



Donaldson's Building Blocks for Success

From September 2009, Donaldson's is launching a brand new weekly support group for parents and carers called Building Blocks. Based at Donaldson's School in Linlithgow, West Lothian, the new group was made possible by a grant of £13,300 from the BBC's Children in Need and supports parents and carers and their children from birth to three years who have a family affected by deafness or speech and language difficulties.

The introduction of neonatal screening has allowed more babies to be diagnosed with hearing difficulties much earlier, which gives parents time to develop their child's skills from an early age and make more informed choices about their future. Many other moderate and complex additional support needs, including communication disorders, are also now diagnosed in babies and therefore an increased number of parents/carers require support and advice within their child's first few years.

Donaldson's Building Blocks is run by highly skilled nursery staff who help parents/carers and their children learn a range of skills in a safe, caring and nurturing environment. The school's nursery itself recently received an outstanding commendation from the Care Commission. Parents/carers and their young children can also benefit from the opportunity to share experiences with other families and participate in a number of programmed social and educational events throughout each term. Donaldson's can deliver the weekly sessions in both English and/or British Sign Language (BSL) as appropriate to the needs of the group.

Donaldson's modern purpose-built campus in Linlithgow was designed with the specific needs of their pupils in mind and offers additional benefits for the Building Blocks group including access to the school's well equipped nursery department, the swimming pool; the sensory room; the library and the Audiology Testing Chamber. Most importantly, the school also provides the highest level of expertise through its specialist staff who can also support Building Blocks including: Speech and Language Therapists; an Educational Audiologist; Educational Psychologist, BSL Tutors; trained counsellors; a physiotherapist; occupational therapist and a school nurse.

Speaking about the launch of the new group, Donaldson's principal, Janice MacNeill said: "For many parents who are deaf themselves or who have children diagnosed as deaf or with

communications difficulties, finding the right support is vital. We believe in early intervention and Building Blocks can help parents and carers right from the very start and aid them through what is, for many, a difficult time. It is a great joy to us, in our new location which was designed with these children in mind, to be able to launch this new service and make a difference to their lives.”

Donaldson’s is one of the seven national Grant Aided Special Schools (GASS) supported by the Scottish Government to provide education, therapy and care for pupils who are deaf or have severe speech and language difficulties. Donaldson’s is a bilingual community encouraging the use of both British Sign Language (BSL) and English, and has day and residential places available for children of all ages from across Scotland and the north of England.

Parents/carers interested in finding out more about Building Blocks can telephone Donaldson’s School on 01506 841900, email info@donaldsons.org.uk or visit www.donaldsons.org.uk.

ENDS

Notes:

- Building Blocks launches on **Wednesday 2nd September 2009** and will be held every **Wednesday between 11 am and 3 pm during term time** and is open to all parents and their babies or children who fall into one of the following categories:
 - 1 Hearing babies/children of deaf* parents
 - 2 Deaf babies/children of hearing parents
 - 3 Deaf babies/children of deaf parents
 - 4 Speech and language impaired children with either deaf or hearing parents
 - 5 Siblings of children affected by hearing, speech or language difficulties
- Building Blocks also offers the opportunity for children to progress to a Nursery placement if required (and agreed and funded by their Education Department) when the child reaches two or three years of age. Hearing siblings may be offered free nursery places to promote enhanced communications within the home environment.
- The nursery at Donaldson’s School received a glowing report from the Care Commission (February 2009), including a rarely awarded Grade 6, confirming the excellent services provided for children between 2.5 years and primary school age within the bilingual environment of the school. The nursery, in which children who are deaf or have severe speech and language difficulties are supported by the highly

skilled Donaldson's staff, has been commended for professional skill as well as the facilities plus the care and support provided to parents and their children.

** Deaf is used to cover Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing*