

Supporting Partnership Working

Top Practice Tips

- Agree a common project that benefits all partners, so they can see the benefit of joining the hub
- Engage the Local Authority
- Make clear that all partners have expertise to contribute and things to learn
- Rotate where Hub meetings take place, but also use the best located venue for training if this widens participation and take-up
- Establish a rolling training programme based on what partners request and the goals identified by the Hub
- Acknowledge that Hub partners may be in competition but show how they can work together to support the needs of local parents
- Once a core hub of providers have been established seek to widen membership to other key partners such health or children's centres who will bring additional expertise

Background

In order to achieve their three main goals, Early Learning and Childcare Partnership Hubs must form partnerships with at least eight early years providers.

How can a Hub develop a successful partnership?

Grange Park Primary School in Enfield is lead partner of the Grange Park Primary Early Learning and Community Childcare Hub.

“As a school, we have always wanted to form partnerships but working with the PVI sector often foundered because of the fear that the school nursery would take the children,” says deputy head Nicky Brown.

HOW

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

WORKS

Working with settings on transition gave the partnership momentum. “Settings and the school saw an immediate improvement,” says Ms Brown. “This ability to share practice has empowered us to develop an environment where partners are positive and open in meetings.”

The provision of training has been a key incentive. “Opening our doors and showing what we do, and that we want to learn as well, has made the whole exercise non-threatening for partners and is something they have valued,” says Ms Brown.

What benefits have arisen from working in partnership?

The Hub has developed a training programme for partners. “The joint training offer works because the school is central to all the settings and childminders so it becomes an ideal venue,” explains Ms Brown. “We also make sure that training takes place at times that suits partners. The school opens in the evening so we can offer training at 6.30pm, which is popular.”

Grange Park designs its training programme around the needs of its partners, who are also able to share their own expertise.

The partnership has also improved transitions for children, allowing the school to discuss with early years settings what it looks for in a “school ready” child, while settings have been able to explain what support parents and children wanted and needed. School and settings have collaborated on a transition booklet, with photos of the school. “Reception staff have gone into each provider and this has led to noticeable improvement,” says Ms Brown. “We are able to know the learning journey of individual children from our feeder settings and childminders.”

The Hub has also created a joint website which promotes local settings and childminders to parents, and gives the Hub a local brand. “Parents of two-year-olds can see that they have more choices than just waiting for a school space,” says Ms Brown. “This helps in managing the market at a localised level. We also flag up vacancies.”

What are the challenges?

“The main challenges are time and the capacity needed to make the project work, as well as ensuring that, the partnership includes all the possible local partners,” says Ms Brown. Keeping the website up-to-date is another issue, particularly as the Hub plans to offer fortnightly updates. “You need someone able to chase and coordinate the information,” she says.

Working with other schools and their nurseries has also been a challenge. “Partners have been slower than we would like,” says Ms Brown. “It might be a time thing on their part, or the fact that many have PVI nurseries on their sites that are often part of big chains, and so less able to engage in local networks.”

Contacting childminders has proved difficult. “We have a good relationship with those we are in contact with but we know there must be more locally that we have not contacted yet,” says Ms Brown. “Training is the key and we are trying to put more on.”



What are the benefits of being part of the Hub programme?

“Being able to phone or email for advice and get instant responses regardless of time and day helped us to keep on track,” says Ms Brown. “Equally important was being part of a national programme. We could share up to date information with the settings and childminders, which they valued, and being able to meet up with the wider network enabled us to see other ways of working that we could adapt.”

What does the future hold?

The Grange Park Hub has big plans for the future as the 30 hour entitlement comes into place. It intends to recruit parent champions, and develop stronger links with other schools, as well as supporting all settings and childminders to achieve a good or outstanding rating. The Hub also hopes to build relationships with the health sector, inviting health visitors to Hub meetings and establishing links with speech and language therapists, as well as providing training on information sharing.

“We are also preparing for the 30 hour childcare entitlement by developing a model to make it work for the school and local settings,” says Ms Brown.

