

Sperrinview

BOY: Lights, camera...

MAN: Action!

BOY: Action!

GIRL: Hello!

NARRATOR: Sperrinview School in Dungannon takes play very seriously. The school caters for children and young people with severe learning difficulties. It believes that play and activity-based learning can prepare pupils for the future.

BOY: Wa-hoo!

GIRL: I did it!

RUTH WALKER: It has been said that you stop playing because you grow old. That's not true. You grow old because you stop playing. And in Sperrinview, the curriculum moves through play and activity-based learning through to the use of leisure for our post-16 pupils.

PAULA JORDAN: Our vision for the school is to enable, empower and encourage. And one of the ways in which we do that is through play and activity-based learning.

NARRATOR: Research confirms that learning through play is one of the key principles of early years education.

PAULA JORDAN: Through well-resourced and well-planned activity and play-based learning, the children can develop the skills that they need for life in the future. And we use play and activity-based learning as the foundation on which to build those skills.

JULIE COERT: Here in Sperrinview, we organise opportunities for children to learn through play on a daily basis. These take place in a variety of settings, some in the classroom, sometimes outdoor play, and also we make use of the soft play room and engage the children in sensory play activities in the multi-sensory room and also in the white room. We try and consolidate the children's existing knowledge and also use it as an opportunity for progression and to teach them new skills.

PAULA JORDAN: Play and activity-based learning gives the children the ability to express themselves verbally and non-verbally, to create their own fantasy worlds which they can explore. They find out about themselves. They're able to develop independence, skills of cooperation with other people. They're able to develop their coordination and their physical ability, and explore their feelings and their attitudes to different things within their lives.

NARRATOR: Fortunately, Sperrinview has large grounds that can be used to enhance pupils' learning opportunities.

PAULA JORDAN: Our sensory garden was built about 12 years ago, and in the intervening years has had numerous face-lifts. It's a place where the children, particularly for those children who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, those children can go, they

can explore, they can use all of their senses to experience what is in the garden. And it's a very valuable learning opportunity for those pupils.

The sensory garden is somewhere that we can use all year round. It's a garden for all seasons. We've tried to incorporate elements that will involve all of the children's senses in the sensory garden. We would have wind chimes, which are hanging from the pagoda. We also have flags which the children can hear flapping in the wind. But they can also, as a child in a wheelchair is wheeled underneath the pagoda they can reach out and touch the chimes, they can feel the wind created by the flapping of the flags, and again, they can feel them maybe touch their hair as they pass underneath them. We have bought sensory plants which we grow in boxes that the older children have made. Some musical pieces of equipment. We have rainmakers, we have chimes. We have a bird board, which has natural bird sound. And the panels are all at a low enough level that a child in a wheelchair can press the panels and then hear the bird sound.

The pathways are flat for the children, they're a safe, secure surface, but there is an incline which leads down the garden so again, the children are getting that experience of movement at different levels.

We have water features, and we have a fountain. But we also have, which is probably one of the favourite things for the children, we have a seal. And when the children either stand on, or wheel their wheelchair onto a particular panel, the seal spits out water. You have the sound of the water, but also the children can put their hands out. They can feel the water coming out. They hear it trickling through the stones and down into the gullies below. So it is a very sensory experience.

Our woodland classroom is based on the forest schools of Denmark, and we like to give them the freedom, with supervision, to explore the grounds. This enhances their self-esteem and self-confidence.

One of the advantages of having the adventure playground here in school, is that it helps with the health promotion issues for children with learning disabilities. The children are able to practice skills such as balance, agility, mobility, and in addition to that, there is the social aspect of cooperating with other children.

RUTH WALKER: There's lots of evidence to say that young people with learning disabilities are at a greater risk of health problems due to obesity. And part of our purpose of having so much leisure and so much PE in the senior school is to allow a healthy lifestyle to develop, so that pupils can move on into adulthood as fit and healthy individuals.

This new extension was built to Sperrinview last year. The senior school have a specially built leisure area with all the facilities you would need for a young person in the 21st century. They have a snooker table, Wii, PSP's and iPads, as well as the more traditional things like table football, magazines and newspapers. It's very appropriate for their age, and for their developmental level.

The post-16 programme allows for use of leisure in the community as well as use of leisure in school. In addition to our facilities here in school, we use local leisure centres, local gyms and youth resource centre, which allows our pupils a wide range of experiences outside school and prepares them to be as independent as possible in their future lives.

JULIE COERT: We are also very aware in our setting here in school that the role of the adult is really key to working alongside our children and giving them opportunities to model play and to build on their skills.

RUTH WALKER: As our school model says, pupils come first in Sperrinview. We believe by developing play like this through from the preschool years, through the foundation and early key stage curriculum, through the post-19 programme, that we really are putting our children first in terms of their physical fitness and their ability to use leisure as they grow up.

GIRLS: Bye!

BOY: Goodbye. Vroom!