

Parent Partnership in the Early Years Foundation Stage



Ideas and Case Studies from East Sussex Settings

Early Years Improvement Team
Standards and Learning and Effectiveness Service



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Introduction

This document is written in recognition that all parents are their children's first and foremost educators. The word **parent** is used throughout this document to include anyone involved with bringing up children and may include a wide range of adults such as mothers, fathers, carers, grandparents, step-parents, and other family members.

Settings refers to all early years providers in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sector including childminders.

Please use this document as a prompt for discussion and reflection in your setting. Think about what you do with parents now. Do you have a genuine partnership? Any developments you identify can be captured in your settings development plan.

The case studies that follow demonstrate the many different ways settings encourage parents to be more involved with their children's development and learning. Tait, in Whalley and the Pen Green Team (2007:33) shares the approach taken at Pen Green Centre:

We recognise the fact that parents are not a homogenous group-their lives vary greatly – and therefore the method of engagement that works for one family will not work for another...We also need to be prepared to adapt the ways in which we work in order to accommodate different families' needs and also the continually changing needs of families.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE: 1995) report found 'What parents do is more important than who parents are.'

Class, income, living conditions and parents' own education are related to child outcomes, but the quality of the 'home learning environment' is even more important. Parents may live in disadvantaged circumstances and may not have achieved well educationally, but if they engage in activities which help their child's development, as part of everyday life at home, they can enhance their child's progress and development. Children with strong home learning environments are already ahead in both social and intellectual development by the age of three. This advantage continues through to age seven, and Sylva and Sammons found that the effect is maintained through to age 10 (Sylva et al, 2004; Sammons et al, 2007).

The impact of a good home learning environment is evident across all social classes and ethnic groups. Children receive not just skills, knowledge and intellectual stimulation at home; they also absorb a positive attitude towards learning and a strong self-image as a successful learner (Desforges, 2003).

Within a home situation adults and older siblings can provide more one-to-one attention; they can really listen to what a child is saying and help extend their learning. Early home learning encompasses all experiences that children have which enable them to develop their full potential.

The Early Years Foundation Stage 2014 (EYFS) provides the wider context and background to working in partnership with parents and home learning. The statutory guidance states that settings **must** ensure information is available to parents on how the EYFS is being delivered in the setting, and how parents and/or carers can access more information if required. The range and type of activities and experiences provided for children, the daily routines of the setting, and how parents and carers can share learning at home must also be shared with parents.

We would like to see the partnership with parents going much further than the statutory requirement, as we know from all recent research that when parents have the knowledge and skills to provide the experiences children need it makes a real difference to their children's futures.

We know that children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents.

Effective partnerships - building relationships

The key principles in working with parents

The child is the focus

It may sound obvious but the best interests of the child (Article 3, The United Nations Convention Rights of the Child, 1989) are the starting point for all work with parents. The key aim of any work with parents is to protect children's rights and enable parents to meet their children's needs.

Work in partnership with parents

Parents expect practitioners who are confident and well-informed, but also able to work alongside them and show an interest in them and their lives. When practitioners and parents work together, within an ethos of partnership, with each contributing their particular expertise and knowledge, this ensures that support is effective and relevant.

Adopt a strength-based approach

Parents have unique knowledge and information about their children and the vast majority of parents want to do their best, although some struggle to do so. Work with parents should be non-judgemental and should seek to empower by building on and valuing parents' existing strengths, knowledge and experience.

Services should be inclusive and accessible

Practitioners should engage with all parents, respecting gender and cultural differences and tailoring support to the needs of different parents.

Be aware of, and aim for, good practice

Workforce development and support is key to ensuring high quality interactions with parents. Staff should work in partnership with parents and be encouraged to reflect on and develop their skills and practice. Supervision is now a statutory requirement in the EYFS (2014:3.20) and appropriate arrangements must be in place to give staff opportunities to receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness.

Adapted from the key principles devised by The Early Learning Partnership Parental Engagement Group (ELPPEG 2009).

Key person

Each child must be assigned a key person in a setting. This is a safeguarding and welfare requirement (EYFS 2014: 3.27). Providers must inform parents and/or carers of the name of the key person, and explain their role, when a child starts attending a setting. The key person must help ensure that every child's learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs. They must seek to engage and support parents and/or carers in guiding their child's development at home and should also help families engage with more specialist support if appropriate. (EYFS 2014:1.10). The key person provides a consistent approach for the child and their family and most importantly provides the secure attachment the child needs when away from their home. The key person will help build trusting attachment relationships that children need and are entitled to.

Maintaining relationships and linking to learning

As home has such a powerful effect on children's learning the most effective early years settings i.e., those that achieve the best outcomes for their children, work very closely with parents.

These settings

- share the educational aims clearly and encourage high levels of engagement
- work to build parent confidence in what they do already at home
- offer ideas to support and enhance the learning at home

Most significantly, they:

- exchange information about children regularly on a weekly or monthly basis with parents
- listen to what parents have to say about their own child's capabilities and interests;
- make use of parents observations for future planning;
- encourage parents to be active in the planning process;
- support children's learning at home directly with suggested activities.

(Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2003; Sylva et al, 2004; Desforges, 2003).

Examples of supporting parents at home can be seen in the case studies.

Involving parents in assessing their children's learning should happen ideally before the children start at the setting, and important information can be gleaned during home visits and visits for the parent and child to the setting. These occasions provide an opportunity for practitioners to explain the rationale behind what you are asking and why you need to know. These initial conversations are vital in order to develop a shared language with parents and build respectful relationships. A document which can act as a catalyst to open up conversation and share knowledge at these initial meetings is available at appendix 3.

Although it is the practitioners' responsibility to assess children in the early years, no assessment throughout the EYFS is going to be complete if it is not a collaborative activity with all significant adults in a child's life. If parents are asked to provide observations at home they should be offered a range of options to help achieve this. In order to have a true holistic picture of the child you need to know about all aspects of their life in order to understand what is happening for them and help them move forward in their development and learning. Knowing about the child and their family will enable practitioners to listen to parents as individuals and adapt what they do to suit parents' needs. It is important that all parents are made to feel their efforts are welcomed and valued. (Whalley and the Pen Green Team:2007) The Sheffield Early Literacy Development Project, Hannon *et al.* (1991) worked with parents to explore how to promote and improve children's early literacy. They used the vehicle of home visits to approach literacy in a sensitive way and provided books, writing materials and photographs of children in the nursery as a stimulus. Parents reported this approach as less threatening and positive relationships with parents, especially those whose first language was not English, were developed.

Additionally Nutbrown (2003:47) believed that the communication between the practitioners and the parents and the continuity of experiences between the home and settings is what has the biggest impact for the child's literacy development. She found the most effective dialogue, happened in parents' homes. Sharing achievements in this way enabled the parents to understand gain more knowledge and insight into how their children were learning.

Some suggestions on what settings do to involve parents in effective teaching and learning can be found in the case studies. It is important that settings make parents welcome and comfortable to entice them to want to become involved. Flexibility is the key if settings are to reach as many parents as possible. Some examples of how settings have included parents are described in the case studies.

Transition

Transition and Home Learning

In the 1960s Plowden recommended that nursery education was provided for 'targeted' children and acknowledged the importance of involving the parents, principally mothers, in the transition period (1967:127).

Home visits were suggested (1967:43) but not a requirement. Fifty years on, home visiting, which was considered such good practice, is still not universally provided, neither at pre-school stage nor school.

One of the aims of the influential Froebel Early Education Project (1973-8) was to produce information on the way that children think, learn and develop within the home and school environments. This project provided evidence of deep commitment on the part of parents, who were consulted on professional concerns rather than 'peripheral issues' (Athey, 1990:206) Home visits were introduced before the project began and they found useful information was gained from this.

Athey (1990:60) reports that in the early days of the project parents felt the 'poor relations', feeling that practitioners held all the power as the "experts" on children. However, this diminished over the time of the project as the parents and practitioners worked together and developed new ideas, views and attitudes:

As the project progressed all the participants worked together and the parents were 'respected and recognised as experts on their own children... 'they knew them better as individuals than anyone else' (Athey, 1990:61).

More recently, in a case study below, a practitioner describes his experiences of home visiting:

I have been on home visits where I have come out and cried for the child (and their family!) and others that I was expecting to be pretty horrific, where they were actually all good. I went on one a few months ago with a fairly new practitioner and I have to say that she was pretty shell shocked by what she saw, but you need to see the home environment to really begin to understand where your families are coming from and empathise with the stresses they encounter on a daily basis.

Since starting our visits I have been to lovely flats and houses but I have also been to blocks of flats that smell of ingrained drugs and tobacco. I have visited immaculate places and others where I did not know whether to sit on the floor or the sofa. I hate dogs and I have had to pretend that I love ones that are actually a lot bigger than me! I have been to places full of toys and others where there is only a TV, a dining table and a sofa but unless I saw these things, I really would have no real clue about my children and families other than what I supposed **East Sussex early years practitioner**.

Ofsted

The Ofsted Evaluation Schedule (2013) for inspections of registered early years provision outlines guidance and grade descriptors for the judgements that inspectors will report on when inspecting registered early years providers who deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Working in partnership with parents features highly and is looked at under the “How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend” section.

“For a setting to be outstanding it must meet all of the criteria in the grade descriptors below for good, plus all or nearly all of the additional descriptors for outstanding”.

A setting will be:

Outstanding, if highly successful strategies engage all parents in their children’s learning in the setting and at home.

Good, if the key person system supports engagement with all parents, including those who may be more reluctant to contribute. Parents contribute to initial assessments of children’s starting points on entry and they are kept well informed about their children’s progress. Parents are encouraged to support and share information about their children’s learning and development at home. The key person system ensures all practitioners use effective, targeted strategies and interventions to support learning that match most children’s individual needs.

Requires Improvement, if parents are welcomed into the setting and encouraged to provide information about their children’s starting points on entry. Practitioners share information

about children's progress but strategies to engage parents to share information and promote learning at home are not always successful.

Inadequate, if strategies for engaging with parents about their child's learning and development are weak and focused too much on care practices. As a result, parents do not know what their child is learning.

In 'Unseen Children – Access and Achievement 20 years on' (2013) Ofsted also undertook a review to look at the pattern of disadvantage and educational success across England. Building on previous known research, such as the EPPE project, they looked at the impact of high quality early years education and care on outcomes for children. They found that the most effective settings, those with an outstanding Ofsted grading, shared their educational aims with their parents and encouraged them to support their children at home. Home visits were routinely offered to support good transition, where the EYFS was introduced and ideas given to extend their child's learning at home.

Parents are expected to play their full part in their children's education and 'school readiness' is seen as a key part of that process. There are some ideas on school readiness and how to work in partnership with parents in the following sections and stories in the case studies.

The Early Years Improvement Team would like to thank all of those who have contributed to this document and the Parent Partnership research project.

Key Points to Consider When Working With Parents and Promoting Effective Partnership

It is important to remember that a range of strategies are necessary when forming and maintaining good relationships with parents. It is not a 'one size fits all' approach and strategies will need to be reviewed and refreshed with different cohorts of families. It is important to reflect on current strategies and to consider their effectiveness. Also, settings need to consider ways of involving other family members if they play a key part in the child's life such as siblings and grandparents.

Forming effective partnerships with parents includes respecting every child and family individually. It is important to consider the variety of family backgrounds and the possible barriers to effective partnerships. Whilst remaining professional, practitioners must also empathise with families and reflect on how to provide high quality provision.

Settings must be inclusive and this may require extra reflection and support for some children and families. However, this should not be regarded as additional to what is provided: it should form part of the setting policies and practice in providing high quality provision for all families.

Home communication books are a frequently used strategy for maintaining contact with parents. However, practitioners should carefully consider the benefits of using these. Is it necessary for every child to have a home communication book as this can take valuable time away from practitioner interaction with children? However, if there is little contact with parents, perhaps due to work commitments, then a communication book may be suitable for some children, especially if it is valued and written in by both practitioners and parents.

This may include strategies for working with

- Families with English as an additional language: making use of translators, asking families for key words and phrases, use of visuals, having bi-lingual books, keeping copies of translated letters and information sheets
- Children and families with SEND includes ensuring parents are included in making decisions and planning for their child's needs, working with other agencies, supporting parents and making appropriate referrals (see SEN Code of Practice 2014)

- Families where parents do not live together (separated parents and those who are separating, parent working away from home). How do you share information with both parents and take account of their views about their child's development and learning?
- Children and families from various cultural heritages including traveller families. How do you welcome families and ensure they feel included within the setting? Does the provision reflect the diversity of the children and families?
- Families with complex issues such as parental mental health, substance misuse, domestic violence. Do you refer to appropriate services such as the Children's Centre Key work Service? Are there information leaflets with phone numbers for local and national support agencies? Do your policies and procedures include guidance on how to deal with disclosures from parents and requests for support? IMPORTANT - settings must follow safeguarding policy and procedures in any instances which are clearly safeguarding.

Below are some strategies for working with parents with points to consider

- The value of a comprehensive, easy to access prospectus and welcome pack. Have you asked for parents' opinions and suggestions to improve it?
- Home visits for all new children. Children and parents are usually more relaxed in their own home. If you positively promote the value of home visits and embed them as part of your welcome and settling in process, parents should be willing to participate. If your setting does not currently undertake home visits, consider starting slowly with families who have another service involved, such as specialist services or Children's Centre Keyworker. You can then undertake a joint home visit.
- Information/notice boards and displays. Do these contain relevant information and have you asked parents whether they find the displays useful?
- Staff display with photographs and information about the practitioners such as qualifications and experience. Including practitioner interests and hobbies gives children and parents a clearer understanding of their child's key person, other practitioners in the setting and promotes good relationships.

- Family photographs from home which are accessible to children either on a child height display or in learning journeys support emotional security and promote the value of home life.
- Sharing information from home is very important. Sometimes, completing a written form can be daunting. It may be easier for a parent to email a photograph or for a practitioner to write what the parent says. How do you support parent's to share observations and photographs of key events and learning which have happened at home? Several settings have found 'take home bears' useful, but are there more regular ways to capture key moments from home?
- Effective communication with parents can happen in a variety of ways; face to face (from daily chat to parent meetings/consultations), displays, daily photos, WOW boards, newsletters (email or printed), texting, phone calls, website, other IT programmes and workshops. Have you asked parents how they would like to be kept up to date with their child's development and what is happening at the setting?
- Inviting parents into the setting through 'play dates', coffee mornings, volunteering, sharing expertise (many parents have a talent and could be willing to share) and 'helping out'. What suits the needs of your parents and are there other ways which are more suitable/inclusive for parents who are unable to attend or are more reluctant?
- Home learning experiences can be provided in a variety of ways including free ideas shared through newsletters (the value of shopping or a visit to the park) to sharing resources: lending library, story bags, role play boxes, recipes, activity boxes, mini projects to finish at home (such as growing seeds). Remember to consider ideas which cover all areas of learning, as well as next steps for individual children and explain to parents why the experience is important. Do you ask for feedback on the suggested home learning experiences and can parents share how these have gone?
- Creating and maintaining a sense of community supports effective partnerships. This can include welcoming parents on trips, celebration events, festivals, sports days, 'community'

garden as well as including parent support with odd jobs from repairing books to creating resources and areas.

Useful books:

'50 fantastic ideas for involving parents' by Marianne Sargent, Featherstone Education, Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 2013 ISBN 978-1-4081-7955-0

Introduction

Ensuring children are prepared for school and ready to learn when they take up their place in Reception has always been a key focus of the early years sector. A shared approach and common understanding of what this actually means has however not developed and has not therefore driven a clear set of objectives. In response to disappointing foundation stage profile outcomes Children's Centres in Hastings & St Leonard's looked at the definitions of 'school readiness' from the perspective of professionals and parents, taking into consideration the revised Early Years Foundation Stage document, papers from Government departments and theorists. The work began by gathering initial feedback from a questionnaire with parents as well as feedback from nursery practitioners and teachers at a local networking event as well as a questionnaire for head teachers in Hastings and a focus group of parents.

The results highlighted the issues around an apparent lack of communication between professionals and parents/carers as well as the differences in approaches between individual schools, which does not give a consistent message for parents. It also uncovered the need for early years settings, children's centres and schools to work together to develop a shared and agreed ethos and ethics in working with children and families.

Learning Together Alliance and Pilot

East Hastings Children's Centre is a partner in a schools Alliance in Hastings along with Guestling, Silverdale, Castledown, Sandown and St Paul's schools and as part of their action plan, it was agreed that the Foundation Stage leads for the schools could form a working group to agree good practice to support school readiness. A group was formed which included the 5 schools, 2 nurseries, a health visitor, the Children's Centre QT, area (cluster) co-ordinator and the Chair of the Children's Centre Local Advisory Group. The group shared their experiences of good practice and an agreement was reached about what each school would offer to support children through their transition into school.

This included:

- Home visits
- Staggered starts
- Information sessions for parents
- Contacting the child's EY setting – visiting the setting if the school had a number of children entering the school
- Open play sessions for parents and children
- Development of transition booklets for parents and EY settings

A questionnaire was devised that was shared with parents at each school's first parent consultation evening for Reception children to find out what parents felt about their child's transition experiences. The results of this were collated and shared at the working group (evidence available). There was a good deal of positive feedback with some mixed reactions to the staggered start, especially for those parents who work. This is something that the group are looking with some suggestions to support this by:

- Giving parents the information on dates for starting at the earliest stages
- Sharing start dates with the relevant Early Years settings to reinforce messages and give the setting the opportunity to offer childcare (paid for by the parent) in the early part of the term

The schools reported that the information about the child from the setting was important to them, especially when it showed clarity and an accurate picture of the child.

Further Developments

Following the pilot transition work, the Children's Centres looked at how 'school readiness' could be measured as part of the performance monitoring of their work. This could potentially give a truer picture of the impact of Children's Centres. Historically, Children's Centres performance has been partly judged on the end of Foundation Stage results which can be challenging when a family may not be accessing a centre for the year on starting school.

Using the feedback from the original Headteacher questionnaire and parent focus group, it was decided to look at key areas of children's attributes in relation to the prime areas of the EYFS. These were:

- Children's independent skills
- Communication
- Confident separation
- Motivation and engagement in learning

Some further work was undertaken with the Alliance schools, and a questionnaire devised, asking some key questions of the Foundation Stage teachers about the children in Reception. These were:

- Number of children who can dress themselves independently
- Number of children who can use the toilet independently
- Number of children who can feed themselves independently
- Number of children who can communicate their needs
- Number of children who can separate confidently from their parent/carer
- Number of children who are engaged and motivated in their learning

We also asked how many of the children were receiving support from specialist early years services and how many were summer born children, as we felt that both of these could impact on their development.

Asking these questions was not making a judgement on the school's teaching and learning, but instead gives an opportunity for Children's Centres to support areas that have been highlighted as areas of concern by the schools and build these into the planning for groups and activities, offering experiences to children and families to support the prime areas.

Learning

The results of the questionnaire were collated and at a meeting of the working group, the questions were reflected on and amended from the feedback to give clearer guidance to the teacher completing them. The changed questions were:

- Number of children who can dress themselves for PE independently
- Number of children who can separate from their parent/carer confidently after 1 month
- Number of children who are curious and confidently explore their environment

It was decided to remove the question about feeding themselves independently, as currently, the majority of children take a packed lunch to school and do not use cutlery. However, this could be reinstated following the decision to give a free school meal to every child entering school.

It was also agreed to add a question about the number of boys in the class, as again, with the knowledge of boy's achievement at the end of Foundation Stage, this could be significant information.

The pilot questionnaire was carried out just before the Christmas holiday, so we were asking teachers to think retrospectively about the children. In rolling this out, the aim would be that the questionnaire would be completed within the first term.

Roll out

This project has already been taken up by Shinewater School, with an initial meeting between the school and a number of local Early Years settings in the area. The aim is to roll out the school readiness work across schools in East Sussex, with Children's Centres cluster co-ordinators taking the questionnaire out to identified schools in targeted areas.

If you wish to know more about this project please contact Tracey Rose, Children's Centres Operations Manager on: tracey.rose@eastsussex.gov.uk or 01424 726453

Case Study 1 Focus: SETTLING IN WITHOUT HOME VISITS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Overview:

Committee run voluntary setting offering term time sessions.

The setting takes children from the age of 2 years.

Starting point:

A settling in session. Parents fill in 'What I like sheet' and the completion of first weeks at setting sheet, followed by discussion with parents.

What we did next:

The practitioners decided that being more flexible would be beneficial to parents and children.

Families are now entitled to as many free half hour sessions as they wish. To aid transparency parents can turn up at any time during opening hours without prior appointment.

The child's key person will spend some of this time with them to start building the relationship.

Parents are encouraged to bring in family photographs.

Families are given a photograph of their key person to take home.

The key person completes a 'first sessions' at playgroup form as do the parents and experiences are then compared. The parents are asked to comment on the settling in process.

During those initial conversations practitioners can usually find out if parents are confident in literacy. If they are not practitioners will find a way to offer the content of letters in conversation.

When children are referred from social care the manager and key person will arrange to meet them with their family keyworker wherever they feel comfortable.

This may be for breakfast or a coffee somewhere local.

Impact:

Parents are keen to join the committee and there is usually a waiting list.
Practitioners feel this is due to the positive relationships built up with them.
When first left children generally seem more confident.

Future plans:

To continue looking at the process, getting feedback and reflecting on what is offered.

Case Study 2 Focus: HOME VISITS AND TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Overview:

A primary school with 2 form entry.

Starting point:

The setting was already doing:

- Teddy Bears picnic
- New parents meetings
- Home Visits
- Stay and Play sessions

What we did next:

- Attendance at Learning Together alliance meetings – school readiness focus
- Looked at research findings from a school readiness dissertation
- Developed current practice
- Developed parent partnership – closer links
- Used a questionnaire to get parental views on the transition process

Impact:

- Reflected on findings from the questionnaire
- Transition process has improved

Future plans:

- Each child will be sent a post card saying that their teacher is looking forward to seeing them in September
- Each child will be sent a balloon which they can put on their door so that the teacher can find them for the home visit
- Children's parents are to be invited to have a school meal with their children
- Development of Stay and Play sessions from Term 1

Case Study 3 Focus: HOME VISITS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Overview:

A pack away pre-school that is open term time only.

The setting takes 30 children per session and has approximately 50 children on the register.

Starting point:

The practitioners reviewed the settling in procedure and felt that not enough information was being obtained from written forms. A particular problem was families not acknowledging that they were involved with other agencies.

It was decided to trial home visits 18 months ago.

What we did next:

Parents are offered a settling in home visit. The child's allocated key person and a manager attend together. The average visit takes 30 minutes. The key person plays with the child using their own toys while the manager speaks to the parent and goes through the registration form / what my child likes sheet. The parents are given an 'All about me' book to fill in prior to visit and this can be looked at with the child.

In some situations the practitioners will not visit the house unless accompanied with the child's family keyworker so that the visit is not seen to be intrusive and is supported by the existing relationship.

Practitioners are willing to meet parents and family keyworkers in a different environment or together in the setting.

The advantages of home visits are explained to parents but not all parents wish to take up the offer and practitioners will spend longer with them in the setting visits.

All parents and children are treated individually in the settling in process and we are flexible in the amount of support needed.

Impact:

The biggest problem initially was time/money. Ratios still have to be adhered to and practitioners may need to do visits outside of normal working hours.

Evaluation shows that children settle better. Practitioners are able to say “Do you remember when we played together with at your home?” and use the ‘all about me’ book. Parents seem happier to approach practitioners with queries and information.

Practitioners have found that often information about working with other agencies flows from the initial conversations during home visits.

The practitioners were initially apprehensive and were coached /mentored by management. Practitioners have found home visits to be a real eye opener.

Relating to *Bronfenbrenner’s theory children are, to a certain extent, what they live* and it is not until you get to see what a child is living that A) you dispel some of the stereo types that you perhaps have in your mind and B) that you truly know where that child’s starting point is (in more than the most superficial academic way).

Manager’s quotes:

“I have been on home visits where I have come out and cried for the child (and their family!) And others that I was expecting to be pretty horrific, where they were actually all good. I went on one a few months ago with a fairly new practitioner and I have to say that she was pretty shell shocked by what she saw, but you need to see the home environment to really begin to understand where your families are coming from and empathise with the stresses they encounter on a daily basis.”

“Since starting our visits I have been to lovely flats and houses but I have also been to blocks of flats that smell of ingrained drugs and tobacco. I have visited immaculate places and others where I did not know whether to sit on the floor or the sofa. I hate dogs and I have had to pretend that I love ones that are actually a lot bigger than me! I have been to places full of toys and others where there is only a TV, a dining table and a sofa but unless I saw these things, I really would have no real clue about my children and families other than what I supposed.”

Future plans:

After evaluating the setting have decided that more of information given during home visit conversations should be recorded for future reference such as premature birth.

These snippets of information can help build up a wider picture of the child and family.

To take a pot of bubbles or play dough so that if there are no resources available we have something small to hand.

Developing of a social story to take on visits.

**Case Study 4 Focus: SETTLING IN, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND
TRANSITION TO SCHOOL**

Overview:

Childminder husband and wife team, who take EYEE funding and funded 2 year olds.

Starting point:

Talking to parents and children and listening to their feedback on how they wanted their service to incorporate their family needs.

The childminders had completed the REAL training for childminders through PACEY and already provided book bags and family support.

What we did next:

The practitioners feel that a good relationship with parents is vitally important as they are handing their most precious being over to them. They wanted to make sure that parents were happy with them so that this would be less stressful. There is an understanding that each settling in period will be unique to each family's particular needs.

Settling in – the setting expanded their offer to a minimum of six free settling in sessions. It is suggested that parents stay and play for at least the first couple of these so that the parent and child are gaining confidence together. Transition can be overlooked from a parent's point of view and can be very stressful especially for new parents who may not have had much time away from their child. The goal was to ensure that both child and parent are comfortable with the care and service after the settling in period. It is therefore preferred to have plenty of notice that a child will be attending to provide this service. Where the childcare need is urgent the setting is flexible and has had settling in visits on Saturdays before. Parents receive a booklet with photographs of the childminders and their house. Practitioners fill in a settling in sheet and discuss this at the end of each session with parents. At the end of the process parents receive a questionnaire regarding the settling in process so that it can be reflected on. Formats used include the 'what my child likes sheet' and a 'family tree' sheet.

Sharing learning and progress with parents-

- Each week practitioners complete a sheet detailing what the child has done, eaten etc. and any links to the curriculum and characteristics of effective learning. This is discussed weekly and parents are asked for any input. Parents are given ideas to extend this at home.
- A more formal parent consultation is held twice yearly. However learning journeys can go home at any time and parents prefer to look at them regularly. Parents are encouraged to add to summative assessments. Every 6-8 weeks parents receive next steps in their child's diary for easy reference along with ideas. A recent successful example of this would be encouraging a child to look at print in the environment which resulted in a walk around the Old Town with parent and child looking at road and shop signs.
- The 2 year check is completed in conjunction with both parents and their health visitor as the practitioners have built a good relationship with the family outreach and local health visiting teams.
- After reflection and discussion with parents regarding their needs drawing and writing bags were developed containing pads of paper and pens/pencils. Next mini easels and paints were added.
- The setting also now provides 'holiday packs'. The parents and child help to choose resources and they can borrow puzzles or games. These have cards with them explaining the learning elements from completing the activities.
- Children can request a particular toy or game at any time to borrow.
- Bradley Bear goes on home visits with a book to record his adventures and spare clothes etc.
- WOW certificates are given out.
- Parents can receive reminders by email or text message although they prefer face to face conversation.
- Practitioners work closely with parents as well as children on transition to school. A booklet is provided for parents about what to expect and tips such as skills needed for packed lunch or school dinners.

Impact:

- By listening to parents the setting is able to make changes that benefit them. Parents are asked for input verbally and by questionnaire. E.g. the information sheets were completed daily but parents felt weekly would work better.
- A very high percentage of children stay for afterschool and holiday care once they have moved to school. Families continue to use their services year on year and recommend them to their family and friends.

Future plans:

Incorporating parent's own skills into training opportunities in languages (German, Turkish, French and Makaton) and working with other professionals to provide training opportunities for parents in Makaton, managing challenging behaviour, SEND, English and Maths.

To continue listening to parent suggestions and adding or improving as required.

**Case Study 5 Focus: BUILDING A FOUNDATION STAGE VILLAGE,
TRANSITION, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

Overview:

A primary school with a maintained nursery. Half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) comprises a Nursery class run by the school within the adjacent children's centre and one Reception class.

Starting point:

The nursery and preschool work closely together to build their partnership with parents but were looking for ways to improve. Parent's views were sought and Parent B is used as an example here.

She has worked as a volunteer in this school and accessed and helped run parenting classes.

What she finds particularly positive is the attention to detail staff give; which she considers made a huge difference to her youngest son's early experiences. She had not experienced this with her other children:

"Nothing was ever too much trouble ...they always made time for the parents. We were encouraged to stay ...nobody rushed you when you were settling your child. We spend time at the end of the session reflecting on what the children had done a kind of show and tell for parents".

Parent B felt listened to and that all staff, from the most senior to practitioners and support staff really care:

"...the staff lead by example, parental engagement is important to them themselves".

Parent B found reports were in a very formal format, similar to the rest of the school, focusing solely on 'academic' achievement:

"My child is an individual and not an educational statistic with levels to achieve, so although I want him to achieve and make progress, for parental engagement, the pastoral aspect is as, if not, more important".

This parent is aware that some parents at this setting feel unable to approach teachers because they are 'professionals', however:

“The school is making progress through parent programmes, parents-in-school sessions, head teacher chats and so on... they treat you like equals and that is much healthier. It is about doing things with you which I find really supportive; they share what they know about our children. They never judge”.

The school considers transition a strength (acknowledged by Ofsted)and this parent agrees:

“The children attended many settling sessions, the friendly home visits with teacher and key person into the family home, helped build links. This was followed up by a learning journey workshop, with home-made cakes by class teacher. The reception class staff are all parents themselves and appreciate the anxieties of all parents as their precious ones start 'Big School”.

Parent B would still like to be more involved more with her son’s learning and would welcome opportunities of how to do this.

What we did next:

The practitioners looked at Parent B’s views and discussed incorporating them into the next steps plan. As a result of this feedback the format of ‘reports’ in the nursery were changed.

The priorities overall were to:

- Build on the transition process.
- Involve parents fully in the consultation of the new outdoor area to help **build**

stronger partnerships:

- Introduce the Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) project to support the early home learning environment.

Parents were invited to a ‘stay and play’ session to introduce the new way of working for the EYFS in this school. The ‘EYFS village’ project will bring the nursery and reception together for parts of the day where they will share space, practitioners and focused activities together. Outdoor learning ideas and pictures were shared with parents to stimulate discussion around the new outdoor area.

Parents were asked if they could contribute any practical skills and, with their children were asked to name the new project. This was a different approach for this school and findings so far have been encouraging as parents who would not usually come forward have become involved.

Impact:

Main findings:

- Several home visits had taken place with younger children and were now reviewed. Early findings were favourable with parents welcoming the visits..
- The level of 'care' provided is equally as important as the learning that is taking place. This is a similar recurring theme with the parents.
- Practical events, e.g. the stay and play to introduce the outdoor and village naming project are more popular with the parents than the traditional parents' consultation meetings.

Future plans:

It is planned to focus on introducing the *REAL project*. To improve literacy in the EYFS is a key priority for this school due to low Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) 2013 data. The *ORIM Framework* will be used to share knowledge and build parents' confidence in providing Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and a Model for four key strands of early literacy; environmental print, books, oral language and early writing. This work will be started at home visits and will encourage the children and family to find meaning in print. Looking for car licence plates, supermarket signs, road signs, creating maps should lead to the children exploring and attributing meaning to symbols which would have otherwise been unnoticed. The REAL project will build on this practical way of involvement which is important at this school.

Case Study 6 Focus: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND PEAL
RESOURCES/RESEARCH

Overview:

A pack away playgroup operating mornings in term time. They are in the centre of a medium sized town.

Parents are a mix of single mothers/fathers, couples in relationships and Grandparent carers. At present there are 6 dual language children and the parents have varying levels of communication and understanding in English.

Starting point:

Ofsted Action:

Not all parents are successfully engaged in fully supporting their child's learning in the group and at home.

This was the settings starting point for parent partnership. These are still in place in addition to changes made.

- Book bags with daily change of books (child's choice)
- Home/school books for parent to share what they have done and an undertaking for us to fill in once a week. This is done daily for SEN children.
- Open door policy
- Weekly notice of key activities
- Occasional stay and play sessions
- Jordan the bear (to take home and look after with diary and bag)
- Christmas play and invitation to events such as end of year party.
- Regular consultations involving parent in assessment.
- Parent resource folder with information on home learning for different areas of the EYFS, illnesses and health issues etc.

What we did next:

Research into **PEAL** resources led to an anonymous questionnaire for parents. There was a good response. A breakdown of survey results asking parents what they felt were barriers to building a strong relationship with the playgroup were as follows. The numbers indicate the number of people who marked this question. Practitioners were quite surprised as the answers were not what they had predicted!

Work commitments 6

Time and pressures in a busy life 8

Childcare needs 2

Pressures due to lack of money, illness, disability or single parent status 3

Own education level: confidence that you can make a difference 5

Knowledge of what to do 8

Negative feelings about school from own experience 1

Own levels of literacy and numeracy are poor 0

English not first language 2

Attitude e.g. "It's the schools job" 0

Feeling unwelcome or not trusting staff 0

Poor experience of other professionals – suspicion of motives 0

Past and ongoing experience of discrimination 0

Practitioner attitudes: not valuing or listening to parent's view 2 (1 did specify that it didn't mean us but the primary school)

Parents not confident in the face of professional experience 0

Practitioners seem to lack confidence when talking to parents 0

Practitioners unable to communicate educational approach effectively 1

Following this it was decided to focus on 4 main points:

- 1) To build the confidence of parents so they realise that they make a huge difference.
- 2) To help the parents gain a better knowledge of how support learning.
- 3) To find different ways of communicating with parents who have time pressures.
- 4) When written information is given to EAL parents to back it up with a conversation and check that the meaning was understood. E.g. we gave out a notice for a fancy dress day. One child came in exceeding smart clothes as they

understood this to be fancy dress. We vowed to ensure this kind of error did not occur again!

In general it was felt that all this could be achieved only if more effort was made to communicate in a variety of different ways in the hope that something would suit each parent. This might lead to engaging parents in learning more successfully.

General research and articles undertaken by manager and practitioners:

'Partnership with Parents ' Part 1 &2 Juliet Mickelburgh(2011) accessed on the Foundation Stage Forum in Early Years General

*'50 fantastic ideas for involving parents' Marianne Sargent - ISBN-10 1408179555
<http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1140591/eyfs-practice-about-building-positive-relationships-parents>*

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/222082/DCSF-RB138.pdf

www.peal.org.uk practice examples

Resources from Open University study.

Saltley Cluster, Birmingham. The reception classes seek to convey to children that their parents are an important part of the learning process and to the parents that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to extend school based learning. These settings have a lot of EAL families so employ a dual language teaching assistant. The parents are invited into the class for story sessions using dual language and visual clues. There are challenge days where families are invited as a whole to complete challenges such as Knex structures. There are stay and play sessions and explanations as to learning given in their own language.

A staff discussion regarding the *'5 a day' approach to parenting* which had been on the news and was proving contentious (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14403919>).

People's ideas of good parenting come from your own upbringing and are therefore subjective. They can change based on education, confidence, social class, culture and pressures of time. We discussed the impact this has on parents when we approach them and that there is not a one size fits all approach. We were going to need a range of different ways so that each parent is catered for.

Impact:

Changes made in time order.

- A key person sheet was devised to give families before they start. This has a photograph of the child's key person and a brief description of their role. There are photographs of the playgroup teddy bear and information about visits home, the toilets (with information about nappies and changes of clothes) and of the setting. This enables the family and child to look at and familiarise themselves at home.
- Stay and play sessions were increased to every term. Grandparents were also invited to attend and younger siblings. It is now held on a different day each term to try and include each parent. Activities are more focussed and include at least one idea for at home such as how to make play dough, science experiments or large art projects.
- Children's next steps were added to the home/school book for easy reference by parents. This has resulted in some parents recording in the book when significant activities have taken place at home.
- The playgroup teddy was replaced with a new model and the accessories revamped. The children named him Murphy. There is a diary and explanation letter to parents in his suitcase along with a sleep suit, toothbrush and comb. He is very popular with the children and there have been some amazing diary responses and photographs.
- The setting invested in an online learning journey system. This enables photographs and observations to be updated daily. Parents receive email notification of entries. They are able to log in at any time and add their own observations. Practitioners are able to print off information or show parents in the setting if they do not have internet access.
- The parents were given an option of receiving letters/notices via email but this did not prove popular and had minimal take up.
- Introduction of 'bring an item from home' scheme. The children are asked to find an item relating to a specific colour, pattern or letter sound with their parents and bring it in for our display. This has a 60% response rate on average.
- The development of a face book (secret group) for parents only. This is under strict control and parents give written agreement to not share any photographs including children other than their own. This is used to inform what has been done during the session, give notices and a blog on home learning. An activity done in

setting such as making 'lava lamps' is photographed in stages and posted or the use of alphabet spaghetti to talk about the different letters. Parents sometimes use it as a quick means of contact through private messages. This has been extremely popular and parents are highly responsive to posts. However it does require a high level of access and monitoring.

- Lastly the format at the end of the session was changed. Previously parents waited in the hallway and the children were let out to them. The children now retire to a small room for singing time while the parents are invited into the main hall. (This main door is still locked and only parents / named collectors are allowed in.) The key persons take turns to be in the hall so that they can chat to their key-children's parents. They may discuss what the child has done, any key moments related to next steps; make suggestions on how to expand on experiences at home or just have a general chat about what is going on in the life of the child and family. The set up includes: a white board detailing activities or provocations out, the parent resource folder and various leaflets, a WOW board (this has photographs of all the children so that it is visually easy to see if there is a note on your child. Parents are also told if they have not noticed and we always try to chat to the parent about the WOW), a display of children's art work to try and encourage them to be taken home, a copy of the EYFS and the parent's guide and the share a game scheme. A borrow a game scheme was set up to demonstrate that by playing games the parents are developing learning at home. Each game has a laminated card attached explaining what the child is learning by playing this game or activity. We have a mix of resources that have been bought new or from charity shops and they include board games, puzzles, nursery rhyme books and beebot. There has been much positive feedback from practitioners and parents as to this new set up and it is felt that the relationship with the parents has increased significantly. Parents have commented that they feel much more welcome and involved.

It has taken a year to get to this point and we are very happy that the changes seem to be improving our partnership with parents.

Future plans:

We have several ideas in the pipeline to develop further. These include:

- An evening workshop on mathematics
- An evening workshop on how children learn through play using video footage to illustrate and explain.
- Adding story bags to the resource box.
- Books for breakfast. Based on an idea seen in an article the room is set up earlier with lots of comfy areas to share books and breakfast with parents.

Case Study 7 Focus: ROLE OF THE KEY PERSON, SETTING IN AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Overview:

This is a community run pre-school which has amalgamated its separate baby provision with the over two's provision onto one main site. The pre-school regularly has over 100 children on role and a large number of part time practitioners.

The setting has had a change of management and governing committee over the last year.

Starting point:

The key person system was not functioning effectively due to the irregular shift patterns of the staff and many children doing sessions on an ad hoc basis. It was not unusual for a child not to be in at the same time as their key person and the staff team had never had the opportunity to discuss and reflect on the role of the key person which was not well defined. Children were collected and deposited from a foyer with parents not entering the main area of the nursery; this meant that parents rarely saw their child's key person on a day to day basis.

What we did next:

Initially the management sought the advice of the Early Years Team who jointly planned with the manager a workshop with the following aims:

- To have a clear shared understanding of the role of the Key Person.
- To develop a plan of how this will be implemented in the setting:-
 - For existing children/families
 - For new children/families

The workshop was difficult for some practitioners as it challenged the established way of working resulting in individual members of staff acknowledging the need to take greater responsibility for providing an individual experience for children and parents. All of the staff engaged with the discussion and an action plan was drawn up, with tasks allocated, to develop the role of the key person role in supporting children and families.

To date the actions that have been taken include:

- Organising shift patterns to ensure that key persons and their children were in at the same time as much as possible.
- Creating a buddy system to ensure that a child and family know who their special person is at all times.
- Every key person adopted an animal and a toy to represent that animal to reinforce the key group sense of belonging.
- Parents were encouraged to come into the body of the setting to collect and drop of their child and to speak to the key person on a daily basis. Key persons supported this by greeting both the adult and the child.
- The role of the key person and the impact of the actions taken so far are a standing item on the staff meeting agenda and progress is regularly reviewed.

Impact:

- All staff now have a clear understanding of their role as key persons and are working more closely with their key children and families.
- All key children now have a buddy key worker who is responsible when the key person is not there.
- Parents report that they really appreciate being able to come into the setting and speak to their key person, seeing what their children have been doing during the day.
- Key persons planning and evaluation of their key children is resulting in more tailored learning for children.
- Take up of slots at parents evening was very high this term.
- Preparation of the transition to school documents was more straightforward this year due to the sharper focus on key children.

Future plans:

The setting is continuing to review how the key person system is working, what is successful and what can be improved.

The manager would like to implement a home visit service to all children prior to starting pre-school.

Case Study 8 Focus: RAISING EARLY ACHIEVEMENT IN LITERACY (REAL) THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL PRINT

Overview:

This activity formed part of a case study for a wider project that a researcher was working on with Sheffield university. Two childminders were invited to participate, one from Hastings and one from St Leonards. They were both rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. The aim of the study was to increase their awareness of the importance of print in the environment and how it can be used to promote early literacy both within their own setting and to parents.

Starting point:

The childminders were aware that print existed in the environment and they would regularly point out road names and signs to the children in their care. They gave verbal feedback to parents about a child's day, but did not specifically focus on environmental print.

The childminders were both keen to extend their understanding of the importance of print in the environment but needed simple activities that they could share with parents. They wanted to be able to find something parents could do with their children whilst doing everyday activities such as shopping or a trip to the beach.

What happened next:

They planned an environmental print walk around the old town of Hastings. The childminders chose a route that would avoid the amusements as this would have been too much of a distraction. The childminders were asked to bring cameras to record the walk and the signs that the children saw.

The childminders were signposted to the REAL website and information about environmental print was given out. The childminders decided to extend the experience for the children by providing them with their own cameras to record the walk themselves.

They met at the car park at Rock-a-Nore and walked along the seafront to George Street where the walk ended in a bookshop with a café. The researcher modelled how to point out signs to the children and encouraged the children to take their own photos. The childminders joined in role modelling to the children and within a very short space of time the children were finding signs and looking for letters

themselves. The children took lots of photos as did the childminders.

When the childminders got home they used the photos to create a display for parents using their own photos and some that the children took. One childminder made a book to add to the book corner so that the children could sit and look at the photos at a later date.

The parents were shown the displays and were given some examples of things to try at home.

Impact:

The childminders continued to look for print in the environment when they went out on their daily routine trips resulting in the children becoming more aware of the print in their own neighbourhood. The children enjoyed looking at the books of photos, using them to recall the event and to discuss what had happened.

Parents made positive comments on how their children now paid more attention to the print around them. One stated "A's speech has improved since doing this project. If we walk past a sign that is familiar, A will independently say the name"

The childminders commented that participating in the activity definitely made them more aware of the amount of print that children are exposed to and how to use it more effectively to encourage literacy. They noted that the simple action such as drawing a child's attention to a sign can make a major contribution to extending vocabulary, increasing conversation and led to children being more involved with their environment.

The childminders acknowledged that the environmental print walk had given them more ideas to encourage literacy activities and suggestions to pass on to parents.

The displays and photo books were a great success in providing a focus for discussion, recalling past events and getting to know their local community. They noted that children's speech had developed and children were keen to spot signs and ask questions about the print they contained.

The photos the children took gave them a different perspective on what children see from their level - there were a lot of photos of the ground! This created an awareness of signs on the ground that as adults we often overlook.

Future plans:

The childminders intention is to include environmental print in their everyday routines, such as the school run, going to nursery, when out and about in their local environment.

One childminder created her own print walk around the roads near to her house so that children could match signs when they were out on a walk.

For more information about REAL visit: <http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/>

Case Study 9 Focus: KEY PERSON AND SETTLING IN

Overview:

30 place communities run pre-school on school site.

Starting point:

Following an Ofsted inspection, the setting realised that it needed to take steps to ensure that all new parents were given support to remember who their key person was. They had a rigorous system of the key person conducting the settling in visits and spending time over the familiarisation and settling in sessions with the family and the child. They realised that when parents are busy or distracted, they were not always retaining the face and name of the key person.

What happened next:

In order to support the family and the children to remember who their key person was, the setting created a system of colour coding key groups and creating key group displays in the entrance to the play room.

In addition to this, every family received a fridge magnet with a picture of the key person on when they registered. They were encouraged to take this home and decide where to put the magnet so that they could look at it as often as possible.

Impact:

The children and the key workers liked the key group displays and, over time, the parents started to contribute “wows” and observations to the display as well as the practitioners and the children’s voices. This helped to build the key group communities.

The staff were initially reluctant to have their pictures going home with the children. However, they quickly realised that the children and families really liked them and that they were helping to build key person and family relationships. Ofsted commented positively on these measures in a recent Ofsted inspection report.

Future plans:

There are no immediate plans to make changes to the key person system.

Case Study 10 Focus: SHARING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING WITH PARENTS USING VIDEO

Overview:

- A privately run setting which offers 42 places for children aged 0-5
- Town environment with high levels of socio economic deprivation
- Multi-cultural area
- Close links with Children's Centre

Starting point:

- Setting has good partnership with parents through home visits for new children, daily discussion, sharing learning journeys and parent meetings
- Setting wanted to focus on children's experiences in nursery and sharing the key development and learning with parents in a more accessible way for all families
- Initial focus children were those considered to be from vulnerable families and those with EAL

What happened next:

- Setting introduced a video project across the nursery with a view sharing children's learning with families
- Purchased 2 video recorders
- Key person planned to video up to 2 children per week for between 2-5 minutes
- Parents were invited to the nursery to review the video with the key person
- In depth discussion with key person across all EYFS areas of learning
- Key person discussed next steps with parents, how the child was developing and learning at home and shared ideas for home learning
- Snapshot photos with significant learning were captured in children's learning journeys

Impact:

- Further improvement on the good relationships formed with parents and families
- Shared understanding of each child's development and how to support their learning

- Positive feedback from parents
- Opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their practice and how to further support children's development and learning

Future plans:

- Setting is planning to introduce the PACT (Parents and Children Together) project which will recruit volunteers who will undertake the Level 2 City and Guilds qualification in 'Work with Parents', with volunteering opportunities to support local families with their children's learning and development through play
- The focus will be on working with vulnerable families where the PACT volunteer will work alongside the key person and visit the family's home to watch and discuss the video

Case Study 11 Focus: INTRODUCTION OF HOME VISITS PRIOR TO STARTING AT PRE-SCHOOL.

Overview:

Private setting over two floors in a coastal town. Setting has been open for three years.

Caters for children aged from 0 to 5 years of age

Open 48 weeks per year.

Starting point:

The owners of the setting had been looking at ways of developing stronger links with families and how to obtain better quality information before the child starts in the setting.

What happened next:

As the setting became more established and the staff team more confident and settled in their roles, the owner/managers decided that they would introduce the offer of a home visit to all new starters.

The staff team met to discuss how this would work and two members of the team developed a home visit check list. This was used to record information which helped the setting to begin to know the child and family, as well as create a developmental baseline.

All visits were conducted by a manager/deputy and the child's key person. The manager went through the parent pack with the family, took notes, explained the settings policy and procedures and explored any concerns or anxieties with the family. A parent pack was left with the family for them to read

The key person played with the child, getting to know them, their interests and what they liked to play with at home.

Impact:

Parents and staff were initially cautious of the new approach and questioned the purpose of home visits. However, more than two thirds of the families have taken up the offer of a home visit since the start of the scheme. All families who have had a home visit have reported that they found it valuable and reassuring. The children arrive at the setting being able to recognise their key person and at least one other member of the staff team. The key person is able to plan effectively for

the child immediately; they know what the child likes and can set up familiar resources from day one.

Parents report that it helps them to get to know the key person and that their children are settling in well. Staff appreciate the opportunity to meet the children before they start in the setting and report that this makes it easier for them to meet new children's needs. This has resulted in easier transitions into pre-school and children who settle quickly.

The managers have noticed that there is a poor take up from families who speak English as an additional language (EAL).

Future plans:

The home visits are considered by the setting to be a valuable use of resources and they plan to continue to do them.

The managers and staff plan to investigate and reflect on why EAL families are not taking up this offer and try to address the families concerns. They will talk to the staff in the schools they feed into to see if they have experienced a similar reluctance from EAL families and what strategies they employ to address this.

Case Study 12 Focus: SETTLING IN, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Overview:

The setting is run by a voluntary management committee consisting of staff, parents and church representatives and judged outstanding by Ofsted. It provides full day care for up to 26 children from 9.00am to 3.00pm during school term time. The setting geographically serves a diverse community. For example, the settled traveller community in the area choose to use this setting above others, and there are also some children who transfer to the independent sector for school.

Starting point:

In 2013, Ofsted found that practitioners were exceptionally skilled at helping children settle and develop secure attachments. Their partnership working was considered highly effective and the pre-school praised for its inclusive ethos. Being very reflective the setting wanted to further improve what was done with parents which led to them seeking parental views again.

Parent A interviewed in the setting felt the support she received from the setting had helped make the difference between her family coping and not coping when her child had needed surgery. Practitioners had signposted the parent to services that could help and support her child and the key person co-ordinated some of the services on her behalf:

'They don't have to get so involved, but K is fantastic, she really is, she is really involved with it, she always asks if there is anything else she can do. I have never had this before'.

The setting set up a contact book to capture what the child does at home and in the setting as he finds it difficult to express himself clearly verbally. This helped the two way communication and was appreciated by the parent.

The parent reported that at a previous setting there was little warmth from practitioners and language difficulties were seen as a barrier. At this setting she feels the staff recognise and understand the difficulties and provide inclusive activities for her son. The parent feels that what she has now is quite unique; rather than single out her son, the environment is adapted for him, and joint approaches are encouraged at home.

However, she would still like to be further involved:

'I would be really up for coming in and seeing what they do... it would help knowing how he is developing'.

What happened next:

The practitioners devised a next steps plan which identified areas for improvement following discussions incorporating Parent A's comments:

- Use the parent voice more widely in children's portfolios.
- Share with parents how their children learn. They were keen to introduce the characteristics of effective learning and schemas to parents as a vehicle for looking at how their children develop and learn.
- Introduce home visits with key persons.
- Offer stay and play sessions for parents.

Previously comments were requested from all parents in the form of 'WOW' slips, which parents were asked to complete when their child achieved something significant. What was received back were basic descriptions of what children do rather than capturing some significant event which would help plan for their learning. It was decided to look at other ways to obtain the parent voice to ensure they had a holistic picture of the child and to develop an approach where learning in the home and nursery could be connected.

The manager held a parents meeting with a focus on sharing how children learn, and linked this to behaviour. Home visits were also introduced. Parents who did not attend or take up the offer of home visits would be contacted individually.

As a result of the parents meeting, existing 'story sacks' were revamped to be far more inclusive, using less text, more pictures, and renamed 'home learning' sacks. Activities for use at home were revised to include pictorial suggestions and games added. A parent friendly observation sheet was included with clear guidelines as to what children would be learning from each activity. Talking tins, where practitioners record messages for parents and parents and children record messages back were included as an alternative to the written word. Initially there was little interest in the bags so it was decided to try a different tactic by giving them directly to the children.

The setting procured two video cameras to use with children in the setting. They discussed the best uses of this resource and agreed on the way it would be

introduced. The aims were clear; to improve dialogue, support learning from home and introduce the family to what the child was doing in the nursery. Observations would be shared with parents illustrating when their child's behaviour may be linked to schemas or a cluster of schemas.

A child was chosen for the video trial and after a period of time the setting analysed how the video had been used by the child's key person. This child was initially chosen as he is on the autism spectrum, and his parent had been experiencing difficulties with his behaviour.

Impact:

The video footage was shared with the parent by the key person. The aim was to demonstrate just what the child was able to do and create an opportunity for dialogue with the family. The parent found this really helpful and enlightening as it focussed on what the child could do. This enabled a powerful learning opportunity for the parent, child and key person.

The child reacted significantly when the video was shared with him. He pointed enthusiastically at himself and listened while the practitioner helped relive the experience. This was a huge move forward for this child.

Future plans:

Introducing schemas, to use as part of a shared language, is planned for the parents.

The video recorders have proved to be a very useful tool in capturing children's imagination and a fun vehicle for learning. It is planned to roll out their use with all the children on a rota basis and use with parents in the holidays.

Be clearer about what you expect from parents; be interactive, use clear language and make it fun.

Listen and act on what parents say. Ensure feedback to parents is positive; focus on strengths.

Ensure the key person system is explained at home visits and induction.

My Transition story through the eyes of a child

My teacher from big school came and visited me at nursery she came and played with me and read me a story. My key person showed her my special book (Learning Journey) and told her all about me; the things I liked doing and what I was good at. My teacher took a photograph of me and said that would help her to remember what I looked like over the long summer holiday.

My mummy went to my big school to find out more about what was going to happen. She met lots of the people who help us in school, watched a film of what it was going to be like for me when I started in Reception and found out about all the things I was going to do, how I was going to learn and how my teacher was going to help me. Mummy had a look around my classroom, bought my school uniform and tasted some of the food I was going to eat at dinner time. She also had a chat with the school nurse because she was worried that I sometimes bumped into things. I got some glasses after that and they help me not to bump into things.

After the meeting mummy told me I was going to be in red group. I went to school for a little while before the summer and when I visited my classroom there were other children in red group and also children in blue group. There were 12 of us and some of the children were my friends from nursery. Mummy came with me and we made a special picture together doing lots of drawing and sticking; I then played with some of my friends. Whilst I was playing mummy went and had a cup of tea with some other mummies and daddies and made some new friends whom we later met at the park in the summer. Mummy, my brother and I also went to a teddy bears picnic at school with lots of other children; some already at school and some like me starting school after the summer. I took my bear Fred and my little brother took his bear Bluey we played outside but we especially liked eating the honey sandwiches that the bigger children had made for us. I was a bit shy but my friend was also there so I could sit with him.

During the long summer holiday my teacher sent me a postcard which said that she was looking forward to seeing me in September.

After having the summer off from nursery and spending lots of time with mummy and my brother, my teacher came to my house with her assistant. They chatted with mummy and played with me; I really liked making up stories with my farm animals, since I had been to the farm with nanny, so we made up some really good stories and I showed her my farm books. Before she left my teacher took another photograph of me and gave me a special countdown calendar so that I could count the sleeps and days before I went to school.

My first day at school was with the friends I had made in red group, mummy came in with me and we found my peg which had my photograph by it, so that I knew where to hang my things up. The special picture mummy and I had made before the summer was on the wall, I felt really special. Mummy stayed for a while and we played with the farm animals. When mummy went home I did lots of playing indoors and outdoors and I had my sandwiches at lunchtime. I had another day in school with my friends in red group so I was really learning all about school and where everything was.

Then the next time I went to school all the friends in my class were there. It was much noisier but so much fun and my teacher is so funny.

The transition process:

- Teachers visit/phone nurseries to speak to the child's key person
- If a visit to the nursery they meet the child; take a photograph of them; speak to the child's key person and look at the child's Learning Journey
- An information session is held for parents – option of an afternoon (4pm) or an evening (6pm)
- At the information session we:
 - Say which class the child will be in and what colour group
 - Give out all the transition dates – taster sessions; teddy bears picnic; home visit; settles; starting school
 - Play the YouTube clip – What a day in Reception looks like in school.
 - Have a PowerPoint on the seven areas of learning and development
 - Explain why we observe so much
 - Have a tour of the classroom and meet the staff
 - Have school uniform available to buy
 - Let the parents taste samples of the food children will have for their school dinner
 - Introduce the Parent Support Advisers and the School Nurse

- The children are put into a colour group - each colour group is invited to a taster session of an hour (a group of 12 children) giving them an opportunity to talk about routines with the teacher and explore the classroom in a small group
- At the taster session the child and parent make something together which will be displayed on the wall in September
- Whilst the child is playing at the taster session parents are invited to have a drink in the café and network with each other
- Families are invited to a teddy bears picnic which the present Reception children host; making honey sandwiches for all to share
- During the Summer holiday a child receives a postcard from their teacher to remind them that they are coming to school
- In September each family has a home visit from the teacher and the Teaching Assistant – an opportunity to informally talk about the child, their interests, any special requirements, any other circumstances the family wishes to share and a chance to play with the child. A photograph is taken of the child and put on the child's peg at school
- A personal timetable is given to the child at the home visit to highlight the settle days and the school start date
- All children have 2 full settle days in their group – 12 children
- Children start school as a class

APPENDIX 1: PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

These are the responses from a focus group held at the start of the project.

What does 'partnership with parents' mean to you?	What might be the barriers to partnership working for parents?	What qualities do you need to form relationships and partnerships with parents?	What might be the barriers to partnership working for practitioners?	What do you currently do that supports partnership working?	
<p>Sharing a child's journey</p> <p>Being a support to parents</p> <p>Team around the child</p> <p>Valuing each others part in child's learning</p> <p>Building a trusting relationship (Home Learning Partnership)</p> <p>Being a team around the child so we value what parents bring</p> <p>Demystifying our roles/learning for parent so we are professionally accessible and they understand what we do</p> <p>Working with them, regardless of your opinion</p>	<p>Life pressures i.e. lots of children, CP issues, parent health</p> <p>Lack of literacy skills</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Unapproachable key person</p> <p>Language</p> <p>Parents lack of understanding of the importance</p> <p>Working hours of parents</p> <p>They don't have an expectation of partnership work so don't see purpose/use</p> <p>Parental choice – be respectful</p> <p>Parents own perception of the person they are talking to</p> <p>Fear of being in school</p> <p>Feeling intimidated by staff</p>	<p>Flexibility</p> <p>To start from the beginning</p> <p>Approachable</p> <p>Non-judgemental</p> <p>Friendly face</p> <p>Common ground – an interest in their child</p> <p>Build strong relationships from the start and be ready to change key person if not working</p> <p>Good communication skills</p> <p>Open minded</p> <p>Need to know their 'level'</p> <p>Good listening</p> <p>Thick-skinned</p> <p>Calm</p> <p>Patience</p> <p>Generous with time</p>	<p>Uneasy talking with parents</p> <p>Parent drops off quickly and is reluctant to interact</p> <p>Unapproachable parents</p> <p>Aggressive parents</p> <p>Time (in ratio, parent rushing off for work, etc.)</p> <p>Pre-conceptions about a parents interests (we believe they are not interested so we don't engage with them)</p> <p>Someone else always drops off and collects and practitioner doesn't get to see or talk to parents</p> <p>Confidence of practitioners</p> <p>Understanding of the EYFS by parents</p> <p>Interpersonal relationships</p> <p>Parents who have had a bad experience of education themselves</p> <p>Understanding what our expectations are i.e. the importance of PSE</p> <p>Disaffected parents</p>	<p>Parents in school sessions</p> <p>'Letters and Sounds parent support'</p> <p>New parents evening</p> <p>Home visits</p> <p>Time for more informal conversations</p> <p>Staff member welcoming parents each day</p> <p>Parent reading sessions</p> <p>Use of parent support worker</p> <p>Learning story events</p> <p>Parent play sessions</p> <p>Settling-in sessions – stay for 1st one (1hr 30min) with key person</p> <p>Toy library with parent observation sheets</p> <p>Regular liaison with key person</p> <p>Key person gives feedback at the end of day</p> <p>Summer term – introduction to Nursery/Reception evening and also for KS1</p>	<p>Newsletters</p> <p>Trips that include parents</p> <p>Cream teas and read, Ginger beer and pizza Fathers Day, Mince Pie and read</p> <p>'Puzzle it out' sessions (games and activities)</p> <p>Open assemblies to show activities i.e. after Arts Week and end of term celebrations</p> <p>Asking parents and trying different ways to engage</p> <p>Home/school link books</p> <p>Meet and greet at beginning and end of day</p> <p>Notice board outside every class</p> <p>Emails</p> <p>Class representatives</p> <p>PTA</p> <p>Open door policy and consultations</p> <p>Invite parents in to 'showcase' something they do that is interesting, inspiring or different</p>

QUOTES
(displayed at the focus group)

We need to begin with the firm belief that all parents are interested in the development and progress of their own children.

Penn Green Centre for the Under Fives and Families

Recognising parents' expertise in their own children and lives, doing things with families rather than to them is crucial.

Moran et al. (2004)

Children whose fathers* are involved in their learning do better at school and have better mental health, even after other factors such as fathers' socio-economic status and education have been taken out of the equation.

*significant adults
Flouri and Buchanan (2001); Hobcraft (1998)

How parents experience services early on can really affect how they feel about both services and themselves as mums or dads.

Disabled parent

In the primary age range, parental involvement has a greater impact on achievement than the quality of schools.

Desforges (2003)

APPENDIX 2: PARENT SELF EVALUATION TOOL

(Adapted from the PICL materials)

Please tick one cloud for each question.

Do I know my child's interests?

I know what my child is fascinated by and provide them with experiences they are interested in.

I know some of the things my child is interested in and sometimes provide them with experiences.

I'm not sure about my child's interests and how to provide them with experiences.

How do I support my child's learning?

I can see my child is learning and I support this at home.

Sometimes I can see my child is learning and I give them things to do at home.

I'm not sure how my child is learning and what I can do at home.

How is my relationship with my child's key person?

I am confident to discuss my child with their key person and feel my contribution is valued.

Sometimes I find it difficult to discuss my child with their key person.

I am unsure about discussing my child with their key person.

Appendix 3: Starting at an Early Years Setting

Your child at home

Why are we asking parents for this information?

When children are in their home environment, they can be completely themselves. Our aim is for your child to feel equally comfortable in their new setting so that they can confidently play and explore. As the person or people who know your child best, please give us as much information as possible to help us to understand their stage of development. We would also welcome any other information or photos that you would like to share with us. We will use all of the information you give us to support your child to become truly settled in their new environment and to maximise their development and learning through play. It will also help us to notice very quickly if there is a difference between your child's development at home and in their new environment, so we can work together to give them the support they need.

It would be advised that this questionnaire is completed with the parents through discussion in order to gain maximum information and understanding, and to set strong foundations for partnership working. Parents should be given a copy in advance of the discussion. If completed by the parent, time should be made to discuss their responses more thoroughly. All of the questions are optional. Please include any statutory information on the registration form.

About you (please include all adults with parental responsibility)

Your full name(s):

What would you like us to call you (please note pronunciation)?

- What are you looking forward to and do you have any worries about leaving your child?

- Is there a specific area of your child's development that you are focusing on or would like to discuss? For example: feeding themselves, toilet training, first words, crawling, jumping etc
- What are your priorities for your child's early year's experiences with us?
- Do you have any particular interests or skills you would be happy to share with us? For example; gardening, cooking, art etc.
- Anything else you would like us to know about your parenting style or how we can ensure we work together with you to support your child?

About your child (please also provide details of current daily routine on separate form)

Your child's full name:

What would your child like us to call them (please note pronunciation)?

- How does your child feel about new activities or experiences?
- Does your child have any special relationships with other people or pets and what do they call them?
- Has your child experienced separation in the past? For example: spent time with a relative or friend without you there.
- Is there anything that might help us to support your child to develop relationships with other adults and/or children?

How your child develops and learns:

- What really interests your child and holds their attention?
- How does your child feel about having a go or trying something new? Will they persist if difficulties arise?
- Is your child independent, preferring to solve problems themselves, but willing to accept support and ask for help if needed?
- Details of fears / dislikes that your child needs extra support to deal with

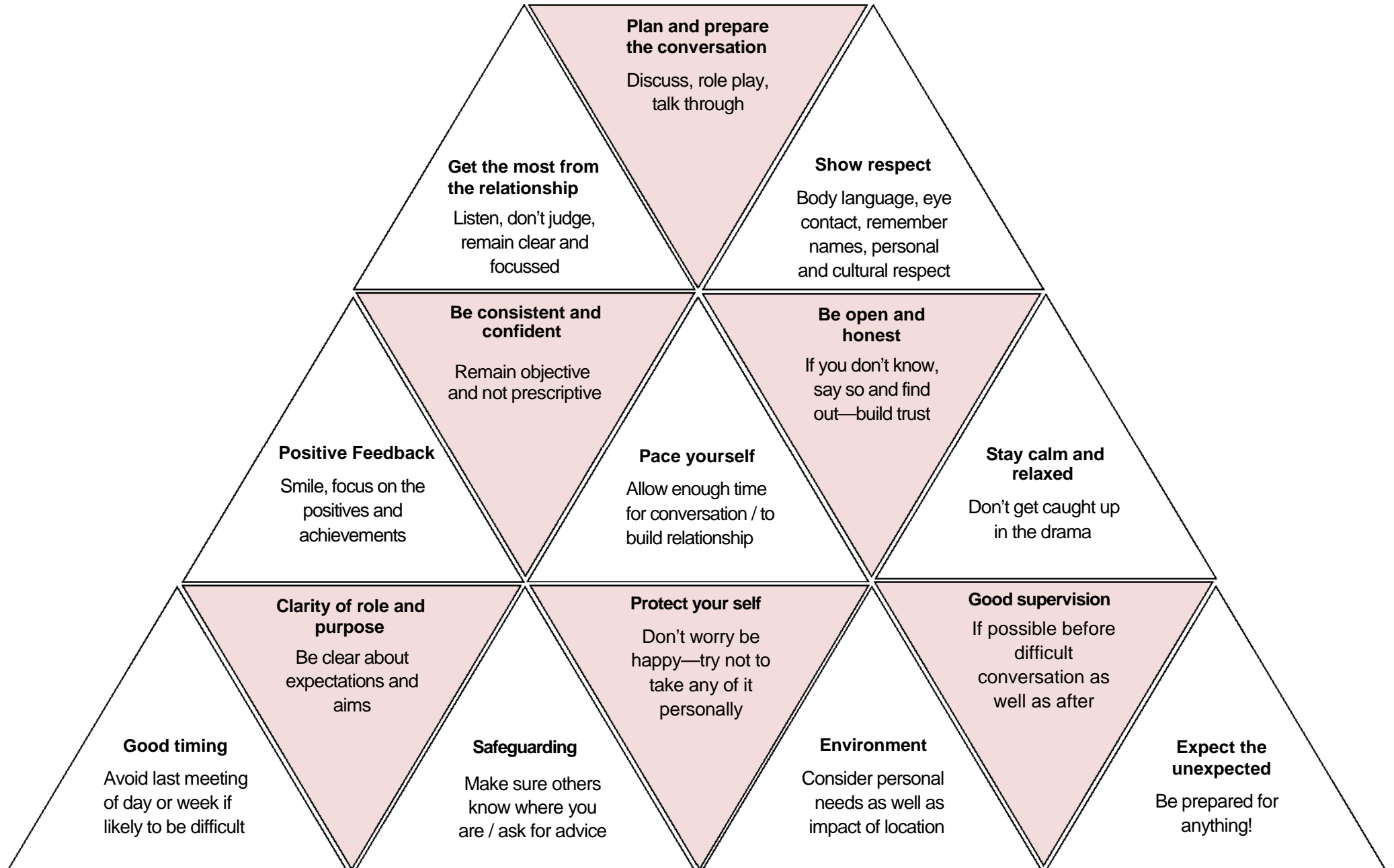
- How does your child show that they are feeling upset/worried/unsettled?
- How is your child comforted when they are upset/worried/hurt?
- Details of any comforters, special toys, and what your child calls them
- Favourite toys / games / pastimes
- How does your child communicate their likes, dislikes and needs? For example: points, signs or verbally
- Favourite songs/rhymes
- Favourite book(s)
- Special words/body language/signs used
- Do you feel your child's communication development is as you would expect for their age?
- What physical activities does your child enjoy? For example: running, crawling, painting, making marks, getting messy, digging, balancing, climbing etc.
- Do you feel that your child's physical development is as you would expect for their age?

Personal care:

- What are mealtimes like for your child?
- Details of any support needed with feeding/mealtimes
- Details of nappy changing/toileting
- Details of daytime naps /rest times

Anything else you would like us to know about your child:

Appendix 4: Difficult Conversations - Top 15 Things to Do or Consider



Appendix 5: High quality transition process supporting school readiness

As schools we agree to:

- Provide home visits
- A staggered start
- Have parent information sessions
- Engage in Stay and Play sessions throughout the year
- Hold transition events for families such as teddy bears picnic; play sessions alongside present YR children
- Develop transition booklets – for families and early years settings

Together with early years settings we agree to:

- Liaise with each other by telephone; through visits; invites to the school; ESCC Early Years Network meetings
- Provide a seamless transition for the child and family
- Ensure continuity of development and learning for each child

We as parents agree to help our children become:

- Independent
- A communicator
- Confident
- Emotionally secure

*“Parental interest in their child’s education has **four** times more influence on attainment at 16 than socio-economic background”*

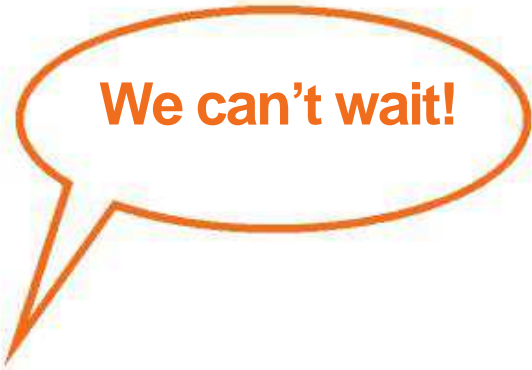
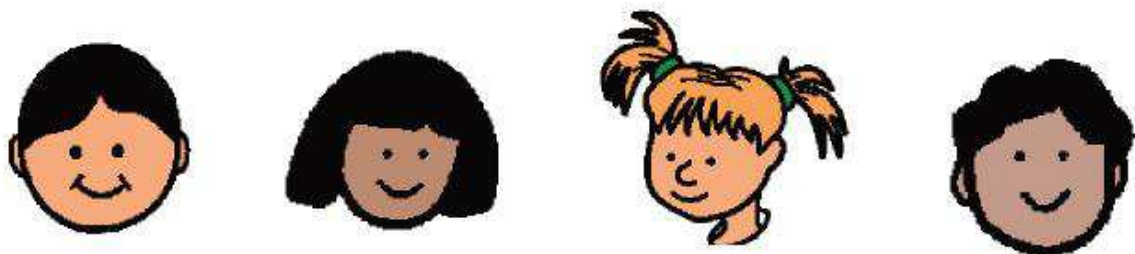
L Feinstein and J Symons 1999

Appendix 6: supporting school readiness
What will you do next?

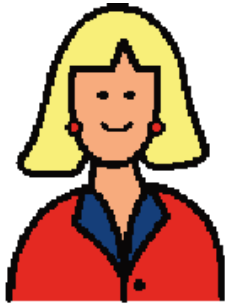
For parents/carers	For children	With settings/schools



Getting ready for school



At their school your child will meet lots of new people



their teacher



new friends



their teaching assistant



the headteacher

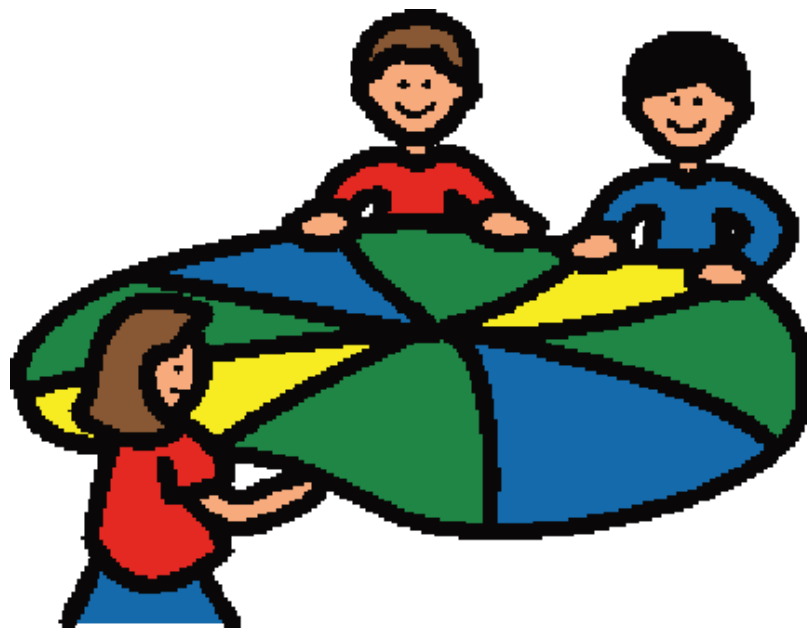


the mid-day supervisors

They will have their own classroom



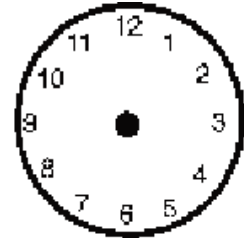
They will be in Reception with lots of other children the same age and there will be lots to look forward to!



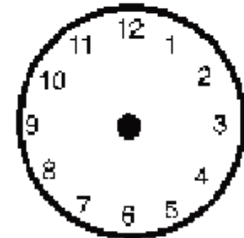
Times

The school will tell you:

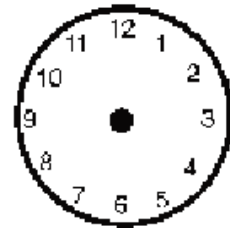
when the school day begins



when and where your child will eat lunch



when the school day ends



You will need to be there in plenty of time so your child doesn't worry.



During the school day your child will be able to do lots of things:

choose to play indoors



choose to play outdoors



work with an adult and some of their friends



story time



P.E.



Helping your child be ready for school

Children develop in different ways and at different rates. Speak to your school if your child needs additional help.

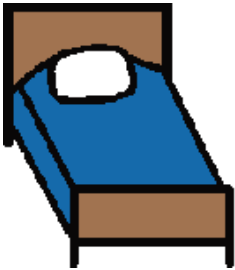


I am practising...
going to the toilet by myself
washing my hands with soap
and water
blowing my nose

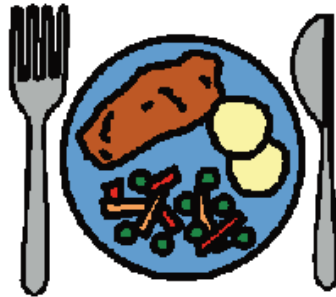
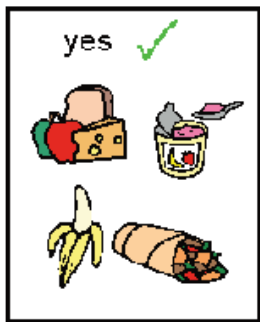


**Your child may have toilet accidents when they start school.
Don't worry – this is quite common.**

It is important that your child keeps healthy by having:



a good bedtime routine –
children at this age need lots of sleep



a healthy diet including
fruit and vegetables



up to date immunisations



an eye check



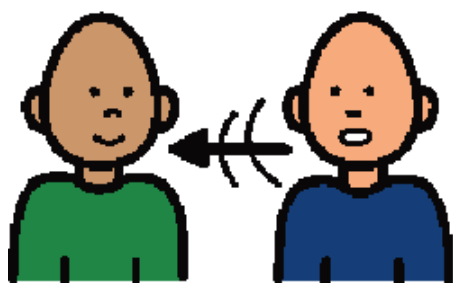
a visit to the dentist

It is important that your child is able to make themselves understood by others and can ask for help when they need to.

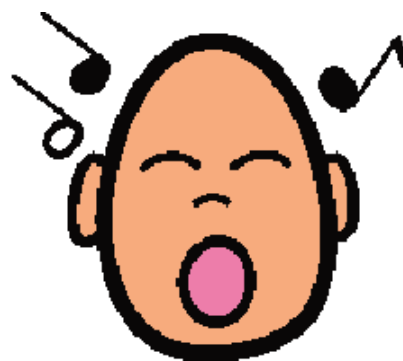
So things to do together:



listen to each other



talk about things you do



sing rhymes and songs

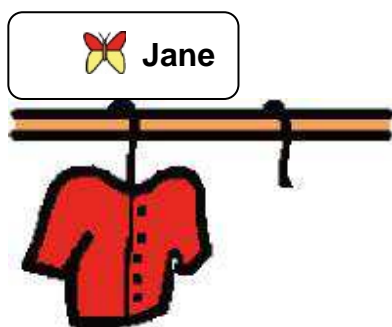


share books and stories

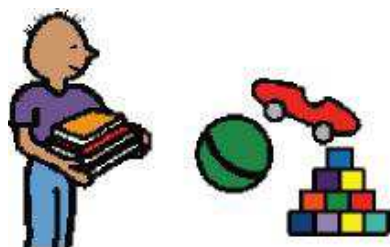
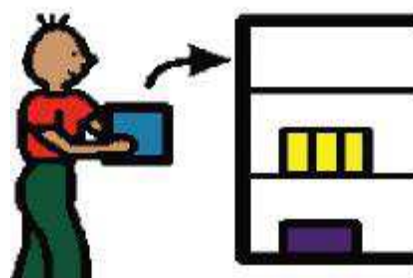
It is important that your child is able to do things for themselves...



putting my things
where they belong



tidying things away



looking after my
books and toys



waiting for my turn

School uniform



sweatshirt



trousers with an elasticated waist



skirt with an elasticated waist

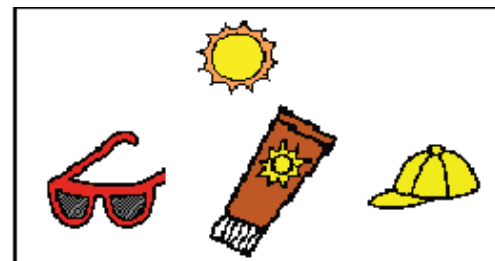


black shoes



a coat most days

Your child will need clothes suitable for playing indoors and outdoors and appropriate for the weather.



Your child should have a bag for their things.



It can be helpful to have a change of clothes.

The school may ask you to supply P.E. clothes



Please label everything with either:

- a permanent marker pen and redo as necessary
- stick in labels or
- sew in labels

James Brown

If you don't label things, they may get lost.

I am practising...

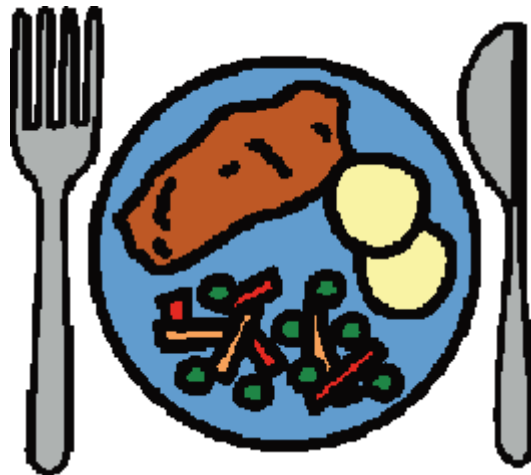
putting on and taking off my
uniform

putting my shoes on – velcro
fastenings are easier



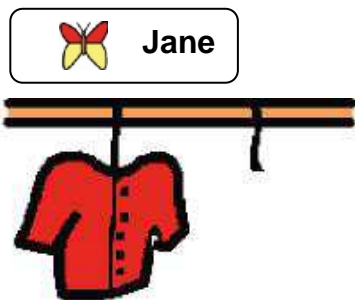
I am learning to
fold my clothes

At lunch time your child can have a free school meal.

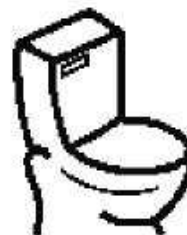


I am practising...
sitting at a table
using a knife and fork
carrying a tray

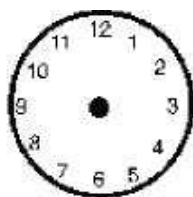
When you visit the school with your child you can find out about...



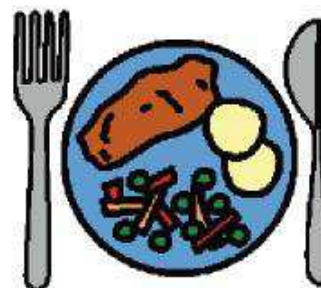
where they will keep their personal things



where the toilets are



school start and finish times



where your child will eat lunch



their classroom

If you have any worries, please ask the teacher.

Contact with the school

The school will need to know any absence.

If your child is ill or has an appointment, you must tell the school first thing in the morning.

Ask the school how you should let them know.



It is important that your child attends school regularly. Taking time off and having holidays during the school term can affect your child's learning.



Sometimes the school will send you messages or newsletters. You will need to find out how these will be sent to you.

It is important to check your child's bag or bookbag daily as there may be messages in there.

Top tips

Starting school is an exciting step. If you are positive about this, your child will be too!

Begin preparing your child for school in plenty of time. Take them on visits offered by the school.

If you have any worries about your child's health speak to your Health Visitor or the School Nurse before they start school and once they start school.

Remember morning routines are very important. Make time for breakfast as it is hard to concentrate or be happy when you are hungry.

Arrive at school in plenty of time in the morning and afternoon so your child does not worry.

Have fun sharing time together.

Enjoy books together.

Things I want to know...

Appendix 8: Developing and Maintaining Positive Relationship With Parents

DO	DON'T
Make sure that you ALWAYS talk about what the child can do in a positive way - highlighting strengths and achievements and possible next steps in development	Start by talking about “the problem”
Talk to all families about their children irrespective of whether you have a concern about development or not	Only discuss a child’s progress when there is “a problem”
Ensure that you are able to talk uninterrupted	Have a snatched conversation in the hallway
Be sensitive about family’s feelings – they may not have the same concerns as you	Start by saying something like “you do realise that Xxx is behind in ???”
Have a plan of how to address area of need you have identified – this includes what you will do, what they can (realistically) do at home and what other support might be available	Describe the problem but not the solution
Help the family see how they can be part of the solution – keep the child at the centre of the discussion	Imply that the family are part of the problem

Appendix 9: Ideas For Working In Partnership With Parents

- ✓ Begin working in partnership with parents before the child comes into the setting: You can provide taster days where the parent comes into the setting and stays with their child, provide home visits, or drop-ins throughout a designated week. During this time practitioners can take photographs of the child and their family and of the things that interest the child. Formal and informal paperwork can be done as the child plays and explores.
- ✓ Establish a settling in process that all parents and practitioners are clear about to ensure that every child has a positive experience of starting to attend. You could write a settling in policy.
- ✓ At the beginning of each session have a settling in time when parents can come in with their child and help them to self-register. Allow them time to play alongside their child, talk to the child's key person, or look through your records of their child's progress before the session begins.
- ✓ Use your records of the child's progress as a way of talking to parents about their child's interests and achievements. Encourage parents to contribute photos and information/observations about their child at home.
- ✓ Provide information meetings/coffee mornings – drop-off and pick-up times are usually best for this.
- ✓ Takes photos or video footage of children in nursery on a regular basis (daily or weekly) and play this back on a computer or TV at pick-up/drop-off times so parents can see what their child has been learning/exploring.
- ✓ Provide an area in, or just outside, the setting where parents can sit and share books, or look through their child's learning record, with their child.
- ✓ Set up a book/resource lending scheme.
- ✓ Make books of outings and special occasions to document learning experiences and share them with the children during the sessions, with parents at drop-off/pick-up time, and with new parents looking round the setting.
- ✓ Display photos of children with their parents in the setting/in the child's learning record. Document the comments of both child and parent(s).
- ✓ Encourage parents and other family members to contribute recyclable resources or their time and skills.
- ✓ Discuss with parents what their child has been interested in at nursery, and make suggestions about what they could do at home to build on this.

Further reading

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