

# EARLY YEARS AND FOUNDATION STAGE

## Education Expert Group Paper

### **How best to close gaps and ensure the best possible start for all children by improving the quality of Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) in Trusts.**

A paper published by the Education Expert Group following a request for advice from CEOs

We all recognise, and research confirms, that a high-quality EY education is vitally important and that pre-school children are at a crucial point in their development. Recent research has found that children who attend pre-school provision, of any kind, attained higher total GCSE scores than those who did not. The higher the quality of the pre-school provision, the higher the difference made (Ofsted, 2024). The education and care that they receive affects not only future attainment but also their future health and happiness.

Having considered recent research and the experience of Queen Street Group members, we hope that the following advice will benefit all settings.

### **Leadership**

- Familiarise your team with recent research and external organisations (see below).
- Start with your vision for EYFS – what is your approach? How does it align with Trust values?
- Plan and prioritise opportunities to develop EYFS leadership.
- Upskill Trust leaders/headteachers with EYFS expertise to ensure rigour, impact and quality.
- Demystify the different aspects of early years to support all leaders in understanding what they are seeing and how that links to a more traditional classroom.



- Ensure high-quality space, resources and infrastructure (e.g. online platform to share and communicate, share statutory updates, research and best practice).
- Ensure all statutory requirements are met such as ratios, qualifications, paediatric first aid and supervision. Build in regular evaluation and compliance checks (include training to ensure team members understand statutory welfare requirements).
- Have a clear business model that is understood by each school setting – fees, guidance, model letters, staffing ratios, define the offer, resources, charging policy, understand financial incentives and opportunities:
  - look at how PP funded children can access 85% of the cost of wrap-around care
  - establish clear expectations of hourly or sessional rates and additional fees for nursery and wrap-around care
  - explore funding opportunities for these services
  - consider pooling some funding for universal training across a region or Trust

## Curriculum

- Prioritise an ambitious and carefully sequenced curriculum from EYFS to KS4 (not an isolated phase).
- Ensure the quality of the curriculum is well matched to the rest of the school's curriculum and that there are high aspirations for all children from the earliest possible age.
- Consider how children will acquire foundational knowledge. Plan sufficient practice time to support fluency and embed knowledge and skills.
- Ensure your curriculum and environment is intentionally planned to address the gaps in learning of each cohort – ask 'why this, why now?'
- Check the EYFS curriculum is not overloaded with non-essential activities or activities that enable some children to 'opt out' through session design.
- Focus on the PRIME areas of learning with the youngest children and those with gaps in their foundational knowledge.

- Consider your approach (i.e. JABADAO) to improving physical development and to teach children to recognise how to have their basic needs met (such as being hungry, tired or wet).
- Be clear about your approach to EY assessment? Utilise baseline assessment tools (i.e. CEM Base).
- Consider your approach to supporting pre-verbal children (i.e. intensive interaction).
- Enhance your curriculum by using diagnostic tools (i.e. WELLCOMM and ELKLAN) to identify gaps in communication and language.

## Provision for learning

- Ensure the design and implementation of provision is progressive across year groups.
- Balance guided learning and child-initiated approaches.
- Be explicit about your approach to planning quality provision.
- Audit your learning environment (both indoors and outdoors) to ensure that provision is well-organised, stimulating and appropriate for the age of the children you are teaching.

## Partnership – Understanding your context and community

- Asset mapping – what does the local community at each of your schools settings look like?
- Establish strong links with families as early as possible.
- Work in partnership with health and social care professionals, family centres and community groups.
- Advocate for EY funding.



- Ensure that leaders across the Trust are part of this EYFS community.
- Consider using the 'Five to Thrive' approach to support staff and families. Use a shared language based on connections and trust.
- Make use of external expertise, i.e. Early Years Alliance (there are two DfE funded hubs in each region).

### Recruitment and retention

- Prioritise recruitment of high-quality and experienced EYFS staff.
- Invest in EY training and continuous professional development.
- Include EY training as part of Headteacher induction.
- Make use of recent EY research and guidance – take an evidence-based approach (see below).
- Develop links with your regional Stronger Practice Hub.
- Lead EY training – develop outstanding leaders and facilitators to provide EY training to your team and external audience (i.e. offer a L3 qualification and deliver this).
- Build strong EY networks across the Trust.

### SEND, vulnerable and disadvantaged learners

- Engage parents and families from the start. Consider:
  - Meaningful on-entry processes with transition as early as possible for children who are vulnerable or have SEND.
  - Home visits.
  - Targeted information gathering – identify any potential barriers.
  - Involve your SENDCO.

- Embedding specialised interventions holistically.
  - Whole-Setting Integration: Are interventions embedded across all areas of the setting? Do staff understand how to adapt activities and resources to meet individual needs?
  - Intentional Planning: How intentional are your staff about planning interventions? Is there a clear link between assessment, planning, implementation, and review? Regular discussions and shared planning time are essential.
- Knowing your local context.
  - Local Authority Links: Do your settings have strong working relationships with the SEND teams in your LA? Are staff aware of the referral pathways and local support services available?
  - Signposting Families: Are staff confident in signposting families to relevant support services, such as health visitors, social care, or charities? Do you have a readily available list of local resources?

#### Working group contributors

**Jackie Griffiths**

REACH2 Academy Trust

**Ben Greene**

Ebor Academy Trust

**Dave Barber**

Ebor Academy Trust

**Claire Harnden**

South Farnham Educational Trust