

# Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service

## Autumn 2024



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Welcome to the Autumn Edition of our Newsletter



*Figure 1 Picture of Jane Peters Head of Service*

Welcome to the Autumn term BSCS newsletter which I hope you enjoy reading as we share with you some of the work and achievements of our young people and what's been happening in the Service.

This edition has a focus on celebrating the voice of our young people and recognising the importance of their 'wishes and dreams' for the present and the future. Inspired by Tom, one of our Educational Psychologist colleagues in Maidenhead, the team have been using a person centred pathway approach with a number of pupils to explore their dreams and aspirations as well as challenges in a more engaging and creative way. We hope to use this more with our young people going forward.

In September we welcomed Lucy as our new Qualified Teacher of the Deaf and Chihiro and Claire as our Specialist Support Assistants. We have already begun preparations for our Family Fun Day in June so do look out for more details of the event at Beech Lodge School next term.

Finally from myself and all the team we wish you a Happy Christmas and thank you Father Christmas for coming to some of our Preschool Group Parties this year - we had a lot of fun!

Best wishes

Jane

Our Stories - Journey to Success

BBC Writing Competition

Akira is immensely proud to share her story 'What Makes Us Different', which has been entered into the BBC's 500 words 2024-25 writing competition.

This is the UK's largest children's writing competition for children aged 5 -11 year-olds and children are encouraged to write a story they would love to read themselves. Akira hopes that you all enjoy reading her story!

Wishing you the very best of luck Akira!

### **What Makes Us Different**

**by Akira, Aged 8**

Akira was in the car going to ANOTHER hospital appointment.

Mum was chatting, but Akira couldn't concentrate, it was hard to understand over the sound of the radio, the traffic outside and her own thoughts.

Akira walked with mum into the hospital, she was playing with the toys, while the doctor and mum were chatting away. She realised the tears in mum's eyes.

She started to focus on the doctor's words "I'm sorry, Akira has a permanent hearing loss and needs hearing aids."

Akira's body froze as all her thoughts came crashing down. "How are they going to look?" "What are people going to say?" "Nobody will understand." The doctor came back to the room with a colour chart. Akira's excitement began to flicker as she peered at the colours. Her eyes met the most magnificent marbled purple shade. "Wow, nobody has ever picked this colour before, in fact I didn't even know we had it," said the doctor in surprise.

Akira went to school on Monday. Her heart began to race as she sat on her desk, she slowly took her hearing aid box out of her bag. Nervously, she set her hearing aids inside her ears for the very first time. Something magical happened!

She felt different, she felt powerful, she felt confident. She felt powers growing and somewhere in the distance someone needed her help!

She could hear voices of children on a school bus chatting away. She could also hear the driver of the bus hitting the breaks. The bus was approaching a red light, and the bus was increasing with speed. Akira knew she needed to act. There was a flash of light in the classroom as Akira closed her eyes, clicked her fingers and found herself alongside the bus. She had teleported! At the front of the bus, her super strength kicked in and with her bare hands she pushed the vehicle to a STOP! Everyone inside the bus cheered but they had no idea that they were just saved by an eight-year-old girl, all they saw was a rainbow flash of light.

Akira closed her eyes, clicked her fingers, and BOOM. She found herself at her desk as if she had never left.

As the day went on Akira noticed she had more powers. She could move things with her mind, hear things being said from miles away, and when someone was thinking about her, she could hear it. Akira couldn't believe how powerful she was, she felt amazing. This magical day flew by, Akira rushed home and when she arrived, she placed her hearing aids in the box and BOOM Akira was once again a normal eight-year-old girl.

Every night she couldn't wait to wake up and use her hearing aids, and each day she learnt to control her powers, nobody knew who was responsible for the heroic acts.

Akira couldn't believe she was ever so upset at the thought of being different, after all, that was what made her magical.

## Dayzie's Achievement

Congratulations to Dayzie on completing the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Fingerprint course on learning grade 2 braille. She then sat the RNIB exam in Unified English Braille (grade 2) in October. Dayzie was tested on her knowledge of the braille alphabet, all the contractions of Unified English Braille, punctuation signs, basic numbering and capitalisation, and basic formatting and type forms. For the 3 hours 45 minutes exam, Dayzie had to transcribe a text passage into braille, as well as reading a braille passage and answering some comprehension questions. After a lot of hard work preparing for the exam, Dayzie was awarded a Certificate in Unified English Braille (UEB) with a grade A, the highest grade obtainable. A fantastic achievement, Dayzie!

## Journey to Cochlear Implantation



*Figure 2 - Picture of Tommy holding his road map to cochlear implants -*

Tommy, Year 5, has begun his journey to cochlear implantation this Autumn term. To support his understanding of the process from his first appointment at the cochlear implant centre, the decision to go ahead with the surgery and receiving his surgery date his Teacher of the Deaf and Tommy

created a road map of his journey - see photograph. The road route analogy has been used to show Tommy where his journey will take him and that there may be a bump or two on the road ahead. So far it has been a good journey with more travelling to do - the next bridge ahead is the cochlear implant surgery in January. Tommy has been very positive and taken this journey in his stride so far, asking lots of questions and able to express his feelings at different stops on the road. He has very supportive parents who will continue to ensure that Tommy completes his journey as smoothly as possible so he is able to achieve his potential in life.

Click on the picture to enlarge.

## British Sign Language Club at Altwood

Erykah-May has started a British Sign Language Club at her school supported by her Science teacher. The club runs every week on Wednesday lunchtimes and is open to all staff and students. Erykah-May is passionate about promoting more awareness and understanding of BSL amongst young people.

The club has begun by covering Deaf Awareness, fingerspelling and basic BSL vocabulary.

Erykah-May has now joined forces with the school choir to teach some signed songs for the Christmas Carol Service.

In the future, Erykah-May would like to be a Teacher of the Deaf and a BSL Interpreter.

## Transition to sixth form

I went to school at Langley Academy in Slough and I am now in sixth form there. I am studying BTEC in IT, Sport, and Health and Social Care. In IT we are studying about computer systems. In Sport we are looking at the anatomy of a human body and in Health and Social studies we are studying the development of babies to adulthood.

Sixth form is different to school in some ways. We have our own 6th form area in school. We study less subjects than at GCSE. We have free periods and supervised study in school which gives us time to study and catch up on work for our chosen subjects. Homework is more about longer assignments that take up more time, rather than short pieces of work. We use folders to store our work while write any notes in our books. We have to wear a tie, suit or jacket and trousers, shoes rather than trainers and we have to wear a lanyard. I have been told that I need to look like a business man!

In lessons, I sit at the front and I have the same access arrangements as for GCSEs – 25% extra time, large print papers and I use a laptop to record my work.

During free periods I like drawing characters from online gaming and animated shows like murder drones while also taking inspiration from web comics – have a look at one of my drawings!

By Alex age 16



*Figure 3- Picture of Alex's drawing of a character*

### Sharing Experiences

Georgia and Ellen are both profoundly deaf, using cochlear implants and radio aids. They are both the only students in their schools with this level of hearing loss, are high achievers and because of this often people teaching and supporting them forget that they do still need adjustments to help them in school and socially.

Georgia is about to go off to Royal Holloway to study Law and Ellen is in Year 9. They met for coffee (and cake) to chat with their respective teachers of the deaf. They had a lot to discuss and we stayed until closing time with the girls comparing notes, worries, gripes, tips and many shared experiences including the good ones! Conversation ranged from helpful teachers, to misunderstanding in large groups of girls and the problems this had occasionally created. As helpful as their peers are at school, they felt they didn't quite know how easily they can isolate a deaf friend without meaning to. There were also lots of funny results of being a deaf pupil and there was a long discussion about the perils of reading the lip patterns of teachers with hair beards!

As Georgia is older, Ellen was also able to ask all sorts of questions about what GCSE and A level studies may look like for her. As you can see Georgia has a Hearing Dog and there was also lots of discussion about how he helps and why he is important to Georgia and her independence as she goes off to live away from home for the first time.

Both girls found the meeting helpful, and Ellen in particular reflected with her ToD on the way home that she had been able to talk to someone who she felt really understood 'where she was coming from'.

This meeting has inspired us to try and make more opportunities for some of our older young people to be able to meet up in the future.





*Figure 4- Picture of a Georgia with her hearing dog and Ellen together*

### Person-Centred Path (PCPath)

At the beginning of the year Dr Tom de Sausmarez, Educational Psychologist from Achieving for Children delivered training to the Sensory Consortium Service.

He presented the Person-Centred Planning approach, taken from humanistic psychology, which puts Children and Young People (CYP) at the centre of planning, and shows CYP that they are listened to, respected and valued.

The process brings people together to celebrate the successes but also to address difficulties, by making plans that build towards meaningful outcomes for CYP. The plan is presented visually and can be used as part of the EHCP process.

Yashas, Year 11, and Abdul, Year 10, have using the 'Person-Centred Path' planning posters to decide what their dreams are and what their goals for one year's time are; thinking about what is important to them now, what their strengths are, what needs to change, who can help and what the next steps are to get towards their goals and dreams.

## Dream Jars

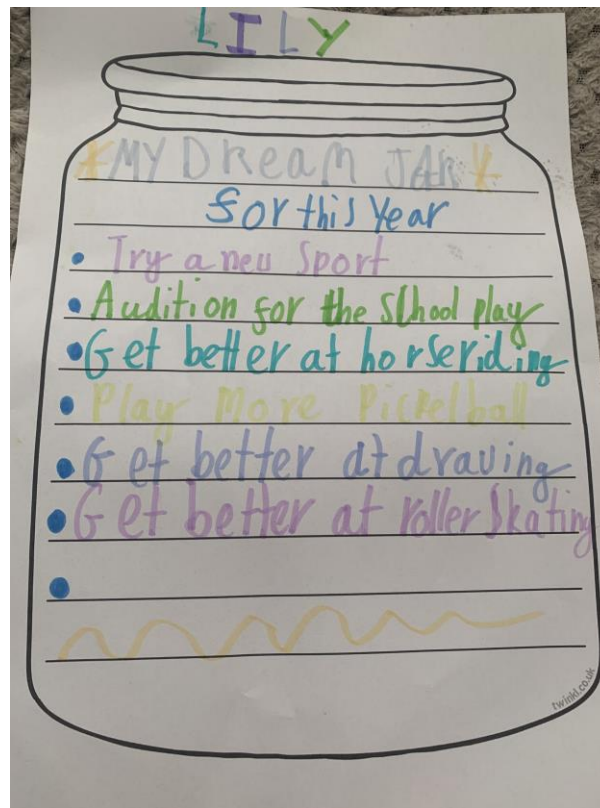


Figure 5 - Picture of Lily's Dream jar

This term pupils have been thinking about their wishes, aspirations and dreams for this coming year and their future, and creating their own dream jars to document these.

Lily is in her second year of middle school. Last year she auditioned for, and got a part in the school play. She loved it so much that she has decided that one of her aspirations for this year is to audition for an even bigger part!

Good luck Lily

## Georgia's Success and Dreams

Georgia has transitioned beautifully into Year 5 at Great Hollands Primary School and is already thriving, thanks in large part to the support system around her. Georgia attributes her success to the encouragement she receives from her dedicated teachers, school professionals, her best friend, and her family. She is most proud of her achievement in mathematics .

Beyond her academic achievements, Georgia has a passion for trampolining and is working hard to pursue her goal of becoming a gymnast. With her determination and enthusiasm, we can't wait to see what she accomplishes next! -

Mia's hopes for the future

Mia has, over the last two years , made a positive transition to the secondary department at Mary Hare School. She is very keen to try all the different opportunities that the school provides and especially enjoys the art and cooking lessons she attends. Mia has been able to make new friends this year and is also taking part in the school's Christmas play.

When asked about her hopes for the future Mia was able to give a very thought out and considered response and identified that she wanted to move to Norway where it would be cold but pretty, that she would also like to run in a forest as it would be fun and it would be great to be in nature. When thinking about a job Mia thought that she might like to work in a cafe as she loves to bake but that she would also like to practise magic and be able to cast spells that would bring her good luck!

Jonah's Dream Jar

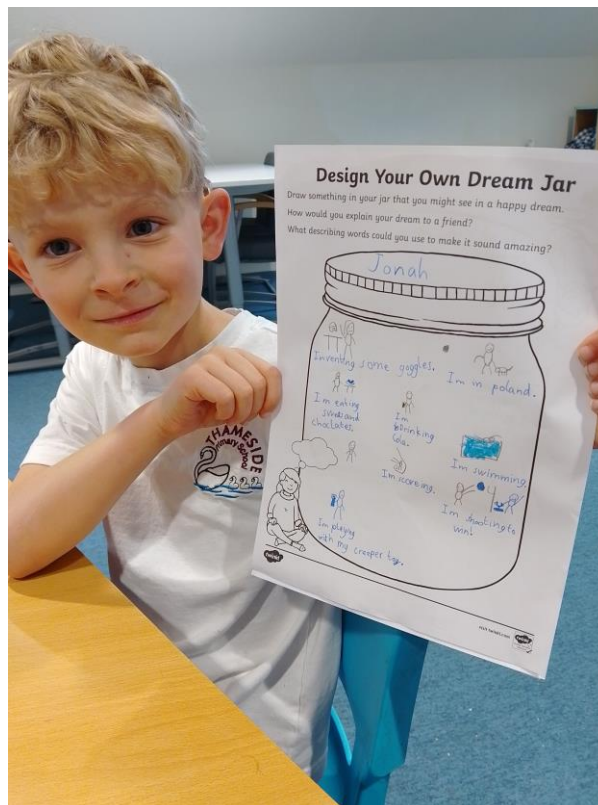


Figure 6 - Picture of Jonah holding his dream jar

Jonah, Year 2, celebrated completing his dream jar with Kingsley the Koala who also has cochlear implants.

## Celebrating 200 years of Braille Event

On Tuesday, 26 November, I had the privilege of attending an event hosted by the RNIB at the British Library to celebrate 200 years of Braille. The Braille 200 Launch event highlighted the incredible legacy of Louis Braille's revolutionary system, which has transformed accessibility and education for blind and visually impaired people.

The event featured a blend of historic and modern exhibits, showcasing Braille's enduring importance in fostering independence and while also looking ahead to future innovations in accessible technology.

A highlight of the day was a question-and-answer session with a panel of prominent Braille readers, who shared insights into how Braille has shaped their lives. Among the panelists was Betsy Griffin, a remarkable 10-year-old from Hertfordshire who recently published her first book, *Out of the Woods*. (Available in Braille from the RNIB.)

Jean Weiss



*Figure 7 Picture of Betsy at the Book signing*

## Pre-School Groups

### Chatty Monkeys- West



*Figure 8 - Picture of mum and Isabella creating a stained glass window*

Our Pre-school group in Spencers Wood has been very busy as always and the children have had lots of fun listening and completing activities around the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. During the sessions the children have listened and joined in with the story, and completed activities to do with the themes of the book. We have made and eaten porridge, we have played with oats, used the language of character names along with simple mathematical language around the sizes of the different objects that the three bears used.

We have also enjoyed activities around the different festivals of this term, such as Halloween, fireworks and now Christmas! Our Christmas party is the 17th December and we look forward to a visit from a special person.

## Exploring Autumn with Busy Bees

Busy Bees, our preschool group for babies and children with vision impairments, has enjoyed a wonderful autumn filled with sensory-rich activities and fun learning experiences.



Our first session took place on *National Read a Book Day*, where the little ones explored *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* through touch, taste, and sound as they felt textures and enjoyed snacks from the story.

For *International Day of Peace*, our Busy Bees crafted paper doves, using feathers and stickers to boost their tactile creativity and fine motor skills.

At our *Early Halloween Party*, the children had a sensory adventure scooping out slimy pumpkin seeds and carving spooky faces with grown-up assistance, while practising hand coordination. They also socialised, shared snacks, and enjoyed the soft play area and sensory room, providing opportunities for physical activity and social development.

During our most recent session, the children explored dry and green leaves with their hands. They smelled the earthy scents, examined the textures and shapes, and then created beautiful collages with the leaves. This activity encouraged sensory exploration, creativity, and a connection to nature.

We've loved watching the little ones grow and explore in their own unique ways and we look forward to many more sensory-filled sessions!

## Chatty Monkeys East

The Chatty Monkeys East has moved to a new venue this term at the Romsey Close Children's Centre. We are enjoying the comfortable facilities and the group is becoming established. Currently we are a small group and are keen to welcome more families to our sessions. We have also had members of the audiology team attending our sessions to take ear impressions if you need them.

This term we have been inspired by the book 'Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What can you hear?' We have been busy making paintings and collages of polar bears. We have also had fun exploring ice while helping toy arctic animals escape the ice, using language to talk about what the ice feels like.

We have just had our Christmas celebration enjoying making collage Christmas tree decorations, playing pass the parcel and sharing party food. We hope that you all have a very happy Christmas and we look forward to seeing you in the new year. Our first session back is Tuesday 14th January 2025.

## Cane and Games Workshop

13 young people, alongside some parents, attended our Cane and Games workshop. The event was jointly run with Guide Dogs and Berkshire Vision. It was a really successful workshop to celebrate the long cane and raise awareness. Students practiced a range of skills with the cane and developing their communication skills.

Feedback from the event was very positive. Students particularly enjoyed the obstacle course and developing their self advocacy skills.

A parent reported:

'It was great to attend the event, I now understand more about the cane tips and scanning skills. It was lovely for B (younger brother) to understand a bit more about his brother's life. He will love B more and take care of him in the future. OMG it melts my heart!'



*Figure 9 Picture of Billy Learning how to hold his cane in the shortened cane gri and developing his communication and self advocacy with Lizzie Habilitation Worker.*



*Figure 10 - Picture of Grace practising her cane skills*

## Spotlight- Speech and Language Therapy Service

Language development- asking the big questions about questions.

by Rebecca Romanowsky, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

From an early age children are exposed to questions. You may see parents asking their crying baby, “What’s wrong? ...What do you want?”, a bright-eyed toddler is often asked “What’s this, or that?”, and a child who just hit their sibling may be asked, “Why did you do that?!” – Questions are a natural part of our communication experience. So, what are the benefits of questions, and what could be the pitfalls?+

### Pros

- **Curiosity!** Modelling questions and showing interest in what others have to offer is a good way to promote curiosity, and that the people around us have unique ideas and experiences to share. As children and adults get older this curiosity is a transferrable learning skill. We have all asked a friend or Googled at some point!



- **Confidence building.** Modelling and teaching questioning skills can help a child understand that it's okay not to know – we all need help sometimes! Questions open up endless possibilities for learning.
- **Checkpoints.** Our young learners aren't always good at recognising what they do and don't understand, but (along with practical activities) we can ask the right questions to check.
- **A means to an end.** Questions that function as requests help people get from A to B. We all need to make requests, and children need to learn to advocate for the things they want or need. □ **Specificity.** When the right questions are asked, we can get right to the point. There are such a wide range of question-types and question words, we can cover all bases.

#### - Cons

- **Overload!** Too many questions can be overwhelming for our young people. Questions can sometimes feel like being tested, which is a lot of pressure if they come one after another in quick succession! Sometimes we mistakenly ask another question when all that is needed is some extra time, or a repetition.
- **Tone.** It's important to understand the context and tone of the questions being asked. For example, 'why' questions can sometimes seem like a challenge or contradiction. How many times have you seen someone squirm and attempt to change their answer when asked "why?" Sometimes children learn to associate being questioned with being in trouble, so it's important to be mindful of this.
- **Limited variation.** If we only ever ask questions, we aren't modelling enough language for other useful purposes and interactions, like commenting, sharing an interest, or explaining something. Some children with communication needs will learn to ask lots of questions (in some cases we may think too many questions!!) but struggle to share something on their mind without forming a question first. We sometimes see children asking a question they already know the answer to, because they don't know how else to start a conversation, yet they want to talk about that thing!
- **Complexity.** Not all questions are formed equally! Watch out for the length and complexity of your questions – are the sentences too long and wordy? – are the words too hard? Are the ideas too hard? Marion Blanks devised a questioning framework that helps us understand the different types and levels of questions, starting with simple "find a..." or "what's this?" at Blanks Level 1, all the way up to "how" and "why" questions at Blanks Level 4. It's important to know what level your child currently understands, to avoid confusing them.

#### Top Tips for optimising questions:

**The 'rule of thumb'...remember that fingers are powerful tools too!**

**Ask OWL...** 1. Ask a question,

2. **Observe** the response: Do they look confused, tense, or thoughtful?

3. **Wait:** allow 5-10 seconds of thinking time if no response,

4. **Listen + Think:** 'Did they understand?' 'Were the words too hard?' 'Do I need to say it again for them?' 'Is this a teaching and modelling moment?'

For further information about our service and links to advice, please look at Berkshire Healthcare's CYPIT website [Speech and Language Therapy | Children Young People and Families Online Resource](#)



*Figure 11 Hand with the one question to 4 Comments, Repetitions, Expansions and Explanations*

**Ask OWL...**




*Figure 12 Picture of an owl saying Ask owl....*




Goodbye Arusa!

The BSCS is very sad to be losing a team member at the end of the term. Arusa, who joined the service in September 2023 as a qualified Teacher of the Deaf is relocating to another part of the country. She will be taking up a new post, again as a peripatetic teacher of deaf. We would like to take this opportunity to wish her all the very best in her new post.

Date for your diary!



# Family Fun Day



## SAVE THE DATE







An opportunity to have fun, try new activities and meet other young people and families.

<b>Date: Saturday</b> <b>21st June 2025</b>	<b>Time:</b> 2 pm to 4.30 pm	<b>Venue:</b> Beech Lodge School, Stubblings Lane, Henley Road, Berks, SL6 6QL
<b>Who is invited:</b> The event is open to children and young people who are currently, directly supported by BSCS and their families	<b>Cost:</b> Free	

**How to book or who to contact here:**  
This information will be available in the New Year

Save the date for our Family Fun Day on Saturday 21st June. Join us in celebrating the achievements of the children and young people we support whilst having fun, making new friends and hopefully enjoying the sunshine.

There will be a range of fun activities, ( a bungee trampoline, lots of creative fun and reptiles plus lots more) a chance to catch up with other families. We also hope to have some of previous staff join us as well and the voluntary agencies we work with.



W: [berkshiresensoryconsortium.co.uk](http://berkshiresensoryconsortium.co.uk) T: 01628 796786 E: [sensory.consortium@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:sensory.consortium@achievingforchildren.org.uk)

Figure 13 - Picture of a Save the Date for the Family Fun Day on Saturday 21st June between 2.pm and 4.30 pm at Beech Lodge School

Wishing you all a fantastic Christmas Holidays, See you in the New Year 2025!



Figure 14 Picture of the Berkshire Sensory Consortium service staff

## The Six Authorities





**WOKINGHAM**  
**BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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*w: [www.berkshiresensoryconsortium.co.uk](http://www.berkshiresensoryconsortium.co.uk)*

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