



Flexible seating leads to inclusive classrooms

St Andrew's Primary's journey with flexible seating in classrooms

Lizzie Cooper, SENDCo at St Andrew's Primary in Crawley, has spent the last year reshaping the learning environment for all her pupils by introducing a variety of seating choices and adaptations across the school. They have seen fantastic results in the participation, engagement, and regulation of children both with SEND and those without.

How it all began

"Following a staff INSET day, it was observed by the SENDCo how many adults struggled to sit for the whole day. Some brought in chairs, some brought cushions, and some chose to stand. This started a spark and made us think: if staff struggle to sit in one space all day, why do we expect children to?"

This led us to research flexible seating, and to start a trial project in one class to see what would work for our pupils. Our focus in this research was to teach pupils self-management skills and, in turn, improve learning behaviours through adapting the physical learning environment.

This research project has had Pupil Voice at the heart of it from day one. We gathered pupil voice about their current classrooms and how they find learning, about what furniture they would like to see added and what they wouldn't like. We listened to pupils during the trial, and asked them which furniture is working and which furniture did not work for them as a class. Staff and pupils were also consulted on the roll out of the project, and they helped choose what went in their new classrooms.

This research project proved really successful and both staff and pupils could see the positives. Following the successful trial, we rolled out flexible seating across the whole school from September. Our pupils have the choice to use standing desks with or without stalls, floor seating and alternative seating around traditional tables such as ball seats and wobble stalls. Pupils are also encouraged to make their own choices as to where they sit, and not have a seating plan made by the teacher. Learning behaviours have been observed to be positive with no arguments over who sits where, as they know that this isn't a onetime deal – they can choose again tomorrow. "

Challenges we identified during the trial period:

- The layout made getting around tricky.
- Beanbags were a bit too comfortable.
- Giving out the books was a challenge in the mornings.
- To start with children were making choices based on friends rather than where they learn best.
- Competition over high value seats (e.g: sofa, beanbags).
- There is one SEN child who needs some adult direction at times.
- At the start, it took a while to get used to as a team.



Positive outcomes we saw after the first year:

- Children are now choosing their seats in the morning and afternoons with almost no issues.
- It is providing adaptations for ALL children - not just those with obvious need.
- There are good learning behaviours from the children, so staff are not having to work harder at behaviour management. Children are very settled.
- Children are staying in their seats more during the lesson.
- Children aren't always opting for the sofa.
- Children are not moving spaces very often, and they are more aware of what does and doesn't work for them.
- "Well behaved" children get to sit and work with their friends. They are not always sat with a child who finds things trickier.
- Aligns with the mastery approach, as the children are always working and exposed to new ideas.
- The horseshoe table is working effectively, as children can choose to be near support. As a result, children are developing a higher level of self-management skills.

Things we have learnt – Top Tips for other Schools:

- You do not lose your autonomy over the class as a teacher. You can move them!
- Some seating won't work for your class, and that is okay.
- The first couple of weeks may feel different, as they will be excited. This is where the high expectations need to come in. They will get used to it and the novelty does wear off.
- Let all the children try all the seats.
- Have daily conversations about choosing places to help their learning, what this looks like, and the expected learning behaviours.
- Have more than enough spaces for the children.
- We are teaching children how they learn, rather than what they like to sit on.

Staff Feedback

Head Teacher, Jennifer Wise: *"Flexible seating has been really successful at improving behaviour for learning, and has promoted independence in all our children, regardless of need. Low level behaviours have reduced across the school; children are quicker to settle following transitions, and are ready to learn. It has helped our pupils to understand how they learn best, which is a life skill in itself. Flexible seating has helped all our children, including our quieter children who may have been silently struggling. Our children feel empowered and valued through designing their classrooms and having input in the process of change. They are also empowered by getting to choose where and who they learn with."*



Kate Trolley, SEN Governor: *"It just makes sense!"*



Natasha Bullen, Teaching Assistant: *"I think it is more natural for the children. It is helping to prepare them to make their own choices and have more control over their learning. I find sitting still a challenge, and know this approach would have helped me when I was at school. The children are happy and so are we."*

Rachel Mulliss, Class Teacher: *"The approach is encouraging children to reflect critically upon their seating choices, but also their location within a learning space and who they learn best with, considering the impact of these choices. Pupils are developing in their understanding of how various factors affect their progress. This is also helping the children to celebrate and value diversity within their class. Pupils feel listened to; they know that their suggestions or requests for adaptations will be taken seriously."*

Pupil Voice

Year 5 pupil: *"We can learn in different spaces. It helps me learn; I do more work when I am comfy. My favourite space is the standing desk."*

Year 5 pupil: *"It helps people to learn, especially if they have disabilities, like me. If they want to stand at a standing desk then they can, and you don't have to keep still there. The standing desks help me feel relaxed."*



Parent Voice

Parent of a Year 6 pupil: *"It's lovely to see things changing and that it's not one size fits all. I really love it!"*

