

My turn!

Children with SEND should not be excluded from activities that challenge them. **Annette Rawstrone** looks at the options

Having access to challenge and being able to achieve independence in the nursery environment is essential for all children, and this must include those with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). By taking risks, exploring a range of interesting resources and being exposed to adventure, children of all abilities are able to learn about their own capabilities and push themselves to develop further.

PLAYING TO STRENGTHS

At Each Peach Childcare in Hove, East Sussex, individual risk assessments are carried out for all children with SEND, with the aim of ensuring children are provided with an environment that meets their needs.

SENCO Joelle Bergin says, 'The risk assessment promotes inclusion and encourages the team to think about any adjustments to the environment. All adjustments must promote equality of opportunity and enable all children to access risk and foster freedom of choice.'

Understanding each child's needs is key, according to Alex Grady,

education development officer at nasen. 'This means recognising what they are able to do independently and where they need support,' she says. 'You need to know how and what they can access. For a child in a wheelchair, for example, physical equipment will need to be put in place such as ramps, and it must be ensured that spaces between equipment and furniture are wide enough for the wheelchair to go through.'

She adds that for children on the autistic spectrum, it is often a completely different proposition. 'They may have no understanding of safety and boundaries so equipment has to be set up carefully. It's important to understand what might be too much of a risk for children and get to know their starting points so that then you can play on their strengths and encourage them. Have realistic expectations and build them up gradually to help them develop independence.'

OPEN-ENDED

Providing all-important freedom of choice comes down to choosing open-ended resources that can be used by everyone in the setting.

At Hopscotch Childcare in Liverpool, practitioners felt the

MORE INFORMATION

- **Community Playthings**, www.communityplaythings.co.uk
- **The Consortium**, www.educationsupplies.co.uk
- **Cosy Direct**, www.cosydirect.com
- **Hope Education**, www.hope-education.co.uk
- **Ikea**, www.ikea.com
- **Mountain Warehouse**, www.mountainwarehouse.com
- **Muddy Faces**, www.muddyfaces.co.uk
- **Muddy Puddles**, www.muddypuddles.com
- **Nasen**, www.nasen.org.uk
- **TTS**, www.tts-group.co.uk



climbing frame was too prescriptive, so they replaced it with outdoor wooden blocks (such as Outlast Blocks and Planks by Community Playthings, sets from £670; or Outdoor Hollow Blocks by Consortium, from £279.99) and crates (such as 12 Milk Crates by Cosy Direct, £87.60). Children now make their own structures to climb and slide on.

Last year a girl who had cerebral palsy attended Each Peach and, while her movement was restricted, she could walk and was finding it difficult to seek challenge outside. Staff introduced large crates to build a platform for her to practise stepping on.

'The crates provided a wider elevated area for her to enjoy. As she grew in confidence, we took away crates until she was able to walk safely along a path of single crates,' says Ms Bergin.

Children at Dandelion outdoor nursery in Marham, Norfolk use real tools

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ToddleBox Balance from Community Playthings





Large Octagonal Sandpit from Hope Education

differentiated according to need (such as Tool Starter Kit by Cosy, £75.99). 'Children who present with ASD, for example, might choose to wear ear defenders when using the drill or they may choose to watch from a safe distance for weeks and weeks before they decide to step forward and ask to use the drill,' explains managing director Emma Harwood.

Staff are trained to differentiate the level of support they offer so, for example, children presenting with characteristics associated with ADHD or dyspraxia may require an adult to support their tool use in a very hands-on way, while another child may, once rules have

been secured, use the tool safely and independently. The ethos at Dimples Day Nursery in Dartford, Kent is that all children free-flow and have the independence to choose what they would like to participate in.

'We rearranged the nursery last year so that all the children's rooms have direct access to the garden, and we have ramps at the doors so that any children using a

walker can go outside,' says owner Sandra Roles.

'One boy who attended our nursery was two and a half before he was able to walk and used to roll everywhere. We reconfigured the room so that he could roll about, and simply ensured that he had a clean wetsuit on when he was outdoors [such as Puddlepac All-in-One by Muddy Puddles, £28, or Puddle Kids Waterproof Rain Suit at Mountain Warehouse, £14.99]. He could roll from one area to another and then pull himself up to stand and play.'

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

At Dandelion there are a relatively high number of children presenting with characteristics associated with autism and Asperger's. 'A number of our children transitioned to primary school and found, because of their additional needs, that the classroom was too noisy or bright an environment. These children returned to Dandelion to complete their Reception year,' says Ms

Harwood. 'Being outside immediately makes our site calmer than indoor settings.'

All staff carry emotion cards, purchased from Amazon, which help them to address the individual needs of children. 'They are especially useful for enabling children presenting with challenging behaviour to learn to "use their words" and therefore prevents them from being excluded,' Ms Harwood says.

Hopscotch Childcare owner Sue Adamson says she is also experiencing an increase in children with ASD and has created comfy areas that these children can independently access for quiet time.

She recommends the 'egg' chair (Lömsk Swivel armchair, Ikea, £50) – and donated resources such as blankets and cushions.

'Children with ASD can become attached to certain resources so they each have a bag where they can keep their special items,' she says.

PUSHING BOUNDARIES

Dimples Day Nursery makes resources available on the floor and tables, such as having a water tray and sandpit – big enough for children to climb into – on the floor (such as Large Octagonal Sandpit, Hope Education, £159.99) as well as on a stand. It finds low chairs with a 'pommel' in the middle stop children with poor body control from slipping out (Mealtime chairs, Community Playthings, from £100) and positions the mud kitchen and other resources at a height that children can comfortably stand at with their walkers. Rather than providing traditional easels, it has found Perspex easels sat on the tables enable access for children suspended in walking frames (A3 Desktop Easel, TTS, £99.95).

'We get a little funding from the local authority for the children with SEND but it's never enough,' says Ms Roles. 'So we borrow resources from other rooms.' An example of this is the ToddleBox from Community Playthings (sets from £125), 'which was bought for the baby room but is also used by older children with mobility problems'.

She adds, 'It's important that the staff know what the children can do and then encourage them to do more. Risk-taking is important for all children because if they don't push their boundaries then they're not going to move on. It's essential.'

Mealtime Stacking Chairs from Community Playthings

