

SEN and disability in the early years

Case studies

Using the graduated approach to meet the needs of children with speech, language and communication needs

The use of *assess, plan, do, review* and planning for individual children

Submitted by Elmscot Nursery

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Context

Elmscot is a day nursery for 70 children aged between 3 months and school age. Their recent OFSTED report said, *their educational programmes are challenging, inspirational and focused to meet the individual needs and interests of all children.*

The practice

The setting uses the universal approach of observation, assessment and planning as identified in EYFS for all children. All children are observed and their progress in all areas of the EYFS is monitored and tracked on a regular basis. This formative assessment is recorded and used to inform planning of the next steps for each child. The records are shared with parents who are invited to contribute to the planning process and agree how they will work together.

Using this *universal* approach of formative assessment, a small group of children, aged between two and a half and three and a half, were identified as having emerging difficulties with their speech, language and communication development. The children were assessed, within the setting, using the more *targeted* approach of the ICAN speech and language progress checkers. This identified, in more detail, the aspects of speech, language and communication (SLC) that individual children needed support with. A six week plan was then developed for each child taking account of the identified aspects of SLC. A programme was then devised using the *I CAN Toddler Talk* resource. This provided practitioners with a reliable source of ideas from which two activities a week were selected and these were also incorporated into daily routines, for example by asking the child to find all the animals, cars etc at *tidy up time*. The activities were targeted to match specific aspects of development such as attention and listening, naming objects, following simple instructions, and building vocabulary. The planned activities are recorded, reviewed and their impact measured. The setting SENCO devised a format to record the assessment information, individual targets, monitoring and impact measurement.

Where children may require further specialist support and with permission from parents, the formative assessment record and the targeted assessment are shared with health visitors as part of the pilot *Integrated health and education 2 year old check*. This has led to further referrals being made by the health visitors, parents and the nursery to the speech and language therapy team for *specialist* support and advice.

Impact

OFSTED commented: *there are very effective systems in place....to monitor and track the progress made by different cohorts of children. This is used very successfully to identify any particular trends in learning and to identify where any changes to the educational programmes are needed in order to meet the needs of every child.*

Impact on the children

The nursery have used EYFS and I CAN tracking data which has identified a significant impact for all of the children who have been through a 6 week period of support (assessed before and after the 6 week period). Every child has moved either up an entire age stage (6 month leap) or moved within a band from *emerging* to *secure*. One child has made so much progress that they have now been discharged from speech and language therapy input. Practitioners have commented on the great success and the progress that they have seen in children over a short period of time:

- *One child has gone from using a handful of words to using a 4 word sentence. The children are also engaging more in activities in the room together with other children.*
- *You can see such a difference. They are using more language and using more words over a short period of time.*

Impact for parents

Parents have commented on the difference they have seen in their child. For one child in particular, whose lack of language skills was contributing to some frustration, the parent has noted a significant difference and improvement in behaviour at home. Another parent commented that their child:

- *continues to make fantastic progress with his speech and this is directly influenced by his key person at Elmscot [with whom] he has formed quite a bond.*

Impact for the practitioners

For the practitioners, using the 6 week plans and individual plans has been very enabling. Previously a large set of recommendations and activities from the speech and language therapist may have been overwhelming but now, broken down for them by the SENCO into a 6 week plan, it is much more practical and manageable. The SENCO is supporting one practitioner to write the 6 week plans herself. She commented:

- *Once you get started it's not too bad, you can look back at activities you have done before and then use it again the next time perhaps in a slightly different way to reinforce.*

Next steps

The use of the 6 week plans and Individual Plans has been in place since September 2014. Additional children are being identified and their needs met using this approach. There is a plan for 3 other settings which are part of the Elmscot group to adopt the same approach. The graduated response of building up the level of support through *assess, plan, do, review* has very quickly become working practice in the nursery, particularly for children with speech, language and communication needs. The challenge now is to consider how this successful approach can be extended to support children with other areas of need.