



Local Offer **the** **LO** **DOWN**

Welcome

Issue 4: Spring 2020

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Welcome to the LO Down - Merton's SEN and disability Local Offer newsletter.

The LO Down is a termly newsletter for parents and carers of young people and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The LO Down will bring you updates about services and support in Merton and the surrounding areas.

A Parent's Voice

A Parent's Voice - Nel and Arya

Arya is 8 and lives with her mother Nel, father Rishi, sister Amaya (6) and brother Luca (4). The LO Down team met with Nel to learn about some of Arya's journey as a child with SEND living in Merton.

When Arya was two and a half months old, it was identified that she had some developmental issues and it was later discovered that she had suffered a Grade 4 brain bleed. This resulted in Arya developing a visual impairment, epilepsy, developmental delays and she was eventually diagnosed with Autism.

Arya was chosen as part of the pilot for the EHCP process when it first came in around 2014 when she was three. As part of this process, Linden Lodge School in Wandsworth was identified as the best education establishment for her and was named as Arya's school.

Arya was originally offered a Short Breaks package of respite care. However, after trying different services, it was concluded that they could not fully meet Arya's needs. After an assessment by the Children with Disabilities team, she was offered a care package including Short Breaks sessions at Brightwell Specialist Out of School Provision and a one-to-one carer.

“Arya loves Brightwell!” says Nel “It provides her with a wonderfully stimulating environment and she is able to access many different activities including water play, helping out with the laundry, cooking, painting and ICT. Her favourite activity is smelling different spices and oils which she absolutely loves. This has become a really positive focus point in the week for Arya”.

Brightwell has also had a huge impact on Nel and the family. “It has allowed Rishi and me to spend more quality time with Amaya and Luca and for us to go on a date night or two!”

Have you used the SEND Local Offer website?

Nel had heard about the Local Offer through the EHCP process, parents she had been in contact with and the nursery Arya had attended. “I probably didn’t know about the Local Offer early enough though and would have liked there to have been more information earlier on, possibly from the Health Visitor when Arya was little” she adds.

Nel’s feedback about the Local Offer is much appreciated. The LO Down team will be passing it on to the Merton Local Offer Focus Group to look into encouraging more sign-posting to the Local Offer by professionals and practitioners who work with families like Nel and Rishi’s.

We would really like to receive any feedback or ideas about the Local Offer you may have. Get in touch with us at localoffer@merton.gov.uk

New sensory libraries are here!

Visit one of Merton’s libraries and you could find yourself in the heart of the forest, under the sea or at the South Pole being chased by racing penguins! Each of the borough’s seven children’s libraries (based in the main libraries) has been transformed into an immersive space as part of a ground-breaking project to make them an exciting place for all children, whatever their sensory needs.

Project Sense, as it is known, is the result of a successful £95k bid by Merton’s libraries for Arts Council funding. The children’s libraries have become unique, sensory spaces around the themes of Antarctica, circus, weather, the jungle, under the sea, the forest and outer space.

Each library has toys to suit its theme; from inflatable minions and racing penguins to aeroplanes. The themed spaces have their own particular scents and sounds too, along with specialist sensory equipment.





There is also a dedicated special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) book section in every library – 5,000 titles have been ordered as part of the project. For children who find noise distracting, or sometimes need a space to escape, equipment such as ear defenders and pop-up dark dens are available to borrow. Sunflower lanyards can also be collected from library staff – so they are aware of any children who may have additional needs. The Library Service has bought specially adapted toys to be used in activity sessions as well as recordable photo albums, voice recorders and other equipment, all of which can be loaned out for families to take home.

“We love the new sensory libraries! The toys are a particular masterstroke. Thank you from all parents of disabled children in the borough. This will be life-changing”

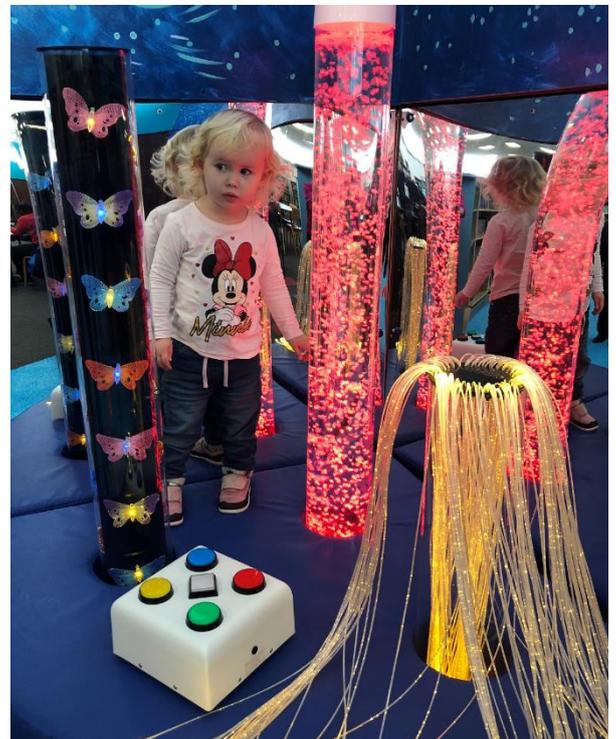
A dedicated events and activities programme for children and families with SEND is on offer. These range from sensory story times and toy activity sessions to karate and drama workshops. Other aspects of the project include family learning programmes and social events for parents and carers.



This innovative project is the first of its kind in the UK.

“My son loves the new circus-themed West Barnes library; he asks to visit every day after school. We are planning on doing a tour of all the Merton libraries to see the different themes, equipment and books they all have”

As well as transforming the physical space, Project Sense is about increasing awareness of children with SEND among the wider population. As a result, all staff are receiving autism-awareness, deafness and visual impairment training to help them support children and families. The Library Service will be working with all of the borough’s SEND schools and running disability-awareness sessions in mainstream schools too. Merton’s successful school’s library membership scheme is being expanded to include all special schools with regular class visits.



You can find out more at www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer. Just search for Project Sense or your local library.

Animal Encounters at Merton's Libraries!

Come and meet the farm animals, learn fun facts and have a chance to pet them. Touring the borough's libraries this spring and summer on selected Saturdays, there is a dedicated session for children with SEN and disabilities (SEND) from 9am to

10am and one for all children from 10am to 11am. Find out where the Animal Encounters will be next at www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer - just search for Animal Encounters. Booking with the relevant library is required

Spotlight on a Service – Brightwell

Brightwell
Specialist out of school provision

Brightwell Specialist Out of School Provision is a purpose-built centre, providing Short Breaks (respite) packages for children with a range of complex needs who have a learning disability and / or physical disability.

Children and young people aged 6 to 18 can have Short Breaks at Brightwell. They go to have fun, enjoy the facilities, develop their independence and spend time with friends outside of school hours. Angie Thompson, Manager say "Brightwell is a fabulous place for children and young people. I and my team of highly-trained staff really enjoy helping everyone to have a great time when they are here. We often welcome children when they are young and they continue to attend right up until adulthood"

What activities and facilities are available at Brightwell?

There are lots of facilities and equipment available to meet individual needs; there is overhead tracking in many of the rooms, as well as mobile hoists so children and young people can enjoy the garden too.

Brightwell has lots of areas to explore and have fun, there is a spacious lounge to relax in, two sensory rooms, ball pool and playroom, soft play room, music room, art room, TV room and a large garden.

A wide range of activities take place, including arts and crafts, sports, cooking, sensory play, massage and sensory stories. There are also lots of toys and games to choose from.

Support for children and young people's learning is provided with a range of educational resources, including touch screen computers, iPads, and educational games.

When is Brightwell open?

Brightwell is open for after school sessions from Monday to Friday, Saturdays and on Sunday mornings. Sessions also run in the school holidays.



How can children attend Brightwell?

Spaces at Brightwell are often in high demand. The Merton Short Breaks Team or the Children with Disabilities



Angie Thompson

Team will make an assessment of needs with the family. They will make a referral to Brightwell if it is felt to be an appropriate

provision. Angie says: "We then invite parents to come and visit and, providing there are spaces available, a transition into the setting will begin."

For details of Short Breaks Services in Merton, please go to the SEND Local Offer.

The Merton Short Breaks Services Statement has been updated and published on the SEND Local Offer

www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer

National Autism Awareness Week 30 March – 5 April 2020

There are around 700,000 people on the autism spectrum in the UK – that's more than 1 in 100 people. Every year, Autism Awareness Day is on 2 April. The week around this day is celebrated as World Autism Awareness Week. This year this will be from 30 March to 5 April 2020.

You can help spread awareness and increase acceptance in a number of

ways. The National Autistic Society has free resource packs for schools to help children to better understand their classmates and for workplaces to help them more autism-friendly. There are lots of fundraising events and activities.

Find out more and get involved at www.autism.org.uk

Did you know that Asperger is a German name and should be pronounced with a hard "G"?



Written Statement of Action is published

In June 2019, the local area of Merton was inspected by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) and the CQC (Care Quality Commission). The inspection looked at how well changes required by the Children and Families Act 2014 for children and young people with SEND and their families had been put into place. The Inspection identified a number of

strengths and areas for development. However, there were three areas of significant weakness. To show how the Local Authority and the area's Clinical Commissioning Group are going to address these, a Written Statement of Action has been developed. You can find the Written Statement of Action on the Local offer website under 'News' at www.merton.gov.uk/localoffer

SEND Myth Buster

Myth: “My child needs to get a diagnosis of autism before the school can access any additional support or advice”

Schools can access support and advice for any child with SEN, based on their presenting needs, not a diagnosis



M-Card Benefits



The Disability Database team are continuously working to improve the discounts and benefits offered as part of signing up to the M-Card. If anyone is aware of organisations that accept the M-Card and offer discounts/concessions, please do send them into local.offer@merton.gov.uk so we can keep our lists up to date and pass the information on to other parents/carers.

Your Views

We would really like to receive any feedback or ideas about the Local Offer that you may have. If you know of any services that you think should be added to the Local Offer or would like to comment on any information on the website, please contact us at localoffer@merton.gov.uk



If you do not wish to receive any future editions of the LO Down newsletter, simply email us at localoffer@merton.gov.uk