

gaelscoil bhaile brigín



Welcome to our first edition!!

Our as yet un-named "baby" is a newsletter which will cover issues relevant to the whole school population, but with particular relevance to children with additional needs and their families. It is a work in progress and we would welcome any input, suggestions and ideas you may have to improve it.

We hope to have a regular section which gives a general understanding of many of the conditions which affect school going children, for example Asperger's Syndrome / Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, ADD etc. We feel that for a school to be truly inclusive, it is important to dispel the myths and stereotypes which often surround these, and many other conditions. We would really welcome any

contributions from parents in this area, as the parent's expertise will often rival the professionals! This can be done anonymously if preferred.

There will also be a section which lists local and national support groups so if you can recommend one then please get in touch!.

Contact

celinecronan@gmail.com

if you would be interested in contributing to any part of the newsletter.



The Way I See Things

A moving yet informative account of how Dyspraxia affects one family

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Inclusion

The meaning and importance of Inclusion in schools today.

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COMPETITION TIME!

We are looking for a name for our Newsletter. We would like it to be original, up to date and related to the contents. The winning entry will receive a mystery prize.

Please email your entries to celinecronan@gmail.com

Inclusive Education

By Celine Ronan

Just after we'd received our child's diagnosis, and before we had told family and friends, my husband asked his friend how he would feel about having a child with special needs in his son's class. The friend's reply was that he wouldn't be at all happy with it. His main concern was that his son would be "held back" by the attention the other child would need from the Teacher. Although his answer saddened us at the time, I couldn't honestly say that if I were in his shoes, and not my own, that I wouldn't have had the same fears he did. There is a lot of misinformation out there and my hope is that this article will go some way towards dispelling some of the myths around inclusive education.

So what exactly is "Inclusion"? My simple interpretation would be an education system that is open to all, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. One where every child is encouraged and supported to participate in all aspects of school life. The support aspect is absolutely critical if Inclusion is to work. It's not about "dumping" children with additional educational needs into mainstream classes and expecting Teachers to cope with these extra needs. There needs to be a clear educational plan in place and a support network available to help implement the plan. Resource/Learning Support Teachers and Special Needs Assistants are a vital component of this support network. Inclusion is doomed to fail if these supports are withdrawn and this is why there are no shortages of Protesters outside the Dail when resources are threatened.

The benefits of inclusive education for children with additional educational needs are obvious: they have more chance of increased social initiations, friendships and networks. Very importantly, they have peer role models for academic, social and behavioural skills. There is generally increased achievement of academic goals. The list goes on and on. But what may be surprising to parents is that there have been shown to be huge

advantages to Inclusion for students without any disability:

- Teachers in an Inclusive environment must "think outside the box"

One of the most important principles of Inclusive Education is that no two learners are alike. Some children are "visual learners", some do just fine with auditory methods, and many thrive on a combination of methods. Teachers in an inclusive classroom use a variety of teaching methods and aids to ensure that all pupils can understand and participate fully in the lesson.

- A Safe Environment

All children will encounter situations where they may struggle. Children in inclusive classrooms realise that this is a natural part of learning and that asking for help is expected and encouraged.

- Literacy

Increasingly, studies are showing academic benefits of inclusion for students with, and without, disabilities (*The effects of inclusion on Learning, ET Baker 1995*) (*Examining the general programmatic benefits of inclusive schools, D Fisher*)

- Respect for Diversity

Inclusion can only work if each member of the classroom is respected and valued for the individual that they are. "We are all unique" and "We all belong" are the messages that children in inclusive classrooms hear time and again. In a world where our children are bombarded with images of "perfection" – the perfect body, the perfect faces etc., I personally think that this is the most important message and advantage of Inclusion.

There are some cases where an inclusive environment in a mainstream classroom is clearly not the right option for the child. Early Intervention teams will usually indicate which form of education is in the child's best interest, be it special school, a unit attached to a mainstream school or mainstream education. It's ultimately the parents' choice and I think it is extremely important that we, as parents, have that choice.

DYSPRAXIA: The way I see things

By Laura Dowdall

My first introduction to dyspraxia, was via a text message. It simply read, "Seán has dyspraxia". The text was from my sister. The Seán, was her beautiful four year old son. My reaction was total horror. I had never heard of the term 'dyspraxia', but it conjured up similar sounding words, like dysentery and dystrophy. Although I wasn't quite sure what they meant either, I knew anything starting with 'dys-' had an ominous sound. I immediately did a Google search, "**What is dyspraxia?**" With a sigh of relief, I read the following explanation... "**Dyspraxia is a difficulty with thinking, planning and carrying out sensory / motor tasks.**" Seán was four years old. Surely there was plenty of time for him to figure out thinking, planning and tasking. Sitting at my computer, I scanned over the "**How to recognise dyspraxia**" section on the site. **#1" Appears not to be able to learn anything instinctively but must be taught skills".** I reasoned that Seán was only four, and surely that must apply to a lot of children his age. **#2" Unable to kick or catch a ball."** This was something that applied to Seán. But then again, not every boy grew up to be a premier league footballer. **#3" Speech problems — slow to learn to speak and speech may be incoherent."** Now, this caught my eye, and did relate directly to Seán. After a waiting list of two years, finally Seán had begun intensive speech therapy classes. The therapist raved about Seán after every session. He worked so hard, was so clever, and his vocabulary was huge for a child of his age. With a smile, the therapist reported to my sister, that she had spent a whole session encouraging Seán to work on his difficulty pronouncing 'Rs'. At the end of the session, the therapist showed him a picture of a 'rocket,' he responded, 'spaceship,' with a smile. He was definitely a clever little guy. Reading down through the dyspraxia list, I found myself nodding away at the familiar observations. "**Cannot do jigsaw or shape sorting games,**" "**Finds some clothes uncomfortable,**" I had put these and more, down to his individual personality and likes / dislikes. The one



point, repeated several times, stood out, "**May not be able to run, hop or jump and has poor balance / posture.**" This is why dyspraxia is often called, "Clumsy Child Syndrome." It all started to make sense. Seán had dyspraxia." No-one is eager to label children. So Seán was in 2nd class before he got official confirmation that he had dyspraxia, and another more familiar 'dys-' word, dyslexia. "**Dyslexia - effect on the way our brain understands words.**" Now finally, there was an explanation why Seán could answer, "Seven plus one equals eight," but would be at a loss minutes later, if told, "Seven and one makes eight". The language had changed, and to a child with dyslexia, that made no sense. Once, Seán was shown three picture cards, and requested to pick the related pair. The options were, an apple, a tree, and a bike. Seán picked the apple and the bike. When questioned why, he explained if he was riding his bike, he would get hungry and he would eat the apple. When he was allowed to explain his choice, his logic was very straight forward, and I think, astute." The diagnosis did not limit Seán. It offered him options, services to avail of, and most importantly, support. One therapist in particular, fought Seán's corner all the way, and he was offered a place in Catherine McAuley National School, Baggot Street. The school specialises in children assessed as having reading difficulties, and who experience problems in mainstream education. A teacher explained the problems Seán faces every day like this. When you learn to drive a car, it is a new skill / experience. You learn the order you need to do things, e.g., mirror — signal — mirror — manoeuvre. Over time the learned skill becomes second nature and routine. You become comfortable with the process. You don't over think the steps. But for someone with dyslexia, the skills of reading and writing never become instinctive. Every action is over pronounced. There is a constant struggle to maintain

a correct grip on the pen. There is a continual difficulty recognising and connecting words and sounds. There is trouble concentrating, because of distractions from the surrounding environment. It is a daily grind. I often think of the times I have taken up a hobby, or tried to learn a language, only to discover it just wasn't for me. It was too difficult. It was too much of a struggle. I just couldn't get the hang of it. So, I walked away from the challenge, because I had that option. It fills me with admiration, when I consider, children and adults with reading difficulties, and their involuntary daily battle with the written communications that surround them. It fills me with pride, that Seán meets his challenges head on. Seán

participated three times, in the 'Write a Book' project, run from the Blackrock Education Centre since 1985. 2012, its 27th year, saw the creation of 6,852 books by 8,016 children from schools all over South Dublin and Wicklow. The Curriculum advises that children should "write for real purposes and real audiences," and claims "success and accomplishment will inspire and motivate them to further writing." One of the proudest moments of my life arrived via a text message. It simply read, "Seán won again". The text was from my sister. The Seán, was her beautiful twelve year old son, who had just won first place in his age category, in the 'Write a Book' project, for the third year running. My reaction was pure joy.

SUPPORT AND WHATS ON

Dyspraxia Ireland was formed in 1995 by parents of children with dyspraxia. The association aims to raise awareness of dyspraxia in Ireland and create a better understanding of the difficulties children and parents face. It is an invaluable resource for anyone affected by Dyspraxia and has links/downloadables on it's website.

The Dyslexia Association of Ireland is holding its major European Conference [📍](#) on Innovation in Assessment and Teaching, which will take place [📍](#) in UCD, Dublin, on April 25th 2015.

Approx. 500 delegates are expected to attend this major dyslexia conference which will bring together experts from Ireland, the UK and Europe to share [📍](#) current research on dyslexia.

<http://www.dyspraxia.ie/> for more details

A helpful guide to the various challenges (and possible solutions) facing children with Dyspraxia in the classroom

<http://www.dyspraxia.ie/documents/classroomguidelines.pdf>

Circle of Friends is an Aspergers/Dyspraxia support group which meets in Skerries Mills Coffee Shop once a month. Contact Karen on 087-9778715 for more details