

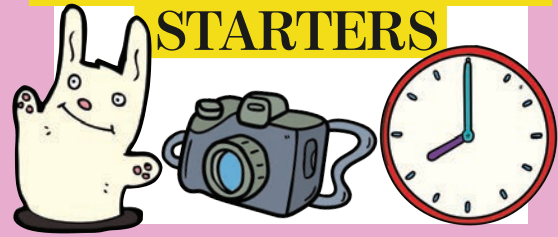
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**WHAT CAN
ROUGH & TUMBLE
TEACH US?**

**POTTY
TRAINING:**
Why we need a
fresh approach

**Get growing
this autumn**
p.23

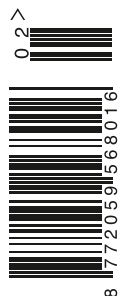
**Profit
versus
practice**
p.66

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Hello



Whether you work in a PVI setting, a primary school, or as a childminder in your own home, the autumn usually brings with it the sense of a new beginning. With older children having grown beyond the boundaries of their preschool years, or the early years entirely, and waved goodbye over the summer months, there are invariably new faces around (as well as familiar faces in different places). For the education sector in England, this feeling of a fresh start will no doubt be reinforced by the news of significant reforms to Ofsted's inspections, which came shortly before this issue went to press. Let's hope this is a real change for the better.

While we wait for the details, *TEY's* focus is on the task of developing the speech, language and communication skills that are essential for children's future success. You'll find tips on supporting early writing through oracy on page 46, advice on handling questions (both yours and theirs!) on page 42, and insights into the significance of this area of learning from both the National Literacy Trust (p38) and Speech and Language UK (p37).

There's lots more to discover too, from advice for managers on employment law to ideas about how to discuss climate change with young children. We hope you find all of it useful!

Helen Mulley – Commissioning Editor



Regulars

6 Nursery Now

Your update from the early years.

52 Book Corner

Inspiring titles to share with your 0-5s.

56 Have you seen

TEY's round-up of the latest early years tools, toys and activities.

Voices

9 "Ministers must value the early years"

The new government needs to recognise the importance of the sector, says Neil Leitch.

11 Should we use screens?

Concerns about the impact of mobiles and tablets on children's progress are growing, says June O'Sullivan.

13 See everyone

Every child is deserving of our acknowledgement and attention, says Nikky Smedley.



THE EXPERTS...



JUNE O'SULLIVAN
CEO of the London Early Years Foundation



KATHERINE COOLING-SMITH
Award-winning childminder



TRACY JACKSON
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Features

16 A world of pure imagination

Pretend play needn't be complicated.

19 Childhood illnesses explained

How to respond when children are unwell.

20 Make food fun!

Ideas to encourage children to eat a balanced diet.

23 Get growing this autumn

Planting vegetables with Ben Faulks, aka Mr. Bloom.

26 It's good to see you here!

12 activities to help new starters feel at ease.

28 Let the indoor games begin

How to hold a sports day the autumn elements can't spoil.

30 "Potty training is a mess"

It's time for a new approach to teaching toileting independence.

32 Slow pedagogy

Packing the day with planned activities isn't necessary; there's a better way...

34 Say "yes" to rough and tumble

Play fighting can be incredibly beneficial.

37 Strategies to support speech

How to spot a child struggling with communication.

38 Early Words Matter

Boosting communication skills improves children's life chances.

48 Author's view: Sam Usher

TEY speaks to the creator of the bestselling Seasons quartet.



TEACHING IN RECEPTION?

This issue, read about...

- Practice at Carlton Mills – p14
- Teaching climate change – p24
- Relatable texts – p50

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF



Management

- The value of apprenticeships – p61
- HR: employment law – p62
- Early years funding – p64
- CPD Bookshelf – p65

EYFS Focus

41 Boost speech skills

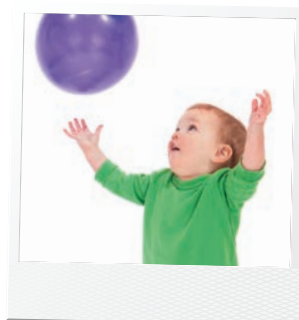
Top tips on supporting communication from Daniel Saturley.

42 Questioning

Emma Spiers explores easy ways to support children as they learn to ask and answer.

46 Literacy

Use oracy to help pupils master the skills they need to unlock writing.





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Room on the Broom



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'A TRULY THEATRICAL FEAST'

The List



'A HIGH-ENERGY TREAT'

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Nursery Now

News and views from the early years



In brief...

Following the launch of the Busy Bees Toilet Training initiative, which was introduced across more than 400 settings throughout the UK and Ireland in late 2023, the childcare provider has reduced the number of nappies it uses by nearly 26%.



Mental health charity Anna Freud and award-winning children's author Laura Henry-Allain MBE have published a free digital book to help educators, parents and carers have important discussions about mental health with young children. *Sometimes Happy, Sometimes Sad* explores the emotions of three-year-old Jackson while championing diversity. Download the story at bit.ly/3Xo4ray



And finally... Laurent Schwarz, a two-year-old from Bavaria whose abstract acrylic paintings have sold for as much as £5,000, has signed brand deals with a paint manufacturer and wallpaper company to develop ranges inspired by his artwork (on show at laurents.art).

Ofsted overhaul

Big changes are coming to Ofsted inspections, though early years settings will have to wait slightly longer for them than schools. Following its Big Listen consultation, which received 700 responses from registered childcare settings, the inspectorate revealed in early September that single-word judgements will be ditched in favour of new report cards designed to provide a "more nuanced" picture of a provider's strengths. A new early years inspection framework is also on the way, which Ofsted states will be more flexible to apply to different types of settings.

Visit bit.ly/3zcKM5o



"Reform of Ofsted inspections is overdue; we want to see a focus on children's experiences and support to settings' efforts to improve quality."

PURNIMA TANUKU OBE,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NDNA

TWEET TALK

@_CREC

A new primary science curriculum, proposed by leading science organisations, outlines "essential experiences" all children should have by age 11, emphasising hands-on learning – read more: buff.ly/3MecyS8 #EarlyYears #EarlyEducation

@earlyed_uk

We welcome the news that @educationgovuk has extended funding for Stronger Practice Hubs until at least March 2025. Also the launch next month of resources for early educators supporting children with SEND including a new online training module, which we helped to develop.

Early impact
62%

ADULTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES WHO BELIEVE EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS HAVE A GREATER LONG-TERM SOCIETAL IMPACT THAN INCREASED FUNDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. READ MORE AT [BIT.LY/4D2W7RC](https://bit.ly/4D2W7RC)



“It is important that the government understands that support for children with SEND needs to start in the early years – our survey shows this is a priority.”

**DR HELEN EDWARDS,
CO-FOUNDER OF TAPESTRY**

Children's Laureate

In July, author Frank Cottrell-Boyce was revealed as the new Children's Laureate. As part of his role, he will be championing the importance of reading to 0–3-year-olds.

The expanded offer is falling short, according to new research

Almost two-thirds (59%) of early years settings that have provided the new expanded offer to two-year-olds since April have *not* been able to offer extra places – that's according to new research undertaken by the developers of Tapestry, the online learning platform and management system. The annual survey of more than 550 early years educators also revealed that a similar number of settings had not recruited more staff.

In total, 69% of respondents indicated that they were providing the extended offer, but the survey suggests that this was only made available to families already using the settings in question; as a result, the overall number of places available may not have increased – a concern that was highlighted in advance of the new offer launching in Coram Family and Childcare's 23rd survey (bit.ly/3zdUXXq). Looking ahead to the expanded offer changes that are now upon the sector, more than half of respondents (54%) felt they were only partially prepared at best (*head to page 64 for advice on how to approach this process going forward – Ed.*)

Asked for views on what the government should prioritise in their early years policies, greater funding (89%) and improved support for children with additional needs (81%) topped the list, while just over half (54%) voiced support for subsidised professional development qualifications to encourage people to pursue a career in the early years.

The survey also sheds light on how settings capture observations. A quarter of respondents reported that their use of group observations had increased, while a similar number said that they had reduced the number of written/typed observations recorded. Conversely, the use of photo and video observations has risen in 25% and 21% of settings, respectively.

Read more at bit.ly/3B6IXaC



INSIGHTS INTO ABSENCE

A study led by a team from the University of Leeds suggests that children who are not considered “school ready” by their teachers are more than twice as likely to become persistently absent at some point in their education. Researchers analysed data for 62,598 children aged 5–13 from across the Bradford district to identify associations between early childhood problems and absenteeism and found that 67% of all persistent absentees were considered “not school ready” when they entered Reception. This contrasted with only 37% of children “not school ready” who were not persistently absent.

Read more at bit.ly/4cXIGoV

785k


THE NUMBER OF
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NEIL LEITCH IS CEO OF THE EARLY YEARS ALLIANCE

“Ministers must value the early years”

The new government needs to address longstanding challenges and recognise the importance of the sector, says Neil Leitch...

There’s no doubt that when a new party comes into power, regardless of which party that is, it’s a change that offers at the very least the sense of a fresh start. That said, given the scale of the challenges currently facing the early years sector, the novelty of a new government is likely to be short-lived. As Labour begins its tenure, providers are facing a myriad of problems, all of which need urgent action.

Not only is the next phase of the entitlement expansion less than two months away, but fewer than half of local authorities are confident that they will have enough capacity to deliver places. Meanwhile, Alliance research shows that providers were grappling with waiting lists, staffing shortages and space constraints before the expansion even began.

Yet, when considering the backdrop against which the expansion has been delivered, should this come as a surprise? Despite recent increases, sector funding continues to fall far short of the cost of delivering early entitlement places, while low pay and limited career progression opportunities mean that attracting and retaining staff to the sector remains a real challenge.

As a result, the sector is struggling not only to meet the increased demand that the expansion has created, but also to meet the needs of existing families. According to recent Ofsted figures, over the past year, more than 1,000 settings have permanently closed while places have increased by less than 1%, with families in the most deprived and economically challenged areas set to find it the most difficult to access an early years place.

At the Alliance, we have long argued that funding that reflects the cost of delivering early education and care, and a comprehensive staffing strategy that values both retention and recruitment in equal measure, are both vital if the sector is to be able to sustainably deliver high-quality early education places. While it’s clear these

asks must be an immediate priority for the new government, we know that such action will only come about when there is a tangible change to the way the sector is viewed. For far too long, educators working in nurseries, childminding settings and pre-schools have been dismissed as babysitters, when

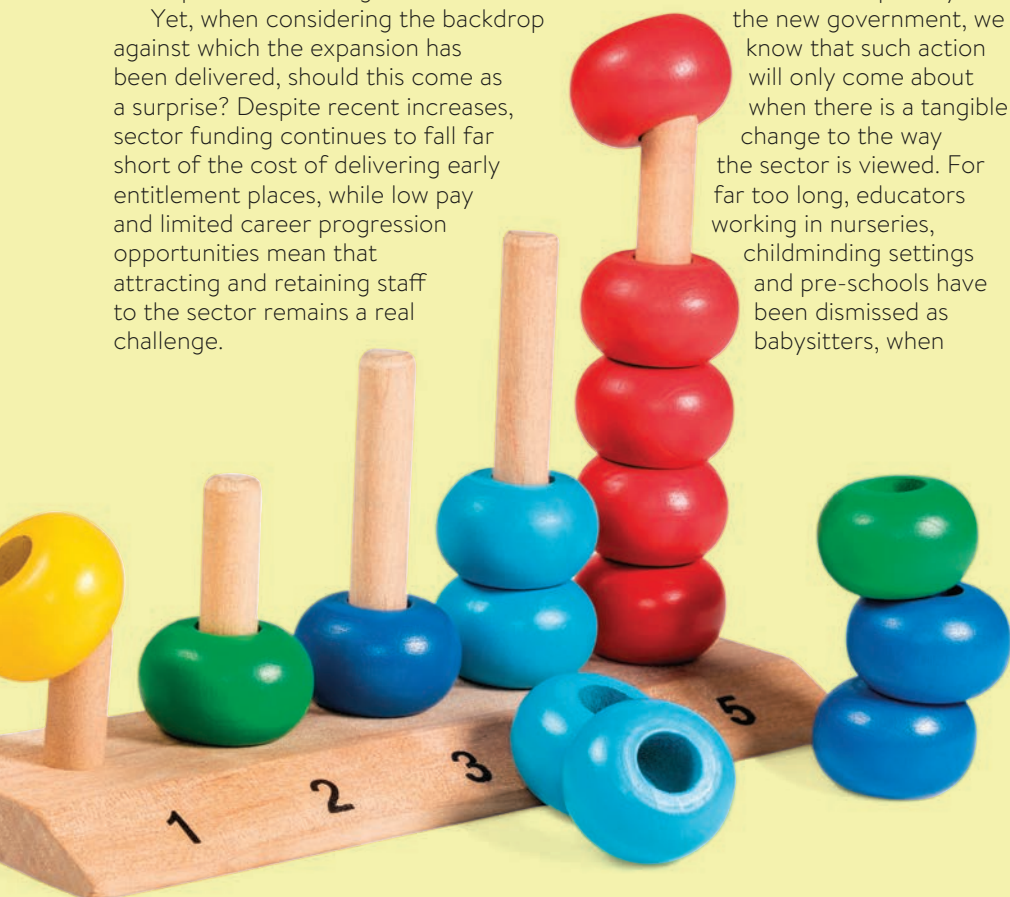
in reality, they provide vital early education that lays the foundations for children’s future development and life chances.

Despite the wealth of evidence demonstrating the importance of the first five years of a child’s life, over recent years, the need to ensure access to quality early education has slipped further and further down the government’s priority list. On those rare occasions when the sector has been included in policy plans, this has largely been via a focus on “cheaper childcare”, with the early years viewed as a vehicle through which to support parents to work, rather than there being any recognition of the transformative impact of early education and the irreplaceable support countless settings provide families.

Let’s not underestimate the scale of the changes at hand; at the Alliance, we are under no illusion that these can be resolved overnight. But for there to be even a chance of turning the fate of the sector around, it is vital that ministers recognise and value the early years as an integral part of the education system and treat it accordingly. They must work with and listen to those who do this vital job day-in and day-out – for it is they who are the experts on what the sector needs not just to survive, but to thrive.

So as the Labour government looks to the future and at how best to support the sector, it’s apparent that the task is not an easy or simple one. But while many challenges remain, a clear focus on valuing the sector and its workforce, genuinely consulting and engaging with those on the front line, and crucially, putting the needs of the child at the heart of any future strategies, is surely a good place to start.

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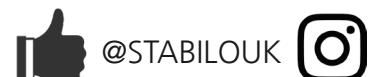


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“Should we use screens in our settings?”

Concerns about the impact of mobiles and tablets on children's progress are growing...



SOMETHING I'VE BEEN HEARING FROM MORE AND more colleagues across the sector recently is how common it is for parents to hand their toddler a phone to keep them busy. This isn't exactly surprising; the push to give youngsters a screen device is very powerful, described by Dr Dimitri Christakis of the American National Institute of Health as “the war for attention”. But what effect is it having on children?

Conversations with colleagues highlight their increasing concerns about the number of children exhibiting a lack of progress in their overall development. Not least, they report widespread language and communication delay, inability to self-regulate, poor concentration and listening skills, and lack of physical proficiency. We can't blame screen time for all these issues, but there is a sense that it is contributing to this worrying situation. Many agree with me that we need a national research study to identify the real state of play, so we can adapt our practice and guidance to parents.

SUPERFICIAL LEARNING

When it comes to devices and screens, parents are faced with confusing messages. The games market is huge and uses persuasive marketing, describing the games as educational. Children themselves like interactive games with music, colour and lively characters. They are often mesmerised by them, in fact, and if you did not know how children learn, you might be forgiven for thinking that these “educational” games make for good activities. But early years teachers and educators, who do understand how children learn, have serious reservations.

Children are brilliant mimics, but their ability to parrot songs and stories doesn't drive assimilation and accommodation of ideas. Any learning that happens is likely to be superficial, and not embedded or transferred and applied in other contexts. Right now, the sector debate is identifying how – or if – we should use screens as part of our modern teaching repertoire.

The American Academy of Paediatrics recommends keeping all

screens turned off around babies and toddlers younger than 18 months. They say a little screen time can be acceptable for older toddlers, but no more than an hour per day. They also warn against allowing any screens in a child's bedroom, noting that even small screens like phones and tablets have been linked to poor sleep quality. This is worth remembering, as an increasing number of parents put the bedtime story on the iPad, and many settings present their home learning advice and activities on mobile phones.

Our focus needs to be on adult relationships

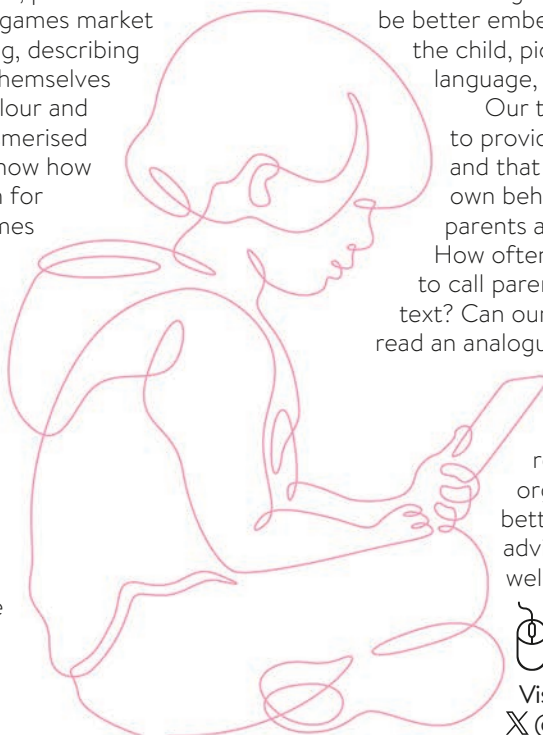
ADULT INTERACTIONS

The latest research confirms the views of most early years staff that our focus needs to be on adult relationships. It stresses the importance of parent participation – in other words, sharing activities together. We know, for example, that babies learn to socialise by connecting face-to-face with their parents, but one study found that when a TV was on in the background, parents were less likely to interact with their children. Of course, there are some positives connected with screens – for example, children do learn new words from digital games and TV – but again, this will be better embedded when an adult interacts with the child, picking up on sounds, words, body language, and eye contact.

Our task, as early years practitioners, is to provide children with the best education, and that sometimes means rethinking our own behaviour. How many of us (staff and parents alike) are addicted to our phones? How often do we actually pick up the phone to call parents or carers, rather than sending a text? Can our younger team members actually read an analogue clock? One thing's for certain:

screens are part of modern life and are not going anywhere, so the more we can all read the research and advice from organisations such as Ofsted, the better placed we will be to give good advice to parents and colleagues, as well as address our own actions.

June O'Sullivan OBE is the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. Visit juneosullivan.com or connect on [@JuneOSullivan](https://www.instagram.com/JuneOSullivan)





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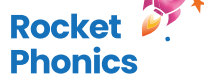
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Amy Brookes, Assistant Principal and Phonics and Reading Lead at Victoria Primary Academy

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NIKKY SMEDLEY IS A WRITER, EDUCATOR AND PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR THE CHILD

HOW TO SPEAK CHILD

See everyone

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE IN SCHOOL?

"I don't get chosen to do stuff." P (female)

I'm going to cut right to the chase here. I'm sure that if we all cast our minds back to our own early educational experiences, we will know exactly where we sat.

Be honest now: you were a smart-kid-teacher's-pet-nerdy-type (less adept with practical applications like tying shoelaces); or you were a physical-playground-dominant-type who struggled more with the academic intricacies of reading and writing; or perhaps you were a shy-wallflower-child who didn't want to put themselves forward in any situation, within the classroom or without; or maybe school made no sense to you any which way. The truth is, of course, that

Every child deserves – and needs – to feel seen

you were a specific individual, unlike any other, with your own preferences, prejudices and proclivities, as is every human being.

Now, I'm not judging, I know how challenging and hectic an EYFS classroom can be, but isn't it true that as teachers we do tend to apply "types" to our children? (Even to ourselves, if you found a slot for yourself in the previous paragraph.) You know what I'm talking about; I'm sure I don't have to supply a list!

I don't know if you relate to this, but on occasion I would find myself in charge of a child that I really struggled with. They may or may not have been difficult or disruptive. That wasn't really the issue. More often than not, it was just that I couldn't find a connection – I found it hard to warm to their personality. In short, if they had been an adult

human, we would not have been friends.

Naturally, this is a horrifying realisation and one that my professionalism railed against in the strongest terms. In order to compensate for what I saw as a personal failing, I would endeavour to make an extra effort to interact with any individual I felt this way about, in order not to allow my feelings to get in the way of my teaching.

I've picked an extreme example to illustrate the fact that we are not machines in the classroom. We are humans, and quite often, humans under pressure. It's easy and understandable to be drawn to the more capable and confident children, or to go the other way and wish to support the underdogs, or like myself, to try and overcome personal preference and then end up over-compensating.

However, there are always children who sit in the middle, who can fall through the cracks. Perhaps that's how you identified yourself in the memory of your own childhood? In the turbulence of any given day at school, how do we ensure that every child in our care feels seen? In some ways, I think this is our most important job.

Every child deserves – and needs – to feel seen. The fact that you can really see them should be communicated physically, socially and emotionally. That's a big job, but it needs to be done. If you fully communicate with a child through all these channels, if you take care to truly see each child and to make sure they understand that you do, then the self-labelling that poor old P in the quote above is in danger of taking with her throughout her whole life is less likely to occur.

Being sensitive to different areas where different children can shine, or at least feel comfortable, brings a variety and diversity to your teaching that can only benefit everyone. Including you.

Nikky's book *Create, Perform, Teach!* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £15.99) is available now on Amazon.

LEARN MORE

Nikky heads up the How to Speak Child initiative and has been collecting interviews with children about how adults communicate with them. To find out more, you can...

 [Head to the How to Speak Child blog, at \[howtospeakchild.com/blog\]\(http://howtospeakchild.com/blog\)](http://howtospeakchild.com/blog)

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SARAH WALKER IS A RECEPTION TEACHER AT CARLTON MILLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

“The ambition we have for our children is limitless”

Sarah Walker explains what makes the award-winning early years provision at Carlton Mills Primary School so special...

Carlton Mills, where I oversee the running of the early years team, is a two-form-entry primary school with nursery provision in Manningham, which was the area affected by the 2001 Bradford riots. The school’s location deprivation indicator is in Quintile 5, meaning it is among the most deprived of all education establishments in the country, with its pupil base in Quintile 4. For many years, Carlton Mills had falling student numbers and a long record of poor academic outcomes,

being rated either Inadequate or Requires Improvement for over a decade. Since becoming part of the Carlton Academy Trust, however, it has rapidly improved, gaining a Good overall Ofsted rating in 2023 and Outstanding for early years. And in 2024, we were thrilled to be named the T&A Primary School of the Year as well as Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Setting of the Year at the annual Tes Schools Awards!

A large majority of our children (99%) are from minority ethnic groups, whose first language is often

not English (73%). Nursery baseline assessments indicate that attainment on entry is very low. Most children have limited skills and prior experience in key areas such as speaking and listening, hearing stories, visiting places of interest and physical development, with a high proportion of children having limited or no English. Moreover, the school community is extremely transient. Due to not being fully subscribed, we regularly admit children new to the area, often from abroad, who don’t stay at the school very long.

Despite these challenges, we take great pride in our trust and school ethos of “Excellence for All”, and in our commitment to developing the whole child. We celebrate our vibrant, diverse community and ensure all children understand equality and respect, equipping them to succeed within their community, modern Britain, and beyond.

THE EYFS ENVIRONMENT

Our EYFS provision is based on a child-centred approach and word-rich, spiral curriculum, which is built on what the children already know and is structured to ensure progression in skills and knowledge while providing our children with the cultural literacy to succeed throughout their lives. The ambition that we have for our children and families is limitless; by the end of early years, Carlton Mills pupils have the language needed to communicate effectively and the social and emotional foundations to achieve their potential throughout school.

Creating an EYFS environment that fosters curiosity and creativity involves a blend of thoughtful physical space design, engaging and diverse

MEET THE CARLTON MILLS EARLY YEARS TEAM



Sarah Walker – Reception teacher

Sarah joined Carlton Mills as a teaching assistant in 2010.

She completed her teacher training during the Covid pandemic and has overseen the running of the early years team for the last three years.



Satvinder Kaur – Early years practitioner

Satvinder has worked in the early

years team for 18 years and has made a real difference to every child in the school, giving them the opportunity to flourish in all areas.



Una Gulbe – Nursery teacher

Having completed a three-year primary education course,

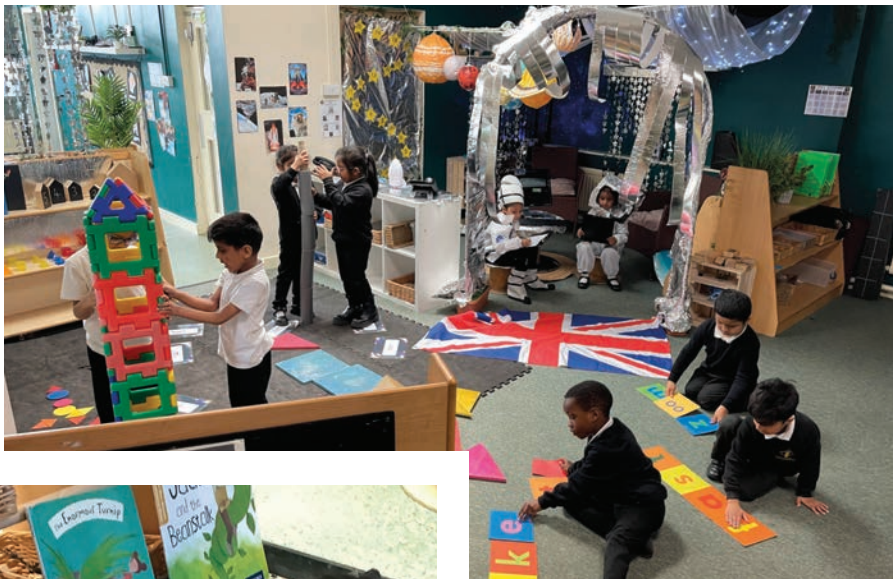
Una became a member of the Carlton Mills early years team in 2023 and was responsible for opening the school’s new nursery.



Kiran Mahmood – Learning assistant

Kiran joined the team in March 2024.

Although she has only been at Carlton Mills for a short while, she has already signed up to complete a foundation degree in Early Years.



We celebrate our diverse community and ensure all children understand equality and respect

activities, positive and supportive interactions, and a strong partnership with parents. This holistic approach ensures that children are not only prepared academically but also develop a lifelong love for learning.

DESIGNED FOR LEARNING

We actively involve parents and carers in supporting children's learning and development in EYFS. Our parental engagement strategies include improving the quality of learning that takes place in the home learning environment, providing simple guidance about how they can support their child, encouraging positive dialogue about learning and development, and considering the specific needs of families by offering more sustained and intensive support where needed.

As the majority of our children don't have access to outdoor space at home, we prioritise outdoor learning. Our EYFS children have access to two outdoor areas; we were extremely lucky that the trust invested heavily in this provision last year and completely renovated our outdoor spaces and resources, inspired by our ideas.

Promoting physical development was a key driver for the design of these areas, ensuring that children have opportunities to develop core strength and muscle isolation as a crucial first

step towards writing. The monkey bars, pulley system, and bike track have been particular successes, and this has had a direct impact on our writing outcomes.

NEXT STEPS

I love knowing that children leave EYFS at Carlton Mills feeling safe, secure, confident, and ready for the next step of their school career. Thanks to the dedication and thoughtful preparation of every member of the early years team, they are well equipped to thrive within the Year 1 curriculum, and have had a wealth of opportunities and experiences that broaden their understanding and widen their window onto the world. Strong relationships between school and parents/carers have been established, which I see flourishing throughout each child's time at Carlton Mills.

Our journey began four years ago with a simple but powerful vision: to improve the lives of children in our community. In those early days, we faced numerous obstacles, from limited resources to gaining the trust of the community. But what kept us going was our shared commitment to making a difference in the lives of children who needed it most. Oh, and by the way – we still have spaces available in our wonderful EYFS for this coming September!

OUR CARLTON 5 VALUES

These values are at the heart of everything that happens at Carlton Mills, underpinning learning, culture, and expectations:

- **Compassion:** We use compassion to motivate pupils and adults to help relieve the physical, mental, or emotional pains of others and themselves.
- **Courtesy:** We use courtesy to encourage polite behaviour, ensuring that polite actions or remarks positively impact the mental health and well-being of others.
- **Creativity:** We encourage pupils and adults to use creativity to believe in themselves, raise aspirations, and eradicate glass ceilings.
- **Collaboration:** We use collaboration to promote working together with inclusivity and equality.
- **Confidence:** We encourage pupils and adults to have confidence and belief in themselves within a safe learning environment where it is okay to make mistakes, grow, and learn.



SARAH OWEN IS THE FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF PYJAMA DRAMA

A world of pure imagination

Harnessing the learning potential of pretend play needn't be complicated or expensive, says Sarah Owen...

A three-year-old asks you to play, grabs your hand, and excitedly leads you through the classroom towards an activity area. Which would you rather it be? Do you hope they'll lead you to the outdoor area? Would you prefer to read in the book corner? Do you enjoy the role-play area? Or would you rather get down on your hands and knees to play with trucks and tractors? We all have play preferences, and these develop in early childhood. By the age of one, 90% of children have a favourite object, and although these preferences regularly change, what you

enjoyed playing most as a child is likely to be what you'd also prefer to play now you're an adult.

Of course, no one type of play is more valuable than the other: physical play, social play, constructive play, games with rules – they all help children develop and learn. By the age of three, however, it's pretend play that's at its peak, so it's worth considering how you might facilitate it (even if the idea of "doing drama" with your children feels uncomfortable). And it's worth knowing that it doesn't have to be difficult, or restricted to the role-play area.

A well-resourced role play area is a rich environment for pretend play, naturally, and it's not surprising that early years settings put so much effort into creating such spaces complete with both realistic and fantastical props and costumes. But actually (and stay with me here), although props and costumes are great ways to ignite children's imaginations, they also have the potential to *limit* them and therefore reduce potential learning outcomes.

PLAY WITHOUT LIMITS

Allow me to illustrate my point. I'd like you to imagine that we're going to a fancy dress party together. We go to the biggest costume shop in the world. First of all, decide what or who you're going to dress up as. You can be anyone or anything – a film star, an opera singer, a character from a book, a banana, or an elf. Any costume your heart desires is waiting for you.

Now you've chosen, pick the costume off the rail and put it on. This shop has an enormous mirror; take a look at yourself. What does your costume look like? What colour is it? What material is it made from? Is it soft, scratchy, heavy, or floaty? Does your costume come with accessories or props? Maybe a hat, some glasses, a wand, or a bag? Are you wearing shoes, boots, gladiator sandals, or flippers? Try to imagine your costume in as much detail as possible.

Finally, how does wearing this costume make you feel? Powerful, brave, glamorous, beautiful, or something else?

If we compared costumes, you can bet your bottom dollar they wouldn't be the same. (In case you're interested, I'm going as Cookie Monster. I feel mischievous and my costume is blue, fluffy, tickly, and comes with a jar of cookies!) Even if we did by chance decide to go as the same character – let's say a princess, because we know how popular a choice that is! – do you think our costumes would look identical? No. Because what I imagine is never going to be the same as what you imagine.



Now think about the dressing-up box in the corner of your classroom. Maybe there's one pirate outfit, chef's whites, a doctor's coat, and yes, that popular princess dress – all of which only one individual child can wear at a time. Not only that, costumes get broken, stained, and ripped, but most importantly (and this is key!) that sparkly princess dress in your dressing-up box will never be as sparkly as the one in your child's imagination.

I'm not saying there's no place in early years practice for dressing up or a role-play area, just that you don't need to rely on them. And if we invest all our time, money, and effort into this type of play, we're missing out on enormous opportunities for learning and growth. With *imaginative* play (by using the Pyjama Drama approach), there are no resources to invest in – just the power of the imagination, and if you harness *this*, children can be anyone, go anywhere, do anything, and learn so much, all in the safe and supportive environment of the classroom.

But I can't do drama! Yes, you can. If you can put on different voices when reading a story or pull a funny face to make a child laugh, you're already using drama. So, let's have a conversation about how to make dramatic play a bigger feature of early years settings so we can make sure children are getting the best play experiences possible.

If you can put on different voices when reading a story, you're already using drama



Very Hungry Caterpillar...). Pick up and describe the imaginary present before asking, "What present did you buy?"

Top tips:

- Model playfulness by giving unexpected presents (*a pet jellyfish for grandad, a hot water bottle for the Big Bad Wolf, a unicorn for the Lollipop Person*)
- Model using descriptive language to give a vivid description of your present
- Show how you feel about each child's gift through your voice, facial expression, and body language (*Yelp! A hairy spider! I hope grandad likes creepy crawlies!*)

GIVE IT A TRY

Here are three easy drama-based circle time activities (absolutely no props or costumes required!)...

1. Share a tall tale!

Share a made-up story starting with the words, "You'll never guess what happened to me this morning..." (*I met a little green man looking for his spaceship, slipped in dog sick and knocked over mum's favourite vase, jumped in puddles with grandma and got soggy socks, helped a hedgehog cross the road...*)

Top tips:

- The more far-fetched your tall tale is, the better!
- Include the emotion of the story (how did you feel?) and show this through your voice and facial expression.
- Ask questions: "Have you seen a spaceship around here anywhere?" "What should I tell mum about the broken vase?" then encourage children to share their own tall tale: "What did you do this morning?"

2. Mime

Tell the children you've bought a birthday present (*for grandad, the Big Bad Wolf, the Lollipop Person, the*

3. Create a drama!

Pretend to fall asleep when you're in the middle of reading a story, that you smell something disgusting, or that you hear something scratching at the door. Try pretending to sneeze every time you go near a particular child or suddenly start giggling as if someone (or something!) is tickling you...

Top tips:

- Repeat, repeat, repeat! There's no limit to how many times a child will love to wake you up, watch you gag over a disgusting smell, or help you search for the culprit making that scratching sound...
- Be "big" as well as silly; there's no such thing as a too-loud snore or a facial expression that's too exaggerated!
- Allow children to lead the direction of the drama themselves – maybe they find and name the spider who is tickling you or cast an anti-sneezing spell that actually ends up making you fall asleep!

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Childhood illnesses explained

When young children are unwell, settings must understand what's wrong and when it's safe for them to return. **Emma Hammett** shares her advice...

Many childhood illnesses are making a resurgence. Last year, cases of measles and scarlet fever rose considerably. This article covers a few of the most common and serious childhood illnesses and includes a chart detailing how long children should be kept away from school or nursery if unwell.

MEASLES

Measles is a highly infectious viral illness that can affect any age group but is most common in young children. The infection usually lasts from 7–10 days; however, it can lead to serious and potentially life-changing complications if it affects their lungs or brain. Measles is also worrying if someone is pregnant.

The initial symptoms of measles develop around 10 days after infection and can include the following:

- Cold-like symptoms
- Sore red eyes that are sensitive to light
- A raised temperature (up to 40°C)
- Small greyish-white raised spots on the inside of the cheeks
- A few days later, a reddish-brown blotchy rash will appear, starting on the head/upper neck and spreading to the rest of the body

People with measles are infectious from when the symptoms develop until about four days after the rash first appears.

Response & prevention

Parents should be encouraged to speak to their GP as soon as possible if you suspect that their child may have measles. Staff should visit their GP if they have had close contact with someone with measles and are not fully vaccinated or haven't had the infection before, even if they don't have any symptoms.

Measles can be prevented by having the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. The MMR vaccination is given in two doses as part of the NHS childhood vaccination programme: the first when children are around 13 months and the second before they start school. Adults and older children can receive the vaccine at any age if they haven't been vaccinated before. Hand hygiene is vital to reducing the spread, as is isolating from other people.

SCARLET FEVER

Scarlet fever is a highly contagious infection. It affects adults and young children but is much rarer for adults. It usually lasts about a week.

- Scarlet fever can start with flu-like symptoms
- A rash will then appear a few days later, usually starting on the chest and/or tummy. It is rough to the touch, pink/red, and can look like sunburn
- White coating on the tongue

If a child has these symptoms, they

should see their GP. If symptoms last longer than a week, they should go back. This is especially important if they have recently had chicken pox. Scarlet fever is very infectious, so parents should inform the GP receptionist when making an appointment.

If they are unwell again, even if it's weeks later, this can be a sign of a complication, such as pneumonia.

SLAPPED CHEEK

Slapped cheek is often mistaken for scarlet fever, but it starts with a rash on the cheek (which looks like the child has been slapped) and then sometimes spreads to the body a few days later. The rash usually lasts for around two weeks but can continue after that.

The child may also have a headache, a sore throat and a high temperature, but will not usually need to see a GP.

The advice in this article is only for guidance. For first aid training tailored to your needs, call 020 8675 4036, email emma@firstaidforlife.org.uk or visit FirstAidforLife.org.uk / Onlinefirstaid.com

Do you know how long to keep your child off school if they are ill?

First Aid for Life
The First Aid Experts
Leading provider of first aid courses for staff and pupils in schools
www.firstaidforlife.org.uk

Scabies Stay home until after the first treatment.	Flu Stay home until fully recovered.	Impetigo Stay home until lesions are crusted and healed, or 48 hours after starting antibiotics.	Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.
Mumps Stay home for 5 days from the onset of swelling.	Scarlet Fever Stay home for 24 hours after starting antibiotics.	Slapped Cheek Syndrome Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.	Head Lice Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.
Measles or German Measles Stay home for 4 days from the start of the rash.	Chicken Pox Keep at home until all blisters have crusted over.	Threadworms Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.	Glandular Fever Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.
Diarrhoea & Vomiting Stay home for 48 hours after the last episode.	Conjunctivitis Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.	Whooping Cough Stay home for 48 hours after starting antibiotics.	Tonsillitis Can attend, but school or nursery should be informed.

Download a copy of this infographic at bit.ly/TEYfirstaid



BETH DOWNIE IS A REGISTERED NUTRITIONIST.

Make food fun!

*There's lots you can do to encourage children to eat a healthy, balanced diet, says **Beth Downie**...*

We all want to encourage children to get the full benefits of food by having a balanced and varied diet, allowing them to grow and thrive in the best possible way. However, we know there are times when it can be a challenge to get children to eat even the most everyday types of food.

Reluctant eating is an unwillingness to eat familiar food or to try new foods, as well as strong food preferences. It is most common in children aged two to five years old and peaks around three years of age. For most children this is just a short phase, so perseverance is key. Often, the less fuss made about a child's eating, the quicker the phase will pass. However, if it does become a persistent problem, this can result in poor dietary variety during early childhood.

If a child is active, gaining weight, and eating foods from the main food groups, then there is no need to worry.

WHY CAN CHILDREN BE RELUCTANT TO EAT?

- Experience of feeding difficulties during infancy
- An opportunity to assert themselves and take control of a situation
- Children generally are less inclined to eat bitter-tasting foods
- Sensory aspects: textures and colours can leave children less keen to taste (or repeat try) certain foods
- Dislike of foods touching or mixed with other foods
- Limited exposure to a wide variety of foods

Children may refuse a certain food because it looks different. Think about a fresh strawberry – sometimes we pick one that is perfectly sweet and

juicy, while another one from the same punnet may be less ripe, hard, or even sharp in taste. Just a single negative tasting experience can be enough for children to be reluctant to try another bite.

Frustratingly, we don't often see the same issue with manufactured food items – a crisp or chocolate biscuit, for example, is consistently made to the exact same specification. Children find this reassuring, hence why these items are less likely to be rejected over fresh food.

Be creative with foods and the way that they are prepared

EARLY YEARS ACTIVITIES

Research evidence has found that experiential learning activities around food can improve children's familiarity of, and thereby increase willingness to try, unfamiliar foods. Together with repeated taste exposure, it can help increase intake of those foods.

There are many ways to incorporate food-based activities into the early years timetable and curriculum. The list below can be aligned into the different strands of the curriculum while encouraging the exploration of new foods. They can support the Early Learning Goals including Managing Self (understanding the importance of healthy food choices) and Fine Motor Skills (use a range of small tools, including scissors, paintbrushes and cutlery).

- Exposure to new foods and concepts through books, e.g. *Oliver's Vegetables* and *Oliver's Fruit Salad* by Vivian French; *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle; *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child; *Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne; *Avocado Asks* by Momoko Abe
- Singing songs, e.g. "Five Currant Buns", "Hot Cross Buns", "10 Fat Sausages", "Teddy Bear's Picnic".
- Being food explorers and using all five senses to discover new foods
- Taking part in food preparation, e.g. choosing their own fillings and making a sandwich or pouring their own drinks at snack time.
- Being creative with fruit and vegetables as tools for painting, printing or as still life to draw; this can help children become familiar with them, prior to tasting.
- Activities and games, e.g. pass the feely bag and guess the food; using a range of real food and talking about where it comes from (e.g. matching eggs to a photo of a chicken); encouraging role play in the toy kitchen; encouraging pupils to share their favourite foods with the class.
- Planting seeds in pots to help them learn more about how food can be grown.

OTHER APPROACHES

Eating with peers and staff at snack/lunch time can help to encourage children to try new foods. If available in the setting, accessing school dinners can be helpful in widening tastes too.

Encourage children to try a new food with these four steps:

1. *Touch it...* What does it feel like?
2. *Sniff it...* Can they describe what it smells like?
3. *Lick it...* What does it taste like? How



DARE DEVIL DIP!

This is one of our favourite recipes – a great twist on regular hummus made with beetroot. It really spikes interest with children because of its name and vibrant colour.

Get children involved with measuring the ingredients, chopping a variety of vegetable sticks, and using scissors to snip strips of pitta to dip in. Make it a fun taste test by evaluating together the best vegetable to dip with!

INGREDIENTS (serves 4):

170g canned chickpeas in water (drained weight)
 100g (2 small) cooked, peeled beetroot
 2 small cloves of garlic, crushed
 1 tbsp olive oil
 1 tsp ground cumin
 1 tsp ground coriander
 Freshly squeezed juice of 1 lemon
 Freshly ground black pepper

METHOD

1. Put all of the ingredients into a food processor and whizz together until you have a coarse paste.
2. Spoon into a dish and serve with raw vegetables (e.g. cherry tomatoes, cucumber and carrot sticks, pepper sticks) and bread of your choice – it's especially nice with toasted wholemeal pitta bread cut into fingers.

does it feel on their lips, or on their tongue? Have they tasted it before?

4. Nibble it (if they feel comfortable doing so)... What do they think about it? Does it remind them of something similar that they have tasted before?

DON'T FORGET TO...

Perservere and provide opportunities – it can take a child 20 times of trying a new food before they enjoy it.

Be a good role model. Our attitude to trying and eating foods plays a major role in children developing their tastes and habits. If you are adventurous with food, they are more likely to be too.

Experiment. Be creative with foods

and the way that they are prepared. Try offering raw and cooked options (think spinach, for example), different cuts, shapes, and grating rather than chopping to vary it. Arrange the food on the plate attractively to make it more appealing – perhaps as a picture, a happy face, or spelling out their name.

Stay positive. It's best to steer clear of negative behaviours around food and mealtimes. If a child rejects a food, do not force it; move on and offer again later. Praise them for trying a new food, but do not reward them with other preferred foods, as it can devalue the new or non-preferred foods.

Remember, don't give up! Just as their bodies are growing, children's

taste buds are evolving too. One day they may say they detest something, but a month later they may absolutely love it!

Beth has experience across the food industry, as well as in public health and community nutrition and wellbeing, and is a consultant nutritionist to Purely Nutrition and the PhunkyFoods programme. Visit purelynutrition.com



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Get growing this autumn

Ben Faulks, aka Mr. Bloom, explains why now is the perfect time to plant vegetables with your children...

Starting to grow vegetables in autumn may seem counterintuitive, but it's a great time to plant things for harvesting before winter bites. The soil is still warm, which helps seeds germinate; there's plenty of sunshine to help things get established; and the extra rain means new plants thrive.

Gardening is affordable for most settings and doesn't necessarily require lots of space; there are a variety of ways to grow vegetables successfully, whether in planters, a small patch of earth, or pots. Old sinks, buckets, and large plastic cartons all make great containers – just ensure you add drainage holes to the bottom.

PLANTS TO GROW IN AUTUMN

You can plant spinach and broad beans now to pick early next year. Broad beans are among the best seeds for children to get started with, as they're large and easy to handle. They are also very likely to germinate!

Start off your broad beans in old toilet rolls filled with compost (or you can use small plant pots if you have them). Keep them inside in a cool but light place until they start to sprout up. Ask children to spot signs of growth and to check that the compost remains damp.

Plant them outside after six weeks, about 20 cm apart. The children can



TOP TIPS

Pests:

Slugs and snails may well munch your plants, but a rough surface will deter them. Try placing grit, used coffee grounds, or broken eggshells around the base of your plants.

Location:

Plants need light and well-drained soil to thrive. Sunny or partially sunny spots are great, but avoid deep shade and any areas where the ground becomes saturated when it rains.

Pinwheels:

Homemade pinwheels placed in pots or a garden can deter birds from eating your broad beans.

help with the planting by digging the holes, pressing the earth down around each plant, and watering. The bean plants are quite delicate, so you'll need to be on hand to show the children how to hold the plants and carefully settle them in their holes.

You can plant your spinach seeds straight into your tubs outside. Follow the guidance on your seed packet, as different varieties of spinach may have slightly different instructions.

AN EXPRESS CROP

Little growers may find it difficult to wait till spring for a crop, so why not plant some radishes too? They grow quickly (3–6 weeks), they are bright and cheerful, and they're great fun to pop out of the ground! Plant the seeds directly into tubs outside, give them a water if the weather is dry, and you'll be harvesting your first crop very soon.

Your growing area isn't just a place for children to find out about plants and food origins; it becomes a fantastic habitat resource for all kinds of animals, too, leading to lots of interesting discussions. That said, new plants may need extra protection from some cheeky garden visitors. Use natural methods to keep seedlings safe (see my tips), as you don't want to use harsh chemicals and pesticides when growing food!

Connecting with nature through growing nurtures confidence, self-esteem and resilience, as well as helping to develop communication and physical skills. There's lots more gardening advice in my free "Beginners Guide" (bit.ly/TEYgrow), which I've written with Tapestry. Good luck with your autumn gardening!

Ben Faulks, aka Mr. Bloom from CBeebies, is the author of *A Beginner's Guide for Growing Things in Educational Settings*, which is free to download from Tapestry. Visit bit.ly/TEYgrow



CARLEY SEFTON IS CEO OF LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES

Cultivating green minds

*Teaching young children about climate change might seem daunting, but it's something that every setting can and should embrace, says **Carley Sefton**...*

Most people agree that, in today's rapidly changing world, the need to address climate change is more urgent than ever. As we witness the effects of environmental challenges unfolding globally, the role of education in shaping young minds towards sustainability becomes increasingly important. But I am often disappointed when I introduce the subject of teaching climate education in early years; people are dismissive of the impact it can have, or worse, they underestimate young children's ability to engage in "big" subjects. At Learning through Landscapes (LtL), we've been thinking a lot about what good climate education looks like in the early years.

In 2023, the Department for Education announced the launch of the National Education Nature Park, led by the Natural History Museum working with the Royal Horticultural Society. Since then, over 2,200 schools, colleges and early years settings have signed up to join a national network of green spaces by improving their schools, colleges and settings for both people and wildlife. LtL is delighted to be the project's lead on early years engagement and resource development.

As Ali Aspin, LtL's early years development lead, explains, "These resources are designed to empower

children to make positive green change to their setting by assessing what they have in place already, planning green interventions, and finally taking part in making a change. Many of the green interventions that early years children can take part in are changes that continue to be open-ended learning opportunities – all of which meet and exceed the early learning goals, improve nature connectedness, and

By developing nature connectedness at a young age, children are more likely to carry positive environmental behaviours into their later lives.

Indeed, UNICEF's 2022 report *Early Childhood Development and Climate Change* states: "The voice of young children remains the most under-represented in most of the decision fora. This presents us with a unique opportunity to shift the

By empowering children to engage with the natural world, we lay the foundation for a sustainable future

leave children with a hopeful outlook on being the change they wish to see in the world."

POSITIVE THINKING

Unfortunately, we have encountered some negativity regarding teaching climate change to young children and the impact this could have on climate anxiety. But all the evidence suggests that the more understanding and agency children have, the more they feel able to deal with their concerns.



current predominant narrative that focuses on children as victims and their vulnerabilities, passivity, and powerlessness towards children with vital voices (as well as their caregivers) empowered as strong agents of change and valuable contributors in a changing climate into the future. We need to include children's rights to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them."

We often hear, too, from settings who are worried they don't have enough green space to get involved, but most activities don't need large amounts. The most important thing is to create regular awe-and-wonder moments in nature, which will foster natural curiosities. With supportive staff helping children engage in climate education initiatives like the National Education Nature Park, we believe that all settings can provide a solid foundation for introducing climate- and nature-based learning.

EMPOWERING LEARNERS

Climate education in early years isn't just about imparting knowledge; it's about fostering a deep connection with nature and nurturing a sense of responsibility towards our environment.



Initiatives like the National Education Nature Park exemplify how settings can become centres of environmental learning and action. By empowering children to engage with and appreciate the natural world, we lay the foundation for a sustainable future where environmental stewardship is second nature. Through collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and communities, we can ensure that every child grows up with the knowledge, skills, and values to protect and preserve our planet for generations to come.

START YOUR CLIMATE JOURNEY

1. Sign up today

Visit educationnaturepark.org.uk and become part of the national movement; you'll receive regular information on activities and grants and access to early years-specific resources.

2. Map your setting

Children can take part in this reflective journey by looking closely at their outdoor space. You can then add your setting to the national map via the Nature Park website.

3. Learn to love soil

Creating healthy soil is a fun activity that can take learning in many directions. Through inquiry and play, learners can explore what healthy soil is and begin to understand the important role it plays in a healthy environment.

4. Making changes

Support children to plan environmentally friendly changes to their setting and then help in the process of making them a reality. Meaningful learning opportunities will abound throughout, and children will gain positive

attitudes towards caring for the natural world around them.

5. Grow to eat

Growing food can be a fantastic way to connect with nature and help learners begin to grasp where their food comes from. The process can be adapted for most settings, whether it's planting in pots or potato bags in an urban setting or assigning part of the field to be a designated food-growing area. Plants, which make up a large proportion of our diet, are crucial for our health and wellbeing, and both healthy eating and taking part in planting experiences improve mental and physical health and wellbeing.

6. Links to literacy

So many of the books we use in early years settings have nature connection in them – from the obvious and brilliant *Stick Man* by Julia Donaldson to *The Bear in the Stars* by Alexis Snell, which provides a perfect opportunity to lightly introduce the concept of climate change to children through the life of a polar bear exploring an ice habitat. Exploring ice is a fun and investigatory way to investigate changing states and climate change.

7. Apply for a Local School Nature Grant

Your setting could receive £500 of outdoor learning equipment, a climate curriculum pack worth £150, and an on-site CPD training session delivered by an LtL member of staff. Visit tinyurl.com/TEYLtL

8. Enjoy it!

The concept of climate education is rapidly evolving, so the most important thing is to just try it and have fun. All our research suggests that practitioners and teachers benefit from time outside and making positive changes to nature as much as the children they work with.

LtL is the UK's leading outdoor learning and play charity. Find out more at ltl.org.uk

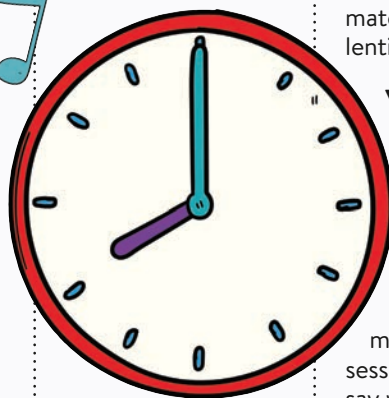
It's good to see you here!

These simple ideas will help you help those just starting at your setting to feel at ease, says **Jude Harries...**

New arrivals

WELCOME WORLD

Encourage the children to self-register when they arrive at the setting. Can they find their own photograph or picture to stick onto a circular "Welcome World" board or peg onto a washing line? Magnetic photos of the children are also fun for children to use and sort into "here" and "away" groups on a metal board. Encourage them to use the "Welcome World" to check if their friends have already arrived, so they feel more confident about the day ahead.



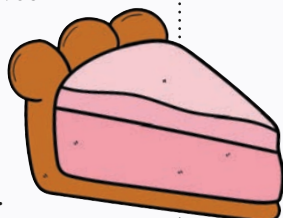
WELCOME SONGS

Invite children to sit down together using a song: *Come and sit down on the carpet/in a circle* (x3) / *Let's all sit together*. (Tune: "What shall we do with the drunken sailor?") If the children have regular places to sit, help them find them.

Try a singing register. Use the two "cuckoo" notes, G and E, and sing: *Hello [child's name], hello [child's name], hello [child's name]* / *Welcome to school today*. (Tune: "It's raining, it's pouring") Can children play the two notes on chime bars or a xylophone for each "hello"?

WELCOME PIE

Invite the children to sit in a circle. If some find this tricky at first, let them watch from a safe distance! Pass a pie dish around the circle as you sing these words using the "cuckoo" notes: *I, I, me oh my, how I love my welcome pie*. Whoever has the pie at the end can choose a new flavour for it, e.g. apple, chocolate or even spiders! Alternatively, write the children's names on small pieces of paper and put them in the dish. Choose a name, welcome the child, and everybody waves hello to them.



First-timers

SETTLERS, MOVERS & SHAKERS

Set up group activities for children to choose as they settle in, move around, and explore. Create a "settling station" with drawing, picture/audio books and music, and provide a home corner for children suffering from separation anxiety. Create a "making faces" activity in a tuff tray for the "movers". Cut circles out of cardboard, make three or four holes around the top, thread pipe cleaners into each hole, and secure. Let children thread coloured beads or cereal "O"s onto the hair. For the "shakers", provide small milk containers or plastic pots with lids alongside materials to fill them, e.g. beads, dry beans, lentils/rice, and buttons.

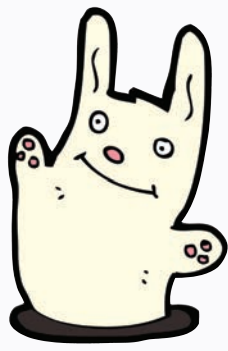
VISUAL TIMETABLES

Many children like to know what the day ahead will bring and find it helpful to see a list or timetable of the day's activities. Some may start by using it simply as a reference to count down until home time. Share laminated pictures you are going to use with the children so they become more familiar. At the beginning of each day or session, point out the list and invite children to say what they think is going to happen. Perhaps the order could be changed sometimes to see if they notice, or invite the children to use the pictures to compile their own schedule!

USING BOOKS

Books are brilliant resources for supporting children through significant transitions, such as moving rooms at nursery or settling in at "big" school. *First Day at Bug School* by Sam Lloyd is a reassuring rhyming story that helps soothe anxieties; the children can sing with the crickets, count spots on ladybirds, and try jumping like fleas in PE. Alternatively, share the classic *Starting School* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, which takes children from the very first day to the end of the school year.





Making friends

PUPPET PLAY

Introduce a puppet to the children – large hand puppets from thepuppetcompany.com work well, as they appear to speak and have more personality. Choose a name for the puppet and invite the children to ask questions about how the puppet is feeling. If it is feeling sad or says it has no friends, how could the children cheer it up? Use the puppet to support children who are struggling to settle or make friends.

BUILD A FRIEND

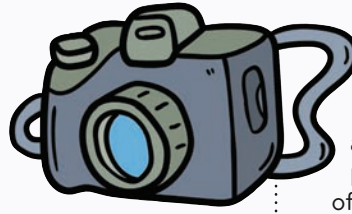
Explain to children that they are going to “build a friend”. Invite a child to lie down on a piece of stiff paper or cardboard and draw around their body before cutting it out. Use collage and paint to create a model friend. Brainstorm some words to describe a good friend and scribe them onto post-it notes to add to the picture. Try *kind, loyal, patient, honest, and funny!* Display the friend at a “friendship stop” so children know where to go when they are feeling lonely.



THE KINDNESS JAR

Share *Kind* by Alison Green. The book introduces different ideas of kind acts, such as smiling, hugging, caring, not leaving people out, and celebrating diverse families. Explain how being kind to each other is what friends are supposed to do. Start a “Kindness Jar”. Every time someone does a kind act, let them put a button or glass marble into the jar. Offer the children rewards such as free “choosing time” or a special outdoor activity when the jar is full.

Celebrating differences



ALL ABOUT ME

Encourage children to introduce themselves by drawing self-portraits and then displaying them next to photographs. Ask them to paint pictures of their families, and ask keyworkers to scribe the names and share what they like to do at home. Display the pictures so children can see their finished work on the walls. Children starting in Reception could fill an “All about me” bag with two or three items that are special to them so they can show and tell their classmates about themselves.

TIP:

An invaluable way for practitioners to help children settle into a setting is to carry out home visits. These provide practitioners with an insight into a child’s home life, their interests and special toys, enabling keyworkers to relate settling-in activities and resources to each child.

CROSS THE CIRCLE

This is a good game for recognising things that children have in common with each other and celebrating their differences. Invite a group of children to stand in a circle and play “Cross the Circle”. Ask for a volunteer and give them an instruction on how to cross the circle. These can range from simple movements such as jumping/hopping/stomping to more imaginative ideas such as *move like a... ballerina/astronaut/frog/snake/train/plane*, and so on. Extend the game to swap places if you’re wearing red/blue/orange... or if you have black hair/blue eyes/red shoes. The children must swap places with another child.

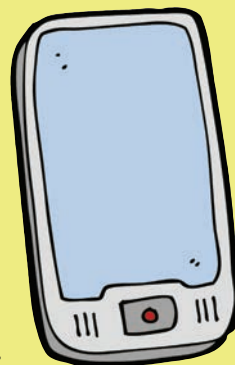


WE’RE ALL DIFFERENT

Sharing books with children is a helpful way to tackle subjects such as diversity and inclusion. *Share You Choose* by Nick Sharratt and talk about making different choices of where they would like to go, different families and friends, which clothes they like to wear and games they want to play. *Who are you?* by Smriti Halls is another conversation starter for younger children to talk about diversity and choices. *My Family, Your Family* by Laura Henry-Allain MBE is a helpful book for talking about different families. Visit the Book Trust website at booktrust.org.uk to find more helpful suggestions for books about celebrating differences.

STAFF STARTER PROCEDURES

Parents can often be very anxious when their children are starting nursery or school. Their concerns may centre around handing over the responsibility for their child’s welfare and happiness to somebody else, possibly for the first time, so it becomes a huge milestone for the whole family. Early years practitioners need to be consistent in communication, confident and reassuring, and sensitive to each parent’s feelings. Try to share daily routines with home, and if possible, during the day use communication platforms to send positive messages and images to the child’s online learning diary. Always make time to talk to parents when they pick their children up and share key moments/concerns from their child’s day.



Jude Harries is an author and teacher of music and drama, with experience of working with children aged nine months to 11 years.



SAL MCKEOWN IS A FREELANCE EDITOR AND JOURNALIST



Let the *indoor* games begin!

Take the elements out of the equation – *Sal McKeown* sings the praises of holding nursery sports days inside...

I first heard about indoor sports days from an Australian teacher. Here, we usually opt for an afternoon outside, late in the summer term, and then worry that it will coincide with a monsoon. Australia is different: rain rarely stops play, but they're acutely aware of the dangers of heat, sun and even fires.

With the benefits of outdoor time well known, you might instinctively reject this approach, but instead of seeing an indoor sports day as second best, look at the advantages. Nursery children are at different stages of physical development. Indoors means you're closer to toilets and potties. You can shut the doors, so there's less chance of anybody wandering off, and some equipment (e.g. skittles) works

better on hard floors.

Choose your venue. Some nurseries have storage furniture on castors that can be rolled back against the walls, leaving a large, clear space in the middle of the room. If this isn't big enough, the school hall might be available (if you're a PVI setting, check out church halls and venues that host children's parties). Pick the date and time. Keep it short and sweet! Younger children might need a nap, so try a sports morning, followed by a quieter than usual afternoon, with a medal ceremony and official photographs at the end of the day.

One disadvantage of being indoors is the windows. Don't let overexcited children loose with a tennis ball or football. Use foam equipment and insist that other balls are *rolled*, not *thrown*. There may be a budding World Cup star in your class, but this isn't the day for talent spotting!

TOP TIPS

1 KEEP THE EVENT SHORT

Plan to have a break in the middle of proceedings so children can calm down and rehydrate.

2 READY TO HELP

Make sure one member of staff is responsible for scooping up children who are overexcited or upset and taking them to a quiet corner.

3 CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Forget the stickers and go for glitter! Think gold, silver, and bronze rosettes or sashes. If you buy or make medals, use elastic or stretchy ribbon for safety.

THE EVENTS

Bean bags

Bean bags are brilliant. Try a walking race where the children complete a circuit with a bean bag on their head. Give medals to the first across the finishing line and to whoever has the lowest score for dropping the bean bag. Differentiate so younger ones have a shorter race. "Toss the bean bag" is like bowls. Set a target or "jack", and the winner is the child whose bean bag lands closest.

On your marks...

An obstacle course is always popular. Include things to climb over or through or go round. Add in some hoops that children must pass over their heads. A "spider race" is when children go down on all fours but with their knees off the ground; this could be for the older children, with a crawling race for the

little ones. Older children could also try walking backwards round a circuit.

Balloon skills

Play keepy-uppy! Divide children into mixed-age teams; they need to work together to keep a balloon in the air. Give one penalty point each time it hits the floor. The teams with the fewest points are the winners. A "balloon stomp" is a favourite party game. The aim is to burst the most balloons in 10 seconds (many children cry when they hear a balloon bursting, so keep this for older children).

If things are getting too hectic, play statues, where children stand totally still for 10 seconds. Weed out those who move, and when you're down to the final three, up the ante to 20 seconds.

Take aim!

A number dartboard with adhesive balls works well for young children. Whoever gets the highest score wins. Skittles are also fun. If you don't have enough, fill empty plastic bottles with sand. Let little ones stand nearer.

Finally, what sporting contest is complete without a cheerleader routine? The simplest one I've found on YouTube is led by Coach Jason Mitchell (bit.ly/3LSFMWf). Be warned, the chant will live on in your head long after sports day is over!

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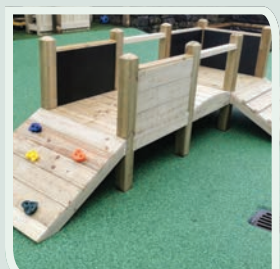


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“Potty training is a mess”

It’s time for a new approach to teaching toileting independence, says Elisabeth Whitebread...

Within the last two generations in the UK, there has been a revolution in potty training. Whereas our grandparents were nappy-free by 18 months, today many children are three or older before achieving toileting independence. This delay has far-reaching consequences for children’s health, development and wellbeing. Yet, beyond a few health and early years professionals, it is little known or talked about.

Since 2020, Kindred² have undertaken school readiness surveys to assess the extent to which children are entering Reception with the skills they need to thrive. They found that a staggering 24% of children start school still having frequent accidents, and an overwhelming 90% of teachers report having at least one child in their class who is not fully toilet-trained. Director Felicity Gillespie told me, “It never occurred to us that this was happening basically in every school in the country, and that it was happening to such a degree that it was skewing the entire provision of early years education for every child.” These accidents often require two adults to assist the child, and based on Kindred² data, I’ve calculated this leads to an average of an hour per day of lost teaching time per class.

Children’s health is also suffering. Prolonged use of nappies is linked to an increased risk of urinary tract infections and constipation, and many children suffer anxiety and diminished self-confidence as a result. Alongside the financial cost to parents and early years settings, the collection and disposal of nappies costs local authorities in England £160 million per year. Moreover, each

additional year a child remains in nappies consigns approximately 1,000 extra single-use plastic nappies to the rubbish dump.

Kate Spencer-Allen, head of Foundation Stage at St Matthews Primary School in Cambridge, told me: “The benefits of ensuring that a child is toilet trained are clear. We can see how it helps foster independence, boosts self-esteem, and promotes a smoother transition into both the social and academic demands of the school environment. But it is also clear to see that more and more parents need support with how to achieve this.”

But why are parents teaching their children this crucial life skill later than they used to?

A staggering 24% of children start school still having frequent accidents



CHANGING HABITS

The answer to this question is a combination of societal changes, cuts to support services, and the single-use nappy industry.

With the rise of dual-income households, children are starting nursery earlier. In the past, early years settings tended to serve children aged three and up, and being toilet-trained was often a requirement of admission. Nowadays, children usually start at a nursery or childminders aged 12 months or younger, and settings have adapted by including nappy changes as part of their provision.

Be it health visitors, much-missed Sure Start services, nurseries or family workers, early years education and support services have been chronically underfunded in recent decades. Kindred² found that 22% of parents had never even seen a health visitor. Only 30% of nursery staff are trained to support toileting independence. This lack of support and reliable information leaves parents with little knowledge about potty training (as well as a whole host of other things), while early years professionals themselves do not receive adequate training due to lack of funding and high staff turnover.

The single-use nappy industry has played a crucial role in shaping current potty training practices, and has a vested interest in keeping children in nappies longer. Famously, Pampers was Procter & Gamble’s first \$10 billion brand. In the 1980s, the company funded paediatrician Barry Brazelton to advocate that parents should wait until their child is “ready”, a term often left vaguely defined but implying that the child will indicate when they are prepared. This concept, combined with the marketing of products like pull-ups by Huggies in



The evidence suggests that teaching the necessary skills gradually as children become developmentally ready, rather than through intensive “training”, is more in line with how they develop other skills and is likely to lead to starting potty training earlier. Plus, it’s less pressurising for all involved than the one-size-fits-all “three-day method”, which expects children to go from never having encountered a potty before to being ready for accident-free outings within the space of a long weekend.

Rebecca Mottram, children’s nurse and potty expert, says, “We wouldn’t strap children to a high chair for 18 months and then expect them to walk. We understand that learning to walk is a gradual process that starts with head control, and that there will be many steps

and little tumbles along the way. We should think of teaching children to use the toilet in the same way.”

Mottram, alongside ERIC, the Children’s Bowel and Bladder Charity, advocates for an approach where children are introduced to the potty as soon as they can sit up on their own. This method involves sitting children on the potty at times when they are likely to need it (e.g. upon waking, after meals) and praising them if they do a wee or a poo, helping them to form positive associations with potty use.

Some nurseries are already taking steps towards adopting this method. ERIC is working with Bristol City Council to provide training to their 10 maintained nursery settings, and Cheryl Hadland, founder of Tops Day Nurseries, tells me: “We plan to start potty training much earlier, imminently, so children become used to seeing other children and having their pees and poos caught in a pot as soon as they can sit securely. I think

different managers and their teams will address this in different ways, and we will feed back on their success as we experiment.”

Currently, most nursery settings operate under a parent-led approach, meaning they wait for parents to signal that they are beginning potty training at home before providing support. But what if nursery staff felt confident and empowered to proactively teach children and their parents the skills they need to become nappy-free sooner?

In my experience, parents are crying out for this support. I’d love to start a conversation with any early years professionals who would like to collaborate on developing an evidence-based, child-centred approach in their setting.

Sprout is a social enterprise on a mission to transform infant toileting for the better. Visit sprout-innovation.co.uk

the 1990s, which often featured older children, has normalised later toilet training.

These factors, combined, have led to the emergence of three pervasive myths that perpetuate late and ineffective potty training. These are:

1. Starting between ages 2 and 3:

Historically and globally, children start much earlier and are mostly trained by 1–2 years.

2. “Signs of readiness”: While some children show clear signals like the “wee wee dance”, many do not, leading parents to mistakenly think their child isn’t ready.

3. The “three-day method” can work for all: Promoted as a quick fix, this method is not universally effective and can be extremely stressful for parents and children, and if it doesn’t work can entrench further problems.

TAKE ACTION!

Four things you can do to support children to toilet train earlier...

1 Learn: access the evidence base via this QR code



2 Watch ERIC’s series of videos at tinyurl.com/eric-potty

3 Listen to the Go Potty podcast by Rebecca Mottram at littlebunnybear.com/podcast

4 Connect: email me at hello@sprout-innovation.co.uk to discuss how we could collaborate



KATHERINE COOLING-SMITH IS AN AWARD-WINNING CHILDMINDER WORKING IN ESSEX

5 ways a slow pedagogy improved my practice

Packing the day with planned activities can negatively affect children's learning – there's a better way, says Katherine Cooling-Smith...

What if we took a step back and made a conscious decision to strip out our pre-planning? What if instead we created an environment filled with rich resources that met our children's developmental needs holistically? And, what if we spent time out in nature, following the intrigues and interests of the children without any rushed time constraints?

This might feel quite daunting and like we aren't "doing enough"; however, cramming in activities to evidence teaching often negatively impacts learning. Rushed sessions or moving quickly from topic to topic can be overwhelming and doesn't always offer children the optimal conditions for embedding new knowledge and skills.

Over the last couple of years, I have made the move towards a slow pedagogy, and in doing so have levelled up my provision. Here are five ways it has improved my practice...

1. Embracing simplicity

Deeper opportunities for emotional and cognitive connection lead to empowered children who love to learn...

While meandering along the Essex Way on a warm morning back in May, my three-year-olds shot off to splash through a long, shallow puddle they'd spotted just ahead. Backwards and forwards they ran until I caught them up with my two-year-old, who had fallen behind after stopping to study

a ladybird sunning itself on a leaf – a moment quietly shared between the two of us.

Setting our bags down, I observed as all three delighted in running, jumping, and dancing in the water, until my littlest decided very abruptly to sit himself down right in the middle of it. I watched as he swished his legs from side to side, feeling the force of the water as he displaced it with his movements. I could see that he was noticing that smaller movements made little ripples, while bigger movements made larger waves. I then watched

Children will meet their milestones whether we pack learning in or take it slowly

as his attention turned to a big stone. Picking it up carefully with two hands, he noticed that his wet fingers made some striking marks on its dusty surface.

My other two were occupied carrying and dropping large rocks from a height, exclaiming that the bigger they were, the larger the splash! I pulled out some watercolour palettes from our rucksack, and for the next few hours we stayed where we were, mark making with water and

paint, revisiting the rock-splashing experiment, exploring the hedgerows, building a bridge for ants, and attempting to skim flat stones, before finally settling down on the bank to read some nature books.

Our morning had begun with no set plans, bar the children asking to visit the horses at the stables. It had taken us an hour to reach the puddle after pausing with a snack to watch two pigeons building a nest. The return journey was no different: more ladybirds were carefully studied, strange bugs were Googled, and our nature books were used again to identify the clouds we could see high above us. It would be a further two hours before we finally made it back to the setting.

In one wonderfully unhurried, unplanned morning led by a small group of preschoolers, we had effortlessly covered all areas of learning and supported everyone's next steps. On paper, that might feel far too simple, but simplicity is exactly what I strive for now. The complexity and meaningful learning opportunities come from what I as the educator add in the moment. It's the skill of standing back and letting children notice, explore, and test for themselves before stepping in at just the right moment to add opportunities for them to take it further.

2. Teachable moments

I've gained greater confidence in my role as a mindful educator...



We are all familiar with that sense of needing to prove that what we are doing is enough. Although a written timetable, perfectly curated tuff tray, and themed display about the life cycle of a ladybird offer a more tangible link to learning and next steps than the child crouched over the buddleia, I now have the courage to know that I can evidence this without the obvious resources and displays.

During inspection, I talk about what my continuous provision offers and the methods I utilise, how authentic resources, loose parts, and access to a wide range of creative and malleable media nurture children's interests, and that the time allowed for children to just be is where I find the richest teachable moments.

However, it wasn't until I discovered research by Professor Alison Clark through her book *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child: Time for Slow Pedagogies in Early Education* that I finally felt truly confident that this slower approach was okay, and that really it was better than okay, because the noticeable impact it was having on my children was remarkable.

3. Engaging conversations

The children are exceeding expectations for Communication and Language...

The extra time we spend "not doing" opens space for conversation and a huge amount of sustained shared thinking on a much deeper level. This doesn't just apply to my preschoolers

but also to my babies and toddlers, for whom the time is just as valuable for connecting and building on their pre-speech skills and understanding.

I have never shied away from using "big" words and rich, descriptive language around my young children, and sharing these moments of learning together in a relaxed manner nurtures their ability to understand, absorb, and embed language more effectively. This is further supported by the fact we are chatting about things that have captured their interest, meaning they are wholly engaged.

4. Time to say "yes"

I can provide richer opportunities for science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM)...

An unscheduled approach means we have time to say "yes" instead of "not today" to children's more complex or messy in-the-moment requests. If conversation turns to volcanoes, we can pull out the bicarb and vinegar when the spark is there, rather than the next day when it's passed. For that child banging a stick against a rock as a hammer, we can offer the woodworking tools and give them all the time they need to explore these and be creative.

I'm a firm believer that you can incorporate STEAM-based opportunities and language into any situation, and I'm always ready to pull out our creative resources when necessary.

5. Stress-free learning

This approach offers enhanced mental wellbeing – not only for my children but also for myself...

The truth is that children will meet their milestones whether we pack learning in or take it slowly. However, rushed or hurried children often have higher levels of cortisol in the brain and feel stressed or anxious, meaning they are not able to absorb information as effectively. Therefore, it's important to consider not just what they are learning but also how.

We must also think about our own mental wellbeing, and how slowing down can give us space to breathe in an industry that asks so much of us. When we curate spaces with resources that spark their interests and fulfil their developmental needs holistically, those rich, teachable moments naturally present themselves. We are empowering, inspiring, and nurturing both the children's love of learning and our own.



TIA CLARIDGE IS REGULATORY, SAFEGUARDING & POLICY LEAD AT FAMILY FIRST

Say “yes” to rough and tumble

Play fighting and other forms of risky play can be incredibly beneficial to children’s development, explains Tia Claridge...

The urge for physical play is an innate characteristic of young children; it is embedded in their nervous systems from birth. Engaging in rough and tumble play (RTP) provides a fantastic opportunity for them to fulfil this natural desire. Such activities are not only enjoyable but also play a crucial role in healthy development, contributing to their physical, social, and emotional growth. Through RTP, children can learn to navigate social interactions, develop gross motor

skills, and begin to understand the boundaries of physical engagement with their peers.

Young children often engage in play that has an aggressive theme, such as superhero and weapon play. Some children appear preoccupied with these themes, but it is important for practitioners to understand that this is not necessarily a precursor to bullying or an aggressive nature. It may simply reflect their interests and ways of exploring relationships and the world around them.

WHAT IS RTP?

Rough and tumble is a vigorous, physical type of play that children willingly choose to engage in. It often involves play fighting, chasing, rolling on, and wrestling each other, as well as imaginary and risky play too. This can at times look chaotic and aggressive on the surface to practitioners. However, despite its seemingly rough nature, this type of play is typically consensual, involves mutual enjoyment and lacks any intent to hurt others.

As RTP can be misunderstood as violence, it is often stopped or discouraged in early years settings; however, it can be so beneficial to children’s development.

CASE STUDY:

Haydon Meadow Preschool, Swindon

While I was supporting on the DfE Early Years Experts and Mentors programme, the topic of boys’ play arose at one of the settings I was linked with. It can be just as simple as giving children the permission and space to engage in RTP, as one educator explains...

“We were struggling with a boisterous group of boys in preschool who were showing high-energy behaviours. The play was chaotic, and we were struggling to get them to stop. They were rolling on top of each other, play fighting and generally playing roughly with one another for what felt like all day, every day. We also noticed that the boys weren’t really focused in their play; instead they were flitting, and we were struggling to get them engaged.

“Tia shared with us the myths and misconceptions of RTP and discussed developmental benefits too. She advised that the next time the children were rolling around with each other, instead of stopping them, we should make the space safe and allow them to play under close supervision. The children used the space brilliantly and enjoyed rolling around with each other, some pretending to be superheroes, others falling on top of each other in such a controlled manner, so they didn’t hurt their friends. It was wonderful to watch. The boys were laughing, having fun and just knew where the boundaries were with one another without an adult directing them. We have continued to support and facilitate this type of play.

“What is really fascinating for me is that after these periods of RTP, the children access the preschool provision with increased engagement and motivation and seem so much calmer. This is certainly something we will be facilitating in our setting going forward.”

THE BENEFITS

There has been an increase in studies exploring the learning opportunities RTP can offer. It can promote:

- Gross motor skills
- Communication and language skills
- Social signalling
- Dominance and relationship exploration with peer groups
- Self-control
- Bargaining, problem solving and negotiating
- Collaborating with others
- Cognitive development
- Health and physical development
- Emotional development
- Emotional resilience and regulation

There is also evidence that high-energy physical play can promote neuroplasticity and cognitive processing – it really is such a powerful (and fun!) play form.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

While RTP has enormous benefits for both girls and boys, we all know who is likely to prefer this type of play above all others! However, girls very much benefit from RTP too, although

“As RTP can be misunderstood as violence, it is often stopped or discouraged

it might look different. The boys will tend to rely on the physicality and, at times, competitive nature of the play, whereas girls may be more reliant on spoken narratives to protect and rescue their friends.

Over my 20-year career in early years, I have consistently heard the term “boisterous boys”. The boys who don’t sit still, roll on top of one another, and want to engage in aggressive and fighting play themes for most of their nursery day. I am often asked when supporting settings how to help them “manage the boys”, so much so that it determined my most recent research study.

Last year, as part of a Psychology of Education (MSc), I explored whether there were gender differences in how educators view and facilitate RTP. At present in the UK it is estimated that 97%–98% of the early years workforce is female. I was curious to see if this type of play was viewed and facilitated differently by male and female educators, and therefore having an impact on the RTP pedagogy in settings. It was only a relatively small-scale exploratory study, but it was a really interesting process! Not only is a practitioner’s gender influential on this type of play, but cultural and community considerations are too. Views and feelings from both practitioners and parents are highly influential in how this type of play is facilitated across the UK.

The research confirmed that boys’ play can be misunderstood by female early years practitioners, which isn’t surprising when we consider the impact our own gender bias has on our outlook on practice. While I have aimed to celebrate and facilitate

boys’ play during my career, it isn’t necessarily an easy thing to do as a female who doesn’t have an innate desire to engage in RTP myself. Female educators must adopt a reflective and reflexive approach to understanding boys and what makes them tick, as it may not be natural for us. Likewise, it is equally important that male educators work to understand girls’ play.

GET STARTED

Skilful observation: Tune in to the content of the play, perhaps to suggest alternative strategies for heroes and heroines, making the most of “teachable moments” to encourage empathy and lateral thinking to explore alternative scenarios and strategies for conflict resolution.

Culture and community: Nursery culture and the local community will have an impact on practice. Therefore, each nursery will need to create a unique stance on various types of RTP to ensure it is suitable for their children’s experiences.

A whole-team approach: Ensure the whole team recognise that RTP is completely normal for young children and should be celebrated like other forms of play (within the agreed limits). Joint observations are helpful, so the team know the difference between RTP and true aggression.

Safety first: Involve the children in the discussions about how to keep everyone safe when engaging in RTP; they are likely to have better ideas than us!

Join in: Encourage the team to join in, so they truly know what this type of play feels like for young children. Have fun!



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Strategies to support speech



Amy Loxley explains how to spot a child struggling with talking and understanding words...

An estimated 1.9 million children in the UK have speech and language challenges. That means one in five children around the country are struggling to talk and understand words right now. Without the right support, these children are more likely to struggle to read, write and do maths. They will also find it harder to make friends, be twice as likely to be unemployed as young adults, and make up almost half of mental health service referrals and two-thirds of the young offender population.

Speech and language challenges are hidden in many children. It can be hard to spot a child who is struggling with talking and understanding words, particularly in a busy early years setting. All children develop differently, and identifying which children just need a bit of extra time, which children will catch up with an intervention programme, and which children have more long-term challenges and require specialist support isn't straightforward.

We know that early intervention is key – but in a time of limited resources and capacity, how do we make sure that children who need support aren't slipping through the net?

SPOTTING THE SIGNS

Challenges with talking and understanding words present in numerous ways. Many children who struggle with behaviour, attention or social interaction may, in fact, have speech and language challenges. A child who presents as shy or quiet may be struggling to talk and understand words. Another child who acts out or has difficulty managing their emotions

could have an underlying speech and language challenge.

If you have concerns about a child's development in any area, stop and think – could it be a speech and language challenge? Have a closer look at:

- **How they communicate** – do they talk and/or use non-verbal skills at a similar level to peers of the same age?
- **What they understand** – are they able to listen and follow directions?
- **How they take part** – do they play alongside and together with their peers?

Speech and language challenges are hidden in many children

There are lots of tools and resources available to help you identify children who may be struggling, including our free progress checker (progress-checker.speechandlanguage.org.uk). Both early years staff and families can use this free online tool. You simply select the age of the child and answer some straightforward questions about their speech, language and communication skills. At the end, you will be directed to helpful advice and resources for the child's areas of difficulty based on your answers.

Other free tools include our *Universally Speaking* booklet (bit.ly/TEYspeech) and our ages and stages (tinyurl.com/TEYstages) webpages.

Both tools give an indication of what's typical, so you can quickly and easily check a child's skills.

WHAT NEXT?

Once you have identified potential concerns with a child's speech and language development, it's crucial to put support in place and monitor their progress. We have lots of advice and ideas in our free resource library for educators (tinyurl.com/TEYtalk).

A small group intervention programme is one type of targeted support. There is convincing evidence that these work. A good example is our Early Talk Boost (tinyurl.com/TEYboost) programme, which has been shown to boost children's progress in language and communication by an average of five months after nine weeks.

Around 10% of all children have a lifelong speech and language challenge – they won't "grow out of it" or catch up to their peers, even with support. Some have challenges associated with another condition, but others have lifelong challenges that are not part of another condition or diagnosis. If a child doesn't make progress after you've put support in place, refer them to your local speech and language therapy service for a full assessment.

FURTHER SUPPORT

If you have concerns about a child and need support, contact Speech and Language UK's free, confidential advice line (tinyurl.com/TEYadvice) to book a callback from a qualified speech and language therapist. And if you want to find out more, be sure to explore the host of resources on our educator webpages (tinyurl.com/TEYtoolsSP).



Early Words Matter

Better speech, language and communication support is essential to counter the impact of poverty on children's life chances, says Tracy Jackson OBE...

Earlier this year, the National Literacy Trust launched a bold new strategy that outlines the three changes (or “breakthroughs”) we believe will have the biggest impact on creating a more equal society driven by literacy. Crucially, the first breakthrough is rooted in the early years. Our aim: for every child to start Reception with language and communication skills, ready to grow and learn at school. Why?

LITERACY BOOSTS LIFE CHANCES

A child's earliest years are crucial to their development and life chances. From birth to age five, the brain develops more than at any other time in life (bit.ly/3AeVMPZ) and language development at just age two strongly predicts readiness for school and future educational outcomes (bit.ly/4dgUUc7).

Early years speech, language and communication is the foundation of all literacy. However, over a fifth (21%) of five-year-olds started primary school last year without the expected skills in early communication and language, and almost a third (31%) without the expected level of literacy skills they need to thrive (bit.ly/3LVIZog). Without this firm foundation, not only will their learning, confidence and wellbeing suffer in their early school days, but they are also much more likely to struggle academically (bit.ly/4deNciS), be unemployed by their 30s (bit.ly/3LQ9Emi), and face poorer physical and mental health outcomes as adults (bit.ly/3LRVktX). This early literacy gap is also estimated to cost England's economy £830 million every year in lost earnings and increased costs to the government from higher spending

on education and welfare, as well as lower tax revenue (bit.ly/3SDWvjM).

The issue is being exacerbated by the lasting impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and child poverty levels rising at the fastest rate in a decade. Poverty and literacy are interconnected; we know that child poverty leads to low literacy, and, as a result, the experience of poverty in childhood can have lifelong impact. Indeed, early years speech and language is the place where literacy inequality first emerges. In 2023, only half (53%) of children eligible for free school meals started primary school

*Literacy gives you
the tools to get the
most out of life*

with good levels of early language and literacy, compared with three-quarters (73%) of their peers who weren't eligible (bit.ly/3LVIZog).

This deficit is one most children will never recover from and one that will hold them back throughout their lives. By providing better early language support, we can mitigate the impact of poverty on literacy and help to ensure that the next generation has the skills they need to lead happy, productive lives.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

To move the needle, there needs to be a far greater emphasis and strategic focus on the home learning environment, including clear channels through which families can find

information, resources and support, and on quality and equity in early education and care provision. This will benefit all children, but particularly those living in disadvantaged communities.

This change cannot be achieved in isolation – it will require collaboration at both a national and local level between public, private and third-sector organisations.

The characteristics of the communities in which children live, and the systems that they encounter, shape language and communication development outcomes more than the effects of social class and overall deprivation levels of the area. Therefore, to better support the early language and literacy skills of children aged 0–5, particularly in disadvantaged communities, we will use a place-based approach that will deliver change through direct service delivery, improving the capacity of early years professionals and creating changes in the systems and policies designed to serve families most in need.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Directly support children's literacy skills by working with 60,000 families, delivering evidence-based interventions to empower parents with the skills and confidence to support their children's language development from birth.
- Help professionals increase the quality of early literacy provision by providing training and support to practitioners working in 300 early years settings in disadvantaged communities.
- Work alongside communities to tackle literacy inequality by having



20 teams on the ground in the communities with the biggest literacy and poverty challenges.

- Influence leadership and policy to create lasting change by campaigning for a commitment to early language and literacy as a priority for the new government.

Our Early Words Matter campaign (literacytrust.org.uk/early-words-matter) will be a key driver for this success. Launched last year, the campaign aims to combat the impact of child poverty on early language skills development. Over five years, the campaign will support the early language and literacy of 250,000 children in 20 communities.

Over the past decade, we have been exploring how place-based solutions can help raise literacy levels in communities most affected by poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. Needs analysis in each of the communities where we work has identified four key elements that are needed to improve early communication, language, and literacy outcomes:

1. Better information and support for parents to build their confidence and give them the skills to make their home learning environment language rich.

2. Evidence-based speech and language interventions delivered by well-funded

and trained early years providers, health visitors, and speech and language therapists.

3. Place-based initiatives that bring together cross-sector organisations to address the underlying causes of complex social problems in a more holistic and joined-up way.

4. Greater access to and awareness of entitlements to high-quality early education and care.

Early Words Matter will build on this learning to create an integrated system that works for all children and families by strengthening and coordinating activity at a local level.

We want to create a systemic shift in early years support, working closely with public sector bodies and local community groups to embed changes that create a more effective, targeted and joined-up early years system. We will also work with businesses to develop a clear understanding of the importance of early years education and how, as employers, their products, services and social responsibility programmes can impact parenting and early childhood outcomes.

Testing this approach in these areas will enable us to develop a framework that can be tailored and replicated at a national level, leveraging our established network of cross-sector partnerships and policy influence.

GET INVOLVED

If you want to find out more about how you can support early language development and boost parental engagement, we have a wide range of inspiring tools and activities available. From our free resources to our evidence-based programmes and annual conference, there's something for every practitioner.

Visit literacytrust.org.uk/early-years

KEY TIP: PLAY!

As the Real Play Coalition asserts, “Play is the ‘rocket fuel’ of child development” (bit.ly/4dudNb7), but common myths continue to mistakenly separate play from education.

Play is the very foundation for all children's learning and development, and each of us has an important role in creating a playful, literacy-rich environment by:

- giving children the freedom and time to play in an appropriately stimulating and resourced environment
- modelling effective language and communication
- actively extending children's vocabulary
- listening carefully to what children are saying and observing what they are doing

Trust your experience and knowledge. By ensuring that children develop the solid foundations for literacy through child-centred play, every child can have the words they need to find their voice, develop a love of reading and tell their stories confidently.



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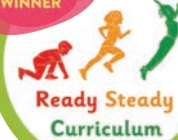


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DANIEL SATURLEY IS AN EARLY YEARS ADVISORY TEACHER

10 ways to boost communication

Daniel Saturley shares his top tips on nurturing children's speech and language skills...

1 BE A CONVERSATION STARTER

First things first, be a conversation starter and get children talking! Take this a step further by being a beacon of language and drop in new words here and there, making your conversations a delightful treasure hunt for vocabulary. Whether you're chatting about the clouds, the colour of a child's shirt, or the taste of their snack, sprinkle in some exciting new words. These snippets of language will help children expand their vocabulary effortlessly.

2 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Let's not forget that a lot of communication happens without words. Gestures, facial expressions, and body language speak volumes. When you're animated and expressive, children pick up on these cues and learn to use them too. So, wave those hands, raise those eyebrows, and let your face do the talking!

3 THE MAGIC OF BOOKS

Reading widely and sharing books is a game-changer. Books are a fantastic tool for introducing new vocabulary and ideas. When you read with children, you're not just telling a story; you're opening up a world of words and

imagination. Don't stop at just reading; play alongside them, expanding their sentences and weaving in new vocabulary. "Oh, I can see that you are building a tower! It looks tall – look at how it's towering over the tiny cars!"

It's vital to articulate and enunciate correctly

4 LANGUAGE-RICH ENVIRONMENTS

Setting up language-rich environments, both indoors and out, is essential. These spaces should be calm, clear, and labelled, with plenty of opportunities for interaction. Skilled colleagues can use these environments to spark discussions and stimulate children's minds. Imagine a cosy reading nook or a vibrant outdoor space with signs, labels, and lots of talking points.

5 ARTICULATE & ENUNCIATE

When engaging with children, it's vital to articulate and enunciate correctly. Clear and precise speech helps children understand and replicate sounds and words. It's all about modelling good language habits.

6 **KNOW EACH CHILD**
Spend time understanding the starting points and next steps for your key children. Knowing where each child is in their language development helps tailor your interactions to be most effective. This personalised approach makes a huge difference to progress.

7 **SONGS & RHYMES**
Songs and rhymes boost language skills. They're not only fun but also rhythmic and repetitive, which helps children remember words and phrases. Whether it's a morning "hello" song or a "clean-up" rhyme, these little tunes make learning joyful.

8 **MODEL LANGUAGE**
While playing alongside children, model language for them. Use visual aids to support understanding, and always be patient and encouraging. Show them how to use words in context, and they'll start mimicking your language use. "I see you're drawing a sun. Is it a sunny day? It looks bright and shiny!"

9 **PLAYFUL WORDS**
Teach words that help children play and interact with their peers. Terms like *share*, *turn*, *build*, and *explore* are practical and help children communicate their needs and ideas through learning and exploration.

10 **COMMENT MORE THAN QUESTION**
Here's a golden rule: comment more than question. Make observations. "I see you're painting the sea. It looks so big. Perhaps it's a big blue ocean!" Doing so could enrich the conversation while allowing children to respond naturally rather than feeling quizzed.





Great question!

Emma Spiers suggests ways to support children as they learn to ask and answer...



Have you ever been out and about with a three-year-old who is at the “why?” stage? As I played in the garden with my niece recently, I received a timely reminder through a perfect demonstration!

“We need to tidy up.”

“Why?”

“It’s time for tea.”

“Why?”

“We need to get in the bath now.”

“Why?”...

The practitioner part of my brain was delighted. Asking questions and being inquisitive is a powerful developmental step for a three-year-old. My niece was showing me that she’s well on the way to becoming a competent communicator and fully

functioning learner. Or was she?

WHY QUESTIONS?

Asking and answering questions is a key part of human interaction; it’s the strategy we use every day to gain information, clarify our understanding, or get help. We ask questions to ourselves as we think through problems, trial solutions, or attempt to make sense of our place in the world. Some children move from learning words and putting them together to phrasing simple questions easily. Others find this developmentally more challenging.

Using questions for communication takes two forms: receptive language, which involves processing, understanding and responding to

questions asked by others; and expressive language, i.e. thinking about, developing, and articulating questions to find out more. Early years children need to develop equal competence and confidence in both aspects.

DON’T OVERDO IT

It’s easy to fall into the trap of asking too many questions. We want to know what our children think, so we ask them. But overdoing it, or asking questions that are too complex, can be counterproductive. There can be an overemphasis on the receptive nature of these questions, cultivating a belief that questions are something that is “done” to us.

Too many questions can feel uncomfortable in any interaction. If we

were sitting in a café and I said, “Would you like a cake? Which cake is your favourite? Why do you like that one? Have you had this kind of cake before? Is cake a healthy food?” you would never want to go out for coffee with me again!

Now imagine you’re engaging in playdough play with a group of three-year-olds. Even though we know that this kind of interrogation is inappropriate, it can easily sneak in as we play: “What kind of cake is that? Who is it for? How many candles are there? Have you ever had a birthday cake? What was it like?”

Written down like this, it looks ridiculous, but it’s an easy pattern to fall into. Next time you’re playing, reflect on the number and type of questions you ask. The last time I did this, it was scarily revealing!

GENUINE INTERACTIONS

Too many questions teach our children the wrong lessons about what questions are designed to do. They learn that questions are for testing or getting the right answer, rather than encouraging curiosity or nurturing a sense of wonder. As such, it’s worth considering whether there’s a genuine point to any question before you ask

It’s easy to fall into the trap of asking too many questions

it. Asking a child, “What shape is this cutter?” when they and you can clearly see that it’s a heart shape is far from genuine. That would be like me sitting with you in the café, holding up a spoon and saying, “What is this?”

A better way of developing questioning is by modelling language rather than extracting answers. We can’t extract information from the brain if the words aren’t firmly embedded first.

This may seem like the opposite of what we’re aiming to achieve, so here are some simple switches from the same playdough example:

“What shape is this cutter?” becomes “I am going to use the heart-shaped cutter.”

“What kind of cake is that?” becomes “I am going to make three cupcakes.”

“Which cake is your favourite?” becomes “I think this will be a chocolate cake; chocolate cake is my favourite.”

In these examples, we’re showing how language is constructed rather than assessing. We’re adding value, not drawing out what’s already there.

LEARNING TO ANSWER

The process of answering any question is complex. Early years children need to be equipped to:

- Hear the question in sequence
- Find where the words are stored in the brain
- Process word meaning based on previous experiences
- Formulate a reply using known words
- Organise a response in a way that will be understood
- Pronounce words in the answer effectively

Young children need much longer to go through this sequence than adults, who are already hardwired with extensive vocabularies and experience to draw from. A simple strategy is to try the “eight bananas” rule. Once you’ve asked a question, count silently in your head (*one banana, two bananas, three bananas*, and so on, up to eight). This provides at least eight seconds of thinking time for the child, reducing our adult tendency to repeat the question or rephrase it, which can be overwhelming.

It’s important to reflect on the nature and demand of the questions we ask, too. For example, “who” refers to people or characters, “where” refers to place, and “when” refers to time. If a child’s basic understanding of these concepts hasn’t been developed through interactions with adults, stories and songs, processing these types of questions can be tricky. It’s worth paying attention to this because a question can become too complex with the simple addition of these words.

LEARNING TO ASK

The bigger issue I regularly reflect on isn’t *answering* questions at all. *Asking* questions can be trickier for young children, and this is vitally important. Expressing interest or curiosity through questioning is a key component to learning more about anything.

Questioning is a major feature of problem-solving, leading to a greater

FIVE KEYS TO QUESTIONING

- 1 Questions should be limited and genuine.
- 2 “Testing” questions don’t add value.
- 3 Process questions using “eight bananas”!
- 4 Build on one type of question at a time.
- 5 Model the process of using questions for thinking.

depth of understanding in all kinds of situations. As adults, we might internalise questions like “Have I got time to get petrol?” “Can I afford that holiday?” or “How on earth does this flat-pack wardrobe fit together?” Automatic internal questions like these organise our thoughts and help us find solutions.

Part of our role as skilful play facilitators is to nurture this questioning for thinking. For example, “If I add this block, will the tower fall down?” “Does this puzzle piece fit in here? How do I know?” or “Where is that glitter I really want to use on my picture?” Modelling this thinking process aloud normalises it for children. They are introduced to the importance of this internal questioning dialogue in a natural, relaxed way.

ANSWERING “WHY” IS HARD

As my niece and I played in the garden, I realised that it’s easy to *ask*, “Why?” I wondered if she really wanted to know the answer or whether she was just loving the attention.

Learning to *answer* a “why?” is considerably more challenging, and a whole learning journey in itself. There’s much more to receptive and expressive questioning than meets the eye, and our role is critical. So, next time you start to ask a question or think that your preschoolers seem less curious than they could be, start by asking yourself “Why?”






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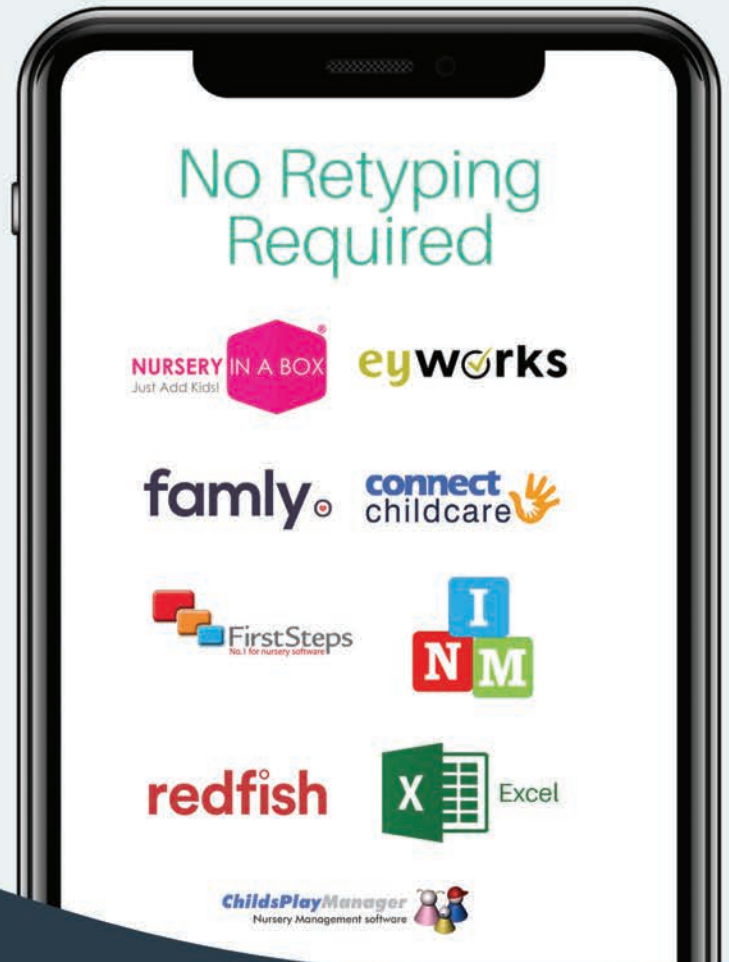
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SARAH PHILPOT IS EYFS CURRICULUM LEAD FOR UNITED LEARNING

Unlock writing through oracy

Simple classroom strategies can prove the key to bridging gaps in young children's communication and language skills, says **Sarah Philpot**...



Early writing is a huge challenge for little learners. They must develop a wide combination of skills, from knowledge of phonetic sounds to correct pencil grip and how to form letters. Perhaps the biggest challenge, though, is knowing *what* to write. This is where oracy can unlock the confidence to not only communicate effectively through speech but also translate this to written literacy.

In Ofsted's recent English Subject Report (March 2024, tinyurl.com/TEYEngEd) there is a recognition that schools understand that spoken language comes first, before reading and writing development, but also the observation that the writing curriculum "often introduces complex tasks too early, before many pupils are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills that underpin these".

So what is the solution? Across United Learning schools, it has been recognised that, alongside the national trend, communication and language levels have been lower on entry across the board than expected in recent years. As a result, all children are screened for communication and language baseline as they enter Reception to look for limiting factors in each cohort and help teachers plan how to bridge these gaps.

Tackling the issue as a whole-class approach rather than solely relying on interventions should provide the key to developing children's communication and language skills first. The following suggestions are all designed to improve children's oracy skills throughout the day in the classroom.

Repeating familiar sentence structures found in texts really aids children's written development

CREATING A VERBAL ROUTINE

Verbal routines can support language development and involve saying the same words in the same way many, many times! This approach helps children gain confidence, as they feel familiar with the routines, which in turn makes it more likely that they will use language independently. Here are some suggestions:

- Start each day with a familiar greeting and question that children have to answer. For example, create a "morning circle" and ask each pupil to complete a sentence, such as, "I feel happy today because..."
- Make time for songs and rhymes to be sung, and encourage children to participate. You may also want to include songs in your classroom timetable, e.g. at tidy-up time or home time.
- Many books feature repetitive language; these can be used to create verbal routines too. Remember to encourage group participation with plenty of praise and excitement!

WHO WILL YOU BE TODAY?

Imaginative play in the role play area can spark creative conversations and mimic the everyday interactions children experience in real life. Ask the children, "Who will you be today?" Whether it's a shopkeeper, a train driver or a postal worker, there are several key questions you can ask to develop children's oracy skills. Let's explore these with the example of a firefighter.

Firstly, ask the children, "What does a firefighter wear?" Children may reply that they wear a helmet to keep themselves safe in a burning building. Next, "How does a firefighter move?" They may respond that a firefighter moves quickly because they have to put out the fire fast! Next, you could ask, "How does a firefighter talk?" Children may say that a firefighter needs to talk loudly because they are

at an emergency.

Interactions like these help children build their descriptive skills, which will later translate into their written work. Using the prompt "why?" supports them to extend their thinking, use more exciting vocabulary, and really imagine themselves as the character they are pretending to be.

BOOK LANGUAGE

Much of the focus with oracy is on conversational talk; however, an ongoing study by Read Oxford has turned the spotlight on the benefits of using "book language" to provide children with the extensive vocabulary and sentence structures not found in conversational talk. The early conclusions from the first stage of this research project have shown that "[b]ook language provides access to types of sentence structures that are rarely encountered in speech, but which are important for children's own developing literacy skills." (tinyurl.com/TEYbookLNG)

Repeating familiar sentence structures found in texts can really aid children's written development. Try repeating these as a whole class and writing the sentence structures using symbols on story maps to give children opportunities to practise what they have learnt.

You can also use books to highlight exciting language that you may not encounter in speech. Encourage children to be "synonym spotters" and write these words on whiteboard paper when you find new vocabulary in the books you read. It's an excellent way to introduce new vocabulary in context, making it easier to understand. Remember to refer to the words you have found in books throughout the day in different situations that relate to the word. A common misconception is that "bigger" words are better; make sure children know this isn't the case, and that instead we want to use interesting words that help us paint a picture in our imaginations.

SMALL MOMENTS, BIG IMPACT

Try involving children in speaking games during small pockets of time in the day. You can play "Would you rather..." to help children develop their sentences. Aim to get the whole staff team involved, from office staff to lunchtime supervisors, and use the

following structure: the adult asks the child a "would you rather" question, and the child follows a sentence structure to reply. For example, a pupil is asked, "Would you rather live in the sky or under the sea?" and replies, "I would rather live under the sea because I enjoy swimming at the weekend."

Children will surprise you with their out-of-the-box thinking skills, and this helps them to develop their sentence structure, using their own ideas without needing prior knowledge of a subject. Voice 21's classroom research (tinyurl.com/TEYtalkpt) used this activity and concluded that significant improvements were made to children's confidence and critical-thinking abilities.

CREATE AN ORACY TOOLKIT

Help practitioners in your setting make the most of interactions during continuous provision. You may want to think of the following prompts and print them onto a lanyard for a quick visual reminder...

Modelling – model new vocabulary and skills. Ensure that, when using new vocabulary, you use objects of reference/pictures.

Questioning – ask open-ended questions and "think out loud" when children are unsure of the answers.

Offering suggestions – offer hints or partial solutions while encouraging children to complete the task themselves. Use prompts such as "I wonder what would happen if...?"

Parallel talk/play – provide commentary on the child's actions and play alongside.

Build on language – this may involve rephrasing a sentence the child has said. For example, if a pupil says, "I goed to the shops," remodel this in a positive way: "Yes, you went to the shops."



SAM USHER IS AN AWARD-WINNING ILLUSTRATOR AND WRITER

“Picture books should fill children with wonder”

TEY speaks to **Sam Usher** about childhood reading, the inspiration for *Boy and Grandad*, and his latest story, *Clang!*...



TEY: How important were picture books in your own reading journey? Were there any that have stuck in your memory?

SU: My favourite picture books as a child were *How Tom Beat Captain Najork and his Hired Sportsmen* by Russell Hoban and Quentin Blake – I still have my old copy we picked up for 50p from the library in Hungerford, where I grew up – and the *Little Bear* series by Jane Hissey, with its incredible drawings! I also remember sitting with my older brother reading the *Rupert the Bear* annuals; I would read the rhyming couplets and look

at the pictures, and my brother would read the grown-up text.

Did your parents read with you? Were there books in your house?

Our parents would read with us all the time. I shared a bedroom with my brother, and we had a wall full of books. I loved books of facts, like the DK eyewitness guides – our great-aunt gave us a selection of them, and the pictures are still etched in my memory: swords, American football outfits, castles. I loved *The Way Things Work* by David Macaulay – I would walk up to grown-ups and say, “Did you know...”

then tell them some obscure fact about pencils in the 18th century or something.

How early was it that you realised how important art is to you? How was your talent nurtured?

I loved drawing, like most children, and my parents encouraged it. My teacher Mrs Wilson in years 3 and 4 put one of my drawings – of a swan – on the front of the parish newsletter. That was my first illustration job! I used to love designing trainers. I would go on a Saturday to the local sports shop and look at the Nike Airs, then go

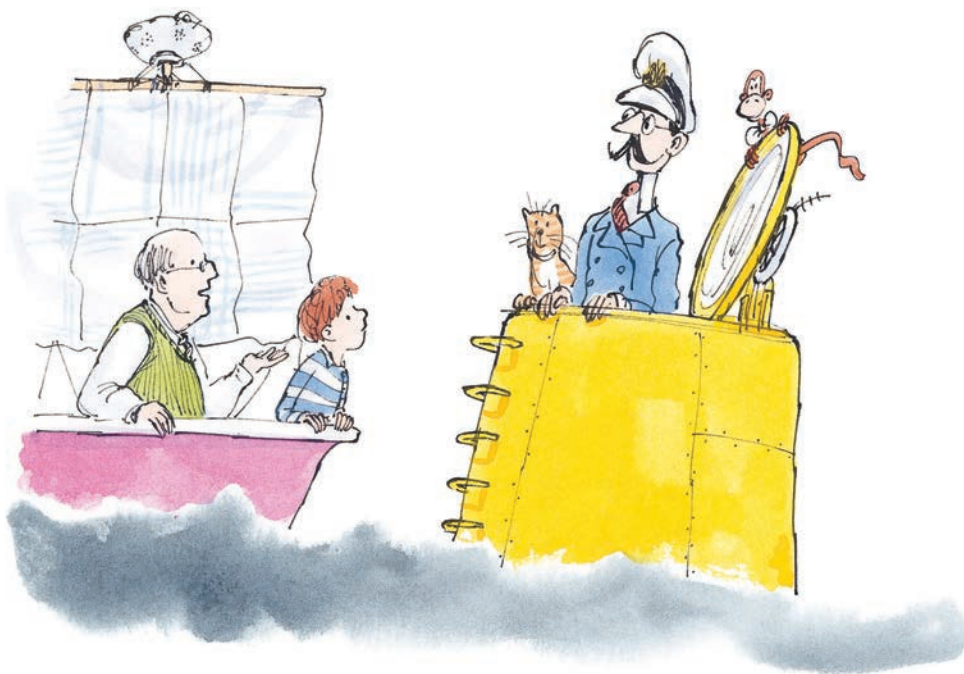
home and design some more. I sent all my designs off to Nike in the USA, and they wrote back to say thank you. They must have thought I was a right weirdo. I did the same with Playmobil; I sent them a whole sketchbook of drawings of a new pirate ship and they also, amazingly, responded. I would have been eight or nine. I suppose that taught me the value of writing to people, having ideas, and trying to make things happen.

Why did you decide to create your first children’s book? How did you come up with the concept?

Why? I suppose it didn’t occur to me not to; someone has to make them! I have the opposite of imposter syndrome: just jolly well try stuff out, and if it works, keep at it. It’s great fun. My first picture book was about a red, yellow and blue stripey snake called Sassoon – you have to spot him through the book. He started out as a doodle in my art school sketchbooks; I used to imagine him slithering around my desk and doing my work for me. The first version of the book was slightly obscure; he went through the book splashing paint everywhere. Then the financial crash happened, and the publisher couldn’t take a risk on such an eccentric book, so we took the character and created something equally mischievous but with a more recognisable format.

With an anniversary edition of the Seasons quartet coming, tell us about Boy and Grandad – why did you decide to focus on that relationship?

After art school I needed to move to London but didn’t have any dosh, so I advertised in the *London Review of Books* and *The Lady* for places to stay. I ended up meeting an 86-year-old man called James and his two stepdaughters in North London. I moved in to keep an eye on him, take him for lunch and to galleries and concerts, and in exchange, have a studio space in his house. I was there when my books started getting published, and I was stuck on my second one, not sure where my next idea was going to come from. I suppose I thought I had to write about something adventurous and



unusual, but actually, what was under my nose was the most interesting thing to write about. Taking small-scale, domestic situations and finding the magic in them – that’s what appeals to me about the books.

I hope parents will always want to read physical books with their children

Your new quartet is focused on mending, reusing and recycling; why did you choose that theme? Do you think that picture books need a “purpose” or educational aspect?

I remember vividly the utility room of James’s house – his bright red toolkit, and stories of his garden shed and making things for his grandchildren. That must be where the idea came from, though when I thought of it, it’d been six years since I moved out. I liked the idea of a series about travel; I was motorcycling around Italy at the time, and in truth, that’s all there was to it! I wrote down *Toot*, *Clang*, *Whoosh*, *Bang* and thought it sounded like a fun series. To be honest, when I was a child, if someone had told me a book had educational value, or a purpose, it would have put me off reading it. I think that is my highest ambition – to create a book with no educational value or

purpose whatsoever, just something that unashamedly celebrates the joy and magic and silliness of existence. Picture books should fill children with wonder, not be a dreary lesson.

Given the range of digital content available now, do you think there’s still a place for printed books in early childhood?

I hope parents will always want to read physical books with their children – it’s so much better than a ghastly screen. We all know instinctively it’s more healthy. I hope picture book time between parents and children is a daily refuge from modernity.

How old would you say is “too old” for one of your books?

Seventy-four and 158 days.



Clang! by Sam Usher is available now in hardback and paperback, priced at £7.99 and £12.99. *Adventures with Grandad* by Sam Usher is published in hardback 10 October 2024, priced at £19.99. Both titles are published by Templar.



ANJALI PATEL IS LEAD ADVISORY TEACHER AT CLPE

The power of relatable texts

When children in the early years recognise themselves in the books they read, the positive impact can be profound, as Anjali Patel explains...

At the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) we do the work we do because we believe – and the research shows us – that being literate has the potential to be life changing. The research also shows us that if you are a literate child who reads for pleasure then this has more impact on your future life chances than any other factor.

In September 2023, we published our findings on a three-year research project, *The Power of Reading in the Early Years*, in partnership with the Imagination Library UK, designed to improve children's early language and literacy development by providing access to quality texts and opportunities for book sharing, at home and in the classroom. Almost 1,500 nursery and Reception children across Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Camden – three of the most ethnically diverse areas of London and the UK – were involved in the project. Many of these children were educationally vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage.

By the end of the project, the impact was clear:

- The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers was smaller in project schools compared to all pupils within the local area.
- Double the number of Reception children were now working at or above age-related expectations in communication and language, reading and writing compared to the start of the year.
- More than double the number of children demonstrated positive engagement in and attitudes towards reading.

A key theme that arose throughout the project was that of the power of social reading experiences and the wide-ranging benefits these can have for children's engagement and development in language and literacy and in building their identity as readers and as writers. Of course, to shape a strong reader and writer identity at a young age, children must make a connection with the reading material we introduce to them. This includes seeing themselves and their lived experiences reflected in the characters and story worlds they encounter.

Since CLPE's *Reflecting Realities* annual survey of children's literature in the UK began in 2017, there has been a notable increase in representative titles available for children. What this means is that we can all now choose books for our classrooms that include characters of colour in settings that are familiar to all our children and in stories with universal human themes. Project teachers were gifted a set of such books, alongside CLPE's *Power of Reading* planning and training, to enable them to be shared in inspiring and interesting ways with the children.

So, what have we learned about the power of reading representative texts with children? What difference can it really make?

RELATABLE THEMES BOOST ENGAGEMENT

Across project classrooms, young children were seen to be more likely to pick up a book independently or become more deeply involved in book talk as a group, if it was centred around a strong and relatable human theme. This allowed teachers to choose books to support children's self-regulation and wellbeing during milestones such as transition, or to develop a range of



personal, social and emotional skills, particularly post-pandemic, which teachers considered an educational priority. Notably, very young children were demonstrating increased empathy and inferential understanding of character behaviour because they were supported to relate it to their own experience.

Children are motivated to read and respond more deeply to books with strong human themes

The books chosen for the class pack were centred around human themes that were universally appealing to EYFS children. When also featuring high-quality ethnic representation, it had a profound effect on some children. When teachers in the first year of the project used such a book to support a sustained sequence of work, children were both delighted and surprised to see a protagonist that looked like them and became deeply invested in the character and the story world they inhabited. In turn, they became more animated and eager to contribute during book talk. By the second and third years of the project, teaching teams were actively choosing such texts to support their curriculum and planning ways to build on these encouraging responses.

Children enjoyed being able to recognise aspects of a character's life in quality depictions, while still relating to universal themes. This allowed more children to have a voice within literacy sessions. It also enabled teachers to assess children's existing vocabulary knowledge and strengthen communication and language development by building on their enthused and knowledgeable starting points. These were the books that were frequently revisited, often becoming firm favourites.

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE IS CRUCIAL

The project also showed that teachers need a sound knowledge



21 BOOKS THAT REPRESENT AND REFLECT

STORIES TO EXPLORE IN DEPTH

- *Zeki Goes to the Park* by Anna McQuinn and Ruth Hearson (Alanna Max)
- *Anna Hibiscus's Song* by Atinuke and Lauren Tobia (Walker)
- *Jabari Tries* by Gaia Cornwall (Walker)
- *We're Going to Find the Monster* by Malorie Blackman and Dapo Adeola
- *Astro Girl* by Ken Wilson-Max (Otter-Barry Books)
- *Lulu's Nana Visits* by Anna McQuinn, illustrated by Rosalind Beardshaw (Alanna Max)
- *Errol's Garden* by Gillian Hibbs (Child's Play)

STORIES TO SUPPORT READING & WRITING:

- *Too Green* by Sumana Seeboruth, illustrated by Maribel Castells (Barefoot)
- *Sand Between My Toes* by Caroline Cross, illustrated by Jenny Duke (Child's Play)
- *The Perfect Sushi* by Emily Satoko Seo, illustrated by Mique Moriuchi (Barefoot)
- *Quiet* by Kip Alizadeh (Child's Play)

● *Where's Lenny* by Ken Wilson-Max (Alanna Max)

POETRY, RHYME & SONG TO SHARE:

- *Blow a Kiss, Catch a Kiss* by Joseph Coelho and Nicola Killen (Anderson)
- *Caterpillar Cake* by Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Krina Patel-Sage (Otter-Barry Books)
- *Big Green Crocodile* by Jane Newberry, illustrated by Carolina Rabai (Otter-Barry Books)
- *A Great Big Cuddle* by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Chris Riddell (Walker)

NON-FICTION LINKED TO INTERESTS

- *How it Works DIGGER* by Molly Littleboy, illustrated by David Semple (Little Tiger Press)
- *Our Very Own Dog* by Amanda McCardie, illustrated by Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)
- *How Big is Our Baby?* by Smitri Prasad-Halls, illustrated by Britta Teckentrup (Wren and Rook)
- *Martha Maps It Out* by Leigh Hodgkinson (OUP)
- *Hey, Water!* by Antoinette Portis (Sallywag Press)

of contemporary, quality children's literature to be able to create a diverse and representative classroom book stock. One project teacher commented: *"I have been interested to go through our core texts for the year and unpick whose stories we are telling, and which pupils in the class we may, or may not, be representing in our stories. I realised that often the central characters in the stories I use as my core teaching texts feature animals or fictional characters as their main protagonist. I began to think about what a missed opportunity this was in helping our children to relate to texts personally and see themselves in books."*

When children do see themselves and their lived experiences reflected in the books they read, it promotes

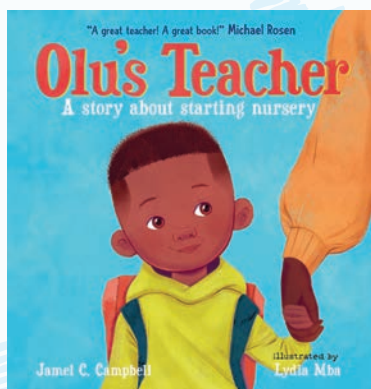
inclusion and encourages more children to engage in reading and in literate acts. In this way, we can ensure that all children are engaging deeply with high-quality books throughout their journey to becoming literate.

Scan the QR code to find out about CLPE's Power of Reading training and membership.



The Book Corner

GREAT TITLES TO SHARE WITH YOUR BUDDING READERS



OLU'S TEACHER

(Walker Books,
hardback, £12.99)

Olu's legs are shaking, and his tummy feels all wobbly; it's his first day at nursery, and all the unknowns are making him very, very nervous. Most of all, he's worried about meeting his teacher – after all, what do teachers look like? Where do they live? Do they breathe fire, like a dragon? *Macaroni!* Luckily, it turns out that Olu's new teacher, Jay, is not only kind and creative, but he also knows how to play the guitar, tells great stories *and* just happens to look a bit like Olu. Perhaps nursery isn't something to be scared of after all? This gentle, reassuring story from Jamel C. Campbell, beautifully illustrated by Lydia Mba, is perfect for sharing with new starters in your setting – as well as for recommending to parents before their child's first day; there's even a brilliant "note for grown-ups" from the author at the end, with thoughtful advice and practical tips to help everyone through what is often one of the first big transitions in a child's life.



DRAGONS LOVE UNDERPANTS

(Simon and Schuster,
paperback, £7.99)

Following the sound advice, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," this is the eighth title in Claire Freeman and Ben Cort's wildly popular series of books combining "characters kids adore" with "clothing that makes kids laugh". Dragons and underpants – really, what's not to love? Here's the thing, though: while it's easy to raise a slightly cynical eyebrow at the repetition of a successful formula to this extent, the truth is, *Dragons Love Underpants* really does feel as fresh as *Aliens Love Underpants* did, back in 2007, and that's because Freedman never short-changes her readers when it comes to the actual story. Cort's illustrations are full of hilarious detail, and the rhyming narrative is a joy to read aloud, as canny Princess Tilly comes up with a smart plan to stop a bunch of fire-breathing marauders harassing the kingdom and stealing villagers' pants. So, whether you have all seven previous titles or none of them, this is well worth adding to the mix.



RABBIT ON THE RAMPAGE

(Walker Books,
paperback, £7.99)

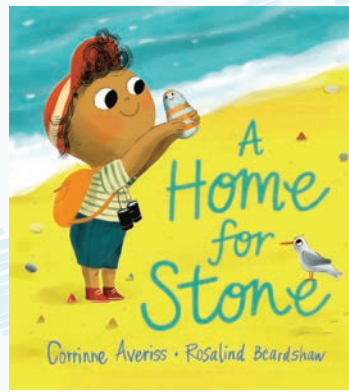
Rabbit has a very special carrot. It's curly *and* wurlly, and she takes it everywhere, including swim club, where it stays in her coat (because, of course, it mustn't get wet). It's a system that works perfectly – until one terrible day, when Rabbit finishes swim club, only to find Carrot has disappeared! Following Swim Coach Manatee's advice, Rabbit retraces her steps in search of a possible carrot-thief, accusing each of her best friends in turn of this heinous crime. But when she gets home, what does she find lurking underneath the hat she's been wearing the whole time...? This funny, charming and slightly naughty story will have young listeners captivated, and the rich vocabulary and unusual – but strictly observed – rhyme scheme will be great for feeding into their speech and language development. Plus, of course, there's a useful message about how varied and delicious vegetables are. What would your charges choose to put in a celebratory veggie soup?



BEA'S BAD DAY

(Bloomsbury, paperback, £7.99)

When it comes to books that help children understand difficult emotions, Tom Percival's Big Bright Feelings series is hard to beat. In *Bea's Bad Day*, the talented author and illustrator tackles one of the most hard-to-handle emotions children regularly experience: disappointment. It's almost Bea's birthday, and she can hardly wait for it to arrive – she knows exactly what is going to happen, and it is all going to be *perfect*. Unfortunately, when she wakes up on the day itself, she is faced with an unexpected change in the weather, which throws all her plans into disarray. No presents, no party, no visit from her grandparents; it seems like Bea's whole world is falling to pieces. Percival's words and illustrations capture the rollercoaster of feelings that ensue perfectly – from overexcited anticipation to frustration, anger and even grief – and there's both a reassuring conclusion and a friendly opening note reminding readers that all of this is both normal and manageable.



A HOME FOR STONE

(Orchard, hardback, £12.99)

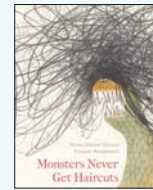
When a little boy finds a lonely stone on a quiet beach, he decides to find him the perfect home among other stones just like him. With stripes just like an old-time bathing suit, Stone really does stand out, but his face is the picture of misery. When the child finds him, all he wants to do is make Stone smile – and so begins a quest to find Stone a new home. Surely he'll want to be somewhere with other folks like him? Told in rhyming verse, this warm-hearted picturebook joyfully explores profound ideas in a way that's completely accessible for young readers. "Fitting in" does not mean "being the same". It is our differences that bring pleasures and possibilities, and with them come learning, change and growth. The bright artwork has a fresh, contemporary feel, and children will enjoy responding to the rich visual landscapes. Stone's story also invites thoughtful reflection about collecting and its impact on the environment. How many different types of stones can children find in your outside space?

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Have you seen these fantastic publications?

Monsters Never Get Haircuts

(Boxer Books, hardback, £12.99)

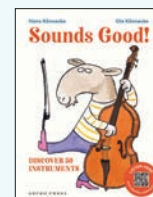


Have you ever seen a monster drinking strawberry milk? Probably not, because monsters don't exist... or do they? In this imaginative and

visually sophisticated picturebook, 15 monsters try – and fail – to do un-monsterly things, framed by a deadpan text that chips away at their dignity and power. Humour abounds, but younger or more sensitive children could find some of these illustrations unsettling. It's all great fun, though, for those ready to be playful in this way.

Sounds Good! Discover 50 Instruments

(Gecko Press, hardback, £16.99)

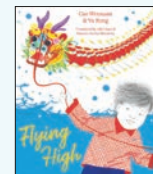


From snakes playing glockenspiels to vultures with harps, the creatures in this appealing hardback are keen to share the sounds their

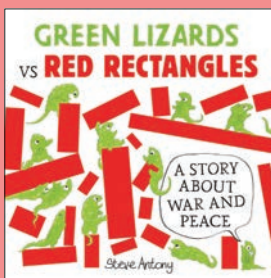
instruments can make. Just click on the QR links to hear original music for each spread. Ole Konnecke's concise and dryly humorous text includes well-chosen facts and feels like chatting to a friend. Beautifully designed and illustrated, *Sounds Good!* really makes an impact.

Flying High

(UCLan Publishing, paperback, £8.99)



It's tough being left out, but trying too hard to fit in can bring more problems – and learning to value your differences may be the hardest thing of all. Gently and affirmatively, this striking picturebook explores these issues through the eyes of a child who yearns to play with the bigger kids. Full instructions on how to build a Chinese kite are included inside, too.



GREEN LIZARDS VS RED RECTANGLES

Tackle the tricky topic of conflict with activities based on this classic story...

- Talk to children about the story. Why do they think the rectangles and the lizards are at war? How do they eventually share their space? Do they think it's a good idea? What do the children argue about, at nursery or at home? Can they come up with peaceful ways to resolve their conflicts?
- Create patterns on white paper with red rectangles, then lay them out on the floor and ask children to choose their favourites. Have a stash of cut-out lizard templates for children to colour green and stick in the gaps.
- Look at the final spread of the book. How do the lizards and rectangles feel, and what do the children think they're saying to each other? Role-play their conversation.

BookTrust – Letterbox Club



Visit: booktrust.org.uk/letterbox-club

Delightful packages of books, games and stationery for vulnerable children

AT A GLANCE

- Exciting packages for children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage
- Six parcels to be used flexibly to suit your school and children
- Quality fun and educational activities
- Perfect for schools and local authorities to support children with disrupted education

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



There's something magical about getting a pleasant surprise. Something exciting. Something inspiring. And something just for you. Even those of us who were lucky enough to have been brought up in a secure home might just remember that feeling. Perhaps it heralded a birthday or some other special occasion.

The sad fact is that there are many children who rarely experience that sense of being made to feel special. That is why the Letterbox Club, from the BookTrust, is such a gift.

The Letterbox Club is a delightful way of delivering joy to children who might otherwise miss out on such simple pleasures. Very often, these are children who have never experienced the wonder of receiving something just for them. These can include the looked-after, the previously looked-after and those on the edge of the care system as well as children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage.

Children in care often have few possessions of their own, things that actually belong to them exclusively, so the Letterbox Club parcels enable children to have some quality resources that are theirs to keep; helping them to feel valued.

I have known children who, on the face of it, are well looked after, yet are still suffering the effects of early-life trauma, neglect or abandonment. This can have a marked effect on their confidence, their behaviour and their capacity to engage with education. That's why I felt a strong surge of admiration for this excellent

initiative.

Right, having got that out of my system, let's look at what the Letterbox Club actually provides. There are six parcels in total, available for each age group from three to 13. These can be used flexibly to suit a school setting or group of children – either to be gifted to individual children each month or can be used as resources for use in school for small groups of children. That's exciting enough. But when I opened the sample I was sent, I was definitely impressed.

This was no tacky collection of stocking-fillers but a thoughtfully curated package of quality products. For a start, there are the books. My selection included a sweet, illustrated tale of fun and friendship and an exciting wildlife book packed with activities, information and stickers – who doesn't love stickers?

And remember, these can be used for children to keep, complete with labels to personalise them. For children who might never have had a book of their own, what a joy that would be!

There was a currency-based maths game, complete with a generous supply of replica coins and notes. There was also a pencil case equipped with pen, pencil, rubber, pencil sharpener and ruler (everyone loves stationery!) plus a lined notebook in which to jot down thoughts, stories, whatever.

And this does more than create a brief surge of wellbeing. According to testimonials from teachers and carers, it has helped to spark a renewed interest in

learning and, in some cases, led to marked academic progress.

You can pontificate all you want about the "failure of the system", the plight of these children and how life has dealt them a bad hand.

Then again, you can celebrate how, in a small way, Letterbox has delivered a way of bringing some tangible brightness to these tarnished childhoods for a remarkably small outlay.

In my opinion, it's worth every penny.

THE VERDICT

- ✓ Quality products
- ✓ Thoughtful mix of items and activities
- ✓ Educational without being oppressively so
- ✓ Tangibly joyful
- ✓ A genuine boon to children who really need it

UPGRADE IF...

... you want to bring educationally valuable moments of joy and excitement to children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.
£152 per child, including VAT

MUSIC

Secret Angels & Hay Bale Hotel

Visit: theschoolmusicalscompany.com

Two magical, musical nativity shows with editable scripts and original songs



AT A GLANCE

- Comprehensive booklets providing editable scripts, song lyrics and music
- Includes detailed staging notes
- CD/downloadable audio files featuring vocal and non-vocal versions of each song
- Entertaining adaptations of the Christmas story
- Sing-along backing and vocal videos

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



Just like the appearance of festive displays in shops in September, the beginning of a new school year comes with the stark reminder that Christmas is coming, and you'll be expected to put on a nativity-based show by the end of term. Now, you might be an ardent Christmas enthusiast – one who delights in every sparkle and song – but there are also those who see it as another thing to add to the endless list of teacher tasks. Either way, you'll be rejoicing at the prospect of getting your hands on a nativity show that takes the effort out of the whole business.

“Everything you need for a stress-free, successful production”

The School Musicals Company has released two new shows: Secret Angels for four-to-seven-year-olds, and Hay Bale Hotel for five-to-nine-year-olds. As those who have put on their shows before will expect, both come with everything you need for a stress-free, successful production.

Written by Niki Davies, Secret Angels imagines a section of the heavenly host as a special-ops squad charged with covertly facilitating the key moments in the nativity story. Need a star to follow? They'll buff one up for you. Innkeeper liable to forget that his stable can double up as a maternity suite? They'll have a quiet word in his shell-like. However, they forget to tell the shepherds and have to rush back to Bethlehem to give

them the news. In their haste, they fail to put on their disguises, and appear in all their blinding glory to the shocked flock-watchers.

Hay Bale Hotel approaches the story from the perspective of Bethlehem's animals. Written by Tom Kirkham and Matthew Crossley, it portrays them as reacting to the census with greater foresight than the human population. Worried that there won't be enough accommodation for the expected influx of people, they decide to establish their own hotel, furnished with hay bales. No prizes for guessing who arrives as their first and only guest family. And, of course, they play host to other special visitors: the shepherds and the three wise men.

Appropriately enough, given the slightly younger pitch of the piece, Secret Angels has a simple, comparatively direct script that relies on the cuteness of the cast to please the crowd. Hay Bale Hotel is a bit more of a romp with the sort of groan-worthy jokes that will put a smile on everybody's face and get them in training for Christmas cracker gags.

As for the songs, Niki Davies has once again managed, in Secret Angels, to hit that sweet spot where simplicity, brevity and catchiness converge. I particularly liked 'Shine Shine Golden Star'. Hay Bale Hotel also offers a charming collection

of ditties. Of course, the suggested age range is that little bit older, but, even so, you may need to schedule serious rehearsal time to get everything right, as some songs really pack in the lyrics. Nevertheless, 'On Christmas Day' is a real good-cheer showstopper that should leave the audience with a warm and festive glow. And, after all is sung and done, that's what these performances are about, isn't it?

THE VERDICT

- ✓ Well-pitched scripts
- ✓ Charming, catchy songs
- ✓ Speaking parts for over 30 children
- ✓ Detailed guidance notes
- ✓ Reduces the stress of staging production

UPGRADE IF...

...you want to put on enchanting, crowd-pleasing nativity-based shows without losing sleep over them.

£26.95 RRP per show for the booklet and CD (or downloads) plus £26.00 performance licence.

Begin with their rights

First Steps is a free resource from Amnesty International UK, designed for teachers introducing human rights to early years learners. Its five lesson plans focus on the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights covering feelings, relationships and belonging, choices and voices, wellbeing and bodies.

First Steps is intended to be a starting point to build children's understanding and confidence in their own rights. It also aims to encourage self-expression and respect for other families and communities beyond their own. And the mix of activities – stories, games, music, art and photography – make it a fun and interactive way to engage children in discussion.

Find out more at amnesty.org.uk/early-years-amnesty or email hre@amnesty.org.uk



HAVE YOU

TEY's look at the latest early years tools, toys, books and activities...

Seeh...



CODING WITH CRITTERS

This new range of remote control woodland animals has been specially created by Hope to equip little ones for a technological future. Moxy the Mouse, Bo the Badger, and Fifi the Fox have been designed to evolve alongside the child's development, with each product increasing in complexity. Suitable from 10 months to 4+ years, the range enhances fine motor skills and understanding of the world as well as guiding children in using directional language.

Find out more at hope-education.co.uk/remote-control-animals



Your one-stop shop

With free next-day delivery and hassle-free returns, nurseries across the UK are switching to Gompels. Get everything you need in one place from the wide range of early years resources and cleaning, hygiene, first aid and stationery supplies, and find much more too! Shop online today and experience the convenience and reliability that Gompels is known for throughout the early years sector.

For more details, call 0345 450 2420, email sales@gompels.co.uk or visit gompels.co.uk

FANTASTIC PHONICS RESOURCES

Reading Planet Rocket Phonics is a DfE-validated SSP programme with a mission: to help every child to keep up, not catch up. Written by author, trainer and consultant Abigail Steel, the programme is available for Reception and Year 1. With Rocket Phonics, you get everything needed for reading and writing: fully decodable books, flashcards, teaching plans, pupil booklets and more. Plus, Rocket Phonics Online includes a range of innovative digital resources to bring phonics to life.

Find out more at risingstars-uk.com/TEYrocketphonics



USE YOUR IMAGINATION!

Pyjama Drama harnesses the power of drama and imaginative play to develop children's life skills, and its team can teach you to do the same!

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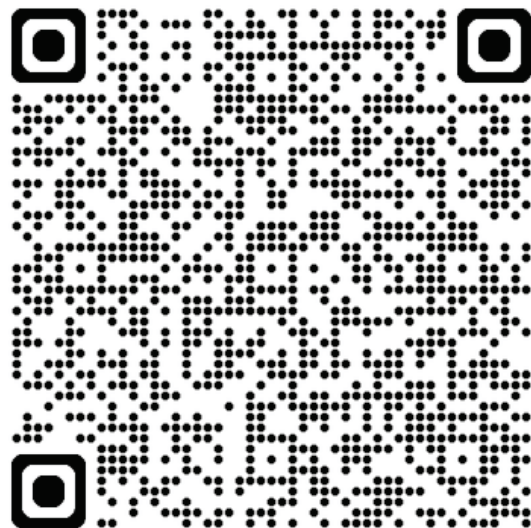
Let us know where you heard about us quote, 'TEACHEARLYYEARS'

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SCAN ME



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teach
EARLY YEARS
AWARDS
2024

The winners of the Teach Early Years Awards 2024 will be revealed in November! Visit tinyurl.com/TEYaws124 to read more about our shortlisted finalists today.



This issue...

61 “APPRENTICESHIPS CAN ALLEVIATE THE RECRUITMENT CRISIS”

Michael Freeston looks at the advantages of apprenticeships for both settings and students and details recent and upcoming changes to the way they work.

62 EMPLOYMENT LAW: WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW

Ella Halliday of Childcare HR breaks down what setting owners must do to be legally compliant when recruiting and employing staff.

64 ARE YOU READY FOR THE DFE'S FUNDING EXPANSION?

James Hemsall OBE explores how settings can adapt to the changing landscape of government early years funding using the PREPARE model.

65 CPD BOOKSHELF

Three titles to inform and improve your team's practice, covering topics as diverse as forest school and co-regulation.

Expert advice from...



MICHAEL FREESTON

is director of quality improvement at the Early Years Alliance



ELLA HALLIDAY

is founder and managing director of Childcare HR



JAMES HEMSALL OBE

is managing director of Coram Hemsall's



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“Apprenticeships can alleviate the sector’s recruitment crisis”

In recent times, the early years sector has faced a growing recruitment and retention crisis. Working with young children remains undervalued and underpaid, despite research showing that those who do so have a huge impact on their future learning and development.

Even before the announcement of the early entitlement expansion, providers were struggling to recruit enough high-quality educators to meet demand. Now, with the DfE estimating an additional 40,000 qualified staff are required to deliver the expansion, the need for staff has never been greater.

On-the-job training

Apprenticeships are one training route that can both encourage people into the sector and provide career progression opportunities for those already employed within it.

One key benefit, for both learner and employer, is the opportunity for on-the-job training and development. The apprentice’s taught programme is delivered in tandem with their work in the provision, thereby enabling and supporting them to learn by working alongside experienced staff. This hands-on approach accelerates their learning and ensures that they are equipped with the skills and expertise needed to excel in their career.

The setting manager will work with the apprentice’s training provider to ensure the curriculum reflects the provision’s standards and expectations.

This mirrors the “grow-your-own” ethos that has long served the sector well and helps develop loyal staff.

Importantly, the apprentice can be counted in ratio at the level below the one they are studying from aged 16 if they are judged to be “competent and responsible”. Settings can also receive a £1,000 payment for recruiting 16- to 18-year-olds as apprentices.

New developments

A number of recent and upcoming developments are designed to support the use of apprenticeships in the early years. The DfE is currently working with sector employers to introduce an Early Years Teacher Degree Apprenticeship. This will complete the framework from levels two to seven and mean a practitioner can pursue their career to degree level without accruing steep course fees. The funding of apprentices is dependent on several factors that

the training provider working with the apprentice will explain and oversee.

A recent change to funding means that apprenticeship training is now fully funded for learners aged 16–21 working in a setting with less than 49 employees, extended from the previous 16–18 age limit. For learners aged 22 and above, most settings will only pay a 5% employer contribution towards apprenticeship training costs, making an apprenticeship a cost-effective training option.

Another key consideration is the requirement for the apprentice to have off-the-job training (OTJ), which must take place during their paid working hours. This is calculated at 20% of a 30-hour working week, which would provide six hours OTJ training per week for the duration of their programme – an important consideration, especially if the apprentice is counted in the provision’s ratios.

Deciding if your setting is able to support and employ an apprentice can be a difficult decision. But if you can, taking on an apprentice can be beneficial for all involved.



Michael Freeston is director of quality improvement at the Early Years Alliance. Visit gov.uk/employing-an-apprentice or contact the Alliance for advice: call 01732 363 070 or email training@eyalliance.org.uk



Train Online



DYNAMIC TRAINING FOR EARLY YEARS

Adventures with Alice is an online digital training programme that is suitable for everyone working with babies, toddlers and young children. The training is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and merges educational theory, cutting-edge thinking and inspiring practice. In total, there are over 100 hours of training on offer, making it flexible for all sorts of providers in early years. Visit alicesharp.co.uk

EARLY YEARS EVIDENCE STORE

Early Years Evidence Store (EEF) has been developed with funding from the Department for Education as part of its Stronger Practice Hubs programme. The resource has been designed to empower early years professionals to use education evidence to make informed choices in their practice and implement approaches with the best chance of success. To learn more about how EEF could help you and your setting, visit educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk



ELLA HALLIDAY IS THE FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CHILDCARE HR

EMPLOYMENT LAW:

What employers need to know

Employment law is a minefield, and there is a whole host of conflicting, jargon-filled information out there that makes it even trickier to understand. Here, I'll share exactly what you need to do as an employer in the UK to be legally compliant, from right-to-work checks and policies to dismissals and reference requests.

HIRING AN EMPLOYEE

So you've found the perfect hire – amazing! There are a few things you need to do at this stage to get on the right track. Not having the basics in place during your onboarding process can lead to significant fines.

What must you have in place?

- A contract of employment or statement of particulars
- Right-to-work checks
- Job description
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) requirements

Contract of employment

A contract of employment is a legally binding contract between the employer and employee that outlines what the employee is legally entitled to. As a minimum, your contract of employment needs to cover:

- Name and address of employer and employee
- Job title
- Rate/date of pay
- Hours of work and details of any rest periods
- Holiday entitlement
- Probationary period
- How long the contract will last
- Any mandatory training required and who will pay for this
- Any contractual benefits, e.g. sick pay, pension arrangements

- Legal deductions to pay, e.g. overpayments, training agreements
- Details of the disciplinary and grievance procedures
- Any other contractual arrangements, e.g. maternity or paternity enhancements

These statements of particulars need to be given as soon as possible and no later than two months after the employee's start of employment. Failure to provide a contract can result in an award that is equal to two weeks' pay at their agreed rate.

You are required to ensure that all employees are safe to work with children.

Right-to-work checks

Right-to-work checks sit separately to the KCSIE or DBS requirements. They are a vital part of the recruitment process and determine a candidate's eligibility to work in the UK. It's a simple process that can save you up to £60,000 per employee if you are found to have not carried out the necessary steps.

If they are a UK citizen, you will need proof of address and an ID document, such as a passport or driving licence. This needs to be seen in person and a copy taken and placed on their employee file. If they are a non-UK national, follow the Gov.uk guidance on checking their right-to-work documents.

All right-to-work checks should be completed *before* they join your setting.

Job description

Often overlooked is the requirement for a job description that is up-to-date and gives the employee an understanding of their role and responsibilities. Again, this should be given within two months of them starting. A job description not only helps your employee understand what is expected of them but also helps you if there are any concerns about the employee's performance and will support your assessment of their probationary period.

KCSIE

Under the KCSIE guidelines, you are required to ensure that all employees are safe to work with children. During the recruitment process this includes:

- A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check at the suitable level for the role
- Relevant employment references from previous childcare roles, or covering at least the last two employers



- A health screening questionnaire
- Obtaining copies and verifying qualifications relevant to the role they are undertaking

This list isn't exhaustive; for further guidance on KCSIE and Safer Recruitment guidelines, you should access the latest version on the Gov.uk website.

DURING EMPLOYMENT

Policies and procedures

Your setting may have multiple mandatory policies for things such as safeguarding and whistleblowing, but here are the policies required from an employment perspective:

- Disciplinary policy
- Grievance policy
- Employee privacy notice
- Health and safety policy

Each of these sets out the way that the employer will handle and process such matters and what is expected of an employee under each. Some employers decide to issue all employees with an employee handbook that collects all policies and procedures in one place, along with other expectations, but this isn't compulsory. Whatever your approach, be sure to regularly review and update the documents in line with changes in employment law and issue the newest version to all employees.

Wages

All employees must be paid at least the National Minimum Wage or National

DISMISSALS: 3 THINGS TO REMEMBER

1 If you are considering dismissing an employee, you should always seek advice on the fairest and legal way to do so. Compensation may be owed to those being dismissed on the grounds of redundancy, and you can find out how much they may be entitled to, including statutory notice periods, from Gov.uk

2 If you are dismissing an employee due to gross misconduct, you may be able to dismiss without needing to pay a notice period, although certain situations may change

this. In all other cases, such as probation, poor performance or sickness absence, statutory notice will likely be owed to the employee. How much should be paid is based on their length of service or their contract of employment, whichever is greater.

3 Always ensure you follow your policies to protect yourself from any unfair dismissal claims or claims of discrimination. Additional protections apply to those pregnant or on, or recently returned from, maternity leave.

Living Wage, dependent upon their age or qualification status. The rates that have applied since April 2024 can be viewed at gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates

Annual leave entitlement

All employees are entitled to 5.6 weeks of annual leave per year (including bank holidays). For a full-time worker, working five days per week, this translates to 28 days per annum; this is then pro-rated for part-time staff.

If you have term-time-only or irregular-hours workers, new legislation came into force in April 2024 that allows you to pay a percentage of annual leave on the hours worked in that pay period; however, there are conditions on when this can be applied. Be sure to check out Gov.uk to find out more or use their helpful annual leave calculator to make sure you are paying the right amount.

Working hours and rest periods

Under the working time regulations 1998, employees must not work more than 48 hours per week, which is averaged over 17 weeks. An employee can opt out of the working time regulations, but this must be voluntary and the employer cannot mandate it.

In addition, the following rules apply:

- You must allow a minimum of 11 hours between each shift.

- Any hours over six per day are entitled to a minimum 20-minute rest break.

Different rules apply if your employee is under 18. Please visit ACAS or Gov.uk for further information.

References

It's a myth that you cannot give a bad reference. A reference must be factual and cannot be given in bad faith, but you can inform a new employer if an employee was dismissed due to high levels of sickness absence or for gross misconduct, etc. You are *not* legally allowed to embellish this information or provide anything that cannot be evidenced as relevant to their job role.

GET SUPPORT

Childcare HR is a specialised HR consultancy for early years businesses across the UK. It aims to provide cost-effective and pragmatic advice to the early years sector via a range of services, from pay as you go through to fixed monthly support packages. Visit childcarehr.co.uk for further information or to book a discovery call with Ella.





Are you ready for the DfE's funding expansion?

September 2024 marks another chapter in the expansion of government funding for early education and childcare. For the first time, the Department for Education (DfE) will be funding local authorities so they can contract providers to offer 15 hours for children of working families aged from nine months old – something that will double to 30 hours in a year's time (September 2025). The programme was developed by the previous government, and the new government has said they intend to continue with these plans.

challenges remain. It is vital we take the opportunity for practitioners, providers, children, and their families – the main reason being that families very warmly welcomed the policy when it was announced in March 2023. Since then, we have seen early demand from existing families, and then a gradual increase of interest from new families. It is such a big change, and one that will have profound effects for months and years. What must we do? It is never too late to take a good, hard look at your business model and practice to make the changes needed for now and later. To help, we have developed

the PREPARE model, which not only prepares you for the change but helps guide you throughout it as well.

PREPARE for the expansion of government funding:

PAUSE

I know that when things are busy it can feel impossible to stop and think for the longer term. I also know that when things are a little slower, the temptation is to stop, rest, and recover rather than do business planning. But you must pause to plan.

RESEARCH

Take a good look at what is happening around you – what your families (current and future) and other local providers are thinking, wanting, and doing. Look at the best sources of information (like the childcareworks.org.uk HUB) and not unreliable social media feeds. Be in regular contact with the local authority or authorities you contract with. That will all help you to keep up to date with thinking, funding rates, information, and training and/or business support if it is on offer.

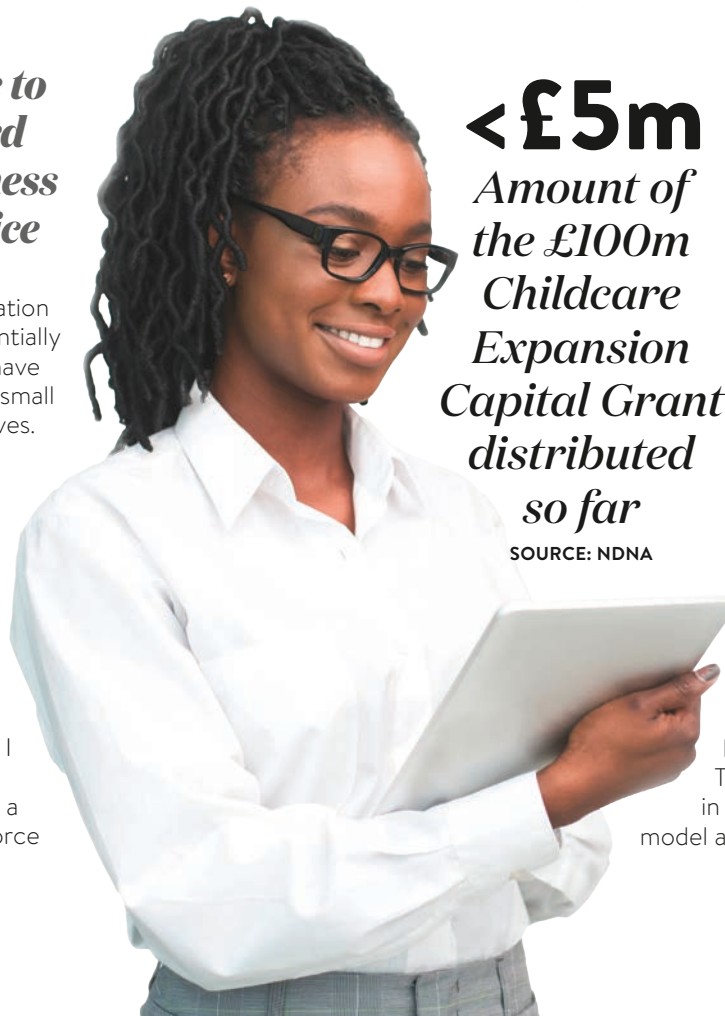
EXPLORE

Take the time to explore in detail your business model and structure, and hold it

It is never too late to take a good, hard look at your business model and practice

Funding for early years education and childcare has grown exponentially over the past two decades. We have seen hours and age ranges start small and build through various initiatives. They variously seek to support young children's pre-school learning, tackle the effects of disadvantage, narrow the gap between least-advantaged children and their peers, and support working families' childcare needs. All are making invaluable contributions to society and children's outcomes, and all are equally good as far as I am concerned.

September is a big change at a time when economic and workforce



< £5m
Amount of the £100m Childcare Expansion Capital Grant distributed so far

SOURCE: NDNA

to account, challenge it, and ask lots of “why” questions. If your answers include “because we have always done it like that”, then be open to think again. If you are a reluctant planner, or it feels overwhelming, get help from a trusted and skilled supporter.

POSSIBILITIES

All of this work will put you in a far better position to consider, with an open mind, the possibilities, opportunities, and risks for your setting. Write a long list – you don’t have to do everything; you can create a shortlist later.

ACTION PLAN

All that exploration and identifying the possibilities now informs your action plan. Set out what you are able to do in the short to medium terms and what you need help with. Make sure you include the groundwork for all the longer-term actions as well as the easier things to do. They will bear fruit later.

REVENUE

With new sources of government funding as income, settings know that this will either add to the existing income streams or replace some of those that may have been chargeable to parents before. This all needs thinking through for financial sustainability and strength, charging policies, and for contractual compliance with local authorities. Families appear more motivated to engage with Tax-Free Childcare than before, so this would be an excellent time to reinvigorate your strategy around all of that as an important source of additional funding for you and families.

EXECUTE

Finally, this is about delivery of your plan and making the changes needed to adapt and respond to the changing

85K
Extra places needed to deliver the September 2025 rollout

SOURCE: NDNA



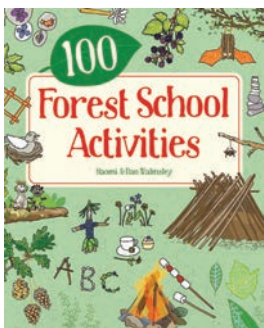
environment, families’ needs and demands, and new financial models. Keep on top of it, keep it under regular review, celebrate the things that are working, and revisit the things that aren’t.

For more information, visit coramhempfalls.org.uk. You can find out more about the PREPARE model on the Childcare Works HUB: childcareworks.org.uk

CPD BOOKSHELF

THREE READS THAT WILL IMPROVE YOUR PRACTICE...

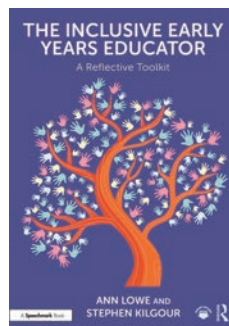
100 Forest School Activities
(Button Books, £14.99)



From den-building and fire-lighting to measuring sticks, camouflage capes and story stones, this large-format paperback is packed with lively ideas for creative challenges and controlled risk-taking in a natural environment. The authors are experienced leaders specialising in bushcraft and Stone Age skills, and every page reflects their knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm.

Visit buttonbooks.co.uk

The Inclusive Early Years Educator
(Routledge, £17.99)



Subtitled *A Reflective Toolkit*, this is an incredibly powerful book, which will be most effective when the reader truly engages with the questions it poses – thinking deeply about aspects of their practice they may never have previously considered, and asking themselves what a genuinely inclusive setting really looks like for children with learning differences and disabilities.

Visit routledge.com

50 Fantastic Ideas for Co-regulation
(Bloomsbury Education, £9.09)



Part of a series of books edited by Alistair Bryce-Clegg, and written by Kerry Murphy, this dip-in-and-out guide will help early years practitioners provide the strongest foundations for children and to give them the best emotional start in life. It offers meaningful and inclusive ideas for co-regulation that can be embedded into everyday practice and used for a broad range of emotional needs, without being tokenistic.

Visit bloomsbury.com

PROFIT VS PRACTICE

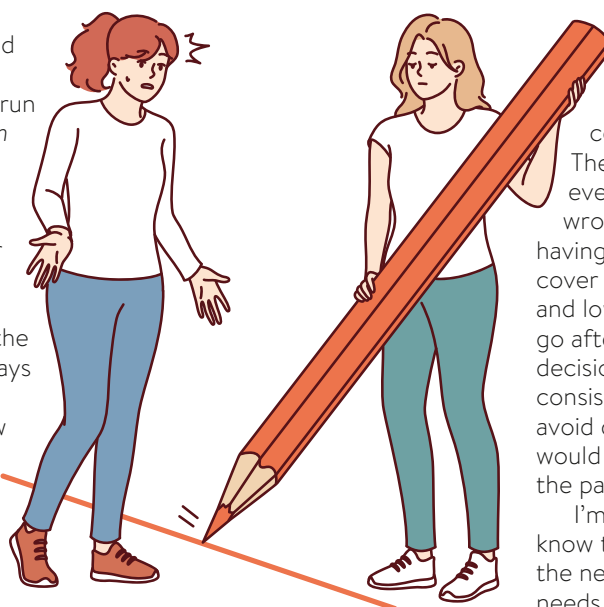
Where do we draw the line?

When business concerns override a focus on care and education, settings and their staff suffer, says the *Secret Practitioner*...

Picture this: you're a qualified practitioner in a preschool room and have just had to run into the tiny toilets to *ahem* toss your cookies because of the dreaded sickness bug doing its rounds. You plead to go home, but, alas, the only other staff in your room are two enthusiastic but very young apprentices who you can't possibly leave alone for the rest of the day. Your manager apologises and says she was only given the staff to *just* meet ratios, and of course you know that the hard-working apprentices are paid pitifully, so it's obviously a decision made with money in mind. There was no contingency plan for the unavoidable situation because, on paper, all the boxes were ticked for staffing that day (in an office far, far away).

Unfortunately, this is a situation that many of us have faced, and it's leading to practitioners feeling overworked, underappreciated, and unheard, often affecting the care they provide. These types of business decisions are made through profit-tinted glasses, rather than the eyes of experienced childcare professionals, and they are overshadowing the needs of children and their hardworking teachers.

Another misplaced business strategy I've encountered is the use of the Bradford Score. If you're lucky, you won't know what this is, but I'd argue it doesn't fit within a childcare setting. The system penalises employees for frequent short absences, and in another context, it might make sense. But in a nursery, where staff constantly pick up minor illnesses and are actively encouraged to return before they're fully recovered to help meet ratios, it's contradictory and unsupportive – particularly as employees are disciplined when their score gets too



a *passionate team* – the usual buzz words to entice unsuspecting practitioners. I couldn't have been more naive.

There were new policies introduced every week when something went wrong at another branch; nurseries having rebrands and name changes to cover themselves after bad inspections; and lower management getting let go after the owners' bad business decisions had left settings without the consistency and resources needed to avoid disaster. Inevitably, many staff would then hand in their notice, and the pattern would repeat itself.

I'm not a business owner; I don't know the exact solution to balancing the need to make a profit with the needs of care and education. However, I do know that many nursery owners have never actually worked in the classrooms or managed a setting themselves. Maybe some of them should spend a day on the playground floor and see the pressure we're all under being micromanaged by someone who only visits us once a year.

I'm fortunate to be employed in a small private nursery that genuinely cares for its staff and children – a place where, because staff aren't scolded for being off sick and are actually supported to improve their practice, the absence level is significantly lower and the setting is a more positive place to work in. But I understand that this is rare – that sadly, many settings are staffed by practitioners who are constantly on edge, feeling undervalued for their work, and losing their love of the job.

We as practitioners are innovative and passionate people, and when there's no room for that because of business decisions that are incongruent with the childcare sector, settings will suffer.

Many nursery owners have never managed a setting themselves

high. When being off sick is “bad for business” and we're told the 48-hour sickness policy doesn't apply to practitioners because “adults know how to wash their hands thoroughly” (yes, I was actually told this during a bout of norovirus), where does staff welfare come in?

Bad management

In my 10 years of experience in the childcare sector, and through discussions with friends and colleagues, I've noticed a pattern: the larger an organisation grows, the less people-focused its decision-making often becomes. When I interviewed for one of the would-be “leading” providers, I was promised a *rewarding career* with *growing opportunities* within

bett

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● A Hyve Event

Due to popular demand, Tech User Labs is back and bigger than ever! With free sessions at Bett 2025, you'll learn how to get the most out of your current tech and explore emerging innovations within education - there's no CPD opportunity quite like it!

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