
Moving Daniel to mainstream at 9 years old

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Daniel is 10½ years old, and has been in mainstream school for nearly two terms, since September 1992. The school is a small C. E. Primary school with 115 children on roll arranged in 4 classes, so each class spans two year groups. Daniel is in year 5, with other children of his own age, and one year older. Previously he was at a special school for mild learning difficulties from the age of 2½ years. The only integration he had experienced at his previous school was a weekly visit to a very large junior school to participate in a games session, from the age of about 8 1/2. He was used to a very small class of about 8-9 children with a teacher and a full time ancillary.

There was very little time to prepare for Daniel's entry into mainstream school as I was not appointed until two days before he was due to start. However, I was able to contact his previous teacher who visited me and was very helpful in outlining Daniel's abilities and achievements to date. She gave me a clear picture of the range of activities he had been used to undertaking, showed me the reading books he had been using, and as I was also able to visit his classroom during a school day, I had the chance to see first hand the environment he had been used to.

I knew Daniel's parents a little socially, so there was already a link there on which we could build. I spent time at their house talking to Daniel and his parents, and this was very useful in getting my relationship with Daniel off to a good start. He accepted me immediately and was eager to show me his computer and a host of other toys, and to talk. He was very eager to start at his new school, and as his first day happened to fall on his 10th birthday, he was understandably very excited!

Daniel's parents have worked extremely hard with him over the years as I knew from previous contact with them, and they had a long drawn out battle with the L.E.A. to try and get Daniel into mainstream school, as he had never been assessed as being suitable. However, when the decision was finally made to allow him a trial period in mainstream school, they agreed to a generous provision in terms of teaching time and ancillary help. I am in school for Daniel every morning and he has a full time ancillary. I have found from talking to other teachers in similar posts to mine that this is exceptional, but I cannot stress strongly enough that I feel this has been crucial to the success of Daniel's inclusion in mainstream school.

It must also be said that over and above the teaching and ancillary hours he has, several people including myself work many extra hours to ensure that Daniel's needs are met to

the best of our ability. For example, I feel it is important to be present at his speech therapy appointments which mean giving up an afternoon to go with Daniel and his mother to the local Health Centre. I find these sessions very helpful in planning the work I will do with him between appointments, which come round about every 3 months. The speech therapist assesses his progress since his last visit, talks to us and gives us guidelines for further work.

Daniel has also benefited greatly from a weekly P.E. specialist who has been working with him on co ordination and quick response skills. This time is also given free and is extremely valuable to Daniel.

Neither myself nor Daniel's ancillary had any previous experience or training for working with special needs children. His ancillary had been working as a lunch time supervisor at the school and doing some voluntary work with the reception class. I have close links with the school as both my daughters are there, and over the last few years I had worked in school on a voluntary basis, on supply and on a job share for one term. So for the first few weeks we were very much feeling our way, learning as we went along, and gathering information from as many different sources as I could find, not least the staff at the Portsmouth Down's Syndrome Trust with whom Daniel's parent's had already formed links. I found it a very exciting challenge, and still do, and happily Daniel responded very well from the start. His mother advised me to be enthusiastic and make tasks fun and he would respond, and that has proved to be an invaluable piece of advice!

During his first half term I worked on two special projects with him, besides all the usual basic language and number work. We went out and took photographs of his route from home to school, the school buildings inside and out, the children at playtime, work time and lunch time and put together an album for which he typed out captions on the computer. We then visited his previous school to show this to his teacher and friends, and to see what they were doing. This was useful in familiarising him with his new surroundings and to show him how such a piece of work could be used to communicate information that would have been hard for him to put into words.

The other project was a book about himself which gave opportunities for him to express his likes and dislikes, any special interests and clarify for him his new school routines and procedures. He was very pleased with the finished results, as he has produced two books of which he was justifiably proud!

Daniel's ancillary found the first few weeks fairly daunting and Daniel was sometimes uncooperative and difficult with her. Although he had been used to working with an ancillary, he seemed unsure of her role. Also she was mainly responsible for him in the afternoons after a morning of fairly intensive input, so he was quite often tired. As Daniel began to settle and fell part of the school, things steadily improved and now they have a very good working relationship. I feel it was a great deal to ask of someone to step into a role of this kind with no training at all and only a hazy outline of what exactly was required of her, and I feel I have been very fortunate in having someone who was prepared to battle on when things got tough and who has consequently become invaluable.

For the first half term, I was withdrawing Daniel from the class for at least half of his teaching time in the mornings, and most of his activities in class were tailored very much to his individual needs and not linked with what the rest of the class were doing. This allowed me to get to know Daniel well fairly quickly, establish a good working relationship with him and assess exactly what he was capable of doing. But it could scarcely be called integration as he was not participating in class activities except for P.E. lessons, assemblies and playtimes, and a weekly music lesson for the whole class.

I did set up a weekly language group session, taking four children at a time from the reception class, and including Daniel in this group to take the pressure off him and give him the stimulus of listening to and talking to other children in a controlled situation. This has proved to be a very valuable venture for several reasons. It has given the youngest children a chance to get to know Daniel and dispel any alarm they may have been feeling because he talks and behaves a little differently to them, and for Daniel, it has given him a respite from one to one contact with me and an opportunity to see how the others respond, communicate and react to a task, and use this as a model for his own responses and behaviour. He really enjoys these sessions, takes his turn well and is very keen to participate and contribute.

I have used a wide variety of activities and language games, usually based on toys or household objects with which they would be familiar as an initial stimulus. Games such as 'What's in the bag?' -each child takes out object in turn, describes it without naming the object, and the others have to try and guess what it is from their description. The others can ask questions like "What is it made of?", "What do we do with it?", "Has it got a handle, is it sharp, prickly, soft or rough?" etc.

Towards the end of his first term, I started to try and involve Daniel more in what the rest of the class were doing, and the Christmas play provided the perfect opportunity for this. He was a little reluctant to get involved at first, but as the play began to take shape he got to know the story and the songs, and began to participate with obvious enjoyment. After the first performance, about which he was very excited, he took the applause like a veteran bowing and smiling as though it was his very own production! That was a very special moment -it was lovely to see him so happy and at home after only a few weeks in a very different environment to the one which he had been used to previously, and emphasised to me again how amazingly adaptable children are, and how readily they rise to meet new challenges in life. He also adapted quickly to the every day school procedures and

became used to the pattern of work and playtimes, what to do at lunch time, getting ready for P.E. and similar daily routines. This must have all seemed quite daunting to him at first, but the combination of the hard work his parents and previous teachers have put in to give him a high level of independence, and the acceptance and help he has had from the other children has made him feel part of the school -one of the family -very quickly.

There is an exceptionally special 'family feel' about the school, and the children right through from the youngest to the eldest have been very welcoming, friendly and accommodating towards Daniel, including him in their games, helping him when necessary and generally making him feel one of them. They do not always understand what he says as his speech is garbled and indistinct at times, but they seem to communicate effectively even so, and Daniel's attitude to school shows that he is happy there.

Socially, Daniel did have a few problems at first, not so much with his classmates, but with some of the younger children who he tends to gravitate towards in the playground. There were a few incidents where he was being treated as a novelty (understandably) and being provoked in to aggressive behaviour by some of the children, and sometimes he can be aggressive when there is no provocation, but the frequency of such incidents and behaviour has steadily decreased.

We dealt with this by increasing the level of supervision on the playground, reminding him every time he went out of the kind of behaviour we expected of him, and we tried to direct his play more by initiating a game and then leaving him to play, either on his own or with a group. Most playtimes now are happy and incident free, and other adults in the school have all been very positive in their approach to Daniel. There was some initial apprehension as this venture is the first of its kind in the school, but without exception, everyone has been interested and supportive.

In common with most children with Down's syndrome, Daniel's speech is his weakest area, but it is definitely improving. The major part of his teaching time each morning is geared towards improving the clarity of his speech, and towards increasing the number of information carrying words in a sentence. As a rule he can manage 3-4, but very recently he has been much more willing to talk and will sometimes string together 5 or 6 words. When he is excited and eager to get the words out in a hurry he tends to lapse into stutters and gabble, before getting to the key words which give me a real clue about what he is trying to say. He uses gestures and mime very effectively, but obviously finds talking very frustrating at times, and he needs a lot of encouragement and praise when he gets it right. The delight on his face then is a real joy to see!

He tries very hard and does not give up easily. He reads fairly well, and is beginning to show an improvement in his level of comprehension when I talk with him about a story he has read. His speech is clearest when he is reading, and this has been a useful key to help him express himself. Another of his strengths is considerable skill on the computer, and he loves to spend time on a range of educational programmes, both maths and language based, and also enjoys using it for writing.

I am responsible for organising his activities for the afternoons

which his ancillary oversees. To give him a measure of independence here, I list for him a range of activities which he is supposed to work through in order, and tick off each time one is done. He does not always do this, and sometimes he is included in class activities such as watching a TV programme or a games session, but generally he has got used to a routine of working at his set tasks alongside the other children.

To increase the level of integration in the mornings, I have worked closely more with the class teacher this term (Spring '93) to see how Daniel could be involved in the topic work in particular. To achieve this I have planned some of the practical activities myself, and include Daniel in a group working on these, so that he can feel part of the class whilst working at a level appropriate to his abilities. When I am working with a group on an activity he has already done, I set him a task that I know he can manage unsupervised, and check on him now and then. This is working well in two ways. Firstly, it is giving him the chance to learn how to work on a

task without continual prompting from me, aiming for a measure of independence, and secondly, he has the opportunity to feel more included in what is going on in the class instead of always being engaged on separate tasks.

Looking back over the past two terms in which Daniel has been with us, I feel that his transfer into mainstream school has been an exciting and successful venture. His own cheerful and amenable personality has been a major factor in enabling him to settle into a new environment with the minimum of fuss. It has been very encouraging to hear from people who deal with him out of school, such as his Sunday School teacher, that he has been noticeably more responsive and talkative recently. His parents have commented that he seems to have acquired a higher degree of personal dignity and confidence, and he certainly seems happy and at ease in school. Progress is not a steadily rising line, but a series of steps and plateau's of consolidation. Daniel has undoubtedly learnt a great deal from this experience, as have all of us at the school, and we feel it has been very worth while.

RESIDENTIAL CONFERENCES SEPTEMBER 1993

The Sarah Duffen Centre is organising two residential conferences in September

Saturday/Sunday 18-19 September
for families with children over 10 years

Saturday/Sunday 25-26 September
for families with children under 10 years

The programme for the first conference will include sessions on:

- *educational and further education*
- *improving academic skills, literacy and numeracy*
- *improving communication skills*
- *independence, personal development and self confidence*
- *eating and drinking to improve health*
- *leisure*
- *friendships and relationships*
- *health, management of sexuality*
- *behaviour*
- *work*
- *leaving home*
- *the needs of families*
- *use of computers to teach*

• *sleep disturbance*

The programme for the second conference will include sessions on:

- *the needs of families*
- *statementing and educational placements*
- *portage teaching activities*
- *cognitive development*
- *language development*
- *social and emotional development*
- *health*
- *sleep disturbance*
- *use of computers to teach*
- *educational needs in early school years*

Speakers will include Sue Buckley, Gillian Bird and Rebecca Stores from the Sarah Duffen Centre, and guest speakers: Professor Ben Sacks, Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School, London, Evelyn Houghton, Portage Teacher, Gosport, Christine Hamilton, Speech Therapist, Portsmouth, Karen Jeffereys, Senior Dietician, Portsmouth, Roberta Bage, Senior Nurse Tutor, Portsmouth, Dr Barbara Crofts, Associate Specialist, Park Hospital for Children, Oxford.

All the conference sessions will be at the Sarah Duffen Centre, where a creche will be run each day by Mrs Stephanie Callaway who is a registered childminder. Accommodation will be in nearby Rees Hall, a University of Portsmouth hall of residence. For further details and application form please apply to the Sarah Duffen Centre.