

**Herts for Learning
Early Years Quality Standards
Highfield Preschool
2019 Case study**



Herts for Learning
April 2019



Early Years Quality Standards – Highfield Preschool

Summary of impact and outcomes

Introduction

Situated in the beautiful setting on the YWAM (Youth With a Mission) Oval grounds, Highfield Preschool, Harpenden, has seen a number of developments within their Early Years setting which has led them to be just one of a select number of schools awarded with the prestigious Early Years Quality Gold Standard in 2018.

Having participated in the Early Years Quality Standard (EYQS) programme five times since it started in 2001, the preschool saw an opportunity to complete their Gold Standard as it was the only thing that had not yet achieved.

This case study looks at how Sandra Case, Manager at Highfield Preschool and her Early Years team have developed their setting with new ideas, combining reading and emotional wellbeing, and the impact it has had on their children.

What is EYQS?

The EYQS is a year-long programme that supports self-evaluation, reflective practice, action planning and high-quality provision to improve outcomes for all children. It involves working with parents, children and staff to make changes and to develop practice. The process takes approximately one year to complete, depending on the level of standard chosen. Once accepted onto the scheme, each setting works towards completing the process within the next academic year, from September, and all settings finish and attend a celebration event at the end the following summer term.

Developments at the preschool

At Highfield Preschool, the practitioners were initially eager to develop a reading area outside for children who needed some 'quiet time' or for those who felt tired or unwell. They felt that, although they often had books outside for the children, and some of the activity boxes have books in them, the children could benefit by having a designated space where they could be comfortable and could quietly look at a book if they wanted to do so.

With mental health having such a big focus, the preschool decided to link this with wellbeing and helping children to recognise, name and manage their feelings. Some of their children (especially the younger ones) struggled to verbalise their feelings, and/or struggled to know what to do about their feelings.

Therefore, the preschool introduced 'feelings cards' in each of their three group areas to introduce children to different feelings by making use of visual aids. The Early Years practitioners encouraged the children to find the way they are feeling, take the card off the wall and present this card to either their preferred staff member or a friend. This caught on very quickly and the children have learned to recognise and name many different feelings.

The children were then given the opportunity to find 'feeling cards' in certain scenarios e.g. while they were reading stories or when the practitioners were telling them that they were upset as they were not tidying up. The younger children follow the older children's lead and are now very competent in finding their or their friend's feelings and by naming this feeling as well.

Impact

The developments were very successful, and the children still use this on a daily basis. Children are making use of books and stories and making up their own stories. This had a great impact on the literacy, communication and language development. Children are often seen 'reading' to each other, or just quietly reading by themselves.

Children are now adept at naming emotions such as happy, sad, excited, surprised, lonely, tired, scared, etc. and even the youngest group are doing well.

The children are much more aware of their friend's emotions, and are able to react in a proactive way, rather than just leaving their friends to deal with it themselves. They are aware of the importance of 'using your voice' to talk about your emotions, rather than lashing out or crying. They are able to name emotions and are learning from each other all the time, and are also learning that emotions aren't bad, we can't help feeling the way we do, but it is what we do with these emotions that might cause trouble. They have learned to ask for help and staff will focus children on thinking for themselves and if at all possible, try to come up with a happy solution.

Children are good at providing comfort to each other, and this has become very apparent especially when new children start at the setting or when visitors come with small children. They show empathy and very mature emotional responses to these children who might need help.

As a whole, this exercise has improved children's personal, social and emotional wellbeing in a very tangible way and the evidence is obvious on daily basis. All staff members are using 'emotion' words all the time.

Children who start at the preschool with a low baseline in PSE Development, make rapid progress and this has an influence on all the other areas of learning as a result. We had one child specifically who was at least a year behind her actual age in her PSE development, and within one term was able to progress to her correct age bracket.

When children enter the preschool, we determine their baseline in each of the seven areas of the EYFS areas of development. It is unusual for a child to display above average in the area of PSE as most of them have never been at a preschool setting before and are not used to being able to vocalise and control their emotions. We have found that 95% of our pupils have made rapid progress in the area of PSE as a result of this programme, and all have made between one and three steps forwards after one term. Making good progress in the PSE area has a knock-on effect on all the other areas of learning, and as a result, the children at our setting are confident, resilient and flourishing in all areas of development. Parents have commented on their children's understanding of emotions and have asked for copies of our resources to make use of these at home as well.

One parent has written: "We received cards with emotions from school that helped (K) identify not only her own emotions, but others' as well. I think the preschool has done a lot to help (K) with her emotions and have been very supportive and active in finding ways to help her process them."



Support

The preschool was supported throughout the programme by Jane Osburn, Early Year's Consultant at Herts for Learning. The support was always available, and Jane encouraged them to stretch themselves to do their best. Although having completed the programme on four previous occasions, Sandra and her team benefited from the help and encouragement for the final part of the Gold Standard project.

Let's celebrate

After achieving their Gold Standard, the preschool attended a nursery rhyme themed celebration event in July 2018. At the event, they had the chance to meet over 70 practitioners from 23 different Early Years settings, who took part in either Bronze, Silver or Gold Standard, to discuss the impact of their work and to hear the achievements in other schools and settings.

The preschool found it useful to liaise with other settings and to get ideas for improvement, and changes which have benefited other Early Years settings.



Recommendation

Speaking about whether they would recommend the EYQS to other schools and settings, Sandra said: “We want to know that we are providing the best quality of Early Years provision possible for us and making use of the EYQS process is such a systematic way to make sure we do this.”

“It gives more than enough time for the different parts of the process to be achieved and the sense of wellbeing within the staff was great once another area was marked off as achieved successful. The Gold Standard process was quite daunting to start off with, but with the help of our mentor we were encouraged and supported in such a way that we surprised ourselves by our achievement and the way that it has impacted the children both at preschool and at home.

“This programme has helped us to ensure that we maintain high expectations of our services and delivery of the Early Years curriculum. We also now have a lot of written evidence to present to Ofsted when they visit.

“The whole process is user-friendly and easy to understand, and although hard work, is a very achievable and satisfactory process. I would recommend any setting to start off as soon as possible to see how you could improve your practise and to have support from EYQS mentors to help you on your way.”

Final word...

Sandra reports that the EYQS programme has helped to highlight gaps and areas for development easier. It has helped them to find areas of development and helped them to think creatively as to how to involve parents, children and staff in this process. Involving all members of the staff also helped them to develop further and to think about ways to improve.

How to register

If you are interested in taking part in the 2019/20 HfL Early Years Quality Standards, please send an email to eyquality@hertsforlearning.co.uk.

If you have any further queries or require any further information, please email eyquality@hertsforlearning.co.uk.

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