

Special Children

Meeting Children's Additional Educational Needs

- TA deployment in primary and secondary schools
- ASD and transition to adulthood
- Ideas to stretch and test all students
- Working memory strategies
- Coding and cross-curricular learning



Bon appétit

Taking the stress out of lunchtime

PULL-OUT RESOURCES

A TA/teacher agreement to ensure maximum impact

The lunch break is a crucial period when children learn to eat in a social setting and develop social skills



Enjoying lunchtime breaks

Shirley Rose explains how to improve the lunchtime experience of children with SEND

Joe is a Year 3 pupil on the autism spectrum who has not yet been stated. He craves order and routine and does not much like lunchtime at school.

Thrown by the lack of structure, he tends to lash out at others when feeling crowded or overwhelmed. In the dining room, he can become frustrated and has occasionally picked up the water jug and poured it over the table. The lunchtime supervisors struggle to cope with his behaviour and some believe him to be 'just a naughty boy'. Understandably,

other children tend to give him a wide berth. They rarely invite him to join in their play and he often feels lonely and isolated.

Joe's case is by no means unusual, and yet it is possible to ensure that pupils like him actually enjoy lunchtime rather than viewing it with dread.

The importance of taking breaks

Lunch breaks provide pupils with crucial opportunities for free social interaction with their peers. They learn to eat in a social setting, play, cooperate and develop

social skills – all part of the process that will enable them to grow up into rounded, considerate adults.

In fact, moves to shorten the lunch break – whether for fear of poor pupil behaviour, to increase curriculum time or because of health and safety concerns – have been found to have a negative impact on children's learning and development (Pellegrini, A. & Blatchford, P. 2000).

We know that pupils with statements engage in approximately half as many interactions with their classmates as their typically developing peers, and that their lack of confidence in social situations can exacerbate isolation and exclusion. They usually find the less structured lunchtime break particularly challenging, creating problems for lunchtime staff, who may find some of these pupils hard to manage.

In addition, when lunchtime goes badly, it impacts on afternoon learning because teachers and senior managers have to spend time and energy picking up the pieces.

Joe's support strategies

1. Additional supervision

It was decided that Joe's class TA would support him in the first part of the lunch break and the senior lunchtime supervisor would take over in the second half.

The TA agreed to take him out of class five minutes early to give him time to wash his hands and go straight to the dining room, thus avoiding the queues. This means he has already chosen his food and taken his seat by the time his classmates arrive.

At the end of the lunch break, he is escorted back to class a few minutes before the bell goes, again to avoid the stress of lining up.

2. Smaller groups at table

The school had already introduced a system where children sit around small tables to eat, often with the same group of pupils. This provides Joe with some security and enables the TA to sit nearby whilst allowing Joe to share lunch with his peers.

3. Training lunchtime staff

The lunchtime supervisors have been trained to recognise Joe's flashpoints and to intervene when necessary. Once he is back in the playground, the senior lunchtime supervisor monitors his progress.

The lunchtime supervisors and TAs also have half-termly meetings with the Senco to discuss how to support Joe and other vulnerable children. In addition, they receive external training on communicating with children and managing behaviour.

4. Occupying Joe

Joe is encouraged to attend the lunchtime chess club and to play in the quiet area of the playground, where there is more supervision. He also knows that he can ask to go inside to the supervised library if he needs to 'cool down'.

5. Teaching self-management

Joe is Pokémon crazy, and staff use characters from the game to encourage good behaviour. He responds well to reward charts, which are used throughout the day to reinforce positive behaviour.

6. A buddy scheme

The school has a buddy scheme and Joe is sometimes befriended by a child in another class during the lunch break.

Helping pupils with physical disabilities

Zainab is a bright, feisty pupil in Year 5 who suffers from scoliosis of the spine. She is small for her age and appears twisted and visibly different from her peers. She has undergone regular and painful corrective surgery, resulting in long periods of convalescence and absence from school. Her impaired mobility makes active play difficult and her parents are concerned that she will be injured in the playground.

Like many children who have spent lengthy periods in hospital, Zainab has struggled to fit in with her schoolmates and feels far more comfortable in the company of adults. She has experienced name-calling and taunting on numerous occasions, and was once pushed against a wall in the playground by a group of pupils who tore her coat.

The impact of bullying

A study by the Anti-Bullying Alliance and Contact a Family reveals that children with SEND who are perceived to be different or vulnerable are far more likely to be bullied. (*Bullying of Children with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs in School*, March 2011).

Bullying has wide-reaching and very damaging effects for the victims and creates considerable distress for their families, who are already under pressure. When asked in the survey what happened when they reported a bullying incident, only 22 per cent of families felt the school dealt with it effectively. A worrying 68 per cent said that the school's responses were often negative or unhelpful.

Zainab's support strategies

1. A place to escape

Following meetings involving Zainab,

Key strategies for better lunch breaks

Setting the context

- Embed a school-wide ethos promoting a basic understanding of disabilities and special needs. Reinforce messages about tolerance of difference and inclusion in different contexts throughout the day.
- Ensure the whole school community understands what constitutes bullying (and what doesn't), the role bystanders play and that bullying will not be tolerated under any circumstances (see *Don't just stand there, do something*, *Special Children* 223).
- Review your anti-bullying policy regularly; involve parents, staff and pupils (including disabled children and their parents) in these reviews.

Developing the specifics

- Consult pupils about what they need at lunchtime and include them in the creation of supportive initiatives, such as buddy schemes, play leader schemes and circles of friends.
- Set up a variety of indoor clubs, drop-in facilities and engaging activities to meet the needs of a wide range of pupils.
- Have a safe place where children can go, such as a quiet area in the playground, a designated classroom or the library. Inform the lunchtime supervisors.
- Introduce a period of structured play in the playground which can be adapted to include all pupils. The Youth Sport Trust specialises in non-traditional, inclusive games and produces a Top Activity Pack: <http://bit.ly/sc226-01>.
- Liaise regularly with parents to gain further insights from their perspective and address their specific concerns.

Upskilling your lunchtime support staff

Help lunchtime staff feel empowered and skilled by:

- providing them with regular professional

development and appraisals

- inviting them to peer support training, circle time and other relevant initiatives
- including them in the parts of an Inset training day that could be useful to them, such as sessions that focus on behaviour management skills or raising awareness of the requirements of children with special needs.

Opening up lines of communication

- Ensure teachers and lunchtime staff formally brief each other about issues that have arisen (positive and negative) that may impact behaviour at lunchtime or during afternoon lessons.
- Encourage lunchtime staff to regularly visit the staff room if this is the hub of all communication.
- Provide them with paper copies of school newsletters and other relevant information if they do not have a computer.
- Include them in staff events where possible.

Sharing sensitive information

Lunchtime staff often complain that they are not told enough about children's individual needs to enable them to handle difficult situations effectively. While it is important to impart confidential information on a need-to-know basis, you can give lunchtime staff a head start by:

- ensuring they have regular meetings with their line managers to discuss behavioural and other issues
- giving them access to folders containing appropriate information about individuals (with photos), including any medical and dietary issues
- arranging for them to meet regularly with the Senco and other relevant staff, including TAs, to discuss initiatives and strategies used to support these particular children.

her parents, class teacher, the Senco and the senior lunchtime supervisor, it was agreed that whenever she feels upset or threatened, she is allowed to leave the playground to find the learning mentor on duty at lunchtime.

2. Developing resilience

Zainab is offered regular weekly sessions with the learning mentor to boost her self-esteem, increase her resilience and help with friendships.

3. Occupying Zainab

She is encouraged to join the Wednesday lunchtime computer club and has been trained to become a playground buddy. This has been particularly successful as she displays a natural empathy for others and enjoys supporting the younger children.

4. Harnessing circle time

Her class teacher uses circle time to

develop social skills and explore issues of difference and inclusion.

5. Training staff

The lunchtime supervisors receive training in how to recognise and respond to bullying, and all staff, including the lunchtime staff, are trained in restorative justice methods to deal with conflict.

Careful planning

There is a great deal schools can do to support children with SEND at lunchtime. This requires creative thinking and careful planning to ensure systems are in place to minimise disruption and distress, and to enhance positive lunchtime experiences for all children and staff.

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