

Birmingham Nursery Schools Teaching Schools Alliance

Working in partnership with Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP)

Best Practice Collection

Good Levels of Development in EYFS

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Context and Design

The purpose of this analysis is to explore the possible commonality in methods of achievement and attainment in a variety of schools across Birmingham where children leave Reception classes with good levels of development.

Within these institutions there is a wealth of teacher 'craft knowledge.'

Grimmet and MacKinnon's (1992) review of craft knowledge offers these perspectives. "Craft knowledge represents intelligent and sensible know-how in the action setting" and "Craft knowledge is essentially the accumulated wisdom derived from teachers' and practice orientated researchers' understanding of the meanings ascribed to the dilemmas inherent in teaching." Teacher Craft Knowledge Tom Russell January 2015

One of the intentions of this analysis is to align practical knowledge and wisdom of practice within the participant schools and make it more readily available to a wider audience of interested schools and practitioners within the Birmingham Education Partnership and beyond.

Methodology

The data drawn here is derived from a variety of sources.

Practitioners, members of leadership teams and Head teachers in 23 schools across Birmingham were interviewed and responded to a questionnaire especially designed and modified by outstanding Nursery School Head teachers working for the Birmingham Nursery Schools Teaching Schools Alliance.

The schools were visited by leading Nursery Head teachers from the Alliance in Spring 2017 who examined practice in Reception classes and interviewed colleagues to obtain an accurate reflection of practical knowledge and wisdom of practice within the respondents own institution.

The structure of the report

The structure of the Report reflects the main aim of ease of dissemination of good practice and follows the basic outline of the questionnaire. The key elements put to the twenty three participating schools are:

- Context and Partnership
- Organisation
- Staffing
- Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Children
- Parental engagement
- Environment
- Craft Knowledge identified by participants

Themes and practices which appear to be contributory to success

Context and Partnership

- One form entry Reception classes tended to be well integrated into the whole school ethos. This was also true of two form, three and four form entry schools but there was a strong sense of Early years identity in the larger schools with Nurseries particularly where they were operating as an Early Years unit
- Schools with large numbers of children with English as an Additional Language appeared to undertake a similar approach to colleagues in other schools but targeted extra TA support for certain groups of children in Reception classes.
- Networking and Partnership working with external colleagues across the group of schools was seen to confer a distinct advantage upon the participating schools.
- Network and Partnership was identified to be strongest when directly related to teaching and learning e.g. Peer to peer review, training, moderation of judgements
- A common theme across these successful schools was that the vast majority of children in Reception classes had received education and social experience before reception age.

Organisation

- There is good evidence that the Early Years are well represented and embedded throughout the whole school ethos.

- Strong Early Years teams where support staff are valued and have access to high level training are a feature of these successful schools.
- Staff are rotated in and around year groups in the schools but the reception classes appear to have greater stability and continuity
- There is a corporate team identity cross the year in which the sharing of 'craft knowledge' is seen as a positive asset and is reflected in positive attitudes to professional development for all staff participants

Staffing

- Staffing across the 23 schools is evenly matched with essentially 1 teacher and a well qualified Teaching Assistant working within each Reception class. Extra support is also provided on a targeted basis usually part time.
- Support staff are well qualified and their current training reflects the demands of fulfilling the requirements of successful EYFS achievement
- A culture of a strong ongoing training element for induction of new staff including support staff is visible

Leadership

- A persisting theme through the leadership of the schools is that the pursuit of excellence is at the heart of all that is done. There is strong vision that is uncompromising about focusing on the achievement of all children.
- Leadership is well versed in good Early Years practice, has sound knowledge of The EYFS and outcomes for children are seen as paramount
- Early Years outcomes are shared in Senior leadership meetings
- A consistent factor across the schools is the provision of strong internal and sometimes external monitoring and moderation supported by an overarching view from senior Leadership.
- Leaders are visible and show how as a leader they inspire others. This is not only in their own setting but also in how they have supported and interacted with other settings
- Senior Leadership teams and Head teachers have respect for and recognise the importance of the Early Years. Quote: "if you get it right in the Early Years you get it right through the school"

Teaching and learning

- In these schools there are good systems to see that teaching is highly effective and that appraisals, performance management and peer to peer observations have impact upon staff practices.

- The schools generally share teaching and learning in the Early Years with all members of staff across the school. This is exemplified by inclusion in pupil progress meetings and data sharing. Progression to achieve Early Learning Goals is shared with staff.
- There are high expectations of what children can do.
- Children have opportunities for personalised learning.
- There is an awareness of the need to close the gaps between the most vulnerable children and the more able. It was evident that across the schools there were many differing approaches particularly through the allocation of EYPP funding. This was an area where the schools had a wealth of approaches and innovations but was the least consistent in an overall analysis of commonality of approach.

Children

- Schools have strong transition programmes in place for induction into Reception class
- The schools have developed strategies to support the induction into Reception with a strong emphasis upon parental engagement, home and settings visits, information packs, lunches and preliminary stay and plays.
- Across the schools upon entry to Reception the children as classes have differing baselines which is to be expected. The majority of the children across the schools are within the range of 22 months-36 months and 30-50 months. The distribution of children within these two groups tends to correlate with deprivation factors e.g Free School Meals provision
- Outcomes for children are measured through assessment, data collection and observation to meet the potential of all children including disabled children, most able, children with special needs and other targeted groups.
- Children are encouraged to use their imagination and inquisitiveness, be responsive to adults and other children
- Children's welfare and personal development is fundamental within the Reception class environment

Parental engagement

- Schools have a wide range of strategies which support parents/carers in their children's learning. There are several strategies described in the body of the report
- Parents/carers have the opportunity to comment upon the children's progress or life at school. There are several good examples of the use of social media as well as more traditional opportunities for parents/carers to engage and contribute to their children's learning.

- Schools use a variety of tools for good communication including Tapestry, Parentshare, 2Simple and Marvellous Me

Environment

- The environment is stimulating and the children are confident and secure within that environment
- Outdoor play has a prominent part in the learning opportunities provided for the children. There are several examples of excellent practice provided in the main body of the report.

"Craft Knowledge" identified by participants themselves

Responses to the question "why do you think your results are good?"

These are some of the responses common to the schools. A fully expanded outline of responses is in the main report

Interventions focussed on gaps in knowledge

Unpicking what holds children back

rigorous monitoring and accountability

Team work /ethos

Passion for role

pupil voice following interests

Parents voice

Learning environment and embedded practice

good balance between play and structure

High focus on language

Balance curriculum relating to the existing cohorts needs

Strong philosophy and Early Years expertise

Teamwork and reflection on learning practice and documentation

Staff know how to move the learning on in the moment

Proactive Senior Leadership team

"engage, develop, innovate"

High quality and exciting learning activities