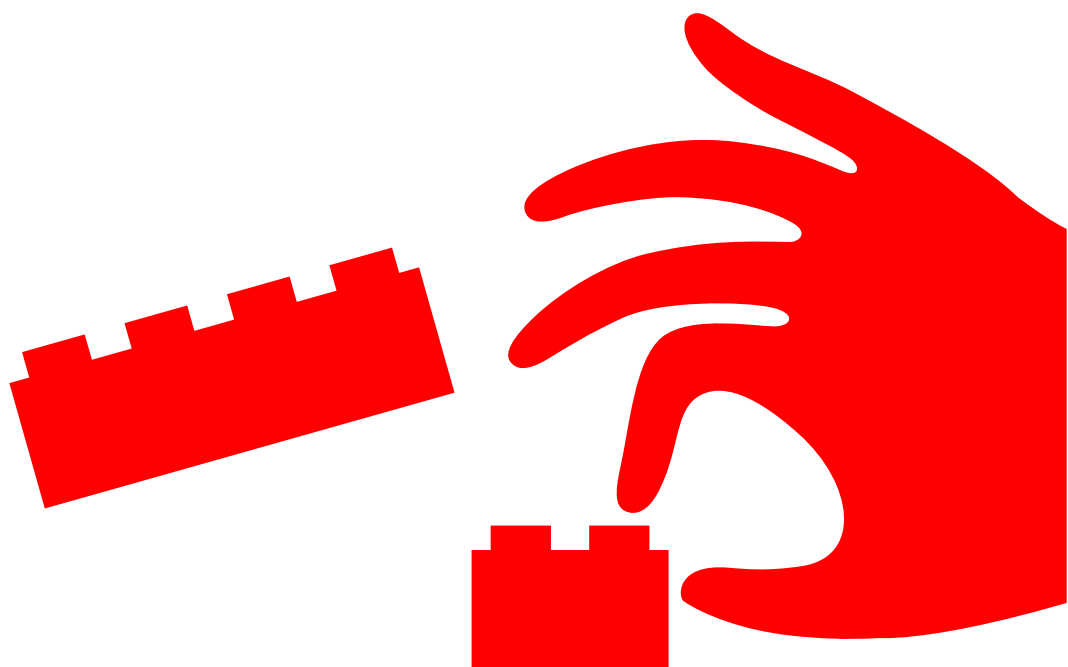


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# Supporting students at special schools with the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme

Jo Ellingworth, Autism Lead, and Lauren Noé, Autism Provision Lead TA, support special educational needs students at Highfield Ely Academy, a special school in Cambridgeshire, UK.

## Introducing the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme

Highfield Ely Academy supports 125 students with special education needs from across Cambridgeshire. The school aims to help its students to develop skills, such as communication, while ensuring they have access to enjoyable experiences and opportunities to make friends and have fun.

Playing with LEGO<sup>®</sup> bricks is an activity that many of the students enjoy, which inspired Jo to implement the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme at the school; known as 'Brick Club' to the children. Through collaborative LEGO play, children have fun, make friends, and

develop their communication skills, confidence, and social and emotional wellbeing.

On joining Highfield Ely Academy, Lauren started overseeing Brick Clubs. The evidence and research that supports the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme drew Jo and Lauren to the approach, they are:

**“impressed with the amount of research that has gone into developing the programme, and the evidence and theory underpinning it as well as the content from autistic people.”**

# PLAY INCLUDED

## A child-led approach

Lauren completed the Brick-by-Brick® programme Certified Facilitator training developed by Play Included® to enable her to facilitate Brick Clubs. Lauren was impressed with the Brick-by-Brick programme training: “Rather than prescribing a traditional framework with goals and objectives, Play Included®’s approach brought it all back to having fun. When the adult steps back, students are able to play freely and explore different situations for themselves.”

After completing the training, Lauren extended her school’s Brick Club session to an hour to enable her and Jo to prioritise the fun of LEGO model building and learning through play:

**“LEGO is so motivating, which is what makes the children want to join in. It's structured, they know what to expect from it, and they get something out of it.”**

## Developing communication skills

Lauren now runs eight Brick Clubs, with up to three students in each: “Some of our children need support to develop their vocabulary. The colours, shapes, and sizes of LEGO bricks are easy to use to help children deepen their understanding of the language used in playing with LEGO sets. Within Brick Club, we have seen big improvements in children’s communication, and we have been able to share this information with classroom teachers to help them to build on these skills further.”



## Tailored to every child’s needs

The flexibility of the Brick-by-Brick® approach means that Lauren was able to adapt each Brick Club according to the specific needs and ages of the children. While some sessions are more child-led, other groups require more support from Lauren, who is able to leverage Brick Club as an opportunity to introduce the children to different social situations and learn new vocabulary through each session’s activity.

## Having fun and making friends

Lauren described the joy children get from attending Brick Club:

**“The children love it. When I see students come to Brick Club, it is clearly a safe space and a break from the hustle and bustle of the school day. They have the chance to come along with a friend, let off steam and have fun playing with LEGO bricks while also improving their social communication skills and confidence.”**

## Future plans

Lauren hopes to revisit her training with Play Included® and make use of the online resources available to ensure that her students get the most out of Brick Club going forward.

