

Kilronan

NARRATOR: Research shows that for the child with a severe learning difficulty, the earlier the intervention, the better. Here at Kilronan School in Magherafelt, they have put this information to good use.

ALISON MILLAR: In Kilronan School, we believe we have developed a model of early intervention which best meets the needs of young children with developmental delay. In the mainstream sector, most children enjoy one preschool year before entering primary one. In Kilronan, our contact with the child begins at a much earlier age with contact through the Mums and Tots group. Mums and Tots caters for children from approximately one year old. The group meets weekly in a classroom. The group has access to other school facilities such as the soft playroom, the outdoor play areas, and the sensory room.

MARLENE YOUNG: We try to support parents however we can. For example, we schedule therapy appointments to fit around our Mums and Tots sessions so the parents don't have to travel specially into school. We have a toy library that lets parents borrow a toy or a piece of equipment. This lets them work with their child at home on developing a particular skill. Parents find this really useful because specialised equipment can be very expensive.

ALISON MILLAR: In addition to Mums and Tots, children can be referred for home teaching from the age of two.

MARLENE YOUNG: I travel to each child's home once a week where I work with the family. I teach a skill to the child, and I also show the parent how to work with their child. Then, before I go, I leave some homework, which is an activity for them to practice during the week. These visits let us build up a good working relationship, they give the parent a focus, and they help us to see progression.

NARRATOR: Kilronan has a preschool class for children in their nursery year. It runs in the morning from 9.15 to 1.15, Monday to Friday.

ALISON MILLAR: Working as a team, the teacher and classroom assistant use their experience and expertise to assess the child's developmental level and then move them to the next stage. The favourable staffing ratio, the highly trained and experienced staff, and the enriched learning environment create the conditions for maximum learning for each pupil. Termly targets are set for each pupil in consultation with parents, staff and the allied health professionals.

MAURA MCCRYSTAL: We were referred by our community nurses. Personally, I didn't realise that Kilronan, sort of, existed until Jack was born, and didn't realise the service that they offered, you know, for myself and my whole family.

AINE O'NEILL: Well, I feel that Clíodhna really benefited from this home teaching and having such early intervention at such a young age has really helped her to progress and develop. Having the weekly contact was great for me to provide advice and guidance on a range of preschool issues.

MAURA MCCRYSTAL: We get to meet other parents who also have... are in the same situation as ourselves. Jack gets to play with other kids as well. We just, we have a cup of tea, we chat with Marlene. You know, we talk about our hospital appointments. Coming here actually takes us out of that hospital environment which is, um, probably the best part.

ALISON MILLAR: Our experience of this model of early intervention has shown that pupils make excellent progress and are happy and secure with staff, and within the school environment.

MAURA MCCRYSTAL: It's good to know that you're not on your own. You know, there's other people out there like it.

ALISON MILLAR: We know that no matter where the children go to continue their education, that we can be confident that our early intervention has provided them with a sound foundation for future learning.