

Spotlight on Battledown Centre for Children and Families

Battledown Centre for Children and Families was the winner of the 2019 Early Years Setting of the Year Award at the Shine a Light Awards.

Located in Cheltenham, Battledown Centre for Children and Families provides specialist assessment of children aged 0-7 years with a wide range of additional needs. With 32 children currently on role, Shine a Light judges were impressed by what the centre have achieved.

All children at Battledown have some form of additional need encompassing communication and social interaction difficulties, learning difficulties, speech and language delay, sensory impairment and emotional and behaviour difficulties. However, due to hard work and dedication, all children significantly improve as they start Year 1.

Academic data from 2017/2018 showed that with six Reception pupils in particular, 17 steps of progress in Listening and Attention, 15 steps of progress in Understanding and 16 steps of progress were made. So how do staff at Battledown bring out the best in their pupils?

The Centre looks at communication from every angle and this includes reviewing different strategies and materials that can be used in the classroom. In addition, they look at ways to make the most out of their indoor and outdoor spaces as well as ways to work collaboratively with staff, parents and carers.

Every member of staff is trained in Total Communication which is embedded in their practice. They have all taken part in Attention Autism programme and 60% of staff have had PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) training.

Outside of training, staff are always trying to think outside the box on how they can support the children better. The day is specifically structured to allow opportunities for children to work individually and in groups, unique outdoor spaces have been created, including an allotment area, sensory water garden, a mud kitchen and music trail with two of their four classrooms designed exclusively to promote communication. Spoken language is always accompanied by visual gestures, signs, pictures and symbols to ensure all children are able to take part.

Staff also dedicate a vast amount of time to building solid working partnerships with parents and carers including making regular phone calls and visits as well as sending home regular photos. The centre's family worker also runs focus sessions to cover a range of topics such as sleep and behaviour and fine motor skills.

To support parents even further, the centre offers extended services all year round so that children have continuity in the holidays by offering a play scheme, family drop-in sessions and holiday clubs, providing additional support for parents and carers, whilst at the same time allowing staff to continue observations and assessments.

The Shine a Light judges were blown away with everything that the centre has achieved and continues to achieve however it was something one of the parents said following a Christmas Carol performance that summed it all up for them: “My baby B...signed and sang his way through all of the songs...I couldn’t be more proud or more grateful...”

For further information about the 2019 Shine a Light Awards visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL