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The road to outstanding – one provider’s journey: Wheatley Hill Community Nursery

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Brief description

Having received a satisfactory judgement in its inspection in July 2007, the manager of Wheatley Hill Community Nursery was determined to improve the quality of the early years provision. She improved the qualification levels of staff, developed productive partnerships locally and created a stimulating, welcoming and inclusive environment that supports all children to make outstanding progress. Five years later, the hard work and commitment of the nursery manager and her staff paid off, and the nursery was judged to be outstanding at their [latest inspection](#). This example is one of a set of 10 that have been published to support the survey report: *Getting it right first time*.

Overview – the nursery’s message

‘Our journey from satisfactory to outstanding is well worth celebrating. Our staff are willing to take a risk, thrive on a challenge and are very reflective. This has ensured that we are able to identify what changes we needed to make to reach a higher standard and provide the quality we wanted.

With the support of our local authority, we quickly up-skilled our team. I am now a graduate leader with a BA Honours in Early Childhood studies and a management qualification. I have an Early Years Professional leading on learning and all other staff are qualified to a minimum of a level 3. Staff enjoy their own personal development journey and welcome ongoing training opportunities which we access both in-house and through our local authority. Having excellent links with other local agencies further strengthens our ability to support our children and their families. Through these partnerships, we have access to a wide range of support services. This means we can really focus on making a difference to the wellbeing of those who attend.

Our journey doesn’t end here; we are always looking at ways to improve our service, for example, we recently changed our corridor into an additional mathematics area after identifying a need to enhance our provision for that area of learning.’

The good practice in detail

Being judged as satisfactory in her first ever inspection in 2007 was the spur Jayne needed to make significant improvements to the quality of provision. 'At the time I had never managed a daycare provision,' says Jayne, 'I did not have a lot of experience. However what I didn't lack was the dedication and desire to create a nursery environment that would give children high-quality early years experiences which would enhance their lives and learning.'

So what can we learn from this nursery's journey from satisfactory to outstanding?

Determined and resolute leadership was fundamental to moving this provision forward. When the setting opened in 2007, all staff had good nurturing skills but were not well qualified. As a result, they did not have a clear understanding of what good or better practice looked like and were not sufficiently focused on children's learning. The manager believed that improving the quality of teaching and learning by improving staff qualification levels was the first step. Jayne led by example and embarked on an intensive training programme that culminated in a degree in Early Childhood Studies.

All staff are now qualified to at least level 3, and the nursery's third in charge has achieved Early Years Professional status. This investment in ongoing training and development is described by Jayne as 'crucial' in order to achieve a strong skill base within the nursery. Staff undertake a skills and competencies audit which requires them to assess the strengths and areas for development of their own practice. This and the manager's assessment of their performance are taken into account in regular supervision sessions, with action plans for ongoing training drawn up as a result. Staff are encouraged to take a reflective approach to practice and to take responsibility for their own learning needs, pursuing further training to continually improve their practice.

When the nursery first opened, Jayne considered that child-initiated sessions lacked direction and staff were not confident to extend children's learning in this context or to support them to become curious, independent learners. She wanted staff to develop the skills they needed to become effective pedagogical leaders who understand the learning and development needs of children, and make the most of planned and spontaneous teaching and learning opportunities. Through 'assertive mentoring' both children and adults are now required to reflect on what they have learnt each day and assess their understanding as a result. According to Jayne, this approach develops 'sustained, shared learning between staff and children'.

Planning meetings focus on the impact of provision on learning, so that staff can be sure that what they deliver makes a difference to children. This has sharpened staff's skill in relation to accurate monitoring, tracking and observation. It has also ensured that they think how the physical environment might be improved to accelerate learning or to engage specific groups of children.

Developing the staff's qualification level, and their knowledge, skills and understanding made staff confident enough to engage in productive dialogue with other professionals, such as school staff, health visitors and social workers. This effective partnership working with a wide range of agencies greatly improves outcomes for children in the nursery. Jayne describes their provision as offering a 'seamless thread of support, learning and

development, which starts with the early intervention provided by the children's centre and continues through daycare and into school'. The nursery is fully embedded within the school's foundation unit. The expectation that the nursery is accountable for their contribution to improving whole-school priorities has sharpened their focus on the progress children make in key areas such as mathematics, communication and language. This has had a significant impact on progress, particularly in relation to children's emerging use of number. The input of an early years consultant has also brought a new perspective to ongoing developments, especially in relation to developing the nursery environment.

Underpinning the nursery's success is the leaders' ability to build capacity and sustain improvement through management systems which hold staff to account for the quality of their practice and the difference they are making to children's life chances.

Nursery background

Wheatley Hill Community Nursery registered in July 2007. It is owned by a private company and operates from rooms within Wheatley Hill Primary School. Children attend from a catchment area ranked in the top 30% of the deprivation index. The nursery supports disabled children and those with special educational needs as well as children who speak English as an additional language. There are four staff working with the children. One holds a full degree in Childhood Studies, one staff member holds a foundation degree in Childhood Studies and has Early Years Professional status. A further two staff hold appropriate childcare qualifications at level 3.

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