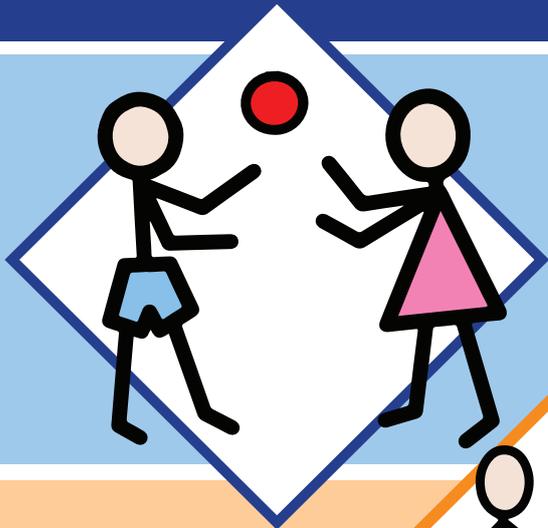


THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING

FOR PUPILS WITH COMPLEX LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS)



Playing and Exploring
– Engagement



Active Learning
– Motivation



Creating and Thinking
Critically – Thinking



EQUALS is committed to improving the lives of children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities through supporting high quality education.

INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE:

There is a growing body of evidence that supports the idea that individual learning styles and differences in **how** young children approach learning affects their later achievements in school (Stewart, 2011; Bronson, 2000).

The long-term effects of developing positive learning characteristics in the early years are profound (Tickell, 2011), and the **Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning** are integral to the EYFS standards for learning and development. Current requirements are that Year One teachers must be given a copy of each child's Profile report at the end of EYFS to include a commentary on the child's skills and abilities in relation to the three key characteristics of learning.

Practitioners must also '*reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice*' (Statutory Framework for EYFS DfE 2017 1.9).

The three Characteristics of Effective Learning in EYFS are:

- **Playing and Exploring - Engagement**
- **Active Learning - Motivation**
- **Creating and Thinking Critically - Thinking**

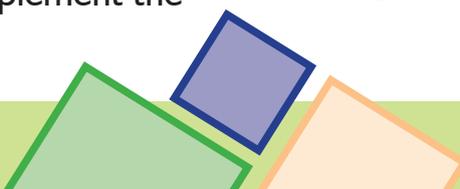
These characteristics include key elements of involvement, self-confidence and resilience and are therefore closely associated with the **Leuven Well-Being and Involvement scales for Early Years** (Laevers, 1999, 2000). Practitioners in Early Years may already use the Leuven Well-Being and Involvement Scales, which complement the EYFS characteristics.

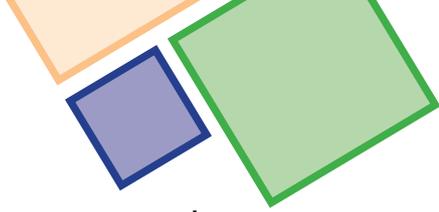
As children progress beyond the EYFS, the characteristics remain key to learning and development, especially for children with complex learning difficulties and disabilities as they continue to progress within the earlier developmental stages. The Engagement Profile and Scale project led by Barry Carpenter (SSAT) has produced a useful classroom tool that links very well to the EYFS Characteristics of Effective Learning and can therefore be used as children move into KS 1 and beyond. However, many schools choose to continue with the EYFS curriculum and the learning characteristics well beyond the EYFS for those children for whom it is developmentally appropriate.

BACKGROUND:

Given the importance of the characteristics of effective learning, and the fact that very little had been written or documented on the EYFS characteristics for children with SEND, EQUALS delivered a series of workshops for EYFS practitioners. During these workshops, a number of teachers and teaching assistants from special schools reflected on how the characteristics could be interpreted for children with SEND, and the ways that the characteristics could be matched to a child's individual learning styles and early patterns of play and development. It was clear from talking to teachers that they wanted a way of recording, tracking and celebrating the significant and unique steps of achievement and progress within the characteristics for children with complex learning difficulties.

As a result, the attached recording sheets were developed, based on each of the features of the characteristics, written in meaningful, or 'child-centred' language.





There is also a case study written by the lead EYFS Teacher at Brookfield School, an Outstanding special school in Reading (see page 10). The case study explains how the EYFS Leader at the school developed a whole approach towards observing and assessing children based on the characteristics.

HOW TO USE THE RECORDING SHEETS:

Each sheet is based on one of the three characteristics.

The contents are not designed to be developmental or hierarchical in any way, there is no specific order as a holistic approach is necessary in order to capture the true essence of the EYFS characteristics.

The sheets are designed to be quick and easy to use.

Some ideas on how to use the recording sheets:

- to be used as part of an initial baseline assessment. To gather information on how a child is learning;
- to be displayed in the classroom in order to support or prompt observations as children play and engage in activities. Observations can then be transferred to the child's learning journal;

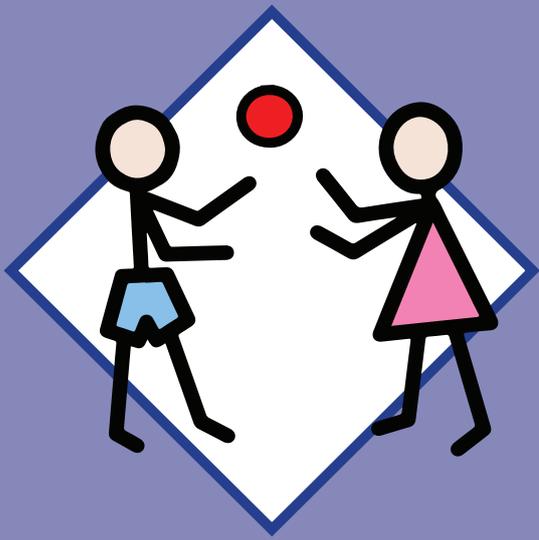
- to be shared with parents and carers in order to support gathering of information towards assessments, or reporting on significant steps and achievements;
- to be used as a tracking sheet for individual children and dated once a child has demonstrated consistency in that aspect of the characteristic; (this may be a very useful approach to demonstrating progress for Ofsted!)
- to be used by the teacher and staff team in order to indicate where there are gaps in a child's learning characteristics. This can then be used to consider ways to support the child and deepen their current learning and development.
- to inform future planning, reviewing and team reflection which might inform certain questions such as: Is your environment enabling? What can you provide and/or do in order to support/engage children even more?

THE MATERIALS ARE DESIGNED TO BE FLEXIBLE, PLEASE ADAPT THEM AND USE THEM IN ANY WAY THAT IS USEFUL TO YOU!

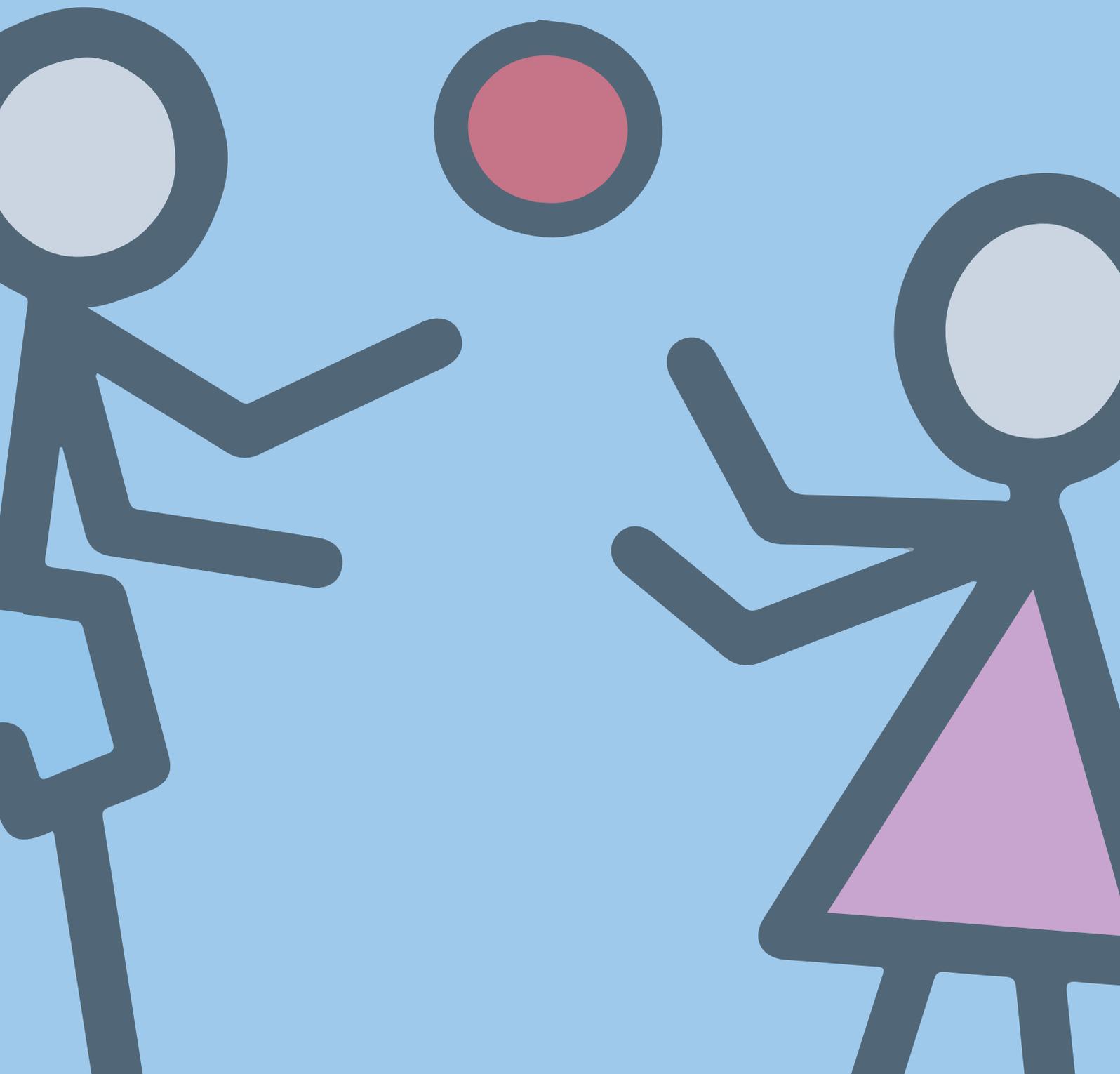
Any feedback on how you have found these materials and how you have used them would be gratefully received. Elaine can be contacted via the EQUALS office at admin@equalsoffice.co.uk

References:

- Stewart, N. (2011) **How Children Learn**, The British Association for Early Childhood Education, Early Education, UK.
- Bronson, M. (2000) **Self-regulation in Early Childhood: Nature and Nurture**, Guildford Press, New York.
- Tickell, C. (2011) **The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning**. DfE.
- Laevers, F. (1999) **The Project Experiential Education**, Katholieke University Leuven/Centre for Experiential Education: Leuven.
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- Carpenter, E. et al. (2016) **The Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project, Engagement Profile and Scale**. DfE



PLAYING AND EXPLORING



I can make a choice of activity/experience

I am willing to try new experiences

I seek to explore using any of my senses/preferred way

I can initiate an activity

I will take a risk

I am curious about my environment

I can notice similarities and differences

I will seek a challenge in my play

Playing and Exploring

(indicate with support (S), prompt (P) or independent (I).

I am curious about people around me

I notice when things change

I can interact purposefully with a toy/object/materials

I am happy in new /different environments

I am keen to have a go and find out

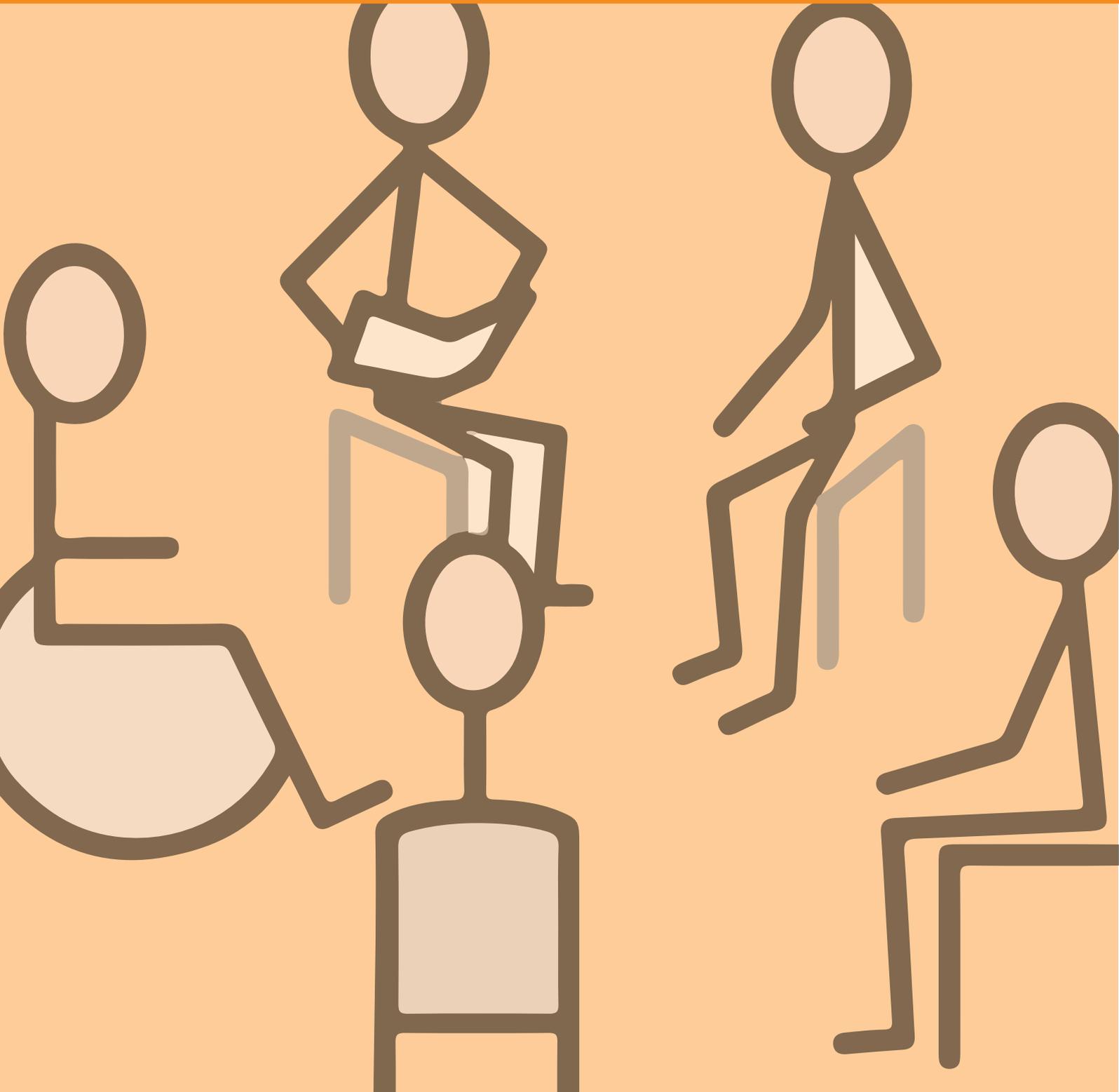
I like to explore when someone helps me

I will look or watch purposefully at something that interests me

I use real-life objects in my play/role-play



ACTIVE LEARNING



I show a positive approach to activities I like

I am excited and enthusiastic about something I like

I will try again to get something right

I want to join in with most activities

I want to repeat things that I like, I can do this myself

I am not easily distracted with something that I like doing

I respond to a special person (using non-verbal, body language/gesture, AC or verbal interaction)

I keep on trying

I will get involved in my favourite play/activities

Active Learning

(indicate with support (S), prompt (P), or independent (I)).

I show an interest in new experiences

I am happy in my self-chosen play

I will try something new

I am proud of my successes and communicate this with others

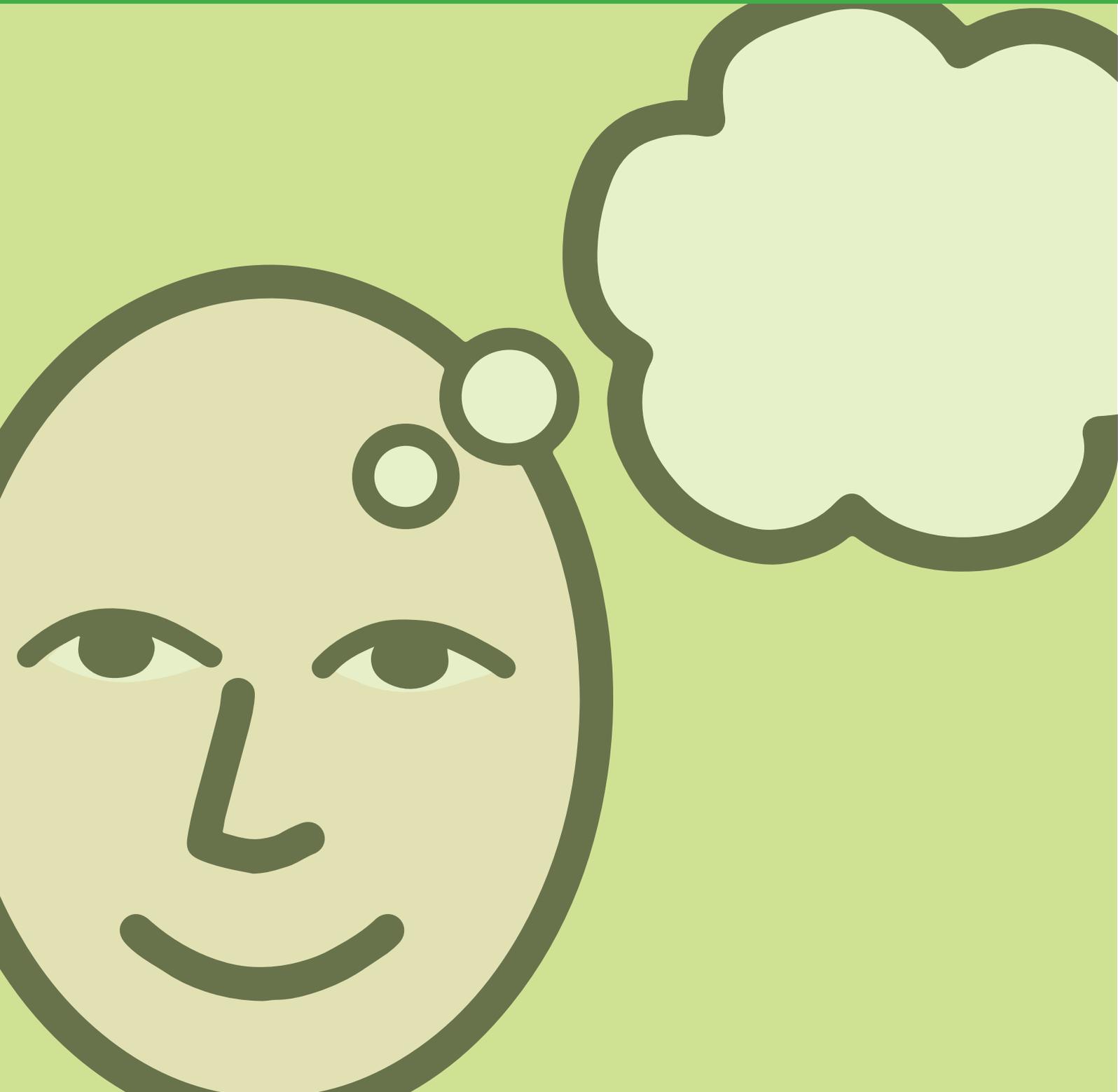
I show satisfaction when I have achieved something

I show attention to detail when I am exploring/playing

I am confident with things that I like/new experiences



CREATING AND THINKING CRITICALLY – THINKING



I can choose/select my own resources

I like to pursue my interests with enthusiasm

I like to have a go at new things

I work things out through trial and error

I will change what I am doing if it does not work

I can combine and connect things during my play

I can make up my own games

I have my own ideas

I show an interest in detail when I am exploring

I show an interest in cause and effect

I am motivated by myself with things that I like

I can find new ways of doing things

I like to finish what I am doing

I can get what I want by thinking for a solution

I can find toys/objects if they are hidden

I can change/test my ideas and try something in a different way

Creating and Thinking Critically

(indicate with support (S), prompt (P), or independent (I).)

CASE STUDY FROM BROOKFIELDS SCHOOL IN READING

SCHOOL CONTEXT:

Brookfields is a large special school in Tilehurst, Reading, which caters for pupils 2-19 years of age. Pupils attending Brookfield have a range of learning needs including profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, sensory impairment and autism. At the time of this case study the EYFS and Key Stage One department held 22 children divided into small class groups of approximately 7 in each.

All pupils within EYFS and KSI follow the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, with access to other provisions according to their individual need. The emphasis is on a child-led approach, very much based on play, with 'Engagement', 'Positive Relationships' and 'Independence' as key values underpinning practice.

RATIONALE:

Two years ago, staff within the Early Years and Key Stage One started a project to look at the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning'. We felt that children with additional needs, similar to their neuro-typical peers, develop key characteristics in how they relate to other people and their environment – 'Active Learning', 'Playing and Exploring' and 'Creating and Thinking Critically'.

After attending the EQUALS workshop on exploring the Characteristics of Learning for children with SEND, and as head of Early Years, I decided that it was a good time to bring the staff together to revise and clarify each characteristic in order to make them relevant, appropriate and meaningful to the diverse learning needs for each individual child at Brookfields.

As a whole staff team, including both experienced and less experienced teachers and support assistants, we worked over the period of a term to create "I can" statements for each learning characteristic. This meant breaking down each of the EYFS characteristics into realistic, child-centred statements which were achievable for all.

We felt strongly that each statement needed to be fully inclusive - in other words, could apply to a child with profound and multiple learning difficulties as readily as to a child with moderate learning needs. We did this by writing a series of 'I Can...' statements based on the Characteristics.

HOW IT WORKED FOR ONE OF OUR PUPILS:

Im Charlie and I am very aware of the camera being pointed at me! I am autistic with moderate learning difficulties.

When I started in Reception, I showed a real interest in the world around me. I especially liked animals, and I was confident in exploring areas near to me, both inside and outside my classroom.



THE STRAND OF 'PLAYING AND EXPLORING' WAS CLEARLY A STRENGTH.

Through gathering many observations of Charlie's learning and play, staff were able to determine that he was also developing in the characteristic 'Active Learning'. For example, Charlie was motivated to play active, sensori-motor games with an adult such as bouncing on a giant ball or being pulled on a parachute across the floor. He showed involvement through eye contact and vocal sounds to the adult to indicate enjoyment or even communicate that the game was not fast enough! This meant that he was confident in achieving 'I can' statements such as: "I can notice something different" or "I can show interest". We were in no doubt that these were Charlie's strengths.

In terms of areas for development, Charlie found it very difficult to sustain persistence in a task for more than a few minutes. He also found it challenging to regulate his emotions if something went wrong. This resulted in frustrated behaviour such as crying, lying on the floor and kicking out; it was often over twenty minutes before he could re-engage in learning.



As all staff had been involved in the process of developing a differentiated approach to the characteristics based on 'I can' statements, they were all fully aware of the content and therefore had ownership. The impact was that they were able to support Charlie in using a range of strategies based on their knowledge and understanding of how children learn. The most effective strategy was using visual support symbols to help Charlie to persist in sequencing and completing a task.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

We felt that we had achieved a way of linking each characteristic or 'I can' statement to each child's learning and development needs across all areas.

Over time, as well as developing persistence, Charlie demonstrated progress in the strand 'Creating and Thinking Critically', especially in having his own ideas such as "I am able to find ways to solve problems" and "I can find new ways to do things".

Charlie began to make links with his previous learning and experiences "I know what will happen if I do this". For example, the photos below show he was

able to spray the frozen Lego man with water and then when that solution did not work, drop a heavy bowl - impact.

CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS ...

The challenge, or 'next step' for Charlie will be to generalise these 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' that he has demonstrated into different scenarios, situations and play activities.

As a staff team, we are continually looking at the validity of our 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' and whether, over time, they meet the unique individual needs of a changing cohort of learners within our Early Years department.

We are also looking at tracking pupil's development in each characteristic, not as part of summative assessment data in each Area of Learning (the 'what' of learning) but as a method of monitoring and recording 'how' each child learns.

However, as a team we can see evidence of the impact of our research and feel we now have a tool that is relevant, appropriate and meaningful to use with our pupils.

