

Meeting the needs of gifted and talented boys

It is important that practitioners are well prepared to support the learning of boys whose language is well developed and who show early and continuing interest in books, reading and writing.

Christopher is three years 11 months old, and has just started attending the nursery unit of his local primary school. For the last year he has attended a 'stay and play' group at the school one morning a week, and apart from that has been at home with his father, who works part time, mother who sometimes works from home, and younger brother.

Christopher's language development was early and rapid. He enjoys sustained conversations with adults, and has an extensive vocabulary. He is interested in new words, and enjoys trying them out. His parents have shared books with him from babyhood, and he has many favourites, which he can retell. He likes to 'read' books to his brother. He has been interested in writing for some time, and knows the sounds of most of the letters of the alphabet. He was keen to learn to write them, and his pencil control and letter formation are good, although he is not interested in drawing. He can orally blend and read CVC words, and can write his name and other high-frequency words such as 'the'. He is also able to segment and write simple CVC words. He often asks to do writing, and will be absorbed for some time, producing writing which includes words he has learned, words he has worked out for himself, random letters, and punctuation including exclamation marks and question marks.

Practitioners in the nursery could support and further help to develop Christopher's language and literacy development by:

- continuing to develop his vocabulary through introducing new words, both in talk and through reading to him; developing his awareness of language by talking about the meanings of words and of expressions such as 'sleep tight' or 'fresh as a daisy'
- playing with language, and talking about it with him, sharing rhymes, tongue-twisters and alliterative word play
- sharing books with him, extending his experience of stories, non-fiction books and poetry; ensuring that the books are matched to his level of development in content, length and complexity, and language
- providing varied opportunities to write, developing his understanding of different text types and writing for different audiences and purposes, for example writing secret messages for his friends; instructions for how to find objects in a treasure hunt; a list of his favourite activities at school, to read to his brother
- supporting his developing understanding of the alphabetic system, responding to his questions about how to represent different sounds.

It is important to note that children may show an intense interest in writing for a time, and then appear to lose interest. It may be that they are simply preoccupied by another area of learning, but practitioners should check that they are responding to children's interests appropriately and that opportunities for writing have not become routine and unchallenging.