

**A capacity building approach of support for early years setting SENCO's and practitioners working with children under 3 with SEND.**

**The development support system for settings and childminders working with under 3's**

**Submitted by Bolton Metropolitan Council**

**Presentation available <http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/2015/04/special-educational-needs-and-disability-events-march-2015/>**

**Context:**

The recent changes have led to a variation in support available across the sector. The PVI settings and maintained nursery provision receive support for children over the age of 3 with more significant needs from the local authority's Special Schools. However, it was identified that childminders, settings with children with lower level needs, and for any child under the age of 3, there was a need to provide increased support. In addition since the extension of free places for eligible 2 year olds it was recognised that despite these places being available for children with SEND they were not always being accessed. The nature of the length of time needed to secure an Educational Health Care plan or apply for Disability Living Allowance, which was needed to meet the criteria, meant that those children who may have been eligible were not able to access the place until they were closer to the age of 3. So a further 'discretionary criteria' was developed whereby a 2 year old would be eligible if a professional applied using an Early Help Assessment or CAF which indicates that the child was at risk of poor learning and development outcomes.

**Developing the model of support: how it works in practice**

Using 2 year old trajectory funding a service has been created that has a number of interconnecting aspects to it. The approach aims to be facilitative and to build capacity with in the sector. The service is offered as a universal service and can also offer targeted services for individual children under the age of 3 who are not supported by any other service and are identified with special educational needs or a disability.

**The role of the SEN consultant**

The consultant appointed to the role was already working on a universal level with settings to develop quality improvement. The creation of this post means that settings can access targeted support for those children in settings who that have been identified at requiring SEN support. The SEN consultant works with the SENCOs to implement SEN support including supporting them to work with parents. She provides practical advice and signposts to other agencies if appropriate. The role is 'needs led': settings, with parental permission can call if they have a concern about a child. Other Early Years Consultants may also signpost settings to the

SEN consultant. *'It's about underpinning and supporting the SENCOs role, aiming to empower them with the skills that they need to fulfil their role'* SEN Consultant. The SEN Consultant monitors the use of the 'Pre school Inclusion Supplement' funding in settings to achieve the outcomes for the child.

With one person fulfilling this role in the local authority it has necessitated a facilitative approach that empowers SENCOs to know where to look, who to ask and how to access support and develop their own knowledge and skills as well as that of other practitioners.

### **Training and SENCO briefings**

The SEN Consultant and the Educational Psychology Team have developed a comprehensive 5 day SENCO training course and also an accompanying SENCO Handbook. These offer a detailed picture of the role of SENCO, supplying practitioners both with the pedagogy as well as practical support in their role.

There are termly briefings to up date SENCOs about with legislative and local practice and procedures. It is also an opportunity for continuous professional development whereby each session has an SEN learning focus. Professionals from local services such as the speech and language service and sensory support teams are invited to talk as well as practitioners. For the practitioners this has supported the learning of new skills, the demystification of services as well as fostering a network of shared practice and self-empowerment.

### **Web based support and information**

The Early Years Exchange is a local authority website dedicated to Early Years providers. It covers a range of materials ranging from links to social networking forums to training, learning and development and legislative updates. There is a specific section dedicated to special educational needs. There is a monthly case study that highlights a setting's good practise, for example including a child with Autism or working with parents. This has been another vehicle for helping providers to feel confident about their practice as well enabling them to share it.

### **Impact:**

The SEN Consultant's role aims to join up the dots between all of these aspects of the service so that SENCOs in settings have a wide range of advice and tools to support them in their role and so that they can support other practitioners. The vision is for SENCOs 'to be more self-managing' and that (SENCOs)' can learn from each other'.

SENCO from Tonge nursery: *The SEN consultant 'comes in every few months to talk through our children and then gives us advice. She's very approachable and helpful. It's good because she tells us about things that have worked well at different settings that she knows about for children that have similar needs. Sometimes she may bring actual materials such as a visual timetable. She'll also give me contact numbers of other professionals and help me to make contact with them. We also get emails and have regular briefings as well as links to the website. The website is good to get paperwork from and I also find the case studies useful to look at.*

*When we've done something well for a child we have had a case study done on our practise as well as have photos taken so that it can be shared with other settings'.*