

Supporting blended childcare incorporating the 30 hour extended entitlement and early education including the 2 Year Old offer.

Top Practice Tips

- Develop websites, leaflets and family information events giving parents local information and advice about different childcare and early learning options including the 30 hour and 2YO offer.
- Work with parents and the local authority to build a picture of the demand for childcare and early education
- Exchange information at Hub meetings to build up a picture of the supply side, especially for children with special educational needs, and identify where to improve quality
- Prioritise working with and supporting childminders to build flexibility
- Parents often need more than one provider, so establish trust among partners while acknowledging they may be in competition
- Demand for flexible childcare and early education is likely to increase - build that into your plans

Background

Every Early Learning and Childcare Partnership Hub must support parents with their working patterns by offering blended childcare and early education. Eleven hubs were surveyed to find out how they are achieving this goal

What difficulties do parents face when looking for childcare?

The survey found that parents are often confused by the range of options available. Many need support to make an informed choice about using childcare, accessing two-year-old provision, and finding patterns of care and education that work for them and secures access to the extended 30 hour offer.

HOW

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

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Parents may be limited to settings they can access by public transport or which are on the route to their work, narrowing the options available. Some find that they have to go in opposite directions to access settings for siblings of different ages. Embsay Children's Centre, a PVI nursery in North Yorkshire, highlights parental concerns: "As a group we have parents who work in professions where it is not possible to leave work reliably on time, such as doctors, and those who commute long distances, who find our opening hours of 7.30am to 6pm difficult."

Many areas have few good or outstanding childminders, while some have no childminders at all, as numbers fall nationwide. Thorpepark Academy in Hull says: "There are currently no childminders in the Hub area, so it is increasingly important that settings work together to ensure they can offer the flexibility that childminders can often provide."

How can Hubs support blended childcare and early education?

Hubs can build up strong networks of providers and make sure they communicate effectively with each other, and with parents to secure take up of entitlement. By bringing together providers including childminders, schools, preschools and nurseries, Hubs are able to offer parents childcare that fits their needs, whether that is blending childminder and nursery care, offering flexible hours or delivering after-school care for older siblings. Hubs can also provide particular support to children with SEND.

Thorpepark Academy explains: "We're hoping the Hub will provide easy access to information regarding availability of childcare places, using an easily navigated webpage, as well as flexibility and informed choice for parents, a positive relationship between providers which will support information sharing and transition, and reassurance about quality provision for parents when signposting them to other providers."

Brookhill Nursery School in Barnet has made all-year-round provision available for all under-eights in the local area, while York-based PVI nursery Funfishers works with other schools, nurseries and childminders to offer a longer day for parents who have to travel further. The setting also offers flexible sessions which include older siblings after school, to save parents having to pick children up from different places.

What challenges do Hubs face when developing blended childcare and early education which secure the 30 hour entitlement and the 2YO offer?

All the Hubs surveyed flagged the importance of building supportive relationships with other providers that avoid conflicts of interests. Such relationships take time and resources to build, particularly when staff turnover is high.



Many Hubs find childminders require more targeted support because they often have less available time. South Tyneside-based Cleadon Tower Nursery says: “As a private setting, getting childminders to trust us has been hard.” Some are building relationships with childminders by offering training, or drop-in sessions, like Dorking Nursery School.

Funding is also an issue. Barnet-based Brookhill Nursery School says it has had its budget almost halved. “Trying to develop a new model with the constraints that we face is a massive challenge,” it says. “We need professional support with marketing and business planning.”

What lessons have been learned?

A common piece of advice from Hubs is to keep timescales tight to ensure momentum is maintained and partnerships do not drift. “It is getting a balance between letting relationships develop and progressing with some purpose,” says Thorpepark Academy in Hull.

What does the future hold?

Hubs across the country are committed to building on their success to secure the extended and 2YO offer. Some, such as Brookhill Nursery School and Embsay Children’s Centre, plan to develop a childminder agency to extend their childcare offer, while Thorpepark Academy hopes to work with the local authority to recruit and support new childminders.

Others, such as St Edmunds Nursery School and Cleadon Tower Nursery, will concentrate on providing training for members. Ronald OpenShaw Nursery School is setting up a pilot holiday scheme for children in early years with SEND and their siblings, after local authority budget cuts have reduced access to holiday schemes.

