

## Parent view

**By Lianne Bunn**

Bill is 4 1/2 years old and has been deaf in the left ear from birth. He also has intermittent hearing loss in the right ear. Alongside this, he also been diagnosed with a sensory processing disorder which, for Bill, can present in different ways. He sometimes appears the same as any other child his age, but when overstimulated by the environment, or overtired and 'triggered', he can have shutdowns that sometimes look like seizures or periods of absences. He can become unresponsive, limp, slack mouthed, or demonstrates repetitive behaviours he is unaware of (like an arm or leg moving up and down). If not observed properly, these *can* come across as him being shy and uninterested, or occasionally it can present like a seizure, which can be very distressing. As it is quite unpredictable how he will react to different stimuli it can be difficult to understand Bill's needs, as they can differ from moment to moment.

The nursery Bill attends is well set up for children with hearing loss and sensory impairment – it is one of the reasons we selected it. This means that there are many strategies staff use through the day (such as signing or giving visual cues) that benefit all of the children, even if they haven't been identified as needing it. Because these strategies are in place, Bill is comfortable at nursery and tends to not have the bigger episodes of shut down while he is there. This has resulted in the nursery saying that they were happy that Bill would be able to slot right into his new school and not need extra support or adaptation made. As his parents, we felt this was optimistic to say the least, so I contacted the school where he will begin in September to discuss my concerns.

Bill's older brother attends this school already and so I was able to explain a little of our situation, knowing they had knowledge of us as a family. They were instantly very reassuring. They offered a meeting before the school applications had even closed, so that they could understand more about Bill and what his needs for transition might be. They explained that if Bill transitioned well, with no extra support, then that is wonderful. However, if we collectively felt that he may need some support, they would much rather be proactive and have plans in place rather than having to be reactionary nearer the time. They asked about what strategies the nursery uses that we feel helps Bill, and also what we do at home. We were able to share several strategies such as supporting his hearing loss by using Makaton. Bill is very familiar with the signs, and in a noisy classroom Makaton really help him to understand and process what is being asked. He often misses the beginning and ends of words, so using Makaton means he understand much better what is going on.

Bill is a completely different child when he recognises where he is, who he is with and what is going to happen. When things happen he isn't expecting, it can really be a struggle. He can also struggle to pick up new skills until he has been shown them many more times than some of his peers. He needs to be allowed to watch until he feels comfortable to join in. Therefore, strategies like visual timetables, cue cards for routines, and countdown timers to signal change overs, really help him prepare and process what he is being asked to do. The cue cards are especially good for supporting his memory of how to do something, or the sequence it needs to be done in.

Another strategy that was particularly effective was that the nursery assigns each day of the week a colour, feel, and smell to help the children to learn and process each of these gradually. It is a gentle introduction to new senses that has become part of the routine of his day. The next time he encounters them he won't be so surprised by them, and this could avoid any sensory overload happening.

The school have said they will ask the nursery for the details of each of these and will be able to implement at least some of them very easily, without disruption or additional cost. They explained that some of these things already help a number of children in the school and they gave us the further suggestions of using weighted toys and knee pads for circle time. The understanding of these needs and the implication of these strategies will, I am positive, prove to be a great help to Bill. It felt wonderful that they had taken the time to listen to our concerns, and engage with us in discussing strategies that would support my son.

As his parents we couldn't feel happier about the approach the school have used. We feel completely relaxed about this transition and very much like any ideas or thoughts will be listened to. The difference between this and the feelings we have been left with from nursery at times is unquantifiable. The transition to school can be a scary enough time, but when your child has additional needs that aren't always obvious, and you think your worries, concerns and knowledge of your child are being ignored, it is even harder.