

About School for Parents



Summary

School for Parents empowers disabled children and their parents or carers. Our work enriches the lives of children with disabilities, develops their independence and prepares them for the future by teaching a range of skills. Parents learn alongside their child and are provided with information, practical and emotional support. More than 90% who attend our pre-school develop the skills and confidence they need to enter mainstream education.



The needs we meet

Children attend School for Parents from the age of 6 months to 12 years of age. They have a range of disabilities and challenges including Cerebral Palsy, Down's syndrome, Rett syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy Global Development Delay and genetic conditions. However, we always focus on what children can do, not labels, diagnoses or conditions.

Babies and children with disabilities need extra support to consciously learn life skills that come more naturally to others. These include communicating, eating and drinking, problem solving and playing, not just literacy and numeracy. We help them find a solution that works for them, such as eye gazing or signing.

Parents have needs too. They require skills to help their son or daughter thrive, the time and support to get to know their child and the knowledge to get the best from other services.

"...but what an absolute fantastic support really, it is just so nice to be with other mums and dads in the same position really ... because there is a connection there and, you know, it is more so than just going to a mother and toddler group really because they understand the challenges that you are up against..." Parent

The School for Parents service

School for Parents is a Nottingham-based charity that meets these needs using the principles of conductive education, a holistic education approach. It is not a 'therapy' or 'treatment', but a method of teaching practical ways to manage the additional challenges that accompany a disability. It brings the professional structure and rigour of schooling (individual assessments and tailored learning plans), but in a setting families describe as welcoming, encouraging and positive.

We run pre-school classes 4 days a week. Our 'graduates' can come back for extra support if they need it while at primary school, at our speech and language classes or our Saturday gym club. We worked with 81 children last year, and we are regularly at capacity with waiting lists.

Our distinctive service

- We provide educational support at a time when most other services are medical
- Family members attend all our sessions so they can learn the techniques to use at home
- We teach practical skills, incorporating daily activities into our sessions where appropriate (e.g. eating, drinking, going to the toilet, socialising)
- We teach in groups, matching children who can learn most from each other
- We see our children and families weekly
- We set individual aims for our children, broken down into very small steps
- We have regular terms and short holidays to fit the learning styles of children and better ensure skills aren't forgotten

This contrasts with other services families encounter at this stage which are mainly clinical, focused on what a child can't do, infrequent (physiotherapy is typically every 6 weeks, speech therapy every 2-3 months) and rarely in groups.



Our impact

We are immensely proud of the determination of the children and progress they make, gaining new skills or, for those with degenerative conditions, working incredibly hard to keep the skills they have.

Working side-by-side with parents, we help improve outcomes for children. A recent survey of parents of children in pre-school showed 91% felt their child had developed better movement and co-ordination skills. 86% considered their child had grown in self-confidence.

These skills grow their independence and personality. Better posture can help safe eating, so improves nutrition and enables them to be away from home longer. This means they can access more services and go to birthday parties. Finding a way to communicate non-verbally means a child can 'ask' for help, learn from classmates and show his or her personality.

Dr Anne Emerson (an expert in communication, disability and inclusive education at the University of Nottingham) conducted research that found *School for Parents* helps mums gain confidence and hope from seeing other children achieve and a greater understanding of their child.

"I was overwhelmed by grief. I couldn't cope with the realisation of the enormity of my daughter's lifelong needs. School for Parents helped me from falling apart; they showed me how to understand her needs and how to love her. Looking back now, it was the one constant factor which held us together in the early days." Parent

We work with families and professionals to help children access other services by producing transition plans for nursery or school, by inviting teachers to come and see children in session and by providing information for Education, Care and Health Plans.

Our history

School for Parents became an independent charity in 2001. Originally School for Parents was part of a larger charity, Scope. It ceased funding local services, including our own, and parents formed their own board of trustees. Each year we have to raise £200,000 to fund our services, supported by the amazing efforts of families, ambassadors, partners, fund raisers and generous donors.

The origins of conductive education date back to 1945, when the method was established by the Peto Institute in Hungary. It remains in practice to this day and is offered as a degree course by the Birmingham City University in conjunction with the National Institute of Conductive Education.

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