

Examples of School Inclusion for Pupils with Down's Syndrome

Early Years



A Down's Syndrome Association Publication

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CELEBRATING SUCCESS:

Examples of School Inclusion for Pupils with Down's Syndrome in Early Years

Introduction

The Celebrating Success series of booklets give examples of the experiences of pupils with Down's syndrome in real school settings. Using the words of the teachers, the teaching assistants and parents they demonstrate how good practice can benefit not only the inclusion of a pupil with Down's syndrome but also impact positively on the whole school population.

Since the 1981 Education Act, a succession of parents have placed their children in their local mainstream schools, and while it took about 20 years for the practice to extend to over eighty per cent of primary aged children, it is remarkable how commonplace it has since become. The expectation of many parents and children is to continue inclusive education throughout their school lives. An increasing number of secondary schools are now learning to make the necessary adjustments required to enable the inclusion of pupils of all abilities. Such schools are improving in the same way that primary schools did during the last 25 years.

Some teachers still find the thought of including a child with Down's syndrome in their class daunting, but almost all already have the skills needed to understand and address these children's individual needs. The case studies show how guidance in the DSA Primary and Secondary Education Support Packs looks when put into practice by school staff in regular schools across the country.

The school with the positive attitude towards meeting the needs of all children is always the one that has the least problems. Although the pupil with Down's syndrome should be treated on his or own merit, as other children are, there is a specific learning profile that helps teachers to focus on their strengths and put strategies in place to overcome their difficulties. Given a little training in avoiding difficult or immature behaviour, engaging the child in meaningful activities and understanding the specific learning profile of children with Down's syndrome, schools all over the country are making reasonable adjustments to the way that they work. Those that encourage a problem solving approach with a knowledgeable and proactive special educational needs co-ordinator and time built in for the class teacher and teaching assistant to plan, reap the rewards of being able to demonstrate how well they meet the needs of a whole range of children.

We hope the case studies will encourage schools to take a socially inclusive approach to meeting the needs of children with Down's syndrome.

The DSA continues to work for improved and better focused provision to ensure that young people with Down's syndrome emerge from education with the skills to make the most of their adult lives.

CASE STUDY 1:

Daniel, aged 3. Dartington Primary School and South Devon Steiner School, Dartington, Devon.



Overview:

Daniel lives with his parents and his older brother Sebastian, aged 6. His mother is German and his father is English and Daniel is learning both of the languages of his bilingual home. Daniel is an active child and is very able and physical. He loves music, animals, looking at books, as well as being generally curious about everything. It has also been recognised that his older brother is Daniel's biggest inspiration and his best teacher.

Daniel has good communication skills and in addition to Makaton signing and pointing he also uses facial expression, gesture and body language. When he becomes tired he sometimes

forgets these skills and may have a 'tantrum' due to his inability to communicate his wants and needs. Daniel has very good motor skills and he shows a tendency for left handedness, but is still ambidextrous.

Daniel was born with two holes in his heart, which healed naturally, and during his first two years he often had chest infections, but other than that he has not had any substantial health problems.

Pre-school placements and support services:

Daniel has had weekly Portage home visits since he was 2 years old. The Portage Early Education Programme uses developmental checklists, which now also incorporate the Early Support Developmental Journal goals for children with Down's syndrome. These checklists are designed for parents/carers to complete with the support of a home visitor to provide a baseline of developmental skills.

Each week targets are set for Daniel and it is his parents who choose appropriate goals. His parents are provided with a written plan that details how to teach Daniel the new skills and this is modelled, and monitored, by the Portage home visitor. The skills need to be practised every day and the family, and home visitor, all work towards the achievement of set longer-term teaching targets defined in the six monthly individual education plan (IEP). Every six months a formal review of Daniel's progress is undertaken and his development to date is analysed and used to support the planning of future targets. This formal review covers a number of developmental areas, such as social and emotional development, communication, cognition and play, self-help and motor and sensory development.

A 6 monthly review of progress is completed. An abridged version when Daniel was 3 years 2 months shows how much progress he has made.

Social and emotional development

Daniel:

- Is persistent in completing tasks and activities with more than one part – for example threading
- Plays happily alone but near familiar adult

Communication

Daniel:

- Uses sounds like those in the languages used in the home, both German and English
- Vocalises in attempts to copy words
- Imitates familiar consonants and vowel sounds associated with frequently used toys, pictures or food
- Concentrates intently on an object or activity of own choosing for short periods
- Watches and listens to others, copying some behaviours in own play
- Understands and signs 100 + words
- Will follow requests during role play such as 'feed teddy' or 'can you give me a cup?'
- Uses words/sign to refer to non-present people or objects
- Points to named signed items in picture books
- Engages in simple conversations between adult and child focusing on the here and now
- Follows simple instructions if accompanied by gestures/signs
- Can identify simple body parts such as nose, eyes, hair

Cognition and Play

Daniel:

- Is intensely curious, exploring objects, rooms and outside areas
- Enjoys looking at picture books
- Matches objects with parts that fit together such as putting a lid on a tea pot



- Enjoys sharing books
- Enjoys ready steady go and anticipates games
- Fits large simple puzzle pieces into inset puzzles
- Recognises familiar adult in picture
- Recognises self in mirror or photo
- Posts 3 shapes with little prompting from adult
- Enjoys building with blocks
- Anticipates what might happen next because of what other people say/sign

Self Help

Daniel:

- Can drink from an open cup independently and use a straw
- Takes part in washing hands and body
- Can scoop food onto spoon independently to feed himself and puts spoon into mouth without turning spoon upside down
- Bites pieces of soft biscuit or banana and chews lumpy food
- Knows where his clothes are kept, for example, out door coat
- Tolerates using toothpaste and brush
- Sits and participates in family meal times

Motor and Sensory Development

Daniel can:



- Visually scan the environment more quickly and now is more likely to avoid objects on floor
- Throw a small ball overhead
- Squat down to pick up a toy from the floor
- Climb onto and down from furniture without help
- Scribble spontaneously and make dots on paper
- Walk upstairs holding the hand of adult or banister
- Get down stairs by sitting on bottom or sliding down on tummy
- Thread beads onto firm cord
- Blow and make noises with a party blower, repeatedly!

Daniel continues to make steady progress across all areas. He has a good memory and is a very communicative boy. Daniel demonstrates clear understanding when spoken to in both German and English when combined with Makaton signs that support his knowledge of what is being said.

Portage is the best thing ever.
(Parents)

Daniel's parents have witnessed the positive effects and are keen to continue with the Portage Early Education Programme and they have all built strong links with their home visitor Sarah. Daniel's parents stated that Sarah is, 'Helpful and co-operative

and is a fund of ideas. We're often so exhausted that it can become too much and it seems never ending. We are really grateful to have Sarah to suggest and provide resources for us.'

It is delightful visiting Daniel and his family. The best thing is that despite the emotional rollercoaster that the parents experience they are so proactive in their support of Daniel. It is so great to work in such close partnership with Daniel's parents and I find it very humbling to see such brilliant work. We are genuine partners. (Home visitor, Sarah)

Daniel also sees a specialist speech and language therapist who co-ordinates her work with the Portage home visitor and Daniel's parents. She visits once or twice a term and uses 'See and Learn' materials to target speech sounds within words.

Daniel's parents initially chose a split placement between the nursery at Dartington Primary School and the South Devon Steiner School, which his older brother Sebastian attends. His parents enrolled him at both schools due to the fact that they were uncertain which school could offer Daniel the best support. Both schools operate on very different systems and curricula and his parents saw a number of advantages to each. His parents stated that until they had tried both they would not be able to decide which would be more appropriate for Daniel's needs.

Dartington Primary School has a successful inclusive background in supporting children with Down's syndrome, and has an experienced staff team, as well as being well resourced for working with children with special educational needs (SEN). Dartington staff are also aided in their own learning and regularly attend a support group for staff supporting and teaching children with Down's syndrome. In addition to this they have received whole school training about Down's syndrome and have attended training days run by specialist educational psychologists employed by Devon local authority. They are familiar with teaching reading to teach speaking using match, select and name methods and have used 'Numicon' successfully. The school places an emphasis on early literacy and numeracy skills. They also utilise effective visual learning support props, such as visual timetables.

South Devon Steiner School places a strong emphasis on daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms and rituals, as well as focusing on life skills, handicrafts and sensory experiences. As a school they give precedence to 'educating the whole child through hand, heart and mind', and place a focus on arts, music, storytelling, singing, finger rhymes and puppets to provide a visual/kinaesthetic input. There is also attention paid to Eurythmy (the art of movement) which helps with co-ordination and balance. In addition to the support that Daniel can receive from the school he is also at the same school as his brother, who has been there since the age of eight months, and this provides Daniel with a deeper sense of community.

Daniel's mum has been involved with 'Down South' (a parent group for children with Down's syndrome), which started in January 2012 with five children. Funded with capital by a Children in Need grant, they run a weekly pre-school speech and language group led by a speech and language therapist. Daniel's family also receive support from 'Home Start', music therapy sessions and a weekly group at the Children's Centre.

Inclusive practice:

Daniel started at Dartington in January 2012 for two mornings a week. He settled in well due to the fact that he had already attended the 'Parent and Toddler' group. A SEN student teacher who shadowed Daniel at this time stated that, 'Daniel will need support when he attends nursery and school. Daniel's main need will be to have somebody who can communicate with him, and help him communicate with others, at the same time standing back when necessary, so as not to prevent his inclusion and interaction with other children.'

Before Daniel started at the South Devon Steiner School his parents wrote a letter to all of the staff and parents to introduce Daniel to them. This letter included general information about what Down's syndrome is and the implications of this for learning and play. She also included examples of unfounded stereotyping and some historical perspectives. This letter served as an ice breaker enabling staff and parents to ask questions and understand the effect that Down's syndrome has on a child's learning and development.

Daniel's group leader at the South Devon Steiner School has stated that, 'Daniel has been a very delightful member of our group and has participated in calm holding and rhythmical activities collectively. Some activities are for parents e.g. sewing whilst the children play alongside and some involve parents and children together e.g. painting or baking. Daniel

enjoys playing 'cooking' and 'serving' in the house corner. He enjoys the slide and his gross motor skills are good. He is fairly confident and able and he manages really well at the snack table. His spoon skills and drinking from a cup are very good. Daniel loves the songs and movement and it's a joy to experience him engaging with others.

An example of a class activity that was fully inclusive was when one of the staff played a guessing game with the children. She had hidden little toy animals in a basket, she then described them to the children and let them guess what animal she was talking about. She also showed the whole collection of animals together with their Makaton sign to the circle so that Daniel could fully engage with the activity.

Daniel can exhibit challenging behaviour and his parents provided strategies to counteract behaviour that may occur in both settings. Daniel sometimes pulls people's hair. This mostly occurs when:

- Daniel can only see the back of a person's head/can't see a face.
- He is overwhelmed by a (new) situation or is tired.
- Someone comes too close (e.g. at snack time).

A spoken 'stop' together with its Makaton sign, plus modelling 'gentle hands' together with its Makaton sign, is used to decrease this behaviour. Daniel sometimes bangs his head against surfaces. The trigger seems to be frustration either because he can't express his needs/wants especially when he is very tired or hungry or he isn't able yet to do something he is keen to do and has a 'tantrum' since he can't get things the way he wants them. When Daniel demonstrates this behaviour his parents advised staff to make sure he doesn't hurt himself, to calm and comfort him and try to distract him. So far, Daniel has not exhibited any of these behaviours at nursery and enjoys all of the activities.

Daniel responds well when told "what to do" instead of "what not to do" as he still focuses on the last word he hears. Daniel currently understands around 100 signs and/or signs them. The amount of words he understands is much bigger. For example, he knows different types of clothes when we name them, and would bring them; he knows the different body parts.

Daniel can say a few words: 'mama', 'dada', 'there', 'da', 'ow', 'oh wow!' (these usually come out together, when he is really impressed by something), 'ba' (could be his big brother (Se) Bastian, banana or bye depending on context), and he tries to say 'bird', 'bear', 'boat', 'Baum' (tree). Daniel also produces single letters/sounds copying others. Daniel gets especially animated to imitate sounds by listening to music/singing.

Successes:

After a period of being at nursery Daniel was reassessed by his Portage home visitor and this session showed great improvement in Daniel's achievement. Daniel was very pleased to co-operate fully and show all his successes.

His first task was to learn how to put the triangle shape into his 'Thomas the Tank Engine' shape sorter. He could already post the cylinder and rectangle so he was offered these first – both successfully and quickly posted. He was then given the triangle, which was more complicated as Daniel had to twist and turn this to the correct orientation for it to be posted. Daniel was immediately successful with this, to applause from all observing. His mum said that he had learned how to do this after only one session of practice and had maintained the skill since then. The task was repeated several times at Daniel's request as he was understandably proud of his achievements.

The second task was for Daniel to make a choice out of two songs using laminated pictures with the title written underneath the picture. He first chose '5 fat sausages' and he was given

a cut out cardboard laminated pan and sausages with the sausages Velcroed onto the pan. As well as singing and signing the song together Daniel also had to pull a sausage off each time that we sang 'Pop' and 'Bang'. Sebastian also had a turn in this enjoyable game. Daniel practised his singing and signing as well as strengthening his fine motor skills by having to use a pincer grasp to pull the sausages off.

The second song that Daniel chose was 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' and Daniel practised his singing and signing, which was modelled for him. He consistently signed 'up', 'diamond' and 'star'. The next choice was 'Wind the Bobbin up' and Daniel sang and signed 'wind', 'pull', 'clap' and pointed to the window and door as they appeared in the song, showing good understanding of the context of the songs.

The third task was to match photos of parts of the face – he was successful in this, which led to a discussion as to how ideal these lotto boards were to start introducing words to match as well. At this point Daniel and his brother went off to play in another room – they play really well together and were involved in building and pushing a train around. Daniel also showed us how well he can ride his 'Like-a-Bike'.

Language and reading:

The process of teaching reading to learn language using a whole word approach with matching, selecting and naming and how this is taught was discussed. Examples of first books (home-made) were shared. It was agreed to start with Daniel concentrating on family members and favourite toys with photos and written words. His parents were keen to start as Daniel has such an extensive vocabulary of spoken words and signs.

Generally we believe that Daniel is part of a new generation of people with Down's syndrome who are able to achieve so much more than the generations before. By achieving we mean not entirely academic, but rather walking one's own path towards fulfilment. This is partly because we know so much more about how people with Down's syndrome learn. We trust that Daniel will grow up to live a fulfilled and mostly independent life. His life is already healthy and happy.
(Daniel's parents)

As the family are bilingual we also discussed the process of using books and photos to teach the English words and their German equivalent. His parents had already created a vocabulary book with half a dozen photos of familiar toys of Daniel's with the German word attached.

Daniel's mum commented that the language group already used the written names of the children and Dartington nursery has lots of written words labelling activities. It was suggested to Daniel's parents that they start to label items around the house as well so that Daniel becomes familiar with words relating to an object.

The future:

Daniel's parents have chosen Dartington Primary School for Daniel's full-time placement as they realise how much support is already in place to support Daniel's learning and social needs. Staff in this setting and his parents will be teaching Daniel reading using a whole word approach to help spoken language develop.

CASE STUDY 2:

Milly, aged 4.
Carousel Day Care
Nursery, Middlezoy,
Somerset.



Overview:

Milly has attended Carousel Nursery for three years. Both the nursery and Milly's mother have received a great deal of help and advice from Ups and Downs SW. In particular, Milly regularly attends their monthly speech and language sessions provided for infants and young children with Down's syndrome. She also receives a great deal of language input and stimulation from her mother, who provides Milly with a wide range of experiences and opportunities for interaction with other children. Milly has also taken part in the Portage Early Education Programme.

Pre-school placements and support services:

When Milly started at Carousel Nursery an experienced key worker was nominated to oversee her needs. This key worker now works to support the entire nursery staff with regard to Milly's development and care needs in this open plan setting.

Carousel Nursery had never worked with a child with Down's syndrome before, so Milly's Portage home visitor, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist and Ups and Downs SW Specialist Advisory Teacher all met with the nursery manager, key worker and Milly's mother to discuss her arrival and inclusion in the nursery, and any useful strategies to encourage her development.

The nursery staff members were particularly concerned with health and safety issues and these were addressed during this meeting along with all of the other areas of support that Milly would need. A transition plan was drawn up to ensure that Milly had the best possible start, and there was a discussion about how each member of the nursery team could help support Milly in her social, physical, behavioural and communication development during the nursery's daily routines and interactions. The nursery found this meeting invaluable. In addition, the nursery manager and key worker attended a training day designed to help support Milly's inclusion and the entire nursery team attended a 'Somerset Total Communication' course.

Inclusive practice:

The staff at the nursery have had to make very few minor adaptations to their usual early years practise, but changes made have included providing Milly with a visual timetable and other visual prompts (for break and snack times, and for hand washing and toileting) and, most beneficial of all, a daily communication book for Milly's mother, outlining what Milly has done that day at nursery. It is filled with photos of Milly playing alongside some of the other children and her inclusion in everyday activities. This gives Milly's mother a valuable insight

As we are an early years setting, the majority of our children's time is spent in 'child-initiated' activities. These activities are carefully planned and made accessible to Milly, accommodating her current interests and developmental needs (documented and reviewed through Milly's learning journal).

Milly is supported through these activities (at least five opportunities each session with us), and opportunities for learning are supported throughout all of her free-choice play.

Should she not want to participate in the activities on offer (all children have less 'focused' days and move through different stages of interest and motivation) then we support her choices throughout the open-plan environment.

(Key worker)

into some of the things her daughter is doing at nursery and has gone a long way to consolidating a strong feeling of trust in the nursery staff.

Milly is very adept at signing and she is beginning to use more spoken language (including sentences) to replace signs. The nursery place great emphasis on teaching sight-reading to help her spoken communication, and resources are sent home regularly so that Milly's mother can work with her on it as well. 'Jolly Phonics' songs and games are used to support her speech sound development and she has access to the 'Letters and Sounds' activities throughout every session she attends, along with the rest of her group. Milly's key worker has regular discussions with Milly's mother about her speech and language progression and there is a cohesive two-way approach to making recommendations. The nursery has also developed their own visual communication resource which they have called "Chatter Mats". This incorporates using real, sensory items with visual representations to make links, and relies on interaction to develop communication. This is proving very successful for Milly.

Milly is toilet training with "fantastic" progression. She is now beginning to notice when she needs to use the potty. Milly wears glasses and 'Piedro'

boots and is happy to keep both on. She uses a lower chair with sides to support her hips and uses a 'Doidy' cup to drink from. She sometimes chooses a china cup and uses a straw to drink from that which also helps to develop muscles for speech, as does playing 'blowing' games using straws, bubbles and wind musical items.

Milly accesses all activities within the nursery at her own level. She prefers focused activities and is beginning to participate with sharing and turn-taking pre-school activities. Milly had tended to play independently of others but now she engages in simple group activities such as repetitive books and musical games. The staff make great use of visual props and puppets to help her participate in these group activities. She really enjoys messy activities including clay, paint and mark-making. She is likely to eat food-based messy play (e.g. spaghetti, jelly) so these are sometimes shorter sessions. Milly's number recognition is growing and she is happy to sit one-to-one to explore number and shape activities (often asking for "more"). Milly is happy to explore outdoor activities, often initiating her own play and direction of interest.

Successes:

Due to all of the educational and developmental support that Milly receives she now recognises the numbers 1-5, counts carefully and has some concept of quantity for low numbers. She recognises some shapes and most colours. She has a good knowledge of 'Jolly Phonics' songs and responds enthusiastically to them. Milly really enjoys sharing a book with an adult and her understanding of language is good, although she finds it difficult to grasp more abstract questions, particularly without direct choices being offered.

Milly is becoming aware of ways to self-regulate or check her behaviour (telling herself "no Milly"... "good tidying" etc). She is also very aware of her academic triumphs – showing pride and confidence and asking for "more" when she knows she has completed an activity well.

There have been many successes on all levels and Milly has really blossomed. She is becoming more aware of her friends, greeting and waving, and she is becoming more confident out of the setting too, having been invited to some of the children's birthday parties. Milly has also made some really strong attachments to members of the nursery team.

Having Milly join our setting has required some adaptations to the environment and practice and it has required closer working with other professionals. We have also had to take careful consideration of how to deploy resources and staff time, but this has been of great benefit to everybody involved: practitioners, Milly and her friends.

(Key worker)

Having Milly join the setting has made a real difference to us as a staff team, by developing a closer understanding of total communication and being able to see the direct benefits to a child who initially relied on it as a form of communication; also, in needing to take the time to view things from Milly's perspective – which may be different to that of some of the other children we have been used to caring for.

Milly's inclusion within her community of peers has resulted in a fond approach to play and caring for Milly – some children may view her as younger, although none have questioned any differences in physical needs and communication – but all have an awareness and voice 'what Milly needs for circle time'... 'what Milly needs at break time' etc.

Milly's successful inclusion at Carousel Nursery is as a result of the nursery staff being keen to include her from the outset. They have consciously forged positive relationships with her mother, who they regard as a source of expertise on her development, and with other professionals (occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, specialist advisory service) who they are not afraid to go to for advice, reassurance and guidance. Milly's successes are best seen through the learning journal that the nursery has put together for her. Milly is well set up to start school this September.

CASE STUDY 3:

Conlan, aged 4.
Stratford-sub-Castle
Primary School,
Stratford-sub-Castle,
Wiltshire.



Overview:

Conlan is coming to the end of his reception year at Stratford-sub-Castle School. He lives at home with his mum and dad, and has an older sister who is in Year 6 at the school. His younger sister is also due to begin school next year.

Conlan has number of physical needs due to health, sight and hearing issues and this requires extra support and numerous visits to hospital, which also means taking a lot of time out of school.

Inclusive practice:

Stratford-sub-Castle has a high proportion of children with special educational needs (SEN) and subscribe to a whole school approach which has driven Conlan's successful inclusion. There is a

warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school with a strong emphasis on celebrating each child's successes. This is evident both in the displays around the school and in the comments the staff make about the children. The school's tag-line is: "Smiles will be returned".

In her letter to prospective parents, Conlan's headteacher writes: 'Our learning community is a place where, by respecting our differences and caring for each other, we show the world how humanity can live in harmony together...We are a school where 'EVERY CHILD MATTERS' is not just a catch-phrase but a TRUTH...We firmly believe that happy children learn better!'

We wanted Conlan to be familiar and have a relationship with all the staff in the class, so we all make ourselves involved in his learning. Having different staff members working with Conlan is a planned part of his school day, with one staff member working with Conlan in the morning, another in the afternoon and the class teacher (CT) also working with him. This routine is featured on the CT's daily planning. If one of us is called away (e.g. to deal with first aid) then the others in the class freely take over and know what they should be doing. All targets and new work strategies are discussed in the team and all of us are aware of them, so we know where Conlan's learning is at all times. We all contribute to his learning, so we are all aware of where he is developmentally. This enables us to direct Conlan to certain activities and expose him to new situations to extend learning further. We all provide input for his new individual education plan (IEP) and we are then invited to discuss it at the IEP meeting held with Conlan's parents and SENCo. These meetings give us a chance to discuss any concerns his parents might have and any we might have too. (TA)

Conlan has two teaching assistants (TAs) assigned to him, one works with him in the mornings and the other in the afternoons. Both TAs work full-time in the class and they swap roles and responsibility for Conlan at lunchtime, the other taking over the role of general classroom assistant. The class teacher is a newly qualified teacher. There is a fluid exchange and sharing of roles and responsibilities between the staff and Conlan has three consistent points of reference for all the time he is in school.

When the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) found out that Conlan was going to join the school, she asked both TAs how they would feel about sharing responsibility for him and for a class.

Social skills and confidence are learned in social situations, and opportunities to mix with his typically developing peers are helping Conlan to develop friendships and learn age-appropriate behaviour. When Conlan started at the school his play was primarily solo and he wandered about flitting between activities unable to settle. In order to address this issue the two TAs would initiate play, which Conlan would then want to join in with. 'The other children always want to play the game that the adult is playing, and so we had perfect opportunities to demonstrate and model good playing. This has worked well and Conlan especially likes games such as 'Duck Duck Goose' and 'Ring a ring a roses'. (TA)

When Conlan wanted to dig, one of us would dig too, and so on. This helped Conlan to pick up social phrases: "Stop it!", "My turn now", "That's mine" – very simple ones at first and then, as his speech developed, more complex ones, for example, "Play with me, please", "Give that back, it's mine!" Soon Conlan moved from playing alongside other children to getting totally stuck in. Conlan initially made a couple of special friends and would choose to associate with them, but soon Conlan was happy to play with everyone and even children who were not in his class. He has made friends across the whole school. He plays very well now and loves being surrounded by the other children. He even starts some games and tells others what he wants to do. An adult is still there to support Conlan in helping to tell the other children what he means, or intervening when Conlan gets too excited, but Conlan is becoming more independent at play times and he loves it. (TA)



Conlan needs to wear glasses. They had been introduced to him at nursery but he really did not want to wear them. Conlan's TA used humour, persistence, rewards and peer support to get Conlan to accept them.

We initially said that Conlan only had to wear them for work, and occasionally Conlan would tolerate them, but only for a couple of minutes. It was proving a real struggle and it was taking a lot of time away from his learning. I had spoken to mum and she was having the same difficulties at home. It became even more of a struggle when Conlan began wearing hearing aids, and his glasses had to go over the top of these. Conlan didn't like that at all. (TA)

One day I decided to start wearing fake glasses also. When it was work time I would go to my drawer and get out my glasses and I made a big deal of the fact that I was putting glasses on and then giving myself a reward, e.g. a piece of fruit or a sticker. Conlan thought this was quite funny and so he let me put his glasses on and then he got the same reward. Whenever he took them off, I would simply put them back on and show him that I was still wearing mine. A couple of times I would invite other children over who also wore glasses and we would all look at theirs. I would comment to Conlan and say, "Oh look, Liam is wearing his glasses!" and give him a reward too. I explained to the other children that we wanted Conlan to wear his glasses and that we wanted them to help us encourage him to keep them on. So, when the other children started to notice Conlan wearing glasses, some would comment and say, "Wow Conlan! Cool glasses!" This really encouraged Conlan to keep them on. We both wore glasses for a few weeks. One day, Conlan put his glasses on willingly and got his reward, without me wearing mine first. Over time, Conlan forgot he was wearing glasses and was soon keeping them on all day and not even noticing. (TA)



Conlan is learning to read words very successfully through the teaching of whole word recognition. The school is linking this approach to the structured reading scheme of the 'Oxford Reading Tree'. Conlan, like many children with Down's syndrome, enjoys whole class phonics sessions. Learning phonic skills helps to develop speech skills as well as reading and writing. It is important to the staff that Conlan is included in regular class sessions e.g. 'Letters and Sounds'. During the first part of the lesson, when there is a general recap of sound and letter names, Conlan sits with the whole class with a TA near him. The CT uses this time to recap sounds as well and Conlan does the same sounds as the others – the only difference is that he has his own sound cards to hold. These hold Conlan's attention and help him to focus and see the sound cards better.

When all the children in the class are sent off into small groups for tailored letters and sounds work, his TA uses this time to work through Conlan's reading programme. They use the see and learn method and keep this in the classroom as he responds to positive role models and enjoys seeing everyone else work. They had previously tried working outside the class but Conlan gets very easily distracted and his attention was not as great as when inside the classroom. He copies others' behaviour and so seeing other children working encourages him to keep going.

Conlan loves stories but sometimes he loses focus and attention when a story is being read to the whole class. To help him, we make sure that he sits near the front of the class so he can hear





and see properly. A TA sits with him and will have a copy of the book as well. They encourage Conlan to hold it himself and turn the pages. It may be a simplified version of the story, or one with flaps, or the version he is used to at home. If the story is then followed up by a discussion or questions, the TA directs Conlan to the correct page in the book and they talk about it or Conlan points to the part of the story to make his point.

If Conlan is going to be reading a particular book the following week his parents are notified beforehand and Conlan's mum always tries to get a copy of the book and read it to him at home. The staff have found this a great support and it really helps to reinforce the story to him. They also include the points we had brought out that day in his communication book, i.e. beginning middle and ends, characters, feelings and so on, and ask his parents to talk about these when they read the story with Conlan too.

The school are working on developing his fine motor skills and have taken advice on ways to help develop these. They also help him to access opportunities for literacy that don't rely heavily on writing. For example, they will make sentences from flashcard words instead of writing sentences, or will select labels instead of writing them and they use 'Clicker 5' as a resource as well.



Like most children with Down's syndrome Conlan has delayed speech but helped by a concerted input from the school his speech is improving dramatically. Conlan's speech has improved since starting school and he can talk in sentences and ask simple questions, although this is not always clear to unfamiliar people who don't know him.

Conlan is encouraged to do as much talking as possible and now he talks and talks and it is difficult to make him stop sometimes! Conlan loves being known to people and when he first started with us he would jump in front of them or fall over to gain their attention. Now he talks to them. To most adults he walks past he has taken to saying, "Hello, what are you doing?" He talks about things he has done at home, like going swimming or family holidays. Sometimes his comments are very random like "down, down, splash!" (a phrase he says when swimming), or "Fireman Sam, help me!" (TA)

Conlan is picking up new words and phrases very quickly now and many are clear and understandable to others. His reading words are especially clear. His speech can sometimes be 'babbly' when he is excited, singing or engrossed in play. Conlan still uses Makaton as a way of communication and this helps when the word he is saying is not yet clear.

Conlan's class has a wide range of abilities and individual differences and the staff team has considered carefully which groups of children to place Conlan with. They always place Conlan in mixed ability groups with confident children who are able to get on with their work sensibly and with limited help from a staff member, leaving the TAs free to give Conlan support. These children provide a model in working behaviour for Conlan, keeping him on task, reminding him what to do and sometimes correcting his behaviour, for example: "Conlan, sit still", "Pick up your pen", and so on. When the class go on trips, or into assembly, the staff try to make sure that Conlan

is surrounded by children who can model positive behaviour, as he copies behaviour and this helps him to stay on track.

Many young children with Down's syndrome are not yet able to remember or tell their parents about what they have done that day at school. The child's 'Home-School Communication' book needs to be just what the name suggests: a means to help the child to communicate to his/her family what he or she has done at school. Parents do not need a blow by blow account but they do appreciate having something to talk over with their child about his or her day at school. The communication book can also enable the child to share his or home life experiences with friends.

Conlan's book is an important tool to aid his development and his TAs take a picture of something that Conlan has done during the school day and write a simple sentence underneath. The TA writes the sentence in the past tense so that he has exposure to the past tense. This is then shown to Conlan before the end of the day so that he is ready to share it with his parents at home. This is done every day at school, and at the weekend his parents do the same with him at home. Conlan's communication book is used during news and circle times and Conlan holds the book and can point to the sentence. He loves telling everyone his news. Even if his speech isn't clear on that day the other children can still understand what he is saying by looking at the picture and reading the simple sentence. They can then ask Conlan questions about his news. He loves that!

Conlan has a shorter concentration span than his peers and also has verbal short term memory issues, which means that he cannot hold words long enough in his memory to process them and often forgets what has just been said if sentences are too long. Conlan is helped to understand the routine and structure of his day through the use of his visual timetable (Figure 1). Visual cues and behaviour prompts also help Conlan to keep on track and remain focused during whole class carpet times.



Fig 1

Conlan follows rules and routines well. When Conlan moved from part-time to full-time and stayed for lunch, the staff found they had an issue. Conlan was so excited about having lunch

at school and bringing a sandwich box that at every moment he got he would go and get his lunch box out. Snack times were difficult as he wanted his sandwiches instead of his snack. To solve this, the staff reintroduced his visual timetable with personalised cards for snack, lunch, horse riding, carpet, work and so on. When Conlan looked at the timetable he could see that snack came first, but it also gave him the reassurance that lunch was coming, and when the cards were taken off, it was like a countdown to lunch. Conlan liked this and it worked well. Soon, he could tell his TA the sequence of the morning, including snack and lunch, in the correct order. The staff still kept the timetable going, but were pleased that Conlan now understood well enough to tell others the order of the day: "Snack, work, lunch? Yeah!"

Following a visit from the Ups and Downs SW Specialist Advisory Teacher, staff were advised to provide Conlan with a 'good sitting' card to hold when he was sitting on the carpet, to encourage good sitting. Other children in the class have been given a carpet square to sit on too. Conlan has his own carpet square complete with laminated behaviour expectations that he can look at to remind himself what to do. This works especially well in carpet and assembly times. Instead of the TA telling Conlan to sit up or be quiet, she can just point to the appropriate behaviour expectation and Conlan understands that his behaviour is inappropriate and what he should do instead.

This happens with minimal noise and with fewer disturbances to the class, and without causing undue attention to him. It also includes a photo of Conlan sitting well. Staff use this to show Conlan that he can do it and that this is what they want and that this is what being a good sitter looks like.



In the classroom, staff work to ensure that all the displays are high contrast. They put neutral and pastel colours up for backing paper in an attempt to make the work going up stand out so Conlan can see it better. Also, on displays and around the indoor and outdoor classroom, they label as much as they can (Figure 2). The staff try to create a language rich environment and put up as much vocabulary as possible.

Fig 2



Conor responds really well to praise. It encourages him to keep going and carry on with his good behaviour. He also responds well to praise given to others. When they are being praised for something he normally joins in so he can receive the praise also. Conlan likes getting attention and praise from the other children. When doing a piece of work, or when having finished, he will go up to certain children in the class, say their name, and show them his work and wait for their praise!

Conlan follows regular class routines well and he is generally quite calm and amiable. He gets on with the other members of the class well. He joins in with class activities and is very willing to come and work, most of the time! Conlan sometimes gets over excited when in front of others. He shows off by beginning to jump about or fall over on purpose to get a reaction. Conlan also gets over excited when he plays and will sometimes end up playing too roughly with toys. He has begun to shout (quite loudly) when he doesn't want to do things. He shouts "No!", and sometimes it takes a lot for him to stop. (TA)

Conlan is very polite and well mannered. He always says “hello”, “please”, “thank you” and “sorry”. Conlan receives a lot of visits from professionals and others observing. He responds well to these people, demonstrating appropriate behaviour and general politeness. He always says hello and tries to make them join in with whatever games or piece of work he is doing. Conlan listens and follows instructions well and he likes to make you laugh.

Sometimes Conlan is asked a question and doesn't respond, either because he hasn't understood the question or because he doesn't know the answer. The staff help him by providing two choices and presenting them in their left and right hands. Conlan then chooses the answer by indicating the hand. This has also proved to be a very good strategy in combating negative behaviour, because the staff get the result they want, but they are still giving him an element of control over the choices he makes.

For example, one day Conlan didn't want to have his hearing aids put in. So he was presented with two choices: “Who do you want to put them in for you? Miss G (present left hand)? Or Miss H (present right hand)?” Conlan tapped the left hand and his TA was able to put his hearing aids in with no trouble at all! Everyone got the result they wanted and Conlan had an element of control. This strategy works all the time and is also useful for when Conlan is having a quiet day and doesn't want to say very much.

When Conlan's attention is not at its best staff find it is easiest to do work little and often. He is still working in a visual and free play based way with structured elements. Conlan loves his reading time, because lots of games are played and he finds this tremendous fun. He will quite often ask to do more. Staff focus on reading the cards and then play about with them in a shop game, hiding them etc. They play many diverse games and have found this is the key to work: make it as fun as possible, and then he will want to do it, and do it properly, in order to get to the funny part. Once he finds it funny, he will love coming to work and you can keep him there for ages. (TA)



One of the key things staff have found that works is when one of them joins in too and really gets stuck in with the play. When they play with Conlan, he really thinks this is funny. They have great fun working and have found Conlan has come on in his work extremely well. (TA)

Conlan has made good progress in his first year at school and I personally feel that his greatest achievement is just how well he fits into the class. Conlan is a real asset to the class. In many ways he helps the other children as much as they help him. He has so much to offer the other children, and his willingness to be friends with them all is very valuable to them. The children love having him around and are always willing to help Conlan. They are excellent in their celebrations of his successes and they recognise his achievements without being prompted. Frequently, a child on the same table will look up and say, “Wow Conlan! What great work!” Sometimes I think they praise him more than we do. (TA)

The children have a great relationship with him and they are always happy for him to be in their groups and work alongside him. Most would willingly volunteer to be with Conlan. They understand that he has additional needs and are willing to support these, such as signing to him or making sure he has his hearing aids in etc.

They accept that his work is sometimes different to theirs but I have never heard anyone belittle his learning. A lot of the children ask questions to try to understand why Conlan has certain things, or does things a certain way, and this helps them to be able to work with Conlan on their own. Although they can sometimes get protective of Conlan, they don't treat him as a baby or patronise him. They know he can do things himself, and the great thing is they tell him to do so! They are not fazed by him and are not afraid to tell him to stop doing something or get cross with him.

At first, some children told a staff member what Conlan was doing wrong, but we have encouraged the children to tell him themselves. They treat Conlan as the happy, bubbly, mischievous 4 year old by that he is.

Also what is great is that Conlan can tell them off too. He tells them off for talking on the carpet, he goes around telling them it's tidy up time, and when others try to take something of his he goes up to them and is not afraid to tell them to give it back.

(TA)

Conlan's speech has developed quickly since starting school. When Conlan first arrived he would answer questions as a 'yes' or a 'no', or not respond at all. Through lots of play, opportunities for speech and modelled communication by staff and other capable children, Conlan's speech has developed quickly.

Once we knew what Conlan was capable of, we were always pushing him on to develop further. We were never complacent. If Conlan was capable of asking for something, he would have to ask for it. Conlan preferred to say a few words and hope that would do, but because we have held firm and not given in, Conlan has learned that the easiest and quickest way to get what he wants is to ask for it.

(TA)

At the end of Conlan's first year, he is talking in sentences and using connectives such as 'and' and 'then'. He has started putting his hand up in class discussions and shouting "I know! I know!" Conlan is quick to pick up new expressions and words and uses these freely. His latest ones are "Wait there Griffiths!", "It's not funny!" and "Go away!" " Now there is no stopping Conlan. He chats away and it is mostly clear and discernible to familiar adults.

Conlan's reading is also a great achievement. Conlan responds well to the match, select and name approach and currently he can read 40 words. We try to make sure that the words he will be learning in his reading are words that he uses often and would be used in his literacy and topic lessons. We did this so that when Conlan made sentences to match his 'news', he could read the words. The other day his news was 'I went on a boat'. All but one of those words Conlan knew well, so he was able to select the words he wanted to make his sentence. He needed help to form the sentence but he selected and then re-read the sentence himself.

(TA)

We wanted Conlan to have real relationships with all the staff in the school and we feel this has been achieved. Through sharing the day and workload between all of us in the class, Conlan has been exposed to many different staff, and he is happy and comfortable in their care. We wanted to get to the point where he could approach all the staff in the room and communicate with them, and not be dependent on one adult. This has helped Conlan not to become too attached just to me.

We feel the first year of Conlan's schooling has been a thorough success. It has had challenges along the way but by constant communication with all involved and a willingness to accept advice, we have achieved a lot and are happy and comfortable in the care we give to Conlan.'

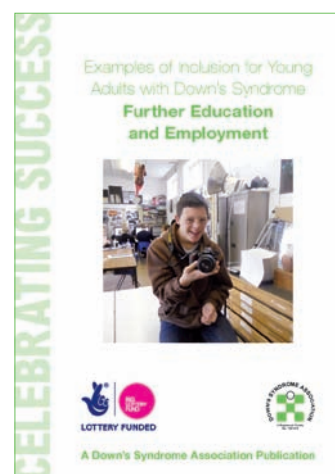
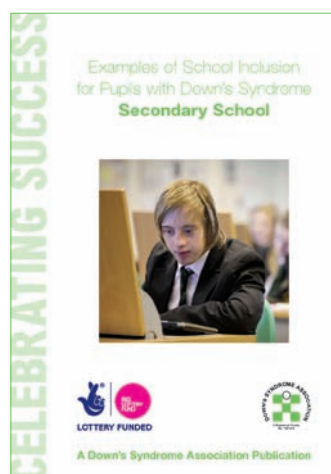
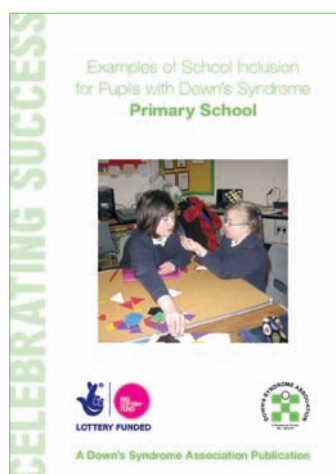
(TA)

The future:

Conlan's current morning TA will follow Conlan as he moves up to Year 1, and the other TA will remain behind in Reception. The same model of support will be provided for Conlan in Year 1 as in Year R, with the new Year 1 TA being trained up and supported by the experienced TA who will remain in Year 1 when Conlan moves on to Year 2. This pattern will repeat as Conlan progresses through the school. In this way, all the staff in the school will have benefitted from the experience of teaching a child with Down's syndrome, and Conlan will not be reliant on the support of one key adult. 'Conlan is not a problem, he is an opportunity.'

(Headteacher)

Also available in this series:





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