

Little Sticks at Marjory Kinnon School

Best practice for inclusive golf in a SEND setting

Marjory Kinnon School in Feltham is a SEND school specialising in autism, supporting pupils aged 5-16 years. Over the past 18 months, the school's cohort profile has shifted, with many pupils presenting with lower autism levels and a wider range of physical abilities. This created a timely opportunity to introduce new activities that could stretch higher-ability groups while still being accessible and meaningful for pupils with more complex needs.

To achieve this, the school adopted Little Sticks, first within two secondary classes (Year 7 and Year 9), followed by expansion into primary. Head of PE Steve Bere led the initial pilot, working closely with Majesticks GC and Sport Impact (a not for profit organisation committed to enhancing the PE, physical activity and sport for all young people) to embed the programme into a wider target games curriculum. The programme quickly proved to be highly effective and very popular.

Why Little Sticks?

The school had previously trialled a different golf programme several years ago, but it wasn't well suited to the needs of pupils at the time. Now, with a more mixed ability cohort, Steve saw the chance for a fresh start: *"We've got a couple of classes that are quite high ability... but we've also got classes with really low autism levels who find fundamental movement skills hard. Little Sticks felt like something they could all enjoy and fulfil their potential in".*

Despite having "no golf background", Steve embraced the programme, learning alongside the pupils. The primary equipment pack proved a strong starting point, and collaboration with Majesticks helped refine adaptations for a SEND context.

Adapting equipment for SEND learners

A defining feature of the school's success with Little Sticks is Steve's proactive adaptation of the equipment to match pupil needs.

Having larger/more varied club sizes was useful: the primary pack included some larger putters, but not enough for a whole class: *"If we could have a bank of larger ones... maybe a few more so there was less waiting"*. Steve said. Longer shafts and bigger club heads were also useful for taller pupils and those with fine-motor or visual-motor challenges.

Adjusted ball sizes for visually impaired pupils were important: *"some of our children are visually impaired... I've been getting a soft dodgeball-size ball for them to strike. It gives that sense of achievement, just hitting the ball is something to be celebrated"*. - Steve. This ensured early success and reduced frustration during initial sessions.

Larger or multiple targets meant greater success and maintained engagement: *"rather than one target, I put two or three depending on the group, so they've got options when they get to the end"*. - Steve.

Teacher-led environmental adaptations: Steve integrated additional school equipment to create "crazy-golf style" tasks: *"I used cones, hurdles, little tunnels... just to give the sense that this is part of golf"*. These additions boosted creativity, problem-solving, and movement opportunities.

Adapting teaching and learning

Steve built the six-week unit around small, achievable steps to ensure consistent step-by-step progression: *"week one was just getting used to the equipment... all the way through to week six where they were playing with a partner, with a group, with crazy-golf elements"*. Pupils progressed from individual putting to paired challenges, to competitive tasks using gates, targets, and course layouts.

Early sessions revealed that waiting caused disengagement, so **activities were adapted to reduce waiting time**: *"there was quite a lot of waiting, so I introduced pair work straight away. Engagement went up massively"*. - Steve.

The focus was on hitting the ball and enjoying the sessions. Fine-motor challenges meant pupils often held the putter in unconventional ways, but Steve overlooked this element and allowed for flexibility in terms of grip and technique expectations: *"I'm not worried about how they're holding it. If they can strike it in roughly the right direction, let's celebrate it. That will come in time"*. This approach helped build confidence quickly.

As a school where communication needs are significant, visuals were essential: *"we're very heavy on visuals... keywords like 'putter', 'target' laminated on the wall or floor. It helps with the language of the lesson"*. - Steve.

Marjory Kinnon's multi-disciplinary team also contributed to lesson planning: *"we liaised with our OT and physiotherapist so we know who may need extra help with fine-motor or coordination skills"*, whilst Teaching Assistants provided targeted support during lessons, enabling differentiated challenges and independence.

Key best practice recommendations for SEND settings

Drawing from Steve's implementation, the following principles could be followed to ensure successful delivery in a SEND setting.

- **Start simple, build gradually.** Focus first on equipment familiarity, then introduce obstacles, including gates, targets, then games.
- **Adapt equipment for accessibility:** this could include larger balls, varied club lengths, or additional targets, for example.
- **Use visuals everywhere:** this could include key words, communication boards, visual rules, and target markers.
- **Prioritise activities with a short wait time:** focus on pair work, multiple targets, and rotational stations.
- **Celebrate success early and often** by focusing on celebrating direction of travel, not technical perfection.
- **Know your pupils and tailor activities** using insights from OTs/physiotherapists and classroom staff if possible.
- **Be flexible with grip and technique** by allowing unconventional approaches while confidence is developing.

Summary

The Little Sticks programme has become a powerful, inclusive tool at Marjory Kinnon School. Through thoughtful adaptation, collaboration, and a pupil centred approach, Steve has demonstrated how golf can thrive in a SEND environment, not only improving skills and physical literacy, but boosting confidence, communication, and enjoyment. *"I'm really happy with it. The children warmed to it, felt achievement, and loved the competition. We'll definitely be using it again"*. - Steve