

# Special Children

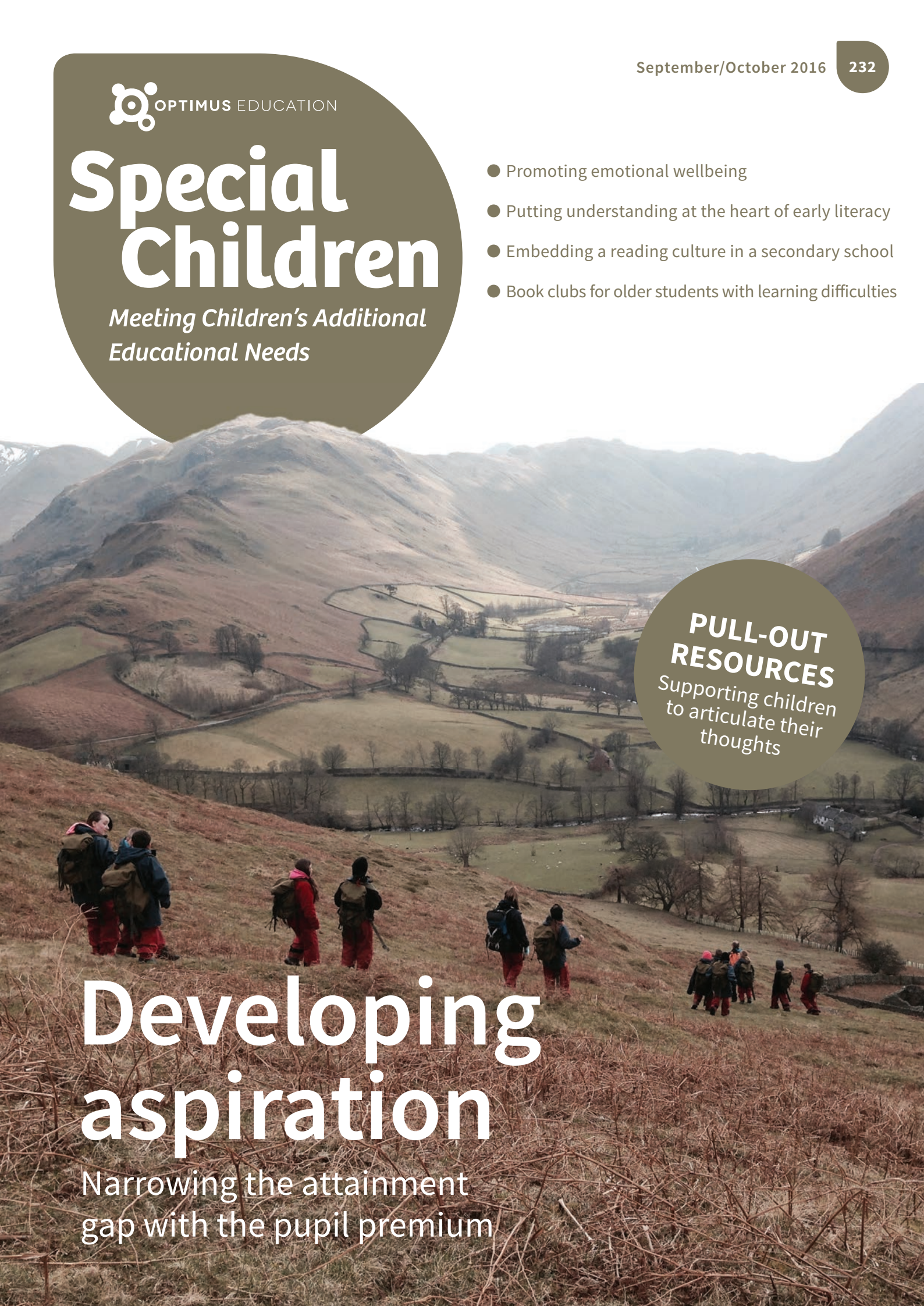
*Meeting Children's Additional Educational Needs*

- Promoting emotional wellbeing
- Putting understanding at the heart of early literacy
- Embedding a reading culture in a secondary school
- Book clubs for older students with learning difficulties

**PULL-OUT RESOURCES**  
Supporting children to articulate their thoughts

# Developing aspiration

Narrowing the attainment gap with the pupil premium



## Proud to be loud – Karen Russell-Graham

**When Gethin Thomas came across light and robust plastic instruments, he realised that at last he could give SEND pupils access to the delights of brass music.**

Mr Thomas is head of music at Canolfan Addysg y Bont (CAYB), a special school in Anglesey, Wales. In his experience, music calms students down but can also excite them, helping them to feel emotion.

Having already started a successful samba band in the school, he decided to create a brass band too. However, the obstacles were more daunting. Brass instruments are large, heavy, expensive and delicate, he had never played one himself and he knew that if a brass instrument is accidentally dropped, the damage can be irreparable. Nevertheless he researched possibilities. 'When I discovered the plastic pBone from Warwick Music Group (WMG), I immediately decided to buy one,' he recalls. 'The kids just loved it.'

British-based WMG is a team of brass musicians. Their instruments are light, strong and brightly coloured, making them appealing, cheaper, and easier to transport and play, especially for younger pupils and those with physical disabilities.

The original pBone is the world's best-selling trombone. There are now two other instruments on offer: the pTrumpet and the new pBuzz – a light instrument designed for little hands, with a mouthpiece that makes the creation of brass sounds even easier.

Chris Fower, WMG education director, is a professional bass trombonist and a leading authority on brass music education. He believes that early exposure to the playful P products can help develop sensory and fine motor skills, encourage self-expression and confidence, and stimulate imagination and creativity.

Mr Thomas ordered more pBones, and when they arrived, he involved pupils in opening up the boxes and distributing the colourful instruments. Colour attachment is powerful, with both pupils and TAs expressing strong preferences. As for teaching pupils how to play the instruments, the whole process is demystified on the WMG website.

Children started by making a satisfying raspberry sound with the mouthpiece,

**Erratum.** In the last edition, the article on page 48, *Enabling pupils with literacy difficulties to access the curriculum*, was incorrectly attributed. The author was Ros Henshaw.



Music making becomes inclusive with plastic instruments at Canolfan Addysg y Bont

and then attached it to the instrument. Multiple mouthpieces can be purchased, allowing students to pass instruments around quickly to take turns. Since these are so robust, Mr Thomas is confident about including children with poor motor skills in music making. Yet, despite being plastic, they produce a good brass sound – sufficiently good to amaze a visiting professional musician.

Not one to set himself an easy target, Mr Thomas began teaching the pupils their first piece; the children responded with passion to *The Hall of the Mountain King* from Peer Gynt, with some recognising it as the Alton Towers music. They played in time, and once percussion was added to the ensemble, a recognisable orchestral sound emerged that has entertained audiences and proud parents.

Further contemporary pieces have added to the band's repertoire. 'There are occasional wrong notes,' admits Mr Thomas, 'but band members work as a team, communicate and experience achievement.'

The pBones are never hidden away and 10 can be easily carried together. When Mr Thomas runs music sessions, they are included in the selection of instruments which pupils can choose from. He will ask them: 'What's your sound?' and watch as they have a go at blowing on the trombone and are motivated to experiment. 'One student on the autistic spectrum has

particularly benefited,' he says. 'He loves to make loud noises, so if he is upset, staff ask if he would like the red pBone, which calms him down. It can also be used as a reward.'

The pBone Mini enables children in wheelchairs to participate, and Mr Thomas believes that the new pBuzz he is trialling has even more scope for including pupils with physical disabilities. 'Some children are not agile with their hands, or can't lift their arms, but they can hold the pBuzz. I'm even attaching one to a stand.'

He likens the pBuzz to a plunger with a telescopic mouthpiece, with colours that match the notes as you move it in and out. WMG is looking to the future, and has just produced colour 'music' sheets for *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. Mr Thomas believes this could even lead to some of his brass band members learning to 'read' a pitched piece. Imagine the pride in that!

**Warwick Music Group runs workshops and training programmes for pupils and teachers worldwide. The pBone and pTrumpet are £125 inc VAT; the new pBuzz is £19.99.**

[www.warwickmusicgroup.com](http://www.warwickmusicgroup.com)



Karen Russell-Graham is a freelance writer and tutor