

# Blog: A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND




**At the heart of early years education lies a profound and shared commitment: to ensure that every child, regardless of need or background, has the best possible start in life. For those of us working with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), this mission becomes even more powerful, personal, and transformative.**

## Honouring the Everyday

Every day, practitioners in early years settings engage in deeply skilled, emotional, and relational work. It's important to pause and celebrate that. Whether you're supporting a child to take their first steps, helping them find their voice, or enabling them to navigate their emotions, you're not just ticking developmental boxes—you're changing lives. And for children with SEND, those everyday moments are often hard-won triumphs, achieved through careful thought, persistence, and deep compassion.

To find out more about our approach to working with children with SEND, and to access practical tools to support your daily practice, please visit;

 <https://www.pengreen.org/a-celebratory-approach-to-working-with-children-with-send/>



### A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND

Giving additional support in the Early Years



# Evidence-Informed Practice That Makes a Difference



Working with children with SEND must be evidence-informed—that is, working in a way that takes into account current research and evidence that delivers the best outcomes for children. This means staying up to date with what we know about child development, inclusive pedagogy, and effective intervention. It also means reflecting on our practice regularly and asking ourselves, Is this the best it can be for this child, right now?

By embedding evidence-informed strategies into daily practice, we ensure our decisions are not based solely on tradition or routine, but on what is most likely to help children thrive.



## Moving Beyond Labels: What Matters Most

The essence of high-quality provision for children with SEND is not found in paperwork or policy alone—though both have their place—but in the warm, responsive, and intentional relationships we build. True inclusion is rooted in the belief that every child has something valuable to offer. It's in the way practitioners anticipate challenges, adapt environments, and plan curriculum that respects each child's individuality.

This approach recognises that development doesn't happen in neat, linear steps. For many children with SEND, progress may look different—but it is no less meaningful. By focusing on what each child can do, and building from there, we foster environments where they not only participate, but flourish.

# What Ofsted Now Understands Better



Recent engagement from Ofsted has shown a welcome shift: a desire to listen, learn, and improve how inspection frameworks support—not hinder—practice with children with SEND.

They've heard the sector's call for:

- More meaningful, flexible curriculum expectations.
- Recognition that high-quality care is high-quality teaching.
- An inspection approach that understands difference is not deficit.

Inspections are beginning to focus more on what really matters: the intent behind your curriculum, the way you implement it, and the impact it has—especially for your most vulnerable children.

## Curriculum as Care, Pedagogy as Relationship

One of the strongest messages from recent research and consultation is that curriculum and care are inseparable. For children with SEND, learning happens through care routines, through moments of connection, and through adult guidance that's attuned and intentional.

This includes:

- High-quality interactions that model and scaffold language and social skills.
- Environments that are calm, predictable, and sensory-aware.
- Activities that are simplified and meaningful—where children can experience success.

The “meat on the bones” of the EYFS curriculum must be tailored. This means knowing your children: what they need, what they enjoy, what might overwhelm them, and what sparks joy. That's pedagogy grounded in relationship and trust—and increasingly guided by what works, according to current evidence.



# Training, Reflection, and Celebration



Ongoing professional development, especially focused on babies, toddlers, and children with complex needs, is vital. But so is space for reflection and affirmation.

So take time to:

- Celebrate the small steps that feel huge.
- Acknowledge the emotional labour of your work.
- Share your insights—because what you're doing matters not just to your children, but to the wider sector and society.



## Final Thoughts

**We know that supporting children with SEND isn't always easy. But it is joyful. It is powerful. And it is life-affirming. In every nappy change, every moment of eye contact, every carefully-chosen word or sensory adaptation, you are helping children become who they are meant to be.**

**So let this be a celebratory call to honour that work—and to continue doing it with pride, creativity, fierce compassion, and evidence-informed intent.**

# Further Reading and Resources



## **Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

## **Development Matters**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>

SEND code of practice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

## **A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND; Giving additional support in the Early Years**

<https://www.pengreen.org/a-celebratory-approach-to-working-with-children-with-send/>

Dingley's Promise (2023). Early Years SEND Assessment Framework.

Sylva, K. et al. (2004). The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project.

Early Intervention Foundation (EIF, 2021). Realising the Potential of Early Intervention.

NASEN (2021). Universal Inclusive Practice in Early Years Settings.

Norwich, B. (2013). Addressing Tensions and Dilemmas in Inclusive Education.

Whole School SEND (hosted by NASEN). Early Years SEND Review Guide.

Nutbrown, C. (2011). Threads of Thinking: Schemas and Young Children's Learning.

Mesibov, G. & Shea, V. (2010). The TEACCH Approach to Autism Spectrum Disorders.

National Autistic Society. (2023). Structured teaching and visual supports.

**View the recording of our recent webinar here;**

<https://www.pengreen.org/stronger-practice-hub/sph-webinars/>