

## Supporting the provision of funded two-year-old places

### Top practice tips

- Work with all partners, especially children's centres, to establish local supply and demand, and ensure places are high quality
- Find ways of engaging childminders, such as offering space and resources in schools and other settings
- Work with the PVI sector to identify and tackle challenges facing the provision of existing three to four year old places if two year old places expand.
- Support parents to understand the different childcare options available, and how home learning programmes can help two-year-olds transition into childcare

### Background

Early Learning and Childcare Partnership Hubs aim to support the provision of new childcare places, with a particular focus on finding places for disadvantaged two-year-olds who are eligible for government-funded early education. Research has demonstrated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds need access to good quality early years provision, which can reduce behavioural problems and increase language skills among disadvantaged toddlers.

**HOW**

**ACTION FOR CHILDREN**

**WORKS**

## How can a Hub support the provision of funded two-year-old places?

Grange Park Primary School in Telford, lead partner of Childcare Hub Around the Park, has developed a good working relationship with children's centres, which act as a broker, matching parents with providers. The Hub also has a "current vacancies" service on its website, allowing parents to find places quickly.

Earlham Early Years Centre in Norwich has established a partnership of providers, including childminders, and works with them to look at how to fill gaps in provision. The centre also runs childcare information sessions for parents, to encourage take up of two-year-old places and explain the options. A website allows providers to market their services, showing parents what options are available and promoting the Hub, as well as linking providers to relevant training and information.

## What role can schools play?

Leeds-based Allerton Church of England Primary School works in close partnership with the children's centre co-located in its grounds. The two settings lead their local Early Learning and Community Childcare Hub. "We joined the Hub programme a year ago when it became clear that the need for two-year-old places would become a priority," says Liz Willis, assistant headteacher at Allerton.

The school decided to provide 20 half-day places for funded two-year-olds alongside its nursery classes for three- and four-year-olds. It has also been able to develop close working relationships with the PVI sector, by offering joint training and support in developing quality funded two-year-old provision.

Allerton now has the largest uptake of funded two-year-old places in Leeds. "This is down to the strong communications with the children's centre, which holds the list of eligible two-year-olds and knows the families," says Ms Willis. "This has meant that we have been able to visit families and encourage them to take up places. "

Elsewhere, Oasis Academy Limeside created a home learning package, through which it was able to monitor demand, and prepare funded two-year-olds for attending childcare. Meanwhile City of York Strategic Hub has worked with local schools to position them as the key providers of funded two-year-old places, with children's centres providing additional support.

### **What role can maintained nursery schools play?**

Brookhill Nursery School has set up units specifically for funded two-year-olds in the three settings that are part of its teaching alliance. This gives parents a choice of places. Partners are supported to improve the quality of local places by observing practice at the two-year-old units, and health care professionals are also offered training placements there.

### **What are the challenges around the provision of funded two-year-old places?**

For Allerton Church of England Primary School the engagement of childminders has been a real challenge. Grange Park Primary tackled this issue by establishing links with existing childminder networks, while Brookhill Nursery School engaged childminders by running a drop-in session and working closely with local authority childminder support staff.

Supply and demand of places is a persistent issue. “We have a yearly intake, so sometimes the funded two-year-olds are ready to move up at Easter, but we do not have places,” says Ms Willis. “We are learning to be more flexible when managing this. Employing and retaining sufficient staff for the two-year-old room is a constant problem.”

In rural areas the numbers of two-year-olds can vary considerably year-by-year across different areas, making it difficult to match supply to demand. The numbers can also be very small, making it hard to provide cost-effective services. Some Hubs and providers report misinformation from local authorities leading to over or under-supply of places.

### **What have Hubs learnt about the provision of funded two-year-old places?**

We had not taken into account the time needed for supporting and developing these initiatives,” says Allerton’s Ms Willis. “However, making a non-teaching deputy head available gave us the organisational and reflective time to develop the two-year-old places as well as other initiatives. This ensured quality and the ability to support parental needs. It also helped the school secure additional funds.”



### How can Hubs develop funded two-year-old places in the future?

“We are going to expand to 32 places and will offer them full day, as this is what parents in the hub have been asking for,” says Ms Willis. “The expansion will support those parents that want or need to get back to work. If we have spare capacity, we would also provide places to parents able to pay for the hours.”

