

SECTION 2 Assisting Inclusion: from early years settings

2.1 Paul's story (aged 4)

When Paul started his Primary 1 year, it was immediately obvious to the school that he had extreme sensory issues, receptive language problems and general communication difficulties. He was a very well behaved child but was almost too quiet and could have been described as being withdrawn in class. Changes in routine caused him considerable distress. He was clearly overwhelmed by the very busy class environment.

His playgroup transition report had very clearly outlined his strengths but the accompanying letter was full of observations which were indicative of a child with ASD. The playgroup leader did not know the source of the difficulties but was concerned, and wrote the letter to enable her to pass on her concerns.

Paul's sensory issues are exemplified by the following:

- He could not tolerate the feeling of rain on his skin.
- He could not walk on the grass, even when wearing shoes.
- Eating was slow and laborious as he had many aversions to textures.
- He always sat on his hunkers at 'carpet time' because he couldn't bear to make direct contact with the carpet.
- Holding a pencil was uncomfortable for him and any marks he made on paper were barely legible.
- He could not bear to play with sand or water and did not take part in any of the messier, creative activities.

Following instructions, starting and completing tasks were everyday problems for Paul and his level of frustration was a challenge. Writing and recording work were very tiring for him.

The playground was, at times, difficult for Paul. As the games played by the pupils became more complex he struggled to stay involved and at times perceived this to be the fault of the other pupils. He needed support, for example, in acquiring the skills of asking for help.

What the teacher / school did to help Paul

The school was at the very beginning of a steep learning curve in relation to working with ASD pupils. Whole-staff training led by the ASD outreach teacher helped enormously.

The teacher used the 'Alphasmart' keyboard and the computer to help Paul to take an interest, to concentrate for longer periods of time and to record longer pieces of work. The school set time aside to enable the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to help Paul develop his social and interaction skills. The appointment of a classroom assistant was also of great help because it took much pressure off the class teacher. These initiatives gave Paul the individual support he needed to understand the activities set for him and the skills to seek help and work with others.

Key learning points from Paul's story

- Observe and assess the pupil in class to help plan intervention
- Develop your knowledge of autism as a good basis of understanding and working with pupils with ASD; access to training is the key
- Using the skills of others, e.g. the SENCO
- When necessary, look for additional resources e.g. classroom assistant
- Share the findings across the staff

