
Teaching Miles in his first year in mainstream school

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Miles is 6 years old. He has Down's syndrome and particularly severe dyspraxic problems which make learning to speak very difficult for him. With co-ordinated treatment of dyspraxia at home and school his speech is improving, but remains his greatest difficulty. His comprehension of speech has always been excellent for a child with Down's syndrome, and his teacher reports comprehension comparable with his peers in class. He learned Makaton from a young age and this is now supplemented by Bristol Sign Language, which his mother has learned at evening classes and teaches his Special Needs Assistant as necessary. Miles is good at making himself understood, using a combination of speech, sign and gesture, even to teachers and children without knowledge of sign language. Development of his expressive skills is a priority. Planning for the future includes development of his literacy and computer skills to support this expression, although recent improvements in his production of simple words are promising. Miles joined Arundel Court school in the nursery class at the age of 3.

The strategies employed in the teaching of Miles have been used to help us to achieve the overall aim of making him independent and to realise his own potential.

Miles is a member of a small class - originally 18, now 25 children - which has been a definite advantage.

He is included in all activities and class information lessons and is expected to follow the same instructions - reinforced by his SNA. He has individual attention from his SNA for most of the working day - 9am to 12pm and 1pm to 3pm. This includes playtime but not lunchtime where he is supervised by the dinner staff. It is beneficial however, if at some time during the day, Miles works independently whilst his SNA either has her break or works with other children for a short while.

It is essential to have a planned timetable - ideally if the teacher, SNA and parent all contribute to the planning. The

timetable is organised to cover different subjects and activities throughout the day. At the same time these must be flexible as Miles cannot always cope with a full day of structured activities. At times like this we allow him to choose what he would like to do and then go back to the planned activities later in the day. Theme/topic work is planned to cover several weeks - this provides familiarity and continued interest - often a topic will fire the imagination of the other children in the class and promotes a lot of discussion. Other areas of the curriculum are planned to achieve steady progress as a result of repetition and reinforcement at each stage.

We have found that the concept keyboard has been very successful with his reading and writing.

Generally we have found that Miles works better in a quiet area with which he is familiar. He responds well to a calm, disciplined situation not only when encouraging him to work but also when reprimanding him. At times he can be stubborn and refuses to complete work - we have found that work is usually completed if he is given the choice for the next activity! If however, he still refuses to co-operate then, as with other children, he has to work through part of a playtime or choosing activity - which usually focuses his concentration on completing the task very quickly!

At this stage we feel that Miles really benefits from being in a mainstream school - socially and academically. The children in his class have readily accepted him and do show a responsibility towards him. We have to monitor his whereabouts at all times and this is one of the responsibilities they have taken on board and share together with teaching staff. The role of SNA should be a person who can be firm and supportive and must have a good relationship with his/her pupil, and if possible, with the parents.

We have found that home/school liaison is a very important factor when providing a concerted approach to learning both academically and socially.

Miles at school



Above - Class 1B, Arundel Court First School, with Mrs Burbridge, class teacher, on right

Below - Classroom work activities, Class 1B

Miles completing written work with his group



Miles taking his turn in the cookery lesson