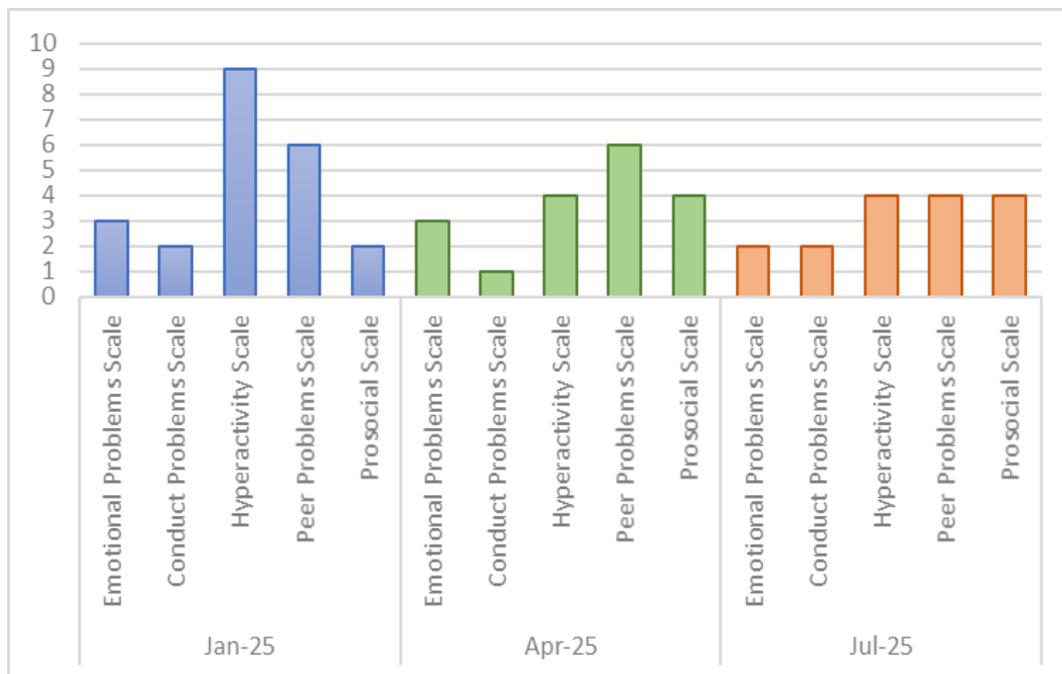


South Asian Dance in SEND schools

Reach Out and Reveal Case Study 1

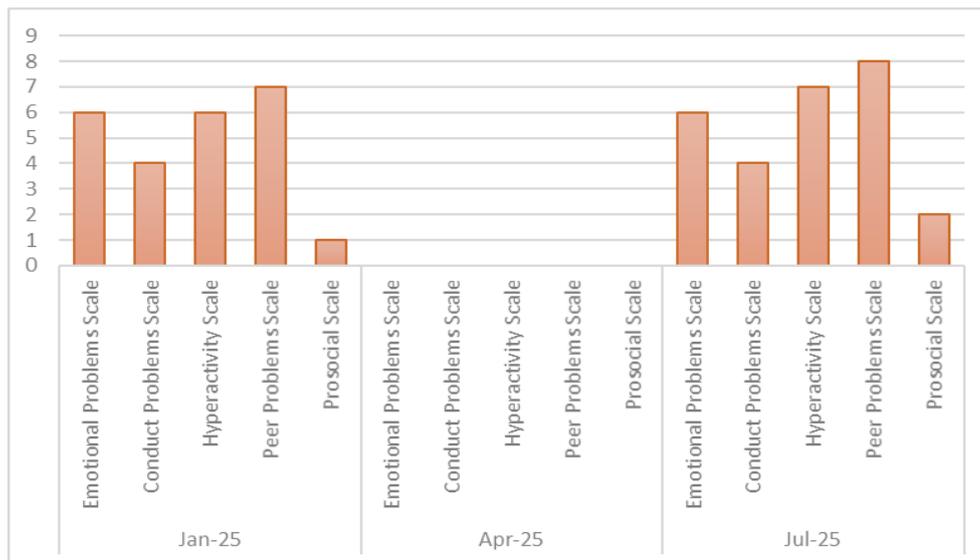
This child was 5.7 years old at the beginning of the study and on commencement of the dance classes was very attached to the teaching assistant (TA). They demonstrated signs of anxiety, coming to each class with several objects or toys in their hands and spending much of the time with the TA. Initial dance classes were often characterised with bursts of high energy and hyperactivity. High levels of hyperactivity were also noted in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire returned by their parent (Figure 1) indicating this was a difficulty experienced in the home environment.

Figure 1: Parent Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)



Despite this hyperactivity seen within the dance class at school, teachers returned a lower score for hyperactivity on the SDQ (Figure 2) at the same timepoint. The child required physical contact to participate in the dancing activity but only from school staff rather than the dance artists. However, moving into the second term the learner began to move away from the teaching assistant, exploring the space and textures of the room and spending moments without any toys or objects in their hands.

Figure 2: Teacher Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)



Interestingly, teacher SDQ scores remained fairly consistent across the academic year, however parent scores saw a marked decrease across most subscales. In addition, parents commented that in attending the dance classes the child's problems were a little better and that it had helped a lot in other ways e.g. making the problems more bearable. Teachers however only noted a little improvement towards the end of the academic year. This highlights the differences in a child's behaviour in different settings and with different routines e.g. home routine compared with school routine and behaviour around different individuals. For this reason, generalisation of dance activities and music into the child's wider life is important as the impact of dancing can be far reaching beyond the classroom and can allow for changes in behaviour that are not immediately observable within only one environment.

Throughout the two terms the learner became more focused and calmer during class, able to leave the toys momentarily to join in activity. Dance movement also progressed from simply brushing the arms in the first few weeks to multiple arm swings and movements by the end of the second term. Shifting focus from objects and people that provide comfort, to the ability to express themselves and move with focus is a wonderful step forwards with a suggestion from the gradual progression across term that with further dancing this would continue to improve. Whilst we know that autistic children's experiences are not linear, despite weeks with less engagement, overall progress can be seen in their engagement with the dancing and their focus in these classes.