

SEN and disability in the early years

Case studies

Working in partnership with parents

Dorking Nursery School and Childrens Centre

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Context

Dorking Nursery is a maintained nursery school for 70 children, with an 18 place SEN and disability Early Assessment Unit. 8 places in the Unit are for children with speech language and communication needs (SLCN). In 2007 provision extended to include thirty 2 year-olds and, in 2008, became a designated Children Centre.

Building strong relationships

The setting places a strong emphasis on establishing relationships with the families before the children start attending the nursery. Features include: out-reach, family drop-in services, tours of the nursery and making links with other settings that the children may already attend. There is good advance planning: children with SEN have home visits; siblings have the same key person to provide continuity and build on existing relationships; parents have support to settle their children; there is a daily contact book; and, for children who attend the unit and arrive by taxi, time is put aside each week for the key person to phone the parent and discuss the child's development.

In parent meetings, the setting has an increasing emphasis on strategies used in the nursery being used at home as well. The Centre acts as the lead professional for the family, and listens to parents, giving them time to discuss issues that worry them and developing relationships built on trust and respect.

Early identification and support

All practitioners have a high level of training and experience. As areas of difficulty emerge, concerns are discussed with parents and a plan to meet the child's identified needs is put in place. If the child has significant needs the SENCO carries out observations, plans next steps with the key person, including considering whether any other agencies should be involved.

The SENCO has established good working relationships with outside agencies, and agencies are encouraged to visit children in the setting to ensure that everyone involved has an agreed picture of the child's strengths and difficulties. This helps to ensure that children get the right support. If children need additional funding or Early Help, this process is triggered.

Early Assessment

Children are placed in the Early Assessment Unit through a Local Authority panel. The children are placed for the academic year before Reception. Over the year, the aim is 'narrow the gap' between the children and their peers and make successful next placements. A speech and language therapist is on site 2 days a week and children receive their therapy during their time at the setting. The children are in a supportive environment which provides the resources and expertise to ensure that children reach their full potential.

The setting invites the new provision to come and visit the children in situ and shares the most effective strategies. They host a review meeting with the parents and the new setting to ensure seamless provision. The majority of children move into specialist provision. Those children who move to mainstream provision are those for whom the gap has narrowed significantly.

Key to the nursery's success are: the communication systems that ensure families and agencies are all involved; the knowledge and expertise of the staff in the setting; the focus on the next relevant step for every child; and the consistent approach. The setting hosts training sessions; the Head Teacher provides school to school support on SEN and disability; and the setting invites practitioners from other settings to visit and observe practice.

Impact

Data collected by the setting in 2013-14, shows that, at the beginning of the year, there was a significant gap between the percentage of children in the Unit working at age-related expectations (ARE) and those in the main classroom. Over the year, the percentage of all children working at ARE improved, but the gap between the children in the unit and their peers reduced significantly. For children with SLCN the gap closed in many aspects of learning and development.

The setting has found that children with SLCN are less likely to move into special school provision.

For the 2014-15 cohort, the children in the Unit were working significantly below the level of their peers in the main classroom. However, by the mid-year point, there had been a significant improvement in attainment.

Quotes from parents:

- *Very useful, good opportunity to get to know who would be involved in working with my son and to observe him in his home environment and also to discuss any concerns*
- *The information pack was very useful*
- *It was very useful indeed thanks to the lovely staff you have especially Pam, she has been lovely to us and our son. She made us feel appreciated*
- *The photobook for our son was great too.*

Visiting practitioner quotes:

- *Our visit was just what we needed and we are really excited to implement all these ideas. Thank you so much for having us, we absolutely loved looking around your lovely nursery, We came away buzzing with ideas so thank you again. We hope to see you again soon.*
- *FAB!! What a lovely atmosphere everyone focused!*

Next steps

1. Continuing the focus on supporting parents to develop learning at home. The setting is currently assessing the 'What to expect, When' document to see how it can support parents
2. Currently reviewing home visit paperwork with a focus on one page profiles before children start at the setting
3. Aiming to provide more induction meetings in the summer term for parents of children starting in Autumn so they can really focus on what to expect and what is expected of them
4. Hosting visitor morning tours, focusing on what the setting provides and why they do what they do