

Multi agency groups for children under five with Special Educational Needs or disability, and their families

Multi-agency early years groups are part of a range of ways of meeting the needs of children with SEN and/or disability and their families.

In November 2014 a group of stakeholders met to develop a vision for how these groups should be provided in Oxfordshire. Those involved included parents, and representatives from voluntary agencies, children's therapy services, special educational needs support agencies and children's centres.

The vision for multi-agency groups

For the child:

- Where appropriate, children under 5 with a special educational need or disability are able to access a group suitable to their needs.
- Groups are accessible and run from local venues across Oxfordshire where feasible.
- All groups provide the child with opportunities to develop and practice new skills in a safe, fun environment, planned around their individual strengths, interests and needs.

For parents:

Parents/carers attend alongside their children in order to:

- gain further understanding of their child's specific needs and how to help them develop
- share and learn about other sources of information that may help them
- meet other parents/carers in a mutually supportive atmosphere.

The staff:

- Groups are run by staff who are experienced in working with young children with special educational needs and disability, and have a background in early years education/physiotherapy/speech and language therapy/occupational therapy/family support.

Principles for planning and offering multi-agency groups

When planning to run a multi-agency early years group we aim to:

- Be responsive to the specific needs of the children invited
- Ensure that parents are interested, and able to attend the group where appropriate
- Accommodate the specific circumstances of each child and family as far as possible

Alongside this, for groups to be run effectively we need to ensure that there will be appropriately skilled staff available and a safe, child and family friendly venue.