

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the image, creating a modern, layered effect. The central area is a plain, light grayish-white.

Supporting and promoting
independence

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- The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the slide, creating a modern, dynamic visual effect.
- Why independence matters
 - What independence looks like
 - Challenges pupils may face
 - Roles of a TA in promoting independence

Why independence matters

Supporting and teaching our students to be as independent as they can be is one of the most important skills we can teach them. Independence is essential to their learning, promoting confidence and wellbeing.

Independence will look differently for each of our students and whilst for some it could be travelling to school on the public bus, for others it could be something as simple as selecting which snack they would like from a choice of three options.

Each student will have different levels of independence but importance of supporting and promoting it with all our learners is the same.

What does independence promote?

- ▶ *Confidence and self-esteem:*

Independence builds confidence and self esteem. When our students experience success completing their own tasks no matter how big or small these are, they gain achievement and pride which then builds on their self belief. This also leads to a willingness to try new things without the worry of failing.

- ▶ *Encourages problem-solving and decision making:*

Allowing the students to be independent and supporting them to do so allows them to make their own choices, explore situations for themselves and understand consequences. These skills will then support the student's cognitive development and help them to become more adaptable, resourceful and resilient.

► *Enhances life skills for the future and life after Foxwood*

As much as we would all love to be, we aren't going to be around to support the students forever. Allowing them to be independent and promoting that as much as possible whilst in the safety of school, gives them an idea of what it will be like when they transition on from us in the future.

Teaching them our PFA curriculum supports them with accessing the community, managing their own health, personal care, entering employment and focuses as much as possible as developing the skills needed to provide a transition into adult life/college etc.

► *Promotes communication*

When given the opportunity to do so, students should be supported to express their needs, make their own choices and advocate for themselves. This skill will then empower them to use their voice in their learning, support and care.

► *Increases Engagement and Motivation:*

Once the students are feeling more successful with their independence, they are more likely to engage in learning, put in more effort and be willing to take risks without the fear of failing. Independence supports intrinsic motivation and helps with a positive learning mindset.

► *Supports Physical and Cognitive Development:*

Independence involves motor skills, memory, sequencing, planning and organization.

► *A sense of belonging and inclusion:*

Independent participation helps students to feel a part of their environment, whether it is in lessons or socializing on the playground, it promotes dignity, equality and social inclusion.

► *Improves wellbeing and mental health:*

Being in a position where you can do as much for yourself (as possible) contributes to a reduction in anxiety, increased life satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose. Even small steps towards being independent can have a meaningful impact on learners with special educational needs.

What independence looks like

Independence will look completely different for so many of our learners and it will vary based on their strengths, needs, communication styles and level of support needed. **The important thing to note about independence is that it doesn't have to mean doing everything alone but about completing tasks with the as little support as possible.**

A student being able to participate, make choices and complete tasks with minimal adult support or supervision is classed as independence.

► **Making their own choices:**

I think our school is great at promoting this as much as we can, starting all the way from Foxcubs students are encouraged to make their own choices indicating their choice of activity, toy, food etc. This choice can be made using symbols, AAC, gestures, words or expressions as well as showing clear 'yes' or 'no' preferences.

► **Communicating Needs**

Asking for help appropriately

Using communication devices or PECs to request items

Telling an adult when they need a break

Expressing emotions in a regulated way

► **Problem-Solving**

Trying different ways to complete a task

Finding missing items or asking appropriately for replacements

Working through simple conflicts or challenges

Promoting independence – Pathway 1

Success in Hedgehogs

- ▶ On arrival, students are encouraged to take their own lunchbox and planner out of their bags. There is a labelled box for each of these items to go into so the students can do this as independently as possible.
- ▶ In September, the students who were new to the class required hand over hand support with this. Once we started to step back and allow more independence, they initially would stand there for a while or drop their things onto the floor. With consistency from staff and perseverance from the students, they were all emptying their bags with minimal support/prompts by October half term.
- ▶ In September, one of the students who moved to Hedgehogs would not open any doors. When she arrived at a door, she would stand there and wait (for as long as it took) for somebody to open the door for her. She would not try to put her hands on the door. To support with this, we decided to take her to dinner a few minutes earlier when the corridors were quieter. Initially, she required hand over hand support to push/pull the doors and would stand and look at staff waiting for them to do it for her. After around a month, this student could walk independently through all the doors from Hedgehogs to the dinner hall whilst carrying her own lunchbox with only a few occasional verbal prompts.

Chances throughout the day which are used to utilize promoting independence (Pathway 1)

- ▶ Putting away coat/bag on arrival
- ▶ Communicate feelings in 'Hello'
- ▶ Make choices regarding their work and food
- ▶ Collecting coat and putting it on with minimal support for breaktime
- ▶ Collecting their things at home time and carrying them to their bus
- ▶ Opening doors for themselves
- ▶ Always attempting to take off/put on shoes before supported
- ▶ Independently sitting and engaging with tuff trays/fine motor around the classroom
- ▶ Identifying their own needs (AhS taking your hand and taking you to the door if the classroom is too loud)
- ▶ Encouraged to take control during their personal care such as getting out their own items, putting things in the bin, redressing themselves

Chances throughout the day which are used to utilize promoting independence (Pathway 2)

- ▶ Being responsible for ensuring all items are brought into class in the morning/taken home at night– planner, water bottle etc
- ▶ Collecting their own items such as ear defenders/putty or asking for them when needed
- ▶ Using a timer to support a movement break and coming back to class without reminders when it finishes
- ▶ Transitioning through school without adult support
- ▶ Being sent on small jobs around school independently such as taking the lunch menu to the kitchen
- ▶ Walking to the bus independently
- ▶ Toileting independently or with minimal prompts (when possible)
- ▶ Being responsible for own work, sticking it into books, collecting own equipment for lessons

Challenges or barriers

- ▶ Children with special educational needs may want to be independent but encounter barriers such as cognition, communication, physical skills/ability sensory needs and emotional regulation, motor skill difficulties or fear of getting it wrong.
- ▶ Low confidence is a huge barrier for many of our learners, with the fear of failing becoming an obstacle for trying.

- ▶ Likewise, low confidence from adults around them. If a student overhears a member of staff saying something like “he’s never going to be able to do that” or “there’s no point even trying to get them to do that” it will plant doubt in their minds and they will be reluctant to give it a try.
- ▶ **Whilst it is important to be realistic about what the students can achieve, we shouldn’t assume they aren’t capable of something without trying it with them first. For example, don’t assume just because a child is in Foxcubs that they can’t put on their own shoes or coat.**
- ▶ Parents/carers can also be a barrier in independence for students, although they are always doing it out of love and care for their child, occasionally the opportunity to be more independent may be taken away from the student due to parents doing things for them e.g showering, brushing their teeth when they are capable of doing it for themselves.

How we can help

► Use Least-to-Most Support (where appropriate)

TAs should start with the **lightest level of support and only increase if needed**. Examples:

Giving thinking time, visual clues, gestures or modelling and verbal prompts. Offer physical guidance only when required. This prevents over-reliance and encourages problem-solving. Some of our students may require it to be modelled and hand-over-hand lots of times before you remove the support and encourage the independence. This will vary from student to student and staff will know best which approach to use.

► Promote student voice and choice

Encourage pupils to collect/choose equipment, decide how they want to complete a task, communicate their preferences and express when they need support. Some students will like to have a try before asking for support whereas others will sit there and wait for support to come and may need encouragement to have a try first before staff step in to help.

► **Encourage Problem-Solving**

If a student is struggling with something instead of jumping in to do it for them, use prompts to support their attempts and encourage them to keep trying. Using prompts such as:

“What could you try next?”

“What do you think would help?”

This supports cognitive development, confidence, and resilience.

► **Break tasks into manageable steps with visual supports**

The use of visual timetables, now/next boards, checklists and modelling the first step allows students to break their tasks down into manageable steps whilst completing them independently. This helps with sequencing, organization and functioning. Following an individual timetable independently can reduce reliance on adults.

Ensure the environment supports independence

It is important that when we are trying to encourage the students to be as independent as possible, we try to reduce some of the barriers they might face. Reducing clutter and distractions, ensuring routines are predictable, labelling trays and cupboards will support the students to be independent in their environment without adult dependency.

► Celebration

Recognise and celebrate attempts, partial independence and persistence. This will encourage the students to have another try be independent again.

Manha follows an individual timetable. She will carry this around with her throughout the day and cross off the tasks when they have been completed. Manha will set a timer for lessons and rewards and turn it off when they have finished. Although Manha has to follow her timetable, giving her the chance to cross it off and see what's coming next gives her involvement in her own day. Manha can also use her choosing board to decide what she would like to do when she has completed her work, giving her independence in her decisions.

Logan follows a chart in each lesson due to his sensory needs, Logan finds it difficult to sit for long periods of time without a movement break. During lessons, Logan collects a star for input, a star for work and one for tidying away his own belongings. Once Logan has collected all his stars, he will go outside on his own for five minutes on the trampoline. He will take a timer in his pocket and return independently when it beeps. Logan then sits and completes fine motor tasks on his own without adult support.

Academic and cognitive barriers	• Difficulty processing information • Challenges with organization and planning
Social/Communication barriers	• Troubles understanding social cues or communicating needs • Fear of stigma or failure
Emotional/Behavioural barriers	• Low confidence due to past academic struggles • Anxiety that makes independent tasks feel overwhelming
Physical/Sensory barriers	• Mobility or fine motor difficulties • Sensory sensitivities affecting focus and participation
Environmental/Structural barriers	• Lack of accessible resources or assistive tools • Spaces not designed to support diverse physical or sensory needs
Limited opportunity for independence	• Over reliance from adult support reducing chances to practice • Low expectations from adults

Links

- ▶ <https://inclusiveteach.com/2020/03/26/send-encouraging-independence/>
- ▶ <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit-excerpt/ten-ways-build-independence>
- ▶ <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/developing-childrens-independence-by-supporting-their-well-being/>