



Specialist Teaching and Learning Service

# Autumn Newsletter

## 2024



## Contents

1. Welcome
2. Local and National Services
3. Q&A with Stella Parkinson on her Handwriting Pre-requisites Research
4. Autism Education Trust links
5. DfE Child Development Training – online, essential, free, and for SCHOOLS as well as Pre-school settings!
6. LIFT dates and upcoming training
7. Talking Walk-ins – IMPORTANT
8. NELFT – Single Point of Access and advice line
9. Time for gifts!

Dear all,

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter 2024!

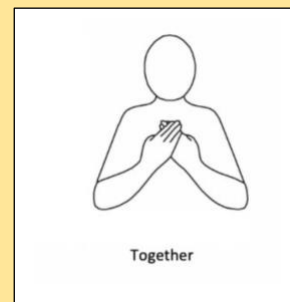
Time seems to be flying by, and it continues to be a privilege to be able to support you in driving forward SEND practice, offering the best possible, genuinely inclusive provision.

Hopefully the contents of this newsletter will provide some thought provoking responses, as well as reminding you of some key training opportunities on offer. We are also fortunate to retain strong links with all of our inclusion partners. In this edition Stella Parkinson (Occupational Therapist), shares more about her drive to raise much needed awareness on handwriting pre-requisites. That means the skills that a child needs to have acquired before we ask them to copy neat letter shapes and which, as a profession, we regularly fail to assess.

Thank you again for your continued endeavours to support all children in their learning and well-being, without EXCLUSION...

Russell Ames (District Lead)

Ashford STLS team





A local service helping children overcome a fear of dogs



Anna Freud

### School Attendance and Well-Being

[Research from the Children's Commissioner](#) found that in the 2022/23 academic year, 22.3% of all pupils were persistently absent from school. In 2018/19, that figure was 10.9%, meaning that rates of persistent absence have more than doubled since the coronavirus pandemic.

An important reminder that *'Reduced or non-attendance at school by a child or young person is often rooted in emotional, mental health or wellbeing issues'*, and that prizes, rewards and sanctions avoid the issues driving this alarming development in education.

The website holds many useful resources, this is just one example so do take a look.

<https://www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/school-attendance-and-mental-wellbeing/>

### Includes Us Too

Remember to share this important service with all of our families.

Phone:

01233 878089

Web:

[includesus2.org.uk](http://includesus2.org.uk)

Email:

[info@includesus2.org.uk](mailto:info@includesus2.org.uk)

**INCLUDES US TOO**  
Empowering families of children with disabilities

**LISTENING, SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING DISABLED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Founded in 2010, Includes Us Too is a parent-driven charity providing a free support service for families who have a child with a disability or additional needs. We also run accessible support groups, subsidised family events, trips and activities and a youth club specifically for children and young people with SEND.

- FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE
- SUBSIDISED EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY
- SUPPORT GROUPS: ONLINE & FACE TO FACE
- SEND YOUTH CLUB
- WORKSHOPS AND INFORMATION SESSIONS
- SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

01233 878089 | [includesus2.org.uk](http://includesus2.org.uk) | [info@includesus2.org.uk](mailto:info@includesus2.org.uk)

Registered Charity: 1137745

Kent County Council | COMMUNITY FUND | LOTTO

## A Q&A with Stella Parkinson about her essential, if alarming, research into our awareness in schools of handwriting pre-requisites.

### **Study title:**

An action research project about how to improve the support by primary school teachers of children who are delayed in their readiness to write.

### **Research questions:**

- What do one cohort of early career Primary school teachers know about the handwriting readiness of children from their training?
- How can collaboration between a small group of primary school teachers and me as a paediatric occupational therapist improve the support children who are delayed in their readiness to write get in class?'

### **Aim:**

To examine whether teachers are given instruction in handwriting readiness when they undergo teacher training and how best to support them if they are not.

#### 1. *What prompted you to make this investigation?*

Handwriting difficulties are one of the main reasons that teachers refer children to occupational therapy, and they're also relatively common, thought to affect between 10 and 30% of all children. Over the years I've noticed that teachers report not being aware of how to support children with handwriting difficulties, and especially they don't feel confident identifying when children are ready to work on letter formation. They also reported not being taught about stages of handwriting development when they did their initial training, so I wanted to explore this in more detail.

#### 2. *Were you surprised by any initial findings?*

Although the anecdotal feedback I received led me to anticipate results (which confirmed what teachers have been reporting over the years), that didn't stop them being quite shocking. I was surprised that ECTs are still not given any training in handwriting development and ways to support this when they did their initial training; there is so much evidence about how detrimental handwriting difficulties are to children's mental wellbeing and academic performance, and how handwriting proficiency is linked to improved reading and spelling ability and working memory (whereas typing is not), it seems to me it should be a key aspect of early years training.

3. *Comments from children are concerning to read - have any particular stood out to you?*

Feedback from children on my caseload was key to me starting the study in the first place. When I asked a 16-year-old with autism and a diagnosis of developmental coordination disorder (which commonly affected handwriting) whether she thought I should do the study, she said yes, and she went on to explain that she wasn't given her pen licence at primary school because her handwriting was always 'messy', despite her trying her hardest, and it still made her sad when she thought about it now.

4. *And similarly from teachers?*

I had worrying feedback from a reception teacher who completed the questionnaire, saying that they basically 'had no idea where to start with handwriting'. After delivering a workshop aimed at addressing gaps in knowledge to 6 ECTs, the group reported that they now felt like they were equipped to do their job properly, and wished it had been part of their initial training.

5. *You promote the collaborative approach with this research - how do you feel it impacts upon the whole process?*

The insights the ECTs gave me in phase 2 of the study, where we talked about the handwriting workshop, were invaluable in helping me to develop it further. The workshop needs to be relevant and useable in the classroom, and having teachers reflect on how this could be improved will be really useful in its refinement.

6. *With 90% of teachers, from a large data set, not having been taught how to identify handwriting difficulties, there is clearly a need for the training you have already initiated. But what further investigations do you feel are required now?*

Another key point we discussed after the workshop is the development of a screening tool for teachers to use alongside the workshop, to help them identify handwriting readiness and ways to help if children are delayed. I want to develop this next, again in collaboration with teachers, so that it can be tested in the classroom and developed into a useable intervention.

### 'Handwriting Policies and Pen Licences'



This is not a training programme at the moment but if you need further advice (and it looks like many of us do), get in touch with Occupational Therapy or STLS.



Autism  
Education  
Trust

Sebda

As schools and settings continue to make great progress in efforts to have all educators and staff trained with the 'Making Sense of Autism' module from the Autism Education Trust, and many are now moving forward with Good Autism Practice and more, it is important to remember that the parent organisation hosts many other resources. This includes SEBDA, who are listed in their Autism Services Directory, and who have recently produced some [FREE training videos](#). These are especially suitable for those of you ready for further, more in-depth study, although highly accessible and presented in a more conversational style. Click on the images, if viewing this newsletter online, or go to the organization websites.



Department  
for Education

Early years child development training

[Sign in](#)

[Home](#)

## Early years child development training

This free online training provides an overview of child development and offers practical advice for supporting children in your setting, including reception years.

[Learn more about this training](#)



### [FREE Child Development training from DfE](#)

Many of you in Pre-school settings will already have benefitted from this excellent resource, including a module on 'Supporting Individual Needs and Differences'. It has always been designed for the entire EYFS workforce but is currently being updated to ensure this message comes across to schools. It is also highly recommended for KS1 educators and all school leaders!

The Early Years STLS team in Ashford have been directly involved in expanding on this training in Stronger Practice Hubs and in reviewing the content for the DfE to ensure specific relevance for Year R in schools, so do ask Lisa Wells or Dominic Gunn if you have any questions. We will let you know as soon as any updates are published.

**LIFT and Early Years LIFT dates [here](#).**

**Training Schedule [here](#).**

**⚠️ IMPORTANT – ‘EYFS to KS1’ will be rescheduled for Spring 2025 ⚠️**

Remember that additional training, including bespoke, is added throughout the year, so do ask for anything that you cannot see!

Clinics continue (contacts below) but with a change that Early Years will be increasing these, both as ‘Post Allocation Clinics’ for children following EY LIFT, and regular ‘SEND Discussion Clinics’. This is in an attempt to offer the best possible support to you at a time when we are experiencing a huge increase in numbers of referrals and degrees of need.

#### **Next Term’s Clinic Dates:**

To book a clinic place please email STLS team members directly.

[Sara.cave@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk](mailto:Sara.cave@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk) [Amy.honey@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk](mailto:Amy.honey@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk)  
[Heather.woodcock@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk](mailto:Heather.woodcock@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk) [Sherian.hogg@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk](mailto:Sherian.hogg@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk)  
[lwells@wyvern.kent.sch.uk](mailto:lwells@wyvern.kent.sch.uk) [dominic.gunn@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk](mailto:dominic.gunn@goldwyn.kent.sch.uk)



#### **Speech and Language Therapy Talking Walk-in Service - IMPORTANT**

- Nurseries should discuss their reasons for sending children to a TWI thoroughly with parents prior to sending them to a TWI, so that they don't arrive unaware of why they are there.
- Universal / targeted strategies should be in place first (LIFT criteria) and children sent to TWI if these strategies haven't helped i.e. TWIs are not the first response, they replace a referral.
- Although not a requirement, it would be really useful for us to have either the communication screen or some written information brought with the children as we only get a short time to observe and may miss the things that nursery are seeing.
- Also, a reminder that if the child has more than one area of need (which can include social communication/language/play/sensory i.e. those you feel may benefit from an Autism assessment) they should be referred straight to CCCT for a full assessment - an SLT will be present at this assessment and will provide any follow up therapy/support that is needed. The child will get more in-depth support. However, if the child is over 3, they should still be sent to a TWI (as well as a CCCT referral) as they will be triaged to a different clinic and will see a paediatrician only.

## Single Point of Access (SPA) Consultation and Advice Telephone Line 0300 300 1585

Kent and Medway Children and Young People Mental Health Services

If you are in a Mental Health Crisis, please call NHS 111 — and chose option 2. For Out of Hours Support – please call Mental Health Direct on 0800 995 100



### What is the Consultation and Advice Telephone Line?

Support for mental health concerns for Kent & Medway professionals working with children and young people aged 0-18 years old.

### What does the Telephone Consultation provide?

Specialist advice from a Senior SPA clinician.

Operates Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-12:00.

One case discussion per call and lasting approximately 20 minutes

[www.nelft.nhs.uk](http://www.nelft.nhs.uk)

### What will happen during the Telephone Consultation?

With pre-obtained consent from the family/carer or young person (16+), a senior clinician will discuss and listen to the current concerns, offer advice and suggest appropriate services.

If the child discussed has complex needs or multiple issues, you may be encouraged to complete a SPA referral.

### The SPA Consultation and Advice Telephone Line is unable to

- Advise about medication.
- Replace the online referral process.
- Advise for children and young people already receiving care and/or treatment from a NELFT service.
- Advise on mental health or support of young adults aged 18 and above.
- Crisis support where there are significant risks to self or others.





## STLS Review

In the New Year, we should finally have confirmation of the changes that will be made to the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service.

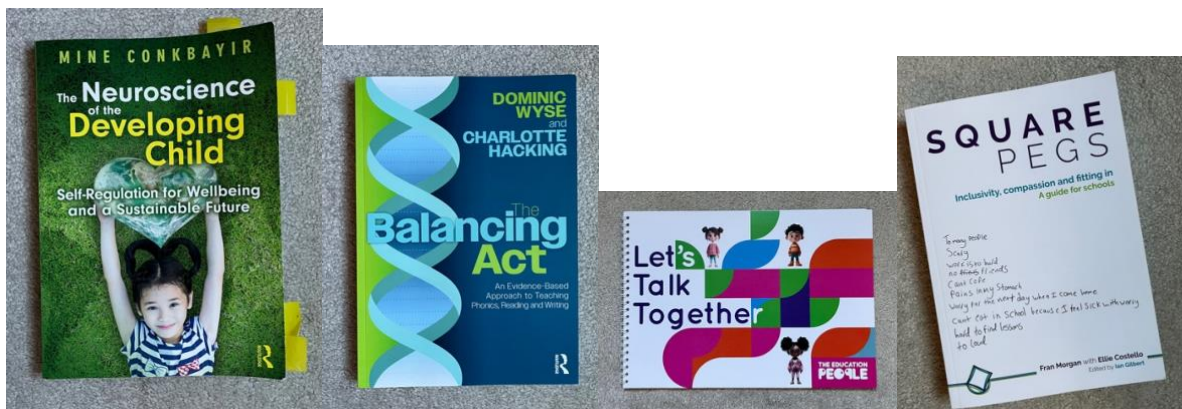
Thank you to all who contributed to the consultation.

Before then, its time to ...



And what better way to celebrate than gifting your favourite books to colleagues, family and friends!

Here are some of ours, new and fairly recent. Let us know what you would add to the festive booklist!



**Warmest Wishes from Ashford District STLS**