



Image: Emma Ogier

## SUPPORTING BY LISTENING

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2024 marks the 10th anniversary of the Children and Families Act. This was quite a pivotal moment in the education of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), heralding the SEND Code of Practice and its message of inclusion, aspiration and collaborative working. Although some children require more specialist provision, for many children and young people with SEND their needs can be met through good quality teaching, support and an ongoing dialogue between teachers, parents and most importantly the child.

The SEND Code of Practice highlights four areas of need: Cognition and Learning (such as dyslexia and dyscalculia), Communication and Interaction (for example autism and speech and language needs), Social, Emotional and Mental Health (for example attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and Sensory and/or Physical needs. However, many of these needs are co-occurring so more recently there has been an increase in the use of the wider term of neurodiversity. This increased understanding has helped us to recognise that as well as some learning challenges there are many positive skills and strengths associated with SEND. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that you are more likely to own your own business if you have ADHD or that some employers actively seek people with dyslexia or autism due to their ability to problem solve, spot patterns and make connections. LinkedIn now lists 'dyslexic thinking' as a vital skill. Did you know that James Dyson, Steven Spielberg and Victoria Beckham are dyslexic? Or that Ryan Gosling and Simone Biles have ADHD? That the creator of Pokémon has autism or that Daniel Radcliffe has dyspraxia?

So how do we ensure that children with SEND are able to navigate the education system to realise their full potential? At the heart of their educational experience, there needs to be an ongoing dialogue that is child-centred. A one-page Pupil Profile is a useful tool in this process. This document is created with the child and includes information on their strengths and interests, the things they find tricky in school and the best ways that teachers can support them in the classroom. The Pupil Profile is updated regularly and ensures that the child's voice is heard and that they feel included in the learning process.

One of the greatest pleasures of my job is seeing children grow in confidence and independence. It is a cliché to describe that we are all on a journey but for parents of children with SEND it can be a daunting process at the start. As well as navigating the myriad of forms, referrals and information there is the anxiety and realisation that their child may face extra challenges. But the children themselves begin to understand what works best for them and by listening and making reasonable adjustments, learning becomes more accessible and engagement, confidence and success follows. So just by including movement breaks in the classroom, presenting information in a different format from writing, using visual prompts to support learning or enabling children to use fidget tools to support concentration, small adjustments can expand the learning experience. As one pupil explained to me:

'At first, it was hard. You think that having dyslexia means that you will never catch up. But it gets easier. Your friends help you and you find out what works.'

And that for me is the best part of working with children with SEND. You are a part of the start of the journey and then left to wonder where their special talents and skills will take them... our future entrepreneurs, creative thinkers and problem solvers. ●

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