

Setting: Benarty Nursery, Fife

Type: Speech Language Communication Needs Support
– Equipment supporting play and language development

Benarty Nursery is a Fife Council nursery class within Benarty Primary School. Up to 30 children attend, 9am-3pm during term time, with a mixture of three-year-olds in their ante-pre-school year and four-year-olds in their pre-school year.

Children have access to a large, enclosed garden and the setting also benefits from the support of the school's ASN department as well as access to its gym hall and purpose-built sensory room.

The school and nursery vision is ASPIRE, which stands for Ambition, Success, Perseverance, Inclusion, Respect and Empower. Putting this into practice means focusing on emotional literacy, developing co-regulation strategies and supporting children and families, especially during the difficulties and challenges faced by Covid-19.

Staff are supported in continuous professional development to ensure all children are included, for example this year in the acquisition of British Sign Language to support communication in the nursery.



The nursery's sensory trolley

The challenge

Benarty nursery is in an area of multiple deprivation, and many of the families who use the service face adversity on a daily basis. Even before the impact of Covid-19 and the realities of lockdown, children and families benefited from ongoing support with managing anxiety and developing communication and emotional literacy skills.

The challenge for Benarty was how they could introduce resources which would help children to communicate more effectively and share thoughts and feelings that would empower them to become more independent in their own learning, and provide them with opportunities to interact with the nursery environment in a way that was right for them. Staff felt that the experience of having access to resources which could provide sensory feedback, allowing children to develop self-regulation skills and gain confidence in taking part, would be transformative.



Playing with 'Giraffes Can't Dance' book

Actions and approach

Identifying that the need was for equipment to support inclusive play and language development, the team used the awards (they were successful in applications for funds in four of the six ELC Inclusion Fund rounds) to buy a range of resources.

Story sacks encouraged children with speech and language difficulties to use the puppets to re-tell the story in their own way, while mirrors and books supported the children – particularly those experiencing anxiety about returning to nursery after lockdown – to explore emotions. Talking Tins to record children's

voices, Walkie Talkies and Talking Tubes have all encouraged speech and language development through technology.

The introduction of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Symbols) has enabled an autistic child to use them to tell staff that they wanted to spend time in the sensory room every day, where some of the larger sensory resources from the inclusion fund are kept. Groups of children would ask to go with the child, which has helped to develop friendships and support transitions from nursery into school.

The ability to use some of technology resources outside has also encouraged children who would not usually choose to play outside to do so.



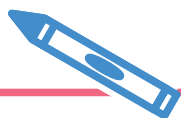
The sensory room



Impact and evaluation

Through observation, discussion with children and parents/carers and discussion with internal and external colleagues, the team at Benarty Nursery has been able to conduct detailed evaluation of the impact of the resources. The best evidence is seen in the children's responses and their asking to use the resources, for example in the sensory room.

Grace Milligan, a peripatetic nursery teacher, works in the team at Benarty and in three other nursery settings. She says: "I've been able to share our experience of some of these resources across the settings where I work, so the benefits have been enriched and expanded."



Talking about 'Giraffes Can't Dance' book

Lessons learned

Grace says that, from experience, it always pays to ask around before you buy new equipment.

"Always seek guidance from other practitioners to find out whether resources you are considering asking for are going to be good quality, especially if they are electrical. Also, if you are purchasing tablets or similar, check with your council to ensure that there are no stops on the model you are requesting, as this has happened in one of my nurseries."

Next steps

What's been missing from the evaluation has been parents and carers seeing in action the impact the new resources are having in the setting. "When parents/carers are able to come into nursery again," says Grace, "we intend to plan activities such as Bookbug using our story sacks to demonstrate how these can be used to enhance children's interest in listening to stories. We will run PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnership) groups using our sensory resources and emotional literacy resources to demonstrate to parents/carers how these resources can be used to help children with their emotional regulation, hopefully providing tips to support learning at home."

