

- 'move forward and learn with you as a parent about the specific needs of your child'

Best of both worlds



A parent using a PVI provider in Kent describes to us, from a parent's viewpoint, how nurseries taking the right approach and embracing a child with special educational needs into their setting can help social inclusion.

"Our son was born in 2004 with Down Syndrome, we had felt that our world had fallen apart and the future was bleak. I couldn't have been more

wrong! I went on a crusade to find out as much about Down Syndrome in the week of his birth, instead of accepting the news, keeping faith, seeing him first instead of his disability. Four years on, having gone through the maze of hurdles I know all parents of children with a disability go through in the early stages, I see how fantastic he is and how I have the time to really appreciate his wonderful personality.

I looked at a number of mainstream nursery settings and asked them all if they had a child with Down Syndrome before. I don't think that was relevant, what was important was the setting welcoming him like any other prospective child and seeing his SEN as secondary. That they are willing to move forward and learn with you as a parent about the specific needs of your child. My older son, had already spent 4 ½ years at Pennies Day Nursery in Bearsted, we knew the setting well and after deliberations my gut feeling told us this would be the best place.

When he was 6 months old I arranged to see the nursery SENCO Amanda Oliver and the Early Years SENCO who visited the setting. I was still apprehensive about how they would support my child – just

- 'He has been a real inspiration to them all'

like any other parent, wanting the best for him. I said that long term I was hoping to get him assessed for a Statement of Educational needs. I knew that this was hard but was clear this was going to be my son's way of getting the support he deserved to achieve his full potential on an equal basis to any other child. Genetically I cannot take away the Down Syndrome and in the real world he was different to other children, like it or not.

The setting, particularly Amanda, from day one embraced the challenges that faced them, to this I am truly grateful because 4 years on, we have achieved the best opportunities for him to fully integrate into the setting. The advice I would like to share is:

- Listen to parents – they usually know what they are talking about when it comes to their child's needs
- Embrace the challenges of children with SEN
- Seek the help and support that can be given to settings, through MAEYM (Multi-Agency Early Years Meeting) funding my son received

support from a one to one worker

- Learn the specific profile of the child
- Get in the professionals to give advice, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech & Language Therapists. The setting took on the SPARKLE project (Special Pre-school Action Resourced Kentish Learning Experience) which helped development of all the children
- Attend training courses such as learning sign language, developing speech and language skills, numeracy skills, early reading development
- Don't be afraid of the paperwork involved requesting a statutory assessment for a child. In our case, we were fortunate enough to get a statement but with a lot of hard work from us and all professionals involved in the process
- Learn about the condition of the child, make suggestions and seek advice. Celebrate the disability; fundraising was done during Down's

Syndrome National Awareness Week

- Include other children; they gain from the experience of having a child with a disability in their setting, other children learnt sign language
- Use local support groups, in our case www.kentds.org

My son also attends a specialist nursery to further develop and meet his complex learning needs. We have decided that his long term needs are best met in a special needs primary school; this is a very personal decision and no reflection upon the mainstream nursery. I would like to say a special thanks to Amanda Oliver at Pennies, Adele Loft his one to one support worker, Trish Turrell his specialist pre-school teacher, all staff that have supported him and in particular all his friends at the nursery. He has been a real inspiration to them all, this is an example that settings can show that every child really does matter."