

Meadowview Preschool: Transitions



Meadowview Preschool is a small, pack-away setting, operating from a Community Centre. There are currently 15 children on roll. When the EYPP was introduced in the Summer Term 2015 six children were eligible for the funding. Three eligible children were due to start in to school Reception classes in September. Of these, two children were already receiving interventions from Speech and Language Therapists for previously identified needs, and one was already receiving support from staff within the setting for Personal, Social and Emotional Development and wellbeing.

When the funding was received, staff reflected upon the needs of the EYPP cohort. They looked at observations of learning and children's progress using the Development Matters guidance; considered key people's knowledge of key children's and their learning journal entries; reflected on information from the Leuven Scale observations of Wellbeing and Involvement and included information from consultations with parents. Staff identified transition to school as an area where the EYPP cohort were potentially more at risk from disadvantage. Alison explained, "Staff realise that for many children, the first big transition in their life is often from Preschool or Nursery, to Reception, when lots of the things they have come to know and trust are suddenly going to change. Children's early experiences of transition will impact on the way they perceive change throughout their lives, so transition itself is a learning experience and we want it to be a positive one for all our children so that they learn to feel positive about change and the benefits it can bring." The setting has always been mindful of the high proportion of disadvantaged children and families it serves and staff have been particularly concerned for these children at times of transition, when they may be particularly vulnerable without the extra support that working with families, and multi-professional and inter-agency work can provide. "We are also very aware that transition to school is not a single event but a process, so staff have agreed that we need to begin preparing children for this process much sooner in very small ways during the pre-transition phase and continue to monitor their wellbeing and assess how well they are adapting in the post-transition phase. Staff attended 'Ready for School?' training, delivered by 'Enable Children,' which highlighted best practice and considered the definition of school readiness, with a strong focus on the prime areas of the EYFS and the Characteristics of Effective Learning. The training was thought-provoking and led to deep reflection on the effects of transition upon disadvantaged families and children. Staff realised that this would become a long-term project which would require them to establish even stronger links with families and other professionals. Other EYPP expenditure has been planned around extra staff hours to support children and parents, cover for out-of-hours visits and multi-professional working, and resources.



Alison and her staff had already established links with one local primary school in preparation for transition, including visits from Reception teachers to the Preschool and visits for children and parents to the new school to meet their new teachers and familiarise themselves with their new learning environment. The school organises a teddy bear's picnic in a local park where new children, parents and teachers can all meet one another in a familiar, neutral, informal

setting. Parents of Preschool 'leavers' were encouraged by staff to share any concerns or ideas they or their child might have about transition, or anything their child was excited about and particularly looking forward to at their new school, in a series of informal chats with their child's key person.

Ideas from parents included books and resources for our 'Big School' role-play area which encouraged our leavers to talk about transition. One child was looking forward to joining an older sibling at school and another was keen to "ride big bikes," which stimulated much positive discussion. A parent whose



child was eligible for EYPP expressed concern about the continuation of her child's speech and language interventions at his new school and explained that it had taken him several sessions to feel at ease with his Speech and Language Therapist. He was now making excellent progress and she wanted this to continue through transition. The child was also feeling apprehensive about transition due to circumstances outside preschool and staff developed strategies to support him and his family through this time as he was particularly vulnerable. The Preschool SENDCO planned extra visits to the new school with the boy and his mother where they were introduced to the Reception year Teaching Assistants, the designated speech and language support worker and the school SENDCO. The child was encouraged to play with his favourite resources whilst his mother was reassured by staff that her son's needs would continue to be met by Speech and Language Therapists and his new school. Information was exchanged by key professionals about the child's progress and the new 'School Start' programme for communication and language was discussed. Photographs of the visit and of relevant staff were compiled into a 'My New School' book for the child to take home on his last day at preschool. This enabled the child and his family to familiarise themselves with names and faces of key staff and the new environment before starting school in September. His mother told preschool staff, "I'm so pleased he got the chance to meet his Speech and Language teachers, and thank you

so much for the book, it really helped him to recognise staff and remember their names. I feel much less anxious now." Preschool staff aim to provide all children with photos of their new school and are considering adding these to the children's Tapestry learning journals before they leave. This particular parent returned to the Preschool in October to explain how well her son had settled at school and to thank staff again for their support. The SENDCO asked the parent if her son might be willing to come and visit Preschool at some point, perhaps with another of our 'leavers,' and talk to our current cohort about his experiences of transition to 'big school.' His mother thought he would really enjoy this opportunity and Preschool staff are going to liaise with parents and the Reception teacher to organise this very soon, whilst these experiences are still fresh in the minds of all of the children.

Parents of leavers had been made known to one another during the Preschool 'end of year' party and encouraged to swap contact details and meet up regularly during the summer holidays to maintain their children's early friendships. Staff also explained that it might be an emotional time for parents too and gave out information sheets produced by The Early Childhood Project entitled, 'Preparing Young Children for Starting School,' with lots of practical tips for supporting children to settle at their new school, reassuring parents about toileting procedures, organising mornings and children's after-school needs and establishing new routines. Meadowview Preschool will continue to strengthen their work around transition by offering 'School Readiness' workshops to parents next year based on these excellent guidelines and have contacted a Health Visitor who has offered to talk to parents not only about 'Getting

Ready for School' but also Hygiene, Nutrition and Toilet Training, in the intervening months. Current parents of the 2016 cohort of leavers are already adding items to the agenda and sharing ideas.

Preschool staff have arranged a meeting with Reception staff at the local Primary School and will ask to visit and observe leavers who recently made the transition to Reception, in their new learning environment. This will enable assessment of how confident, well equipped and prepared these children are to engage in their new learning environment, eight to ten weeks after transition, particularly those who attracted EYPP. Parents of these children will also be consulted about the transition process their children are undergoing and their views will help to shape this process for next year. A member of Reception staff will also be invited to the Preschool to observe, for example, how practitioners foster independence in, dressing, personal care and eating; encourage communication and language skills; and provide activities which develop the children's gross and fine motor skills which will facilitate their pincer grip, and eventually, the tripod grip required for holding writing tools.

Another child with severe speech delay who was eligible for EYPP was offered a place at the specialist speech and language nursery I-CAN for five afternoons a week following referral by Speech and Language Therapists. This was challenging for the boy's mother as he had settled so well at preschool and appeared to making rapid progress. The preschool SENDCO worked with PRESENS and the child's Health Visitor and arranged to accompany his mother on visits to the I-CAN nursery, asking questions on her behalf and gradually building her confidence in this new environment. She developed a rapport with staff at the new setting and agreed to take the place offered. Meadowview were also able to offer the child two morning sessions so that he could maintain early friendships with peers who will make the transition with him to his local primary school Reception class next year. Staff at Meadowview have used EYPP funding to support the child through this dual-setting arrangement with resources including a 'Now and Then' Makaton board with photos of the child at each setting and an exchange visit which has been agreed between the Preschool SENDCO and the child's key person at I-CAN to observe his language in different environments and share support plans and learning programmes. Preschool staff have adapted their lunch time routine to enable the child to have his lunch before being collected and taken to I-CAN in time for the afternoon session. A diary is passed between the two settings and photos and observations of the child taking part in activities are added by both settings. This provides a link between settings and a link with home. Further EYPP funding may be spent on Speech and Language resources specific to this child's needs following the exchange visit and advice from I-CAN staff. Feedback from the child's mother has been very positive and both she and her son seem to have settled well into their new routine.

Staff at Meadowview have only just begun using Tapestry software and are looking to discuss the option of forwarding each child's learning journal, or excerpts from it, with parent's permission, to their new school when they meet with Reception teachers. This would not only provide continuity for professionals involved in the child's learning, but would also provide a collection of memories of familiar things and enable each child to look back on their

"Without the ability to communicate effectively in speech and through reading and writing, children and young people are seriously disadvantaged for life"

-J. Rose, Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, DfE, 2006

own record of development and see how far they have travelled on their own learning journey and what they might do next. As stakeholders in their own transition process, staff at Meadowview are also keen for the children's voices to be heard and are thinking of ways they can offer choices in the pre-transition phase. One idea they are considering is to ask children to choose their favourite books to 'take with them' – this may entail buying used duplicate copies or locating existing copies in the Reception classroom, but they could be packed in a basket and 'appear' in the children's Reception classroom. All feeder preschools and nurseries could contribute similar ideas at transition.

The team at Meadowview strongly believe that any attempt to develop nationally agreed guidelines for 'School Readiness' and a model of best practice for the transition process from preschool settings to school Reception classes must value the views of all stakeholders, including schools, pre-school settings, parents and children, in order to provide the best outcomes for all children and their families.

- Many thanks to Alison Groves and the staff, children and parents of Meadowview Preschool, for their kind co-operation and the information they provided for this case study.