

Adding value to National Teaching School activities

Top Practice Tips

- Model effective partnerships with the PVI sector, working to improve quality
- Improve practice through a wide range of practical programmes
- Use robust and research-evidenced tools to help settings and childminders identify necessary improvements
- A local conference with world-class speakers can motivate and inspire Hub members and showcase the achievements of the Hub to local leaders
- Peer learning programmes mean that the lead partner is not overwhelmed
- Cut down on duplication and ensure clear lines of accountability by working with Hub members to clarify local authority and National Teaching School responsibilities

Background

National Teaching Schools are outstanding-rated schools that work with others to provide high-quality training and development to new and experienced school staff. Teaching Schools must provide evidence of successful partnership working and Early Learning and Community Childcare Hubs can be a good way to connect them to other providers, particularly in the PVI sector and in supporting the 30 hour extended entitlement and the 2YO offer. As lead partners, Teaching Schools also have a lot to offer Hub members.

HOW

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

WORKS

What benefits can Teaching Schools bring to Hub partners?

Newham-based Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre is a National Teaching School and also lead partner of an Early Learning and Community Childcare Hub which includes a network of ten early years settings and a network of 16 childminders.

"There has been a marked effect on quality, with the Sheringham figures well ahead of those for the local authority as a whole," says Julian Grenier, headteacher at Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre. "The Sheringham network now outperforms the country by having no 'requires Improvement/satisfactory' or 'inadequate' settings."

As lead partner, Sheringham has run a number of quality-enhancing activities across the Hub settings. Local providers are engaged in ongoing "Every Child A Talker" training, which has been effective in narrowing the gap between children who start nursery at risk of language delay and their peers. All local settings have been involved also in using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) to improve quality for two-year-olds, with some showing significant improvements.

Visits to all settings by Area SENCOs highlighted the significant difficulties experienced by a number of small settings when admitting children with additional needs. Further support and training was planned, based around the Early Years Inclusive Classroom Profile.

All settings have received one visit from a Speech Therapist and some have now had two, as part of an Early Intervention Speech Therapy Project. "We are looking at any ongoing support settings need," says Mr Grenier. The therapist gave extensive feedback on how staff were supporting language development, and how practice could be improved.

The children's centre team is linking with settings and childminders to promote take up of free places for eligible children. Over the last 12 months, the number of children engaged with the childminder network has increased by 25 per cent. "We have helped improve occupancy by advertising the childminders on our network and holding information days for families looking for childcare," says Mr Grenier. "We have also put parents of eligible two-year-olds in touch with childminders with vacancies."

The network coordinator provides regular support and training, with a focus on improving quality. "The quality of childminders in the Sheringham hub is now significantly better than in Newham as a whole," says Mr Grenier.

How can Hubs become part of a wider network?

The success of the Sheringham community hub has provided an effective model for the borough-wide “Learning Without Limits” network, which comprises all seven of Newham’s nursery schools and their Hubs. A “Learning Without Limits” conference brought together more than 250 early years practitioners from across the sector.

The seven Newham Nursery School and Children’s Centre Hubs now also form part of the East London Early Years and Schools Partnership, a Teaching Schools Alliance led by Sheringham Nursery School.

What challenges have been faced?

“Many of the settings struggle to send staff out on training because of supply costs,” says Mr Grenier. “A high level of staff turnover can make it difficult to maintain the momentum of improving quality.” Illness and staff shortages in the settings can also make engagement challenging.

“The Hub lead needs to ensure that it does not focus so much on its systemic work across the network that the quality of its own provision is compromised,” says Mr Grenier. It is often easier to engage settings through a peer learning model, where Hub members learn in partnership with each other, as opposed to having setting staff attend a one-off training day or come in to observe good practice, he says, but this takes careful design.

“With hindsight, we would have publicised the project better to parents,” he says.

What does the future hold?

“With resources shrinking, we need to avoid duplication and overlaps,” says Mr Grenier. “We have mapped a possible way forward in partnership with the Newham Early Years team to integrate and intensify our work to improve quality, based on the community hubs model, while a core range of statutory functions remain with the local authority.”

“We want Newham’s early years to be amongst the best in the country,” he concludes. “We have taken significant steps towards that goal: but there is much more to do.”