug his heels in. The TA said it was because I was a man.

Slowly, through talking to Charlie in his classroom, and through some gentle coaxing to give music a try, we got to the point where

## **WHAT IS MUSIC MENTORING?**

**CHILDREN LIKE DANNY, CHARLIE AND HAZEL MIGHT FIND PHIL MULLEN'S SESSIONS THERAPEUTIC, BUT IT'S NOT MUSIC THERAPY, HE EXPLAINS...**

Music mentoring is a way of working with children that helps them to progress musically, while also taking into account their personal and social development. As a mentor, I try to work in an emotionally intelligent way, to understand the child's journey, feelings and frustrations and see beyond his or her behaviour to a deeper, perhaps hidden potential. Often, although not always, I will let the child take the lead in deciding what instruments to play or where to take the piece of music.

I tend to work with the more vulnerable

children in the school, sometimes in one-to-one sessions, but never with more than six pupils at a time. This means each child receives more time and attention than he or she would in a larger class; it helps me establish a warm working relationship, concentrating on his or her individual goals.

It is not music therapy. It focuses on the music and the quality of the sound produced, but in a way that allows the young person to understand, appreciate and celebrate his or her own work.

he came in for five minutes, holding his TA's hand.

Over the last few weeks, we have made further progress: Charlie now runs ahead of me into the music room and we sometimes work without the TA. He talks to me throughout the session, which now lasts half an hour, experimenting with the instruments and trying out new ways of playing each week.

It has been different with Hazel, who has followed my instructions throughout. She sits a little away from the instruments (Djembe drums, xylophones and other hand percussion) and plays the drum just at the edge, not in the centre. She tentatively follows what I say and play,

but hasn't shown the desire to use her initiative and do her own thing.

Today things have changed. Because Hazel's key worker is here, alongside the regular TA, there are enough adults to set up a stronger drum rhythm and build momentum. Hazel and Charlie are playing along and, once the rhythm is solid, I leave a little empty space (just three or four beats at a time), which the children take turns to fill with whatever sounds or patterns they like.

At first Charlie took the lead, but now Hazel has got the idea and is excited and laughing. She is using different parts of the instrument each time and changing what she is doing, trying things out –

improvising. The music is alive.

I have been counting "1, 2, 3, stop" to let Hazel and Charlie know when to play their solo sections. As the piece goes on, they both grow in confidence, trying and achieving new things.

Hazel is in her element and, for the first time in our sessions, is articulating vocal noises.

Her key worker is convinced she is trying to say "Stop". I am just happy she is playing her heart out.

**Phil has written further about using music to connect with hard to reach children in the Music Mark publication *Reaching Out* (2013). Find out more by visiting [musicmark.org.uk](http://musicmark.org.uk)**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Phil Mullen** has trained community musicians at Goldsmiths

College since 1990.

He is also a freelance community musician specialising in working with children in challenging circumstances. Email him at [sndpeop@dircon.co.uk](mailto:sndpeop@dircon.co.uk)



# BUSY FINGERS

Improved fine motor skills can unlock children's confidence and creativity, as well as dexterity – and these activity ideas from **Becky Tuxford** can help it happen...

**T**he development of their fine motor skills is an essential precursor to children being able to do many of the things that the majority of us take for granted from a relatively young age – such as buttoning a shirt and using a knife and fork, for example, as well as writing legibly and controlling a computer keyboard and mouse.

Many children with special needs will have particular challenges with fine motor skills and may experience frustration and poor self-esteem as a consequence, therefore impacting on their learning experience. Including a range of opportunities to help develop them, then, whether within the classroom environment generally or as part of an intervention strategy, should form part of every teacher's planning.

## What and why?

The term 'fine motor' means 'small muscles'. Fine motor skills encompass the coordination and use of the small muscles in the fingers, hand and arm to manipulate, control and use tools and materials. Hand-eye coordination, where a person uses their vision to control the movements and actions of their small muscles, is also an important factor in fine motor skills development.

Fine motor abilities form the foundation for many of the abilities children need to develop and enhance as they

progress through their earliest years. Little hands must build strength and dexterity in order to facilitate their interactions with the world – and inevitably, their learning. Adequate fine motor control is crucial in the development of early literacy, numeracy and self-help skills, as well as enabling the child to participate in a range of more complex activities such as board games, arts and crafts projects and making music, which they will find less demanding (and more appealing) as they strengthen the required muscles.

The following suggestions are ideal for helping all children develop their fine motor skills, and can be especially useful when supporting children with SEN, who may find themselves behind their peers in this respect. They can be used in multiple ways: one-to-one; with small groups; or as a whole class activity.

## 1 Feed the ball

This activity is targeted primarily at hand strengthening, although it helps with finger dexterity, too. It could be used as an intervention strategy – either as one-to-one or with a small group – or incorporated into whole class numeracy and literacy lessons (counting items as they are 'fed' to the ball, for example; or working with letters to spell out words).

> Cut a 3-inch horizontal line across a tennis ball (so when you squeeze the ball, it looks like a mouth is opening; if you are feeling creative and have the time, draw a face on, too). Put a selection of small items, such as coins, beans or beads, on the table in front of the child.

> First, show the child how to squeeze the ball and 'open its mouth' using only one hand (preferably the dominant hand). Once they have the hang of it, explain that the idea is that they pick up the small items with their other hand

– one at a time, using a pincer grasp – and 'feed' them to the ball by opening and closing its mouth.

> To work on finger translation, ask the child to pick up two or three coins at once, but 'feed' them to the ball one at a time.





## 2 **The right lines**

Tracing encourages children to use hand-eye coordination, as well as controlling the dominant and non-dominant hands. It's a skill that not only requires a strong pencil grip to hold the pencil or marker, but also demands good coordination of the muscles in the hand to stay on a narrow line while following it.

As a starting point, print some images related to the topic you are studying - to make it more fun, you could give groups of children different pictures that when put together form a giant jigsaw. Direct pupils to trace over the lines, curves and shapes with coloured pens. Depending on ability, they can then label the image with key words, facts or statistics before putting them all together.

For younger children, try homemade worksheets; use a yellow marker to draw shapes, images, letters or numbers and then have the children trace your lines with a blue or red marker to see the outline magically turn a different colour.

## 3 **A squash and a squeeze**

Putty or play dough is an ideal way to help develop fine motor skills, as manipulating it effectively requires the use of many different actions. Try mixing and matching the following activities to help children work on the various muscles of the hands and fingers.

### **RAISE A TOWER**

> Place a small amount of dough onto a flat surface and shape it into a cone, by pressing fingers and thumbs lightly into the dough, then slowly bringing the digits together and up, forming a sharp point.

### **SQUASH THE SNAKE**

> Place a roll of dough in the palm of a hand and flex fingers to make a fist. Squeeze as hard as possible.

### **PULL UPS**

> Shape dough into a 10cm disc on a flat surface. Place a hand over the circle, with the tips of fingers and thumb in the dough. Draw thumb and fingers together to the centre of the shape.

### **MUSCLE-FINGERS**

> Hold a ball of dough in one hand. Use each finger of that hand to poke the ball, flexing the digits one at a time, and using them to push dough into the palm of the hand.

### **MAKE IT THROUGH**

> Place a ball of dough between the thumb and index finger of one hand. Push the digits through the ball until they meet. Repeat with the other fingers; then with fingers and thumb on the other hand.

### **STRETCH THE LOOP**

> Place a loop of dough around four fingers. Spread fingers apart, stretching the dough, until they are as wide as they can be.

### **SAY WHAT YOU SEE**

> This is a great activity to use in small group interventions. Like the game Pictionary, the idea is to have others guess a 'secret word'; but instead of drawing to give the clue, one member of the team must use play dough to represent it as the others race to work out what's on the card. It's a fun, inclusive game for the classroom and can tie into many learning activities or subjects.

**Northeast Manor is a CReSTed approved co-educational independent school for students with specific learning difficulties; explore further at [northeast.co.uk](http://northeast.co.uk)**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Becky Tuxford is head of English and drama at Northeast Manor School in Lewes**



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# Going through the EMOTIONS

**Amanda Godfrey** explains how teaching children about their feelings can help close social and academic gaps between pupils with SEN and their peers

**T**he best way for schools to provide the right provision and care for children with SEN – whether diagnosed or not, temporary or permanent – often starts with identifying the level of requirement for emotional support, because this tends to be at the root of everything we do as human beings, regardless of our level of ability to learn. On that basis, a truly successful SEN programme must rest on a whole-school approach that nurtures and develops the whole child.

Providing emotional support is at the centre of everything we do at the Spiral Partnership Trust, where I am executive head; but it becomes a particularly important issue for those children whose development may be delayed

or disrupted for any number of reasons. Children's emotional wellbeing is paramount to their progress in all other areas. It is one of the basic needs that must be met to ensure that children are able to learn effectively – with or without additional support. In short, whether a child has SEN or not, they need to be emotionally safe and happy if they are to get the best educational start in life.

## **Wholly focused**

Schools like ours, with a PSHE core curriculum approach, teach children about emotional intelligence and how to recognise their own feelings and those of others through specific lessons i.e. the PSHE curriculum – as well as ad hoc throughout the day in every area of the school and

via all of the interactions the children are having. Whole school assemblies, which set the direction for pedagogical activity, are loosely based on an agreed set of learning behaviours but are adapted to meet the needs of the children at the time, including those with SEN.

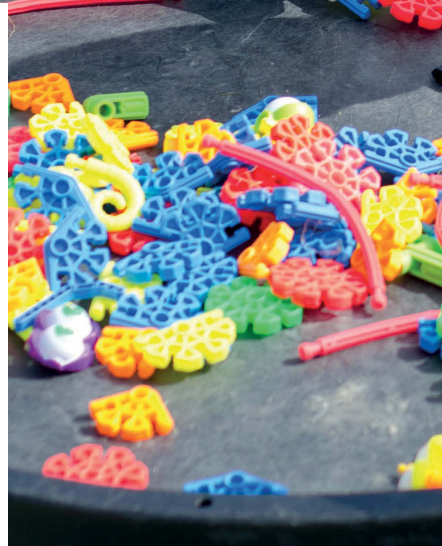
Individual schools can be better prepared for providing additional support where needed if the overall approach is centred around being aware and understanding the importance of the different ways that children learn. Staff must be trained to recognise that there is no black and white or rigid way of developing understanding; young children need to be taught about emotions and feelings whatever their capabilities, and schools must adapt how they communicate and teach those life skills to the individual child.

Classrooms should be places where children feel safe and secure regardless of their academic abilities and that is most definitely about creating a positive whole school ethos. Pupils need to be able to talk to adults and feel they are being listened to – and indeed, 'heard'. Teachers and staff must be approachable and nurturing. Communication with parents is also essential to support the emotional development of their child, especially where SEN are involved.

## **Growth through nurture**

In early years education we believe that all children need to be taught about their emotional development regardless of variations in maturity, disability and home life. However, it goes without saying that some young people are more vulnerable than others and as well as pastoral help, these individuals will need more support with additional interventions, involving parents as well.

Nurturing in early childhood plays a significant part in helping to form children's emotional resilience. This is a vital element of learning and development for a child with SEN, who might lack confidence or feel they don't fit in. All children need to develop their emotional intelligence and self-awareness in school and at





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Amanda Godfrey** is executive head at the Spiral Partnership Trust



## SPOT THE SIGNS



The following are some examples of behaviours that might suggest a child has unmet emotional needs:

- > Unpredictable outbursts of emotion
- > An over-reliance on adult attention or approval
- > Over-emotional responses to minor incidents
- > Persistent attention seeking
- > Becoming withdrawn or disengaged
- > Clinginess; reluctance to leave adults

home, but those who may have experienced trauma, have SEN or are delayed for some other reason, are likely to require extra support from the school in this regard, and parents must be engaged as far as possible in the entire process.

Sometimes it takes time to work out what the emotional gap is, if it is masked by other additional needs or conditions. But we need to work together as a whole school, and with families and other professionals, to 'unpick' these underlying issues and come together to support the child and implement the best strategies to help them thrive. Effective provision stems from the entire staff body understanding and modelling the inclusive school ethos and practice. All staff within the Spiral Partnership Trust

recognise their responsibility is wider than just their own class, and that they must pull together with their colleagues, as a team, to support all children – which is what we mean by a whole school effort.

### **Support strategies**

Whole school rules and routines help children to understand boundaries and feel safe and ready for learning. Simple strategies, such as coming in from the playground quietly and calmly, or finishing a football match 15 minutes before the end of lunchtime to give the teams an opportunity to be debriefed before coming in to learn, can have a dramatic impact. Again, a learner with SEN may not arrive in class when they are expected to, and they may not always be the quietest child in

the room; they may also display characteristics associated with panic, fear or anger. But our teachers are encouraged to use mindfulness and visualisation to support those children that struggle with instructions or routine. Exercise and regular physical activity also help all children to be in a positive place for learning.

Various therapies can make a significant impact on getting children ready to learn. At our schools, we work with Counselling in Schools who provide a play therapist once a week, and our children's support worker is trained in drawing and talking therapy. Sometimes, a child only needs to get something off their chest to feel better. In other circumstances, and for children with SEN, it may take a longer, more structured period of time.

Insecurity and fear are huge barriers to learning. They stop children from taking risks and trying new things, which can be a common trait in children with SEN. Greater encouragement and support is therefore needed to ensure those pupils make good progress in their learning. Being trained in Protective Behaviours techniques will help staff throughout the school to better support anxious, risk-averse youngsters.

We believe that children need to be taught to clear the emotional clutter from their minds and make space for learning. To this end we have

created an intervention called Make Room for Learning, which endeavors to empower children to be able to leave their 'baggage' outside the classroom and build the confidence and self-esteem they need to learn. Of course, for children with SEN, schools need to create an approach or tactic that is manageable and digestible.

Finally, focusing explicitly on making mistakes and recognising them as opportunities to learn and grow, not as failures, has made an enormous difference in our children's resilience and for young people with SEN. This is a vital part of learning to feel comfortable with the decisions they make; recognising that just because we don't all think the same way, this doesn't make the way that they are thinking, wrong.

**Spiral Partnership Trust** ([spiral.herts.sch.uk](http://spiral.herts.sch.uk)) is a community of schools working together to make a positive difference to children's lives.

# What **OFSTED** wants

School inspections now include an examination of SEND provision and pupil progress – so how should you prepare for when the inspectors come calling? **Natalie Packer** takes a closer look...



*outcomes and a rigorous approach to the monitoring and evaluation of any SEN support provided.*

SEND code of practice

Under the 2014 SEND Code of Practice ([tinyurl.com/TS-SEND-CoP](https://tinyurl.com/TS-SEND-CoP)), teachers need to demonstrate with confidence that their support and intervention for pupils with SEND promotes progress. This means that although you have the job of coordinating SEN provision across the school, your role in supporting others to meet their responsibilities is equally as important.

While Ofsted does not make a separate judgement about SEN provision, it is woven throughout the whole-school inspection. Judgements are made on four key areas:

- > Effectiveness of leadership and management
- > Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- > Personal development, behaviour and welfare
- > Outcomes

Before making their final judgement, inspectors must evaluate the extent to which the education provided by the school meets the needs of the range of pupils, including those with SEND.

Ofsted's school inspection handbook ([tinyurl.com/TS-SIH](https://tinyurl.com/TS-SIH)) provides detailed guidance on what inspectors will look for under each of those four areas – but what will they be looking for more specifically in terms of SEN provision and progress?

**W**aiting for Ofsted to visit can be a nerve wracking experience. We know that the ultimate goal of education isn't about achieving an 'outstanding' grade – but we also know that

the outcomes of an inspection involve high stakes.

Given the current framework's focus on vulnerable pupils and those not making expected progress, as a SENCo you are an increasingly important contributor to the inspection process. So what's

the key to surviving your next inspection? Being prepared!

## **The Common Inspection Framework**

*As part of any inspection, Ofsted will expect to see evidence of pupil progress, a focus on*

## TIP!

Before their visit, inspectors will look at the SEN information report on your school's website. Make sure that it covers all the statutory requirements, is accessible, reflects your school and has been developed and reviewed with parents.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

Whether you are a senior or middle leader, inspectors will likely interview you as part of the process and want to see that you, other leaders and governors have clear vision and ambition for SEN and that strategic plans are in place.

They will also look for a culture of high expectations and aspirations for pupils with SEND. The school will need have implemented a broad and relevant curriculum for pupils with SEND, personalised where appropriate, and be closely monitoring the progress of pupil groups, including those at risk of underachievement.

The school's SEN provision will need to be rigorously and accurately self-evaluated, and actions taken to improve inclusive high quality teaching, learning and assessment. There should also be evidence of the impact being made by SEN-related CPD, engagement with parents, carers and other stakeholders and the effectiveness of any arrangements made for safeguarding pupils

Ofsted will be keen to ensure that your governors are involved with SEN. Your link SEN governor will likely be interviewed to see if they are knowledgeable and challenge leaders, while other governors

may be asked about the use of any pupil premium and SEN funding and whether it is making a difference to outcomes.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Ofsted will be looking for evidence of inclusive, high quality teaching that meets the needs of all pupils. This means that teaching staff should have consistently high expectations of what all pupils can achieve, and understand the implications of SEN on learning.

There will also be requests for evidence of additional adults being effectively deployed to support pupil progress, and teaching that is structured and managed according to the needs of pupils. Your assessment information will need to have been gathered effectively, and used to plan appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Pupils with SEN will need to be understood how to improve as a result of feedback, and their parents made aware of how they are doing and what they need to improve. Finally, the school should be promoting equality of opportunity and recognition of diversity.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

During the visit, inspectors will spend time observing and talking to pupils to determine their behaviour and attitudes towards learning. They will look for evidence that pupils with SEND are committed to learning, understand how to be a successful learner and feel safe at school.

They will also consider how pupils with SEND are represented in terms of attendance, punctuality, exclusions and bullying (and if over-represented, what the

school is doing to address this), as well as their welfare and general safety.

Schools will also be examined on how prepared their SEND pupils are to contribute to wider society and life in Britain, and how the school identifies, supports and tracks the progress of pupils with mental health needs or challenging behaviour.

### **Outcomes**

Outcomes for pupils with SEND are key to informing the inspectors' view of whether the school's provision is successful. Crucially, Ofsted will consider the progress of pupils with SEND in relation to their starting points. These means schools must show how SEN identifications have led to additional provision being made, and led to progress improvements.

Based on RAISEonline data and any other performance information the school might be using, there should be evidence of the impact that interventions are having on closing any gaps in progress and attainment. Pupils with SEND will need to have been set aspirational targets and be on track to meet them, and the same will apply to any pupils attending off-site alternative provision.

### **Getting yourself prepared**

Establishing a rigorous and effective approach to SEN monitoring and self-evaluation means you will always be prepared for when Ofsted visit. The school's SLT needs to be part of this, with any actions linked to the whole-school development plan.

Put simply, you need to be clear on what you're doing, how you're doing it and why. It's also important to be clear as to what's working well (and how you know this), what isn't working as well, and how you

plan to make improvements.

When preparing for an impending visit, make sure that teachers and support staff are well briefed on what inspectors will be looking for with regards to SEN. Remind all staff of their responsibilities towards pupils with SEN, and the importance of having a clear understanding of individual pupils' support needs.

Discuss any particular issues the inspectors are likely to explore with your headteacher, and be sure to pre-empt any challenging questions you might be asked. If the inspector comments on something for which you're unprepared, be honest and try to provide details of how it will be addressed as soon as possible.

### **All the right reasons**

It is understandable to be anxious about your school's inspection – but try and view the process as an opportunity to share your school's successes and show how you are being proactive in further developing its SEND provision.

Once the inspection has concluded, revisit your improvement plan to ensure you have included any identified areas for development, and review these as part of your ongoing self-evaluation process. Positive results will emerge from embedding best practice over a number of years, and by ensuring the very best outcomes for all of your pupils, all of the time.

## TIP!

The London Leadership Strategy has developed a SEND Review Guide which schools can use to audit and evaluate their SEND provision – download it for free via [tinyurl.com/TS-SEND-review](https://tinyurl.com/TS-SEND-review)

# Lost VOICES

At least two children in your classroom are probably struggling with the communication skills they need to learn effectively – but do you know who they are, asks **Shona Crichton**

**S**peech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of needs, with varying severity. Quality, evidenced, universal teaching strategies that can be implemented in every classroom provide a foundation for – and can enhance the impact of – the effective, further support that pupils with SLCN require.

SLCN is the most common type of special educational need in state funded primary schools in England. A research study published this year found that 7% of children – that's two in every classroom – will have a language disorder significant enough to impede their access to the curriculum. Along with this group of children, where their primary need relates to their language skills, SLCN is also associated with many other types of SEN, such as autism spectrum disorder or general and specific learning difficulties.

Additionally, there has been much discussed about the number of children who are starting school without the speech, language and communication skills expected for them to be able to do so. Although there is no agreed criteria for what it means to be 'school ready', the centrality of speech, language and communication for learning, literacy and socialising means that SLC skills must be at the heart of school readiness. A poll of 500 primary school teachers

conducted by Save the Children last year highlighted that 75% of school teachers see children arriving in reception struggling to speak in full sentences.

## **Missed opportunities**

These figures tell us that SLCN is everybody's business. As a professional working with children and young people, SLCN will be a type of SEN that you will come across. However, despite its prevalence, there are many children with speech, language and communication needs which go unidentified; either missed altogether, or misinterpreted due to more prominent signs of their underlying needs being on display, such as challenging behaviour, literacy difficulties or struggling to follow instructions in class.

Speech, language and communication skills are central to learning. They impact not only on academic achievement, but also on wider measures pertaining to children's future progress, enjoyment and success. The new SEND Code of Practice makes it clear that it is every teacher's responsibility to be able to identify children who are not developing their skills as they should be. That

responsibility extends to knowing how to proceed where there are concerns.

Where children's SLCN aren't spotted early (and 'early' can mean at any time that they first start to experience difficulties as a result of them, whether it's in nursery or year 6) this means that they are not accessing the support they require in order to minimise the impact of their disadvantage. Only through effective and accurate identification of children's needs can valuable support be put in place. It's an essential first step in ensuring that every pupil is enabled to achieve their potential.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Shona Crichton** is a professional advisor at The Communication Trust



**“ 60% of young people in young offender institutions had a significant language disorder, which had gone undiagnosed**

## **The long term**

It's crucial that anyone working with children or young people understands the importance of speech, language and communication as foundation skills. Without them, how do pupils learn? How can they read if they can't understand the words or sentences on a page? How can they write a word, a sentence or a story if they don't have the vocabulary or the sentence structures in their spoken language? How do you make friends, learn about rules and understand your own and others' emotions without



language and communication? The evidence and research tells us that children who have SLCN do less well in terms of their attainment, their mental health, their friendships and their literacy skills. For those pupils whose needs are missed, misinterpreted and go unsupported, the impact can be significant; one research study found

60% of young people in young offender institutions had a significant language disorder, which had gone undiagnosed and therefore unaddressed.

Speech, language and communication needs are not always easy to spot. Even very young children may already be developing their own strategies to cover their difficulties with certain skills: following what their peers do; being quiet in the

classroom; or avoiding particular words or sentences that they know they find difficult to say. However, the evidence tells us that these children are in our classrooms.

Whether it's the two in every cohort who will have a language disorder so severe that they can't access the curriculum, or the three quarters of a reception classroom who have begun their school life without the language skills they need, every teacher is responsible for identifying and supporting pupils with SLCN, and minimising the potential long term impacts.

**The Communication Trust is a coalition of over 50 not-for-profit organisations who work together to help ensure that all children and young people are supported to develop their speech, language and communication skills to the best of their ability. Find out more at [thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)**

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## TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING CHILDREN WITH SLCN:

> Start by developing a really clear understanding of what typical speech, language and communication development looks like for the age group of pupils you're working with. Use this knowledge to review children in your class. How are they doing according to what you'd expect? Why not take a look at The Communication Trust's free online 'Universally Speaking' resources to check expected development from birth to 18, or, 'Communicating the Curriculum' to break down the primary curriculum spoken language statements into expectations for different year groups see ([thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://thecommunicationtrust.org.uk))

> Don't forget to look for other, less obvious signs of underlying speech, language and communication difficulties.

Could challenging behaviour be masking a problem with understanding language, or the rules of social communication? Could problems with literacy be due to spoken language difficulties? Do quieter pupils follow others in the class as they're unsure what to do?

> Where there are pupils that you're concerned about, it's essential to look in more detail at their speech, language and communication skills. There are a range of different tools available, including GL Assessment's 'Wellcomm Speech and Language Toolkit' and The Communication Trust's 'Speech, Language and Communication Progression Tool'. Both are designed to allow non-specialist staff to identify children with potential language difficulties and to

support referral information where more specialist assessment is indicated

> Where identification systems are in place, this must then lead to effective support. There are a number of resources available to complement the specialist support that pupils with SLCN need. For example, The Wellcomm Big Book of Ideas is a useful resource containing 150 intervention activities to support pupils who have been identified through the screening process. Additionally, No Pens Day Wednesday and The Communication Commitment, from The Communication Trust can help you and your school on the road to promoting a positive communication environment for all pupils, not only those with SLCN.



# “Dyslexia is a weird word for the inability to spell and read”

**Benjamin Zephaniah** struggled with literacy, was thrown out of a succession of schools, and had run-ins with the police – but he never, ever, thought he was stupid

**I**n many ways being dyslexic is a natural way to be. If you look at a pictorial language like Chinese, you can see the word for a woman because the character looks like a woman. The word for a house looks like a house. Early languages were like that. It is a strange step to go from that to a squiggle that represents a sound, which is how we read and write here.

I think having dyslexia can make you creative. If you want to construct a sentence and can't find the word you are searching for, you have to think of a way to write around it. That's the way architects work. They see a problem – maybe a building has to be taller or has to keep the light out – and find a way to deal with it. In fact I've come to the conclusion that dyslexia is the human race's default position. I presume everyone's dyslexic and wait for people to tell me they're not!

Dyslexia is a weird word for the inability to spell and read. When someone first told me I had dyslexia it sounded as if they were saying I had some kind of disease. This happened when I was 21 when I went to an adult education class in London to learn to read and write. As I started to learn the teacher said,

'You are dyslexic', and I was like, 'Do I need an operation?' She explained to me what it meant and I suddenly thought, 'Ah, I get it. I thought I was going crazy.' Having a word for it was great.

I'm of the generation where you went to school and teachers didn't know what dyslexia was. They weren't trained to know about it. The big problem with the education system then was that there was no compassion, no understanding and no humanity. There was no consideration for people who were different. I don't look back and feel angry with the teachers. The ones who wanted to be creative and have an individual approach to their students weren't allowed to anyway. The idea of being kind and thoughtful and listening to problems just wasn't done. The past is a different kind of country, really.

## **Inner awareness**

I got thrown out of a lot of schools, the last one at 14. But I never thought I was stupid. I didn't have that struggle. In class they would call me stupid but inside I knew I wasn't. There were no role models to inspire me; it was just something I knew. I remember this teacher implying I was a bit dumb and

my life would go nowhere – and I was already being paid £100 a night for a poetry gig. I thought, 'You're supposed to be teaching me this English language and I've got it and run with it.' It was ironic.

When I was really coming up as a writer I had to write things down; I didn't know I was dyslexic, so I didn't know there was anything to fight against. I wrote a lot of my poems phonetically: 'wid luv' for 'with love' – but people thought it was a deliberate choice, not because that's the only way I could get the words down on paper.

I was very self-motivated and became very 'successful' and then doors opened for me. I wrote more poetry, novels for teenagers, plays, other books and recorded music. I have 17 honorary doctorates! I take poetry to people who do not read poetry.

When Brunel University offered me the job of Professor of Poetry and Creative Writing I spent a year thinking about it, making sure it was for me and that I could see a purpose in it. I knew my students would be officially more educated than me and probably better read. I am here because of my experience. I tell my students, 'You can do this course and get

the right grade because you have a good memory – but if you don't have passion, creativity, individuality, there's no point.'

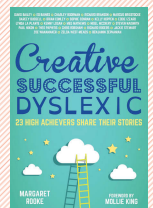
When kids come up to me and say, 'Can I take your photograph? I'm dyslexic too', which happens all the time, I tell them, 'We are the creative people. Use it to your advantage. Us dyslexic people, we've got it going on – we are the architects. We are the designers.' It's like they are proud of me and if that helps them, that is great. I didn't have that. I always say to them, 'Bloody non-dyslexics... who do they think they are?'



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Benjamin Zephaniah is a poet, writer, lyricist and musician. This article was adapted from his**

**contribution to *Creative, Successful, Dyslexic* – 23 high achievers share their stories, by Margaret Rooke (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £8.99)**



# The B-Word

Children with SEND know more than most about bullying, says **Marius Frank** – and their experiences have to be part of the conversation on eradicating it

**C**hildren and young people with special education needs and disabilities are disproportionately bullied when compared to their peers. In fact, the most recent research (Institute of Education 2014) suggests that primary school pupils with special needs are twice as likely as other children to suffer from persistent bullying.

The impact of bullying can be profound, on the mental and physical well-being of a child, on their school achievement, and on their subsequent life chances. A recent survey of 18-year-olds conducted by the Brighton-based anti-bullying charity Ditch the Label brought the impact on academic progress into sharp relief: 41% of respondents who were not bullied reported attaining an A\*/A grade in GCSE English. This dropped to a staggering 26% amongst those individuals who were being bullied. If this trend is extrapolated to groups of pupils who already feel vulnerable, disadvantaged by impairment or lacking confidence and self-esteem, reducing the impact and incidence of bullying becomes as critical a whole-school imperative as raising the quality of teaching – with potentially the same impact on whole-school performance.

## What works

Between 2013 and 2015, Achievement for All worked in close partnership with the Anti-Bullying Alliance, Mencap, Council for Disabled Children and Contact-a-Family (which supports the parents and carers of children with disabilities) on a DfE-funded programme to address specific issues around disablist bullying. Achievement for All was responsible for creating and delivering a training programme for school-based professionals. Through a series of national training events led by a team of specially trained AfA lead coaches, staff from over 1,500 primary, secondary and special schools accessed the training. Over 96% of the delegates rated the training as good or outstanding, and now feel more confident in identifying resources and strategies that could have a positive impact on SEND bullying in their school community.

The training acknowledged that every school community is unique, with different strengths and needs. The programme was designed to raise awareness of the key issues (with resources that could be reused to support further whole school professional development), then empower schools to make informed decisions for themselves about what

measures would have the biggest impact on their particular communities. Here are the top five strategies, approaches and ideas chosen by primary school delegates:

### 1 Named contacts

Every school had named staff (and robust systems) to deal with reported bullying, and every school had named staff (and support networks) for pupils with SEND – but the two robust systems did not necessarily ‘talk’ to each other. Given their communication difficulties, many schools realised that they needed to develop specific routes, procedures and systems to support pupils with SEND and report any incidents of bullying behaviour. Critically, this was the case for their families too. Many schools decide to develop the ‘Key Worker’ role as the conduit for reporting bullying, helping to build the relationship with the child and their parents or carers.

### 2 Dealing with ‘banter’

After this topic was dealt with in depth during the training, many schools reflected that, whilst making huge progress with homophobic or sexist ‘banter’ in playgrounds, social spaces and non-structured time, the same attention had not been paid to disablist banter. The impact of words like ‘spaz’

and ‘mong’, or ‘body-bullying’ were explored. Schools chose to investigate the use of these phrases with their school communities, and seek School Council and peer-to-peer challenge, agreement and vigilance around unacceptable use of local phrases or words.

### 3 Social resilience training for pupils with SEND

At first, this may seem incongruous with a clear ‘stamping out bullying’ message, because it accepts that bullying happens. We encouraged primary colleagues to consider their role as ‘stewards’ of a child’s lifelong learning journey for just a short period of time, and that developing friendship skills and assertiveness approaches with their most vulnerable children was absolutely vital, even (especially) if there was no identified bullying in their school community. Why? Perhaps this social resilience might come in handy in later life, even beyond school. Perhaps it would make the atrocities that occurred in Rochdale and Oxford, where vulnerable girls were explicitly targeted by ruthless men, less likely? The delegates spoke very highly of the resources that were made available to them to support this activity.

### 4 Anti-bullying mentors/ambassadors/buddies

Empowering the whole school community to be vigilant, assertive and active in reducing bullying was another top strategy. Initiatives like the Diana

“Primary school pupils with special needs are twice as likely as other children to suffer from persistent bullying”



Awards were highly praised, as were specific training programmes to empower groups of pupils to take a lead role in unstructured school time. One school even named these individuals 'Squabble Busters'. Circle time and other similar sharing and open discussion methods were also chosen for development.

## 5 **Relaunch/refresh the school's anti-bullying policy**

Many schools saw this as a powerful tool to re-engage the whole school community with the key issues, and develop a common shared ownership across all members: governors, teachers, support staff, parents and carers, pupils and even the local

community. Focus groups and School Council members would be actively involved in shaping the policy, and use of language would be examined. A great example of this was the large number of schools that were eradicating the use of the word 'bully' and 'victim' from every document in their school, from the staffroom and from the classroom. Why? These words can so often be used as damaging labels. Instead, the phrases 'child who has been bullied' and 'child displaying bullying behaviours' were being widely adopted, giving everyone a chance to talk about and deal with the behaviours that need to be addressed and changed, rather than labelling an individual. Powerful stuff!

The Achievement for All CPD pack, and access to an array of supporting materials, is still freely available. AfA lead coaches can also be commissioned to lead whole-staff INSET sessions. Our partner, the Anti-Bullying Alliance, has an extensive range of additional materials too, including online training and additional tools that can be used to raise awareness and address the key issues. Above all, we encourage every school community to talk about bullying – even (indeed, especially) if you do not think you have any.

**If you would like free access to the CPD Pack email enquiries@afaeducation.org**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**After 30 years of teaching and leadership in challenging school**



**communities, Marius Frank became CEO of ASDAN Education, before joining Achievement for All to lead the development of the Anti-Bullying Training Approach. He is now in charge of The Bubble, Achievement for All's interactive online professional development portal, available to all Achievement for All education settings.**

# Ready for a **RETHINK?**

How do we assess SEND pupils in a post-levels world? The answer starts with SENCos asking themselves the right questions, says **Daniel Sobel**

**W**hilst levels were never perfect, they provided a common language for us all to access the world of student progress and were a bedrock of stability in the edu-political landscape. We knew these levels, we trained on them – we calibrated everything according to them.

So the shift away from levels raises important questions for teachers and school leaders when it comes to data collection and reporting. What use do assessments serve? "What should good quality assessment information look like? How often should we collect and report?"

Levels have been removed on the principle that schools are best placed to develop their own formative, diagnostic – and not necessarily nationally referenced – assessment systems.

This change presents a great opportunity for the profession to further develop a meaningful curriculum, and an assessment model that schools can own. It could be revolutionary for SEN students, who have suffered from being on the sidelines of a system that didn't quite work for them.

However, the removal of levels means we need to do an awful lot of rethinking – and frankly, the current lack of clarity could be described as a horrendous mess. However, I will do my level best to piece together some useful information, highlight where we need to focus our thinking, summarise what we know so far and describe some practical outcomes for your schools.

## **What do we need to work out?**

To produce high-quality formative assessment, we need to:

- > Reinvent models of ability
- > Explore different concepts of progression
- > Ask questions about what scale and scores mean
- > Consider how we can measure competences, such as in reading

Each year, the belief is that all children should make 'expected progress', particularly at the end of KS1 and KS2. Not just some – *all*. Learning should be thought about in terms of breadth and depth of understanding, *not just 'more'*.

This presents an opportunity to establish meaningful stages of assessment, possibly by interweaving the 'domains' in each subject, tracking progress against milestone standards (graduated, secure and moderated) and developing new tracking and reporting formats.

Assessment criteria for periodic assessment are traditionally arranged into a hierarchy, setting out what children are normally expected to have mastered by the end of each year. The SENCO's role in this should be to comment on, and

help fashion appropriate criteria for the SEN and vulnerable students in the school.

Ofsted now expects school to track their pupils' progress, though it won't endorse a specific approach. Inspectors will, however, want to see how often children are assessed, what tests are used, how well those tests are linked to the curriculum and how the results are used to inform the school about the quality of its teaching and the progress of its children.

Right now, there is no obvious new assessment system for you to leap to. What we have instead are questions, and few obvious answers. Try and answer the below yourself, then discuss them with your head of curriculum or headteacher:

## **How can our assessment...**

- > Be naturally inclusive of all abilities?
- > Be ambitious for the full range of student abilities (and what is our ambition for SEN students)?
- > Draw on a wide range of evidence to provide a complete picture of student achievement?
- > Provide meaningful and understandable information to all stakeholders?

## **On the ground**

My team and I have worked with more than 600 schools in the last year and hosted a national conference for heads to explore solutions to life after levels for more vulnerable

students. I myself have sat on the Department for Education's Rochford Review a few times.

I would like to report consistent successes around the country, though all I can really say is that we remain in a state of flux. The introduction of new legislation always throws up



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Daniel Sobel is the founder, lead consultant and CEO of Inclusion Expert, having previously worked as a SENCo and assistant head; for more information, visit [www.inclusionexpert.com](http://www.inclusionexpert.com)**



teething problems, but I have the sense that we'll be dealing with issues for a good few years yet.

That said, here are some of the positive ideas that my schools have shared:

#### A 'What if I...?' document for every child

Children are profiled against a set of 'What ifs' – for example, 'What if I arrive late every day?'; 'What if I have EAL?' This is a standard formula that can be applied to all students, and help both them and the school to focus on the affirmative. 'Can do' statements are similarly useful.

#### 'Flight paths' / 'Trajectories'

These are useful for all categories of SEN, as they bypass the traditional

summative model that assumes all pupils should be making adequate progress linearly. Instead, trajectories show how students could be making progress across a range of skills specific to their make up.

#### Developing school partnerships

Instead of just being used to verify judgements, partnerships with other schools could also be used for moderation purposes.

#### Think things over

Think on behalf of students, parents and the school about whether the new assessment system has a meaningful impact for the students under your wing. Consider the following questions:

## POINTS OF ACTION

### WHAT SENCOS SHOULD DO WHEN THEIR SCHOOL DRAWS UP A NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM...

1 Make sure you grasp the details of the system your school is implementing and work out what this will mean for your students.

2 Write this up and summarise for yourself initially. You could use these three general statements:

- > Our approach to assessment is...
- > Our method of assessment is...
- > Our use of assessment is...

Focus on getting the rationale right early on, rather than just quickly implementing a new system you have been given. Ofsted will likely ask about how your assessment procedures impact your students and your teachers' approach to

SEN, so prepare for these two questions if you are expecting an inspection.

3 Include details about your school's approach to assessment in your SEN information report, and ensure that parents of students with SEN understand it

4 Consider how your assessment system can be made inclusive and reflective of all abilities, and discuss any concerns you might have with your headteacher.

5 Find out how other schools have made their systems appropriate for pupils with SEN, and whether they might be useful in your setting.

### Critical issues

Ultimately, there are several critical issues that SENCos need to know about this new world of ours – some for which the DfE and co. currently do not have answers, and some of which might suggest inherent flaws in the whole shebang.

Many SEN and vulnerable pupils are being forced to engage with learning that is not suitable or appropriate. The DfE and Ofsted currently seek a 'Best fit for all' model, when what we actually need is to move towards an individual mastery model that encourages personalised, bespoke and creative learning.

Progress measures are only as good as the people applying them. There needs to be considerable focus on CPD, so that the average teacher can understand the nuanced developmental factors of SEN.

There also needs to be greater clarity from local authorities about education, health and care plan targets – what evidence is required, how that evidence should be presented and the expectations around evaluation.

- > Can it be shared with most of your SEN students?
- > Does it help teachers focus on SEN in a more nuanced, meaningful and personalised way?
- > Will it identify where students are falling behind quickly?
- > Will it help shape curriculum and teaching around SEN?
- > Will it provide information that can be shared with parents of SEN children and be helpful at key meetings, such as Annual Reviews?





# “We faced a lonely path”

Parents of children with SEND need all the support you can give them when they first arrive at your school, as **Michelle Myers** explains...

**A**s lazy summer days drift away, thoughts inevitably turn to the exciting possibilities awaiting children starting 'big school' for the first time. As parents pack them off with both pride and trepidation, social media is flooded with images of happy, smiling kids in their new uniforms; some mums and dads even take the morning off work to mark the momentous occasion.

But if I think back to when my son started at his 'big nursery', then later, his first day at school, well... it all looked rather different.

Instead of standing on the lawn and posing for a cheesy photo, my son was cowering behind his dad's shed at the bottom of the garden. He was pinned to the spot, white as a sheet and crippled by anxiety. Instead of shiny new shoes and freshly pressed trousers, he was sporting an old pair of

pumps. He was wearing a pair of trousers that had been washed with fabric softener three times to remove their smell of 'newness', and every label had been hacked from his vest, shirt and jumper (my son feels labels in the same way that we feel prickles from a thorn).

You see, my son is autistic. We know this now he is 12, but at the time he started school we faced a lonely path of judgement and unhelpful labels. He's a "naughty kid" or a "typical,

boisterous boy" were regular comments that would come our way. He's now happy and settled in a specialist provision, and I have a great relationship with his teachers. He'll be happy to return to his class this September, I'm sure. But as you can imagine, on his first day all those years ago, we had tears and huge upset...

## **Early frustrations**

In those early days, other parents would stare as he

clung to my legs in floods of tears every morning. The poor TA would try her best to peel him off me whilst reassuring him that everything would be okay – all he had to do was "say goodbye to Mummy now". On many occasions I recall just making it to the car in one piece before howling over the steering wheel as all the pent up adrenaline came gushing out uncontrollably.

As the days and weeks turned into months, I felt increasingly frustrated that my concerns were being dismissed. Little things that probably sound insignificant now. His lunchbox, for example, would come home still full with a note saying he hadn't been hungry that day. I knew the issue wasn't my son's appetite; high anxiety levels or sensory issues were the real cause of his difficulties eating.

One of the hardest things was the dismissive nature of some staff. I would explain that my son was getting increasingly upset at home after being in school all day, but receive a puzzled response. They couldn't see how my son could contain

his anxiety and stress in class, then let it out at home. They saw a quiet, passive child during the day, while I bore the brunt of his behaviour at home. I can see how the easiest solution for them was to think it was a parenting problem. But they were wrong.

### **Working together**

Though he had no diagnosis back then, I knew there was a reason for my son's behaviour; it wasn't 'all in my head'. He had such potential inside him, but his environment wasn't allowing it to flourish. He became quiet, insular and passive. As he wasn't a 'trouble causer', staff felt there was no need to intervene.

It left me feeling like I was handing my child over to people who barely knew him. People dismissing my concerns and questioning my ability to parent. And all this despite the fact that I was an experienced nursery manager and autism HLTA myself. Something had to give.

I realised we had a lot to learn from each other, and needed to look at my son's

needs holistically – what happens at school and home are intrinsically linked. I needed to take the lead and develop a strong partnership with my son's teachers. They needed to start thinking of me as a professional at meetings, not just a mum who could be dismissed as if she didn't know anything. After all, I know my son better than anyone, so had lots to bring to the table.

Slowly I learnt not to be afraid, to say to them, 'Have you thought of this?' or 'Maybe this could be causing the problem?' I wanted to be front and centre of any decision making, and have my opinions and ideas validated. His teachers learnt to keep me updated about changes that might affect him and 'checked in' with me every day via his home-school book. They stopped dismissing my concerns as nonsense. In return, I needed to remember that his school were constrained by budgets, league tables and ever-changing curriculums. They often shared my frustrations about lack of services and funding. The system for kids like mine is tough. Fact.

The more open and honest I became, the more they understood. And when they asked me what they could do to help, we were able to come up with solutions together – for example, letting him start school a little earlier, which removed him from the glare of others and eased him into his day (small accommodations like this can make a big difference).

They accepted that even though I knew their hands were tied on many things, it wouldn't stop me asking questions and never giving up. I accepted that I had to learn to take advice and have faith in the teachers. This isn't always easy as a mother and can still take some practice even now!

### **Change your approach**

So as my son starts his new class and you welcome your new starters, think about that parent who may need a bit of reassurance. Trust me when I say that they will be feeling insecure and judged before they

## **IN FIGURES**

# 700k

People living with autism in the UK – that's more than 1 in 100.

# 63%

Children with autism who don't attend the type of school their parents believe would best support them.

# 17%

Autistic children who have been suspended from school.

Source: The National Autistic Society

even step through the door. Maybe, like me, their child's first day isn't turning out as they'd imagined.

Don't wait for them to take the first step. Make an effort to go out of your way with them. Take the time to listen to their concerns, and reassure them that you value their input. Open those doors of communication as early as you can, and work in partnership with your parents. Then the world of exciting possibilities that all parents hope for when their child starts nursery or school can open up for all children. It may look a little bit different for some, and it may require some out-of-the-box thinking, but children on the spectrum have so much to offer, and so much to teach us... if we only take the time to listen.

**To read more about Michelle's experiences, visit [asliceofautism.blogspot.co.uk](http://asliceofautism.blogspot.co.uk)**

**“ Open those doors of communication as early as you can, and work in partnership with your parents**



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Michelle Myers** is a former nursery manager and HLTA.



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# “It went into space!”

**Sal Mckeown** looks at the hardware and software schools are using to engage their learners with SEND – and at how some of the outcomes have been out of this world...

Once upon a time, drill and practice reigned supreme. It was widely accepted that children who made slow progress with spelling and mathematics would simply need more of the same, as they were 'slow learners'.

Now schools take a somewhat broader view, with teaching efforts focused more on building the motivation and fostering the creativity of pupils with SEND – often with the aid of various technologies.

## **Providing individual solutions**

"I have a passion for using technology as a tool for learning," says Christine Terrey, head-teacher at Harbour Primary and Nursery School in Sussex. She believes that schools need to opt for individual solutions and offer a range of generic open-ended apps and programs that can provide visual stimulus to support auditory learners and children with ADHD, who thrive on rigour and repetition.

A good example is Showbie on iPad. Children use voice notes to talk through a process – for example, recording the stages of working out a maths problem. They then listen back to the recording, identify where they have made mistakes and

edit the recording as needed. It is a good solution for those who need to develop their speech and language skills, and gives children practice in developing an internal voice.

Also of note is the way teachers have been using eye gaze technology – traditionally used as a mouse alternative for young people with disabilities – to support

pupils with dyslexia. One such device, the MyGaze (see [tinyurl.com/TS-MyGaze](http://tinyurl.com/TS-MyGaze)), has a video facility that tracks and records what the user is looking at.

"It is just amazing as a diagnostic tool," says Terrey. "We can see if a child is looking at words and scanning lines, and start to help them to develop

strategies – perhaps encouraging them to look at pictures to get clues about the words they cannot read.

The teachers at Harbour School make regular use of internet forums, social media, blogs and various websites to track down promising apps and software subscription packages, such as the learning resources and assessment tools developed by 2Simple (see [2simple.com](http://2simple.com)).

Terrey also employs a school network manager, whose job is to troubleshoot issues, train staff in the use of educational technology and support teachers when things go wrong in the classroom.

## **From technology to books**

"Ofsted wants to see children's books, but we have to strike a balance," says David Mordue, KS2 leader at Lanchester Endowed Parochial (Controlled) Primary School in County Durham.

Mordue's Year 4 class has a spread of ability, with high-fliers and several children with SEND, including dyslexia and autism. Earlier this year they were working on the topic of space, surfing on the wave of Tim Peake fever. The children researched planets, and wrote a report about the International Space Station. Mordue took a picture of the work, tweeted it, and





soon saw it 'favourited' by none other than Tim Peake himself.

"Not only did it go worldwide, it went into space!" Mordue remembers. "When I showed the children the next morning, it was one of the most memorable moments of my 10 years in teaching – they gave each other a round of applause."

Lanchester Endowed Parochial currently employs the services of Martin Bailey, director of a primary ICT consultancy called Animate 2 Educate, once a week to help them embed various technologies across the curriculum.

With Bailey's assistance, the school adopted a range of open-ended apps, including Tellagami – an iOS app that lets the children create a custom virtual avatar in a

choice of different outfits. Once they've settled on their avatar's look, the children talk into their device's microphone – in this case, while reading out facts about space. The app saves their recording, and when it's played it back the character appears to speak, his or her lips moving in sync with the recorded words.

"This is good fun," says Bailey, "but more importantly, it makes the children think very carefully about the vocabulary, tone and phrasing that they use. Technology like this lets teachers tick a lot of boxes for the literacy curriculum in a fresh and different way."

### **Getting parents on board with maths**

Dean Catchpole is maths coordinator and Year 6 teacher at Henry Whipple

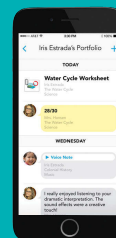
Primary School in Bestwood, Nottinghamshire. Many children start with low attainment on entry, but the school works hard to narrow the gap between their less and more able learners.

The main challenge has been to engage parents in their efforts at raising standards in mathematics. Catchpole in particular wanted children to use Mathletics at home to help them progress and become more fluent in mental arithmetic.

A former mining area, Bestwood is not affluent. Few parents own computers, but most have a smartphone or tablet, meaning that the children can usually access programs and apps at home in one form or another. Catchpole observed that children who had not understood a particular method would have a look at the Mathletics explanation at home. He has since seen an increase in staying power, too – "If pupils do a task and get 3 out of 10, they automatically have another go," he says. "They are determined to show that they have mastered it."

**“When I showed the children the next morning, it was one of the most memorable moments of my 10 years in teaching – they gave each other a round of applause”**

## TRAINING AND SUPPORT ARE THE KEY TO SUCCESS, BUT HERE ARE SIX GOOD IOS APPS TO TRY:



### **SHOWBIE**

If any of the pupils in your school have been assigned their own iPads, this handy app will help you organise your class assignments and keep track of feedback.

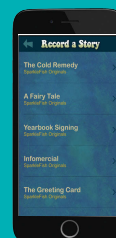
[tinyurl.com/TS-Showbie](http://tinyurl.com/TS-Showbie)



### **TELLAGAMI**

As explained by Martin Bailey, Tellagami lets children create their own custom avatars and animate them with speech recordings.

[tellagami.com](http://tellagami.com)



### **SPARKLEFISH**

Children record themselves reading aloud their choice of adjectives, nouns and other elements; the app will then use them to create a unique – and potentially rather funny – story...

[tinyurl.com/TS-sparklefish](http://tinyurl.com/TS-sparklefish)



### **COMIC LIFE**

Lets children create their own illustrated comics and photo stories that they can view on an iPhone or iPad, and comes with a number of templates and page layouts to help them get started.

[tinyurl.com/TS-comic-life](http://tinyurl.com/TS-comic-life)



### **SOCK PUPPETS**

Similar in style to Tellagami, children can use this app to record spoken story ideas – only here, their words are brought to life by a series of glove puppets...

[tinyurl.com/TS-sock-puppets](http://tinyurl.com/TS-sock-puppets)

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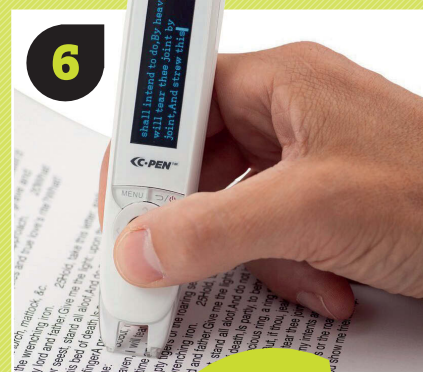
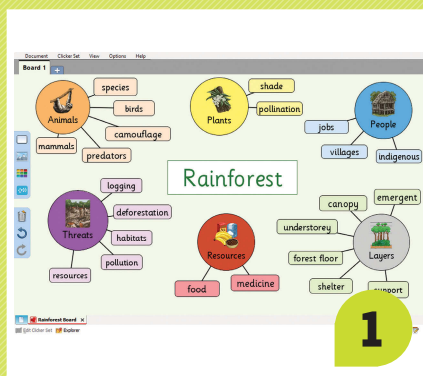
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# Best in show

**TES SEN Show**  
takes place on  
7-8 October at  
London's Business  
Design Centre

We round up our pick of the products and services worth further investigation at TES SEN Show 2016

## **The write stuff** Stand P31

1 Crick Software produces award-winning reading and writing software for children of all ages and abilities. The company's best-known product is its acclaimed literacy support tool Clicker, which is currently used in thousands of UK schools. New for 2016, Clicker 7 is the most accessible, user-friendly and customisable version to date! Crick will also be showcasing its range of writing apps for iPad and Chromebook users, and Clicker Communicator – the child-friendly classroom communication aid.

[cricksoft.com](http://cricksoft.com)

## **Lucid thinking** Stand 175

3 GL Assessment is a leading provider of assessment solutions for children's education, mental health and wellbeing. The company's portfolio has recently expanded to include a range of SEND assessments from Lucid Research that can be used to identify special needs, plan interventions for children with barriers to learning and ensure access to exams for learners with dyslexia. Visitors to company's TESSEN stand will get to learn more about those and its new SEN Assessment Toolkit.

[gl-assessment.co.uk](http://gl-assessment.co.uk)

## **Taking play seriously** Stand 227

5 SenseToys is an independent specialist supplier of educational resources aimed at helping children develop language and encourage their communication and social interaction skills. The company will be selling wooden toys, sensory products, pencil grips and puppets, plus biting aids, timers, special scissors, language resources, and more besides. Visitors will be able to pick up copies of the latest SenseToys and Simply Special Resources catalogues and place orders there and then.

[sensetoy.com](http://sensetoy.com)

## **Eyes on the prize** Stand 39

2 The multi award-winning Crossbow Education has been supplying schools with support resources for dyslexia and specific learning disabilities since 1993, and are the UK's main provider of coloured overlays, reading rulers and tinted exercise books for visual stress. At this year's TES SEN Show, Crossbow will feature the new Dyscalculia Kit from Steve Chinn, who will also be making a headline appearance at the company's popular SpLD Central conference next year (June 29th 2017).

[crossboweducation.com](http://crossboweducation.com)

## **Raising aspirations** Stand 169

4 Pearson's comprehensive portfolio includes tools for access arrangement applications and assessments for literacy, language and mental health. The company's presence at the show – which comes ahead of its sponsorship of this year's Shine a Light Awards – will allow visitors to explore its portfolio of assessments, including the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) and Pupil Aspire, and find out more about its upcoming #EducationLearn and #Workingmemoryweek online events.

[pearsonclinical.co.uk](http://pearsonclinical.co.uk)

## **Literacy life-saver** Stand P25

6 The C-Pen Reader is a major technological breakthrough for anyone with reading difficulties – a portable, pocket-sized device that reads text out aloud with an English human-like digital voice. Simply pass the nib across a word and it instantly displays the definition and reads it aloud. Featuring an in-built dictionary (based on the Collins English Dictionary), it can also function as a scanner for capturing and uploading lines of text to a PC or Mac.

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

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

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\*school therapist must be in attendance



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# Naturally INCLUSIVE

Outside spaces offer plenty of opportunities for all children to learn and play together, says **Juno Hollyhock** – especially with some thoughtful planning

**R**ecently at Learning Through Landscapes we were challenged on the inclusivity of a natural primary school playground that we had designed and installed. The concern was that a particular four-year-old with special educational needs was not able to access every

single piece of equipment unsupported.

Needless to say the playground facility had been designed with the involvement of children, parents/carers and staff, and a range of options had been considered and revised carefully and over time. Uncomfortable meetings ensued which involved a GP,

an occupational therapist, a concerned parent – and a rambunctious four year old who managed to access more than 50% of the provision unaccompanied and with enormous delight. It was clear that in time, she will be able to scramble up most of the slopes, barrel roll down the hills, bury herself in the sandpit hide in the tunnels

and fully enjoy the jumping and loose parts play.

When we consider designing inclusive play opportunities, we will get better value if we do not expect to come up with something that everyone will be able to access every single aspect of, immediately. Four-year-olds (with or without SEND) are, generally

speaking, shorter than 11-year-olds; they are less developed and their balance may be slightly more 'off'. All children are individual and different and yes, we need to try and cater for all – eventually – to be inclusive. However, it is ok for children to aspire to different parts of the play area over time, to learn how to navigate more complex areas and to grow in their understanding of managing risk and challenge

What is not OK, ever, is for children to have to watch consistently from the sidelines as their peers enjoy facilities and activities that they can never access. All children have the right to learn and play out of doors as a part of their school day. True inclusion happens when they can do that together in a space that has been designed and built with everyone in mind.

### ***It's the law***

Planning for learning and playing outside the classroom for all children needs to be considered at the very earliest stages. This is supported by current legislation. There are a number of key differences between the 2001 SEN Code of Practice and the revised Code of Practice published in 2014. Two of these are that:

- > there is a clearer focus in the new Code on the participation of children and young people and parents in decision-making at individual and strategic levels, and
- > there is a stronger focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for children and young people.

The Equality Act 2010 also states that schools must make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services, to ensure that disabled children and young people are not at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers. This duty is anticipatory: it requires thought to be given in advance as to what disabled children and young people might require and

## GETTING OUT THERE

ONCE YOU HAVE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE FOR ALL CHILDREN, IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE AS MUCH USE OF THAT SPACE AS YOU CAN. HERE ARE A FEW TIPS AND SOME USEFUL INFORMATION TO HELP YOU DIFFERENTIATE:

- > Physical activity can help stimulate play and communication skills as well as exercising the brain to process information more effectively.
- > Add value to climbing structures by introducing ropes and pulleys, tubes to talk through, objects to roll down, slides and even water in summer.
- > Try to provide a range of climbing activities, such as slopes with and without ropes, nets and ramps.
- > Repetition and activities such as rotating, rocking, wobbling, swinging and bouncing can help some children with sensory processing issues or those who are feeling stressed.
- > Some children may not be able to sit without support or may have a weak hand grip, so providing a choice of features offering large scale, whole body stimulation is important.
- > Large cardboard boxes make great temporary retreats or play spaces; lining the boxes with fabric can offer a range of tactile experiences.
- > Outdoor gems and prisms cast rainbow patterns and coloured shadows which can offer similar experiences to expensive indoor sensory equipment.
- > Gutter runs placed along a ramp offer opportunities for children to roll noisy balls, marbles, toys or water to the bottom whilst developing dexterity, cognitive skills and understanding of cause and effect.
- > The experience of water and wind can be very positive and stimulating to the senses; activities should be monitored, though, in case children find them distressing.
- > Strong tonal contrast in conjunction with sensory olfactory cues such as scented plants, and sound cues (such as rustling grasses), can help children with visual impairments to be independent within a play space.
- > There is no substitute for a positive approach to learning and playing outside. Even the blandest and most unpromising of playgrounds can be transformed by the enthusiasm and leadership of a lively and fun-filled member of staff.

what adjustments might need to be made to prevent any disadvantage.

### ***The natural environment***

The benefits of having regular and repeated access to outdoor learning are well documented; children need to connect with nature in order to understand and protect it; nature, in turn, provides children with a stimulating, interesting, multi-sensory environment.

Generally speaking, the natural world is better suited to meeting the needs of all children than conventional playgrounds, which can be limited by play structures that tend to dictate which activities children can engage in. Even settings in inner city areas and densely populated urban conurbations can still offer natural spaces for their children to enjoy.

In order to ensure a space is fully inclusive it is essential that an understanding of the design requirements is

brought on board at an early stage. The best place to start is through consultation with children and parents. Simple changes, such as setting appropriate distances between stepping stones and the creation of small sheltered safe areas, can help children feel safe in their outdoor environment, enabling them to play and learn effectively.

### ***Risk and reward***

The best outdoor spaces are as diverse as the children who use them. They can include spaces for reflection and story telling, running and hiding, interaction with nature and wildlife, planting and growing, climbing and swinging, loose materials and den building, water play and woodland play.

Planting can be designed to deliver a multi-sensory experience by including plants that are visually interesting, smell and taste good, have different textures and make a noise when rattled or when the wind blows.

The more complex and

challenging an outdoor space, the more concerns there tend to be about risk management. The reality is, though, that if we do not allow all our children to experience a degree of risk within the safety of our schools and settings, they will not be able to identify, judge and manage risks when they are out and about in the adult world.

Visit [ltl.org.uk/membership/member.php](http://ltl.org.uk/membership/member.php) to find out more about Learning Through Landscapes, and become a member.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Juno Hollyhock has been executive director at Learning Through Landscapes since 2012.**



# "But I'm bored, MISS!"

If you've ever checked Facebook in a staff meeting, you'll know why it's so important to tap into what each child, especially those with ADHD, finds truly interesting, says **Letitia Sweitzer...**

**W**e are not free. We are continuously contained, directed, limited, required, forbidden, prevented, and restrained. We are thereby productive, appropriate, out of trouble, safe from harm, polite, employed and sometimes paid. We are sometimes bored. If we have ADHD, we are often bored, restless, dissatisfied, frustrated, and very often not our true selves. Dealing with boredom is much easier when we are free to do whatever we want.

Seven-year-old Ryan is bored while waiting with his grandfather to be seated at a table in a restaurant. He sits briefly in a stuffed chair beside the door. Soon he kneels on the seat of the chair and looks up at a picture on the wall behind it. It's a landscape, the same boring landscape that is outside the restaurant. He butts his head against the back of the chair.

"Turn around, Ryan," says his grandfather. Ryan turns around and swings his legs. Then he spins around again and

inches his legs up on the chair back, letting his head drop off the seat. His grandfather admonishes Ryan: "Sit up properly." 'Properly', for Ryan, is the byword of boredom.

Compare that scene with one at home in which Ryan has been interrupted while building a bridge for dinosaurs out of Lego. His mother has asked about his homework. He says he hasn't done it and he doesn't remember what it is. His mother looks in his backpack and finds an assignment to write six sentences about his pets.

"I can't think of anything to say," he says.

"It's hard to think of things when that's not what you're thinking about right now," says his mother. "And I bet it's even harder to think of six things to say about your pets if you're upside down on the sofa."

Ryan gets a twinkle in his eye. It's the first time his mother has said anything like this. He immediately drops the Lego, flops on the sofa, and lets his head drop off the front, all the way down to the floor. He says nothing, just enjoying the new position. His mother repeats, "See, you can't think of even one thing to say about your pets when you are upside down."

"I can too," he says, "Darth is black and Vader is black with white on his chest. That's how I can tell them apart. They aren't exactly afraid of Winston (the dog), but they sneak around the side of the room when he's lying

in the middle. He's not mean.

He doesn't pay any attention to them. He mostly just wants to eat and go outside. He chases squirrels, not cats."

"That's amazing," his mother says. "You can think of things while you are upside down." She pauses until she gets a twinkle in her eye. "I know one thing you could never do."

"What?"

"I bet you could never write down those things you just said on a piece of paper while you were upside down."

He jumps up and gets his pad of paper from his backpack. He lies on his stomach on the sofa again with his head and arms hanging off. The paper is on the floor. "I have to hold myself up with my elbow," he says, maneuvering.

"Ha!" says his mother. "I knew you couldn't think, write and be upside down at the same time."

"It's easy!" he says, beginning to write on the paper.

You can see where this is going. What Ryan wrote was not as fluent and complete as what he had said about his pets, and the handwriting was not great, but he wrote a whole paragraph about his two cats and one dog.

He drops the pencil and lets the paper drift under the chair. He is grinning. But then his mood changes.

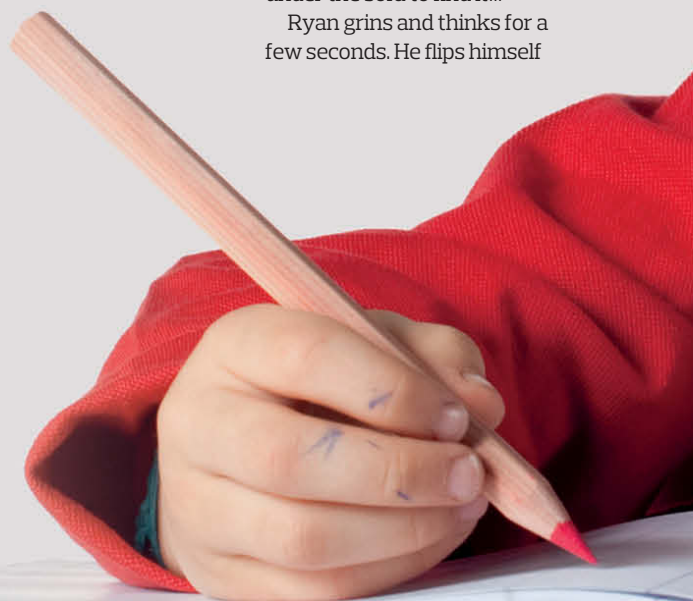
"It's not very good."

His mother glances at it and says, "It's pretty darn good for someone who wrote it while upside down. I bet nobody in your whole classroom could do that but you. Your teacher is going to be surprised... Of course, she'll have to look under the sofa to find it..."

Ryan grins and thinks for a few seconds. He flips himself

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Letitia Sweitzer**  
M.Ed, BCC, ACC is  
trained in ADHD  
coaching by the  
Edge Foundation  
([edgefoundation.org](http://edgefoundation.org)).



off the sofa, pulls the paper out from under it, and puts it in his backpack, from where with luck – and a grin – it will be pulled out and handed in at school the following morning.

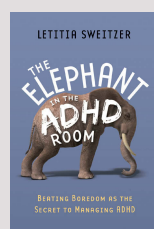
Ryan and his mother both know what has just happened here – though his mum understands just a little bit more. She has given Ryan a half dozen of his Elements of Interest (see 'What floats your boat?', right): novelty, physical action, humor, curiosity, challenge, and surprise.

The difference between that scene and the one in the restaurant was basically the freedom to be upside down in a chair. How often is a child really free? And how much less freedom is there for a child in a restaurant? What could the grandfather have done with Ryan in this situation? What freedom could he have given his fidgety grandson?

As an alternative to a reprimand, he could have asked Ryan to walk quietly down the hall like a giraffe and come back like a squirrel. He could have given him a task to do: "Go over to the bulletin board and see what's on it and come back and tell me about it." He could have planted a penny or two in a magazine on the table and said, "See if you can find a penny in this magazine, I have a feeling someone might have left

one or two inside it." But first a grandfather has to understand that waiting in a chair for dinner is boring for anyone, that Ryan, being a child with ADHD, is especially boredom prone, and that he needs a few tricks, not a scolding.

Many of us are bored if we have to be still for too long. Freedom to seek interest is what we all need – and a few tricks. Ryan has ADHD, but it doesn't really matter if he does or not. What's good for ADHD is good for everybody who is stuck in a boring situation.



£17.99), a book with a wide range of strategies for professionals working in clinical, educational and therapeutic settings to help those with ADHD beat boredom and engage with the tasks or goals they want or need to achieve.

This article is an edited extract from *The Elephant in the ADHD Room* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers,

## WHAT FLOATS YOUR BOAT?

**THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU LIKE TO DO, AND YOU'LL OFTEN DISCOVER COMMON THEMES...**

It's important not to assume you know what is interesting to a child – it's better for your pupils to discover and embrace their own interests. Also, while it is obviously good to know their preferences such as subjects, sports, or hobbies, it's more important to recognise the portable, lifelong 'Elements of Interest' that favourite activities involve. I use the term to mean the underlying aspects of an activity that excite them versus a complex interest such as history, lacrosse, or model airplane building, which involve many elements of activity. The person who loves to play football may love it because physical action and competition are among his Elements of Interest, but it may be that the social aspects of affiliation and social interaction with the team are more important Elements of the game for him. Your job is to help him focus more on the Elements than the activity.

# 'Let your musicality flourish'

If you're happy to organise professional-led music sessions in your setting, but balk at the idea of leading them yourself, let **Craig Trafford** explain why there's nothing to fear



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**S**ENCos – those priceless cornerstones of pedagogy – know that music-making opportunities facilitate broad, holistic learning access to all topics, with some employing specialists to run participatory music programmes for their school or setting.

However, many SENCos are reluctant to provide their own inclusive music making sessions, perhaps as the result of confidence-sapping myths and limiting beliefs.

By addressing these common myths, we can encourage any SENCo who might otherwise consider themselves 'musically challenged' to overcome such reluctance.

## ***Playing the long game***

Schools might revel in music programmes designed and delivered by music hubs, community musicians, specialists and music-focused 'experts,' but all too abruptly these programmes end. Groups dissipate. Instruments are retired to gather dust on storeroom shelves, leaving a music and movement void.

The misperception here is that no 'expert' means no music.

What about the children? A forlorn imprint now remains; a mere memory of magical learning moments that once catered for all learning and sensory preferences. Important momentum in personal, social,

emotional, physical, cognitive, academic and learning benefits grinds to a halt.

So how might the 'non-musical' SENCo, sustain and develop their invaluable work using the school's own resources?

## ***Dismantling the Myths***

First, let's dismantle the myths, discover your hidden talents, suggest actionable frameworks that might help, and inspire with a sprinkling of resources.

### **MYTH 1 – "MUSIC-MAKING IS THE REALM OF SPECIALIST MUSICIANS"**

Do parents undergo music training before singing nursery rhymes or tapping along on a

biscuit tin to the latest hit from Mr Tumble? As a significant adult in a child's life, your voice is an emotional nutrient. Your children will feel good when you sing.

Someone once told me the quote, "We don't sing because we're happy; we're happy because we sing." Singing makes everyone feel good. Relinquish your harsh self-judgments and simply sing with the children.

Don't enjoy singing? You can always 'talk-sing', by exaggerating your vocal inflections and playfully moving your voice around, as we would when reciting 'Incey Wincey Spider,' or performing an animated story reading.

### MYTH 2 – “I CAN’T KEEP TIME, SO THERE’S NO WAY I CAN LEAD A MUSIC SESSION.”

Steady beat is an action that refines over time. Just ask any drummer.

According to early years consultant Ros Bailey, a major benefit of steady beat competency is that you are providing the basis of early language learning, and thus thinking skills. Your heart and lungs automatically keep their own rhythms, so you’re already unconsciously following a steady beat without effort!

Let your CD tunes initially keep the beats for you. Relax. It’s okay to sometimes miss the beat. Do your best to follow clapping songs and body beats activities. Maybe start with some rhymes, perhaps some slow hip-hop or reggae with a strong beat, with everyone clapping along. Refine and add complexities as you go.

We don’t ‘work’ music, we ‘play’ it – so have fun.

### MYTH 3 – “YOU NEED MUSIC SPECIALISTS TO RUN PROPER MUSIC SESSIONS.”

In the hands of an experienced musician, a musical instrument can be a device of mystery and beauty. In the hands of inexperienced adults and children, instruments can become curiosity-inducing sound-makers to be explored, played with and intrinsically valued, leading to an ocean of



experience and discovery

Specialists are wonderful and add value to your experience, but you don’t need them all the time.

Be open, creative, curious, and embrace the chance to enjoy making sounds. You will already be organising and feeding progressive developmental steps into your children’s learning, so you know what they need.

Un-tuned percussion can help you to tell stories, highlight events, encourage participation, represent characters, and make a range of simple or increasingly complex music. Record your use of instruments and play it back – everyone loves that.

So, with the myths dismantled and your innate talents revealed, let’s see what a 15 to 20-minute music session might look like...

### A 15-20 minute music session format

In this session, the children learn about participation, positive emotions, body acknowledgement, self-awareness, handling instruments and meaningful movement.

1 Gentle introduction – make some soft sounds on an instrument or play some peaceful and calming music as the group enters the session.

2 Sing and clap a greeting song – this is an opportunity for making eye contact, warming up and assessing participation levels.

3 Perform a whole body action song – songs such as these can be inclusively adapted. Everyone can benefit from body acknowledgement, body beats, muscle lengthening, and the naming of body parts and functions. Feeling body-positive is key.

Make the physical activity easy to join in with, throwing in graded challenges at appropriate times. Actions that include backwards and forwards movements can help activate participation – eg. rocking back and forth to accompany a rendition of ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat’.

4 Listening activity – for hearing impaired children I would recommend resonance boards, shaman drums, acoustic guitars, or any instrument that facilitates listening to, sensing and feeling variation in vibrations.

For a sample activity, try dropping and rolling a ball shaker across a wide, nestled drum head.

5 Exercise motor control – an activity that connects gross and fine motor skills in preparation for instrument or props play. When these things are done in full awareness, the effect amplifies and the teachable moments increase.

You might, for example, flap your ‘wings’ and tap your fingers.

6 Play with instruments – play along to a CD, a live musician or a steady beat.

## NOW HEAR THIS

*How to facilitate a meaningful music-making session*

> **Check your needs assessment for the group**  
Mentally highlight any individuals you wish to benefit in specific ways from the session. A mental note should suffice – e.g. ‘Julie looks lost and vague.’

> **Set your intention**  
Following from the previous step, consciously decide what outcomes you want – eg. ‘Julie could benefit from more eye contact.’

> **Scan your repertoire**  
Look over the various activities available to you and trust those that jump out. You might, for example, sing the ‘Bluebird’ activity song ([tinyurl.com/sc-bluebird-song](http://tinyurl.com/sc-bluebird-song)) and ask Julie to ‘show us what she likes – to eat.’

> **Observe the results** as you usually would, and decide the next step.

Beat competency can help with language issues and introduce dynamics (‘stop/start’, ‘fast/slow’, ‘loud/soft’, etc.)

7 Closing song – use the same closing song each time. It can be something calm, easing us back into the body.

For maximum value, make music every day – little and often is best.

Above all, let your inner musicality flourish. Take notes as your creative ideas flow. You’ll soon find yourself building a comprehensive and curriculum-enriching inclusive music repertoire – and more importantly, helping your children develop a lifelong love of music.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Craig Trafford** is a SEND music specialist based at the resources, teaching and training provider, **Drums for Schools**. For more information, visit [drumsforschools.com](http://drumsforschools.com)



# Ports in a STORM

From calming children down to encouraging social interactions, sensory spaces have a range of uses. **Sarah Martin-Denham** and **Clare Stewart** look at what schools should do – and avoid – when putting one together...

**W**hen we talk about 'sensory play', we are referring to a range of activities which, broadly speaking, stimulate children's senses, while at the same time helping them to engage with learning. It's important to note at the outset that sensory play – and the spaces it's practised in – can support children with a wide range of needs, in both mainstream and alternative contexts. That makes sensory spaces a useful resource for all children.

The most effective sensory spaces stimulate visual, tactile and auditory senses. Teachers need to consider the influence of the learning environment on a child's responses, such as the presence of other children and adults, the influence of light and other sounds. If teachers are unaware of these factors, the child may not be able to participate in learning, resulting in the teacher potentially viewing that child as disinterested.

It is important to note that regardless of whether or not the child has an identified need, it is the role of the school to ensure that they feel safe and secure, so that future learning may occur. Sensory spaces can therefore be a valuable resource for all children if effectively planned and resourced, with a shared and clear understanding of how and when it is to be used.

Bear in mind that when setting up a sensory space, you need to consider the amount of physical space available – not all classrooms will be able to accommodate a sensory area. If it is to be a separate space, you will need to think about staffing and who will be the named person to accompany the child there, as this should be consistent.

## ***Sensory spaces in practice – a case study***

A mainstream, primary-aged child was in the process of diagnosis for autism. The initial concerns were in relation to her 'stimming' (self-stimulatory behaviour), difficulties with social skills and lack of awareness when it came to others' personal space.

The SENCO, class teacher and parents discussed how various classroom strategies and potential adaptations to the school and classroom environment could be used to reduce her anxieties, since she encountered challenges in communicating her thoughts and needs. The case study below details Clare Stewart's approach to setting up different sensory spaces.

### **Sensory room**

The child was in a small rural school and space was limited. It was not possible to create a sensory space within the classroom. The child was given a choice of three areas

within the school that could serve as a sensory space, from which she chose a small room with a window that overlooked the allotment. The child and parents were consulted in the design of the space, and her special interest in maps, facts about different countries and LEGO were incorporated into the design.

The finished space included a suspended hammock that would allow the child to look at the wall maps under adjustable lighting. There was also access to an iPad and headphones for the child to self-select music.

In the room's LEGO space, she could build a LEGO maze or dough print with LEGO as a means of self de-escalating. Also present were three glittering 'calm down' jars, each filled with a mixture of glue, glitter and warm water and containing a single LEGO minifig. The glitter solution mixes when the jars are shaken, and as it settles, the LEGO minifig appears. The process of the child shaking the jars allows them to achieve calm.

This approach provides both tactile input and proprioceptive feedback. The Autism Research Institute describes the proprioceptive system as a combination of muscles, joints, and tendons that provide a person with a subconscious awareness of their body position. When functioning well, it will allow you to sit properly in a chair and manage other fine and gross movements

smoothly. It's what also allows you to manipulate objects using fine motor movements, such as when writing with a pencil, using a spoon to drink soup and tying one's laces.

It is crucial that the child has access to the room as soon as it is identified by them, or the adults around them, that they are becoming anxious.

### **2 Reading retreat**

There was a need for a calm but stimulating area within the classroom that children could use to self regulate, so a story chair was created to serve as the area's focal point. The chair was covered in a wide range of tactile scenes representing a range of stories. The intention was that children would sit on the chair and explore the different fabrics while reading.

**3 Dark den**  
The 'dark den' was introduced to a child who became over stimulated by the lights and sounds in the classroom. A two person, pop-up tent was placed in a quiet area of the classroom and filled with cushions of varying textures, LED lights and ropelights. This was simple to set up, and the child was encouraged to access the dark den as and when needed.

If you plan to create something similar, be sure to check that is compatible with a small space.

**4 LEGO therapy**  
To lead LEGO Therapy, you should read the evidence-based manual *LEGO-Based Therapy*, published by Jessica Kingsley (see [tinyurl.com/lego-therapy-manual](http://tinyurl.com/lego-therapy-manual)). You then need to identify the children you feel would benefit from this type of therapy, which is generally recommended for children with ASD, social communication difficulties and anxiety-related difficulties.

LEGO building can become a medium to encourage

social development, if led correctly. The sessions should be timetabled weekly, with a maximum of three children.

The therapy format is that the children are allocated one of three jobs on rotation – builder, engineer and supplier. They follow a structured set of rules that supports participation, including turn taking, maintaining eye contact and using descriptive vocabulary.

**“ Sensory spaces can be a valuable resource for all children if effectively planned and resourced**

## CALMING MEASURES

*Below are some of the different ways in which schools can provide calm and stimulating activities to children with SEN*

### CALMING COUNT BOX

Put cotton wool balls into an old tissue box and encourage the children to count them out and in.

### BALLOON TENNIS

Use fly swatters and balloons to develop gross motor skills, social interaction and co-ordination.

### DISCOVERY BALLS

Fill balloons with a variety of different tactile products such as rice, flour and beans – these can be used as stress relievers in a child's hands.

### RESISTANCE GAME

Have two children sit on an old sheet or rug. Nominate one of them to be the 'pulling partner', who then has to hold the other with two hands and walk backwards, so that they slide across the floor. Once they have taken turns, they can then progress to going round obstacles. This activity is good for developing social skills and teamwork.

### LAZY 8

Print off a large '8' digit on a piece of paper. The child then draws round the number shape, breathing as they draw around the top and out again once they reach the bottom.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

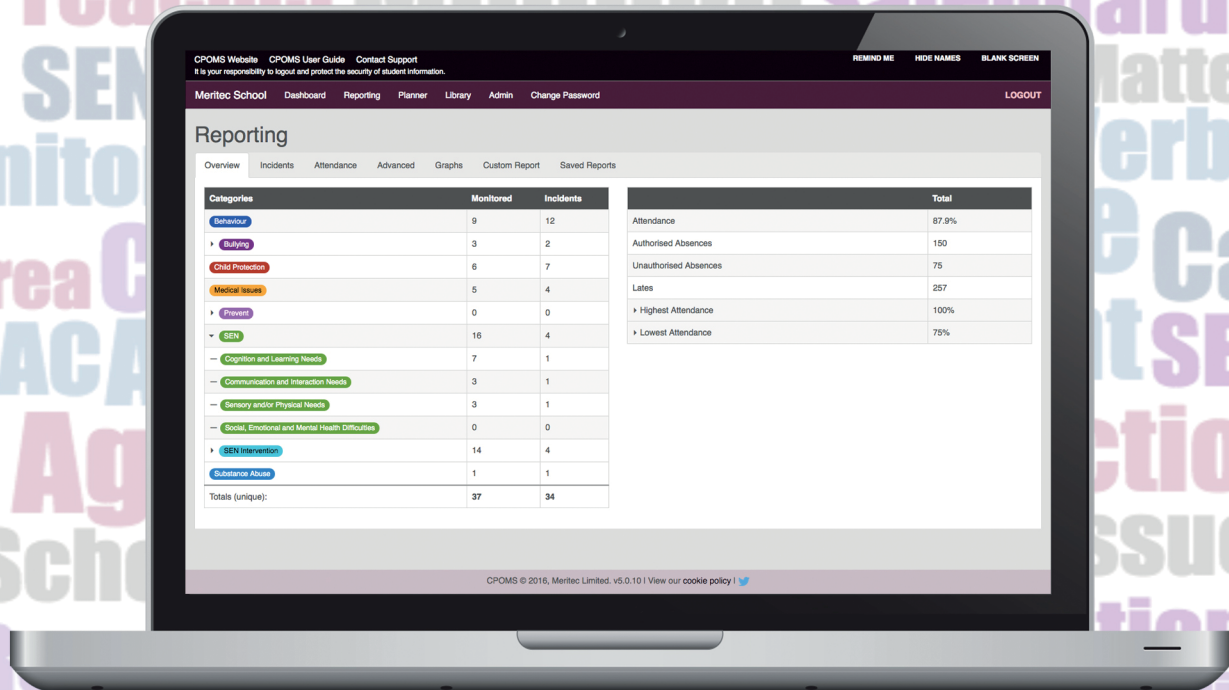
**Sarah Martin-Denham** is a programme leader at the University of Sunderland and editor of *Teaching Children and Young People with SEN and Disabilities*, published by Sage



**Clare Stewart** is the designated SENCo at St Marys RC Primary, South Moor, County Durham



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# Laying down THE LAW

**Douglas Silas** looks at what the role of a SENCo involves from a legal perspective...

**T**he goal of every SENCo will be to provide the best opportunities for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities – something which will require them to have knowledge regarding the legal dimensions of their school's SEND provision.

Examples of this include awareness of the law regarding disability discrimination or exclusions, the specifics of SEND funding and the processes involved with giving pupils statements of SEN and education, health and care plans (EHCPs) – including how to transfer from the former to the latter, as well as Annual Reviews. SENCos also have to know what schools need to provide for the vast majority of pupils with SEND on the school's SEN register that do not have a statement/EHC plan.

If that were not enough, in addition, SENCos usually have teaching duties to fit in on a daily or weekly basis and are expected to represent the school at various seminars, meetings and hearings. Never mind 24/7 – the workload of the average SENCo is closer to 25/8!

While there is insufficient space here to detail everything a SENCo needs to know from a legal perspective about the above, I can try and provide an overview.

As with any other school employee, SENCos will regularly find themselves working with parents, governors, educational psychologists, therapists and external agencies (for example, health and social services). They can also expect to liaise with further education colleges, family support workers, youth groups, voluntary bodies and more besides.



## ***The SENCo's 'bible'***

*The National Standards for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (1998)*, sets out four suggested areas of SEN coordination:

- > Strategic direction/development of SEN provision in school
- > Teaching/learning
- > Leading and managing staff
- > Efficient/effective deployment of staff and resources

The key piece of SEN legislation that SENCos must be familiar with is Part 3 of the *Children and Families Act 2014*. The SENCo's 'bible', however, is the '*SEND Code of Practice*' [2015] ('CoP'), which elaborates on their legal requirements and provides guidance on education of children with SEND.

A school will add a pupil to its SEN register if they believe she requires additional support to ensure she is making good

academic progress. This is likely to occur when a pupil appears to have made little or no progress, after the school has already tried different teaching styles, changing her learning environment, bringing in additional help or changing the curriculum.

The SEND CoP recognises four different areas of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health; and sensory and/or physical needs.

SENCos work alongside teachers to find ways of supporting and improving pupils' learning whilst they are receiving school-based SEN support, ensuring that each pupil's progress is regularly monitored and reviewed. If a pupil is shown not to have made adequate progress, the school should look at providing

additional support for the pupil via external specialists or agencies. If that pupil has received SEN support with little or no success, it is SENCo's responsibility to see whether she should be formally assessed for an EHCP.

## ***What do we mean by 'inclusion'?***

Importantly, a SENCo is ultimately responsible for inclusion of SEND pupils in a mainstream school. 'Inclusion' in this sense refers to including all pupils – both with and without SEND – in the educational opportunities and activities available. It also promotes the principle of treating all pupils equally and fairly, whatever their educational needs may be.

SENCos also have to oversee and be involved in transition periods. In KS1 and KS2, this is more to do with helping to co-ordinate and plan educational opportunities for them, but when they move from KS3 to KS4, a SENCo must help pupils with SEND be aware of, and start to consider, their academic career options.

A SENCo has to work with the whole school to try and promote inclusion, which may be easier said than done! The varying needs of pupils with SEND will greatly affect how successfully they can (or indeed want) to be included in a mainstream class.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Douglas Silas**  
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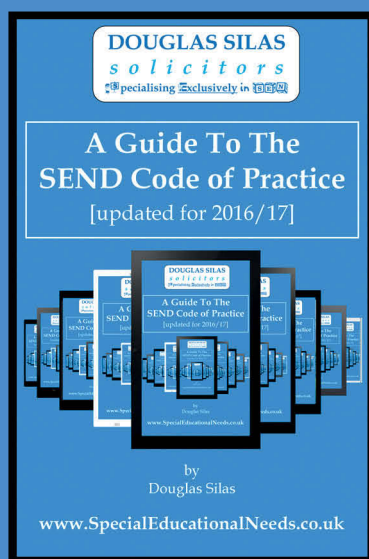
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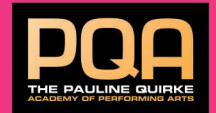
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# Part of the CONVERSATION

The iPad has cropped up in lessons everywhere, but perhaps its greatest potential is in helping children with SEN to open up new lines of communication, says **Cherryl Drabble**...

**H**ighfurlong is a special school in the North West of England catering for children with additional needs. Like many schools, some of our children are physically disabled, some have challenging behaviours, some have profound and multiple learning difficulties, while others are very delicate and require very particular care and attention.

It is the children in this latter group who need the most stimulation. They are difficult to engage in the learning process and tough to keep on task – but it is immensely rewarding when learning is taking place. As a teacher, I believe the most important gifts I can give to these very poorly children are a sense of inclusion, as much independence as they can achieve and a voice – where and when it is needed.

## **Flexible solution**

Every child wants to join the conversation and be a part of the lesson and there are many inventions designed to help with this. Five years ago, after much research, our school decided to invest in iPads as we deemed this to be the best high-tech tool available for our learners.

The iPad's most obvious advantage was its portability, enabling it to go to and from school and on educational visits. But every iPad model also features two built-in cameras – a rear-facing camera that takes pictures and can be used to give parents an overview of their child's day, and a front-facing camera for video calls. This is a wonderful

invention for special children. One of our very delicate girls was extremely poorly and had been in hospital for some weeks. At school she had won an award for endeavour, and was going to miss her big moment at the prize-giving assembly. We called her using FaceTime (Apple's video call app), so that she could see her award being presented – and so we could

see her delight at winning. Absolutely marvellous.

## **Public speaking**

When we first purchased the iPads there was already an amazing array of apps available designed with special learners in mind, which have been joined by countless others in the years since. However, I still have a particular favourite in

Proloquo2go ([tinyurl.com/TS-Proloquo2go](http://tinyurl.com/TS-Proloquo2go)), which, whilst expensive, is worth the £199.99 asking price.

Proloquo2go is an alternative and augmentative communication system for children without a voice. It converts text into speech and has a vast library of pictures that can be selected to illustrate the text. Photographs can be imported from the iPad's own camera roll, allowing the user to personalise his or her messages.

We use this program for daily timetables, choice of food, news and general communication. The spoken voice is loud enough to enable children to take part in an assemblies and opens up many previously denied opportunities to a non-communicating child.

We have previously used Proloquo2go during a special assembly for a headteacher who was leaving. There was a child in my class who would not normally have been able to participate, but was itching to give his views on the outgoing head. The iPad was swiftly programmed using pictures the child had taken of our headteacher and text describing his fondest memories of working with him. With a custom made key guard in position, the boy was all set to take centre stage and give his own tribute.

Watching the young boy delicately isolate one finger and operate his iPad to give his speech was a sight to behold. It was the first time he had ever been able to join in with his peers and give his own valid opinion. Quite a tear-jerking moment for all concerned.



## It's your choice

A further example of the success of iPads and Proloquo2go came when we used it with a 12-year-old child who operated around what was then P5 level. This boy was able to use a touch screen, but would not be parted from his computer, which he used to watch clips of trains on YouTube. To make progress, he needed to move on from the PC and his obsession with trains and learn to use the more versatile iPad.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cheryl Drabble is acting assistant head at Highfurlong School in Blackpool; her latest book, *Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities*, is available now, published by Bloomsbury; follow her blog at [cherryllkd.wordpress.com](http://cherryllkd.wordpress.com)**



When we first gave him his iPad he refused to play with any other app except Talking Tom, which he used imitate noises from around the room. It was a lovely program, but had little educational value – though it did encourage him to improve his touchscreen skills.

Otherwise, this was the ideal scenario for introducing Proloquo2go – especially since this boy had limited communication and could generally only be understood by those who knew him well. We used the app to put together a page displaying a number of cells, each containing a word and a corresponding picture. Pressing a cell would result in the word being read out loud in the voice of an appropriate child.

This thrilled our boy, who continually pressed the screen to hear the voice. We added his name, age and objects he found of interest – such as McDonald's and crisps – to the cells, which inspired him to leave Talking Tom behind and show us the things he favoured. A few months down the line, with lots of encouragement and support, he was able to introduce himself

to people, tell them his age and that he liked McDonald's.

His next steps for learning were to master a new page with a choice of activities. The idea was that he would choose an activity, participate in it for a given time and then receive a reward. The activities would be educational, and the reward one of his own choosing – I seem to recall that one them was watching trains on YouTube...

Educational visits for this boy subsequently became a fantastic experience. He had a choice of food with pictures and words, and was able to approach service counters and order his own food by pressing each cell. For the first time, he was communicating on a level with his peers.

The more I explored the iPad, the more I came to realise just how valuable it can be for special learners. I have since seen classes Highfurlong gain so much since we began tentatively using them all those years ago. The children continue to enjoy using the technology to this day – and the successes and breakthroughs are there for all to see.

## ENGAGING THE SENSES

I once had a desperately poorly 14-year-old girl in my class who had complex medical needs and profound multiple learning difficulties due to her illnesses. Among her many problems she had pseudomonas – a chronic long term lung condition. The staff that cared for this young girl had to wear gowns and gloves at all times to protect her from any further infection.

Yet despite being so poorly, she was always cheerful and a joy to be around. As her teacher at the time, it was my duty to give her the best education I could, while keeping her happy and well cared for. The pseudomonas meant that this young lady couldn't participate in cooking and water experiences, and many other activities that children routinely enjoy during their learning.

This was where Fluid, a sensory app for the iPad ([tinyurl.com/TS-fluid](http://tinyurl.com/TS-fluid)), came in. It turns the screen into what looks like a liquid surface, with water gently lapping over stones in a pool in a way that produces movement that can be seen and almost felt. Zen music plays gently in the background, or you can alternatively use music stored elsewhere on the iPad. The young lady had limited independent hand movements, so a TA gently massaged her fingers to enable her to experience the sensation of moving the water over the stones. This calming app had a profound effect – one that produced sensations that had formerly been denied to this young girl.

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# Clicker 7

**Sal McKeown** reviews the latest version of Crick Software's complete literacy toolkit

Clicker 7 has an august parentage. It first appeared in 1995; the year when John Major became leader of the Conservatives and Princess Di's all revealing interview with Martin Bashir was broadcast. Back in the day Clicker was a simple word processing package for children with special needs – but over time it has grown, won a slew of awards and adapted to multiple changes in technology. These days Clicker is used to support literacy development in thousands of schools and homes around the world.

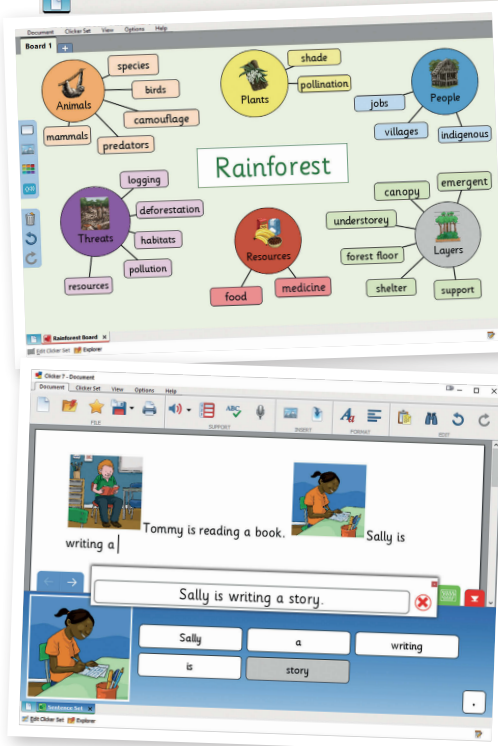
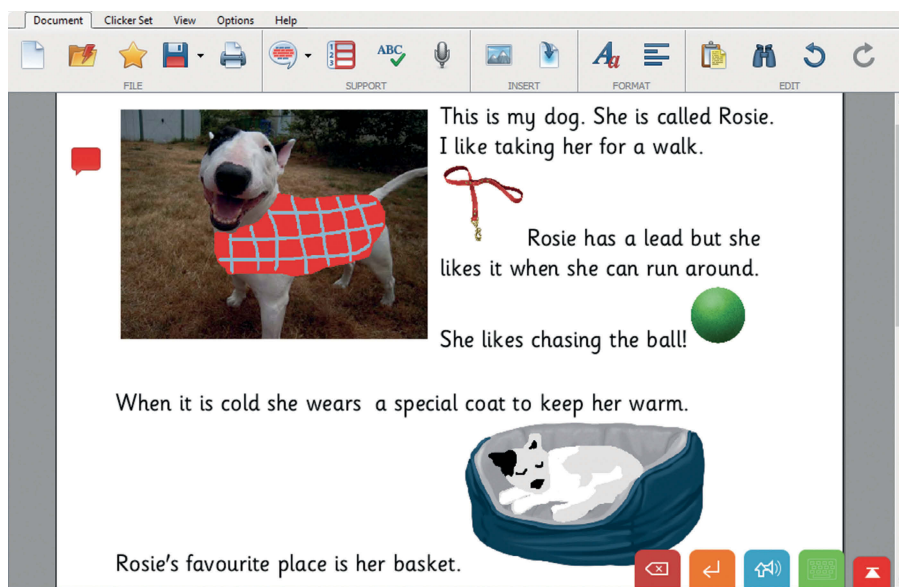
What teachers like about Clicker is that it offers so much support in different forms that it meets the needs of just about any pupil. Text-to-speech and the enhanced spell-checker make it a good choice for those with dyslexia, while intelligent word prediction ensures it's a great tool for pupils learning English as an additional language and deaf children who are BSL signers as it helps them develop their syntax. It also offers symbols and pictures useful for children with delayed language development, and a range of text input methods including switch access for learners with physical disabilities.

## Added extras

Clicker 7 is of course bigger and better than its predecessors (although I wish it had been named differently; I don't know if I am particularly innumerate but I can never remember which version is the latest – what's wrong with 'Clicker 2016?') – and boasts some attractive new features such as children's voices with an English accent. While there are youngsters who might relish Dalek-type synthesised speech, many others will prefer the more natural sounding voices of Rosie and Harry to read back their work.

There is also a Word Pool where adult helpers can type in unusual words – perhaps family names such as Siobhan or Caoimhe – to be added to the dictionary and word prediction. Even more importantly, they can type in a phonetic version so that their names are read back as Shiv-awn and Keeva.

Clicker Board is a mind mapping tool where



children can pull together words and pictures and use the spell-checker and text-to-speech functions. Pupils can brainstorm key words or find good phrases on the internet, and with just one click, the entire contents of the mind map will be exported to a word bank.

There are also some really exciting new accessibility options. Alongside joysticks, tracker balls, mouse and switch access, the new version also offers input via eye gaze technology and Crick's own SuperKeys assistive keyboard. Eye gaze is big news in the world of assistive technology; with eye tracking

making it possible for a computer to identify the exact point on a screen that users are looking at. It is opening up speech and communication for those without a voice, and the world of gaming for paraplegics; now it can work with Clicker 7 to offer personalised literacy support.

## Super support

SuperKeys breaks up the QWERTY keyboard into seven manageable chunks that operate as 'super keys'. Tap one of the clusters and the keys expand to fill the screen, making each one an easier target to hit. Choose a letter, unleash intelligent word prediction and writing gets a whole lot faster. It is so useful for those with poor vision or dyspraxia.

If I had to choose just one killer feature in Clicker 7 it would be Voice Notes. Children often think of really good sentences but once they start trying to compose them word by word – and often letter by letter – they can easily forget what they were trying to say. Now, with Voice Notes, they can click on the microphone icon, record their sentence and then focus on the spelling and punctuation at their own pace.

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# Bog STANDARD

Interventions get squeezed into any available space, but is a table outside the loos really the best place for children, especially those with SEND, to learn, asks **Nancy Gedge**

**W**hen I was a little girl, my classroom got some new curtains and the event is burned into my memory. The windows were too high to look out of when you were sitting at your desk, but the pattern of horses that dashed across the curtain fabric entertained me many times when my workbook failed to inspire.

That classroom, being as it was mostly windows, had little in it by way of displays. I remember an alphabet frieze hung over the teacher's desk that used to help me find my way around the dictionary, but that was about it. How different to the classrooms of today. In some, you can barely move for printed-out posters, laminated and attached to every available surface, as well as hanging from homemade washing lines. Making your way across them is like an obstacle course, and it's a positive trial for many children with autism.

When we were looking for a school for my son Sam, who has Down's syndrome, the environment was one of the things we thought about. Too far to walk to every day? Off the list. Over-subscribed and therefore huge classes? We turned ourselves away. Open plan? For our little flitterer? No chance. In the end, we plumped for a school that had created several smaller rooms, rooms we knew that Sam would use when he wasn't being taught with the rest of the class.

Like many children with SEND, Sam spent a lot of his primary years in intervention groups. When a child has needs

that are significantly different to the rest of the class there is often not a great deal you can do about that. When schools are under pressure to come up with acceptable results, there isn't a lot of choice in the matter. Something must be done, and we must be seen to be doing it. There is, however, quite a bit of choice in how you go about it.

There's the style of intervention, for a start. No one wants their child, especially if she is an included one, to spend a lot of time on her own with a one-to-one TA. The day I inadvertently observed a rather lovely reading session between Sam and his one-to-one was tinged with sadness as he wasn't with the rest of the class. An intervention doesn't always have to mean withdrawal.

And then there's the resources you use. As part of my SENCo course, I was keen to find out if the reading programme we have on a couple of

computers at school was worth the money. After all, practice makes perfect, and reading to something non-judgemental, in private, has to be good, right? There's interesting research about the effect a child reading to a specially trained dog can have on particular children; could it be transferred to a computer programme?

Oh dear. The best laid plans. It turns out that I had not thought carefully enough about the environment. I hadn't realised that with all the noise going on around sensitive microphones, the doors banging, the voices of TAs and children working on whatever interventions were also running in the shared space, the children spent more time trying to set the thing up than doing any reading. I'd have been better off hearing them read myself.

Like me, many teachers are guilty of the same thing. We don't stop to think about

the environment surrounding children before we pack them off to their various intervention groups. Few schools have dedicated smaller rooms where distractable children can work effectively. Those with reading difficulties, short working memory spans and problems in processing the sensory information that bombards them within the busy walls of the school need to be in places where distractions are minimised.

More often than not the children, and their teachers or TAs, are squeezed into the spaces in between. The smelly spot next to the cloakroom. Between the plimsolls and the door to the playground. On the floor. I do wonder sometimes whether, like my failed experiment, these interventions make any difference at all. Or whether, in reality, it's all just for show.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Nancy Gedge** is a primary teacher in Gloucestershire. She blogs at [notsoordinarydiary.wordpress.com](http://notsoordinarydiary.wordpress.com)





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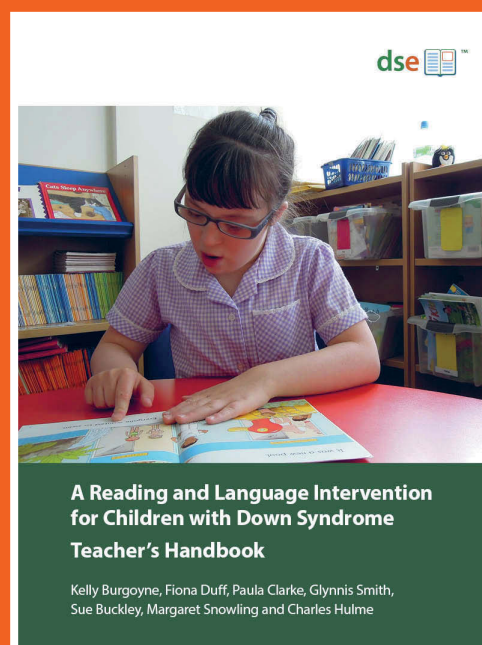


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