Developing provision for two year olds

Summary

In January 2013 Rebecca Saunders took up the post of Headteacher at Lydalls Nursery School. Lydalls is a maintained Nursery School with full service daycare on site, known as Chameleon Club.

Part of Rebecca’s vision for developing the school was to include provision for two year olds. This would have a particular focus on meeting a local need for families who are entitled to a funded place.

Key challenges

The indoor learning environment at Lydalls is a large, open plan space and is organised to enable children to self-select and direct their own learning. In January 2013 Chameleon Club were working in a room within the Nursery building, offering full wraparound care including breakfast and tea club for children from ‘rising 3s’ onwards.

The key dilemma faced was how to provide an environment that was safe for two year olds but did not detract from the needs of older and more able children. There seemed to be so many stimulating and challenging resources in the Nursery that could be unsafe for two year olds to access independently. Would younger, more vulnerable children become lost in such a large space? Also, the structured routine of a Nursery session seemed inappropriate for two year olds. Instinctively Rebecca felt that she needed to create an environment for two year olds that was nurturing and homely and where routines could be flexible to meet their developmental needs.

In July 2013 Lydalls appointed a new co-ordinator for Chameleon Club who initially worked alongside the two existing members of staff. By December 2013 they had appointed another member of staff with experience of working with two year olds and had identified a member of staff within the Nursery team who was keen for a professional development opportunity.

The decision was made to create two Chameleon Club bases. One would provide breakfast, tea and wraparound sessions for children attending Nursery. This base for
older children is now sited in a room off the main Nursery. During the session the Chameleon Club staff that work with the older children are based within the Nursery and this provision is fully integrated.

Lydalls Nursery took the 'small is beautiful' approach towards two year olds - offering eight places in the morning session and eight places in the afternoon session. In any one session at least 50% of places are reserved for families in receipt of a funded place.

The original Chameleon Club base became the base for younger children, those aged between two and three years of age. This needed some minor structural alterations to provide nappy changing facilities, for which Lydalls received a grant from Oxfordshire County Council.

The younger base contains all the core elements of an early years environment; a home corner, sand, water, small construction, book area, mark making, and paint. It also has soft furnishings; a sofa, cushions, and rugs.

By Easter 2014 Lydalls had their official Ofsted registration. The staff had already visited children in their homes and organised sessions for parents and children in the base. They were finally up and running.

Outcomes and impact

Parents and other visitors have commented on the homely, relaxed feel within the younger Chameleon Club base. The space does not feel institutional.

The two year olds love the challenge of the outdoor environment and the space that Lydalls offers. The youngest children are actively involved in Forest School type sessions in all weathers.

Lydalls journey towards working with two year olds had also involved reflecting on how effectively they were meeting the needs of younger three year olds within the Nursery. By December 2013 the inside environment at Nursery looked radically different. They have moved to a much more 'floor based' approach to learning.

Lydalls are able to support families at an earlier stage. Partnership working with Children’s Centres and Health Visitors continues to strengthen and develop.

Reflections

Rebecca was keen to get children in and settled as quickly as possible in the first term. Some families had been waiting for the provision to be open since January! The settling processes are under review to ensure that individual children have the staggered start that they need. There is no ‘one size fits all’. Having said that, the children all settled back really quickly after the half term holiday.
Key learning points

- Change takes time and energy. If you have the vision your passion and belief will take others with you.

- Staff new to your school or setting may need to develop and extend their experience of working with families and other agencies.

- Having an experienced member of staff working in the two year old base who also works in Nursery has been brilliant for continuity and making links across our setting.

Next steps

Rebecca says “I’m looking forward to tracking the progress and attainment of the children in our two year old base as they move into Nursery. Our two year old progress check is going to become part of the transition between Chameleon Club and Nursery.”

Further information

http://www.lydallsnurseryschool.co.uk

Lydalls Nursery School is one of 6 Local Authority Maintained Nursery Schools in Oxfordshire. The Nursery Schools work closely together as the Early Years Aspiration Network to support settings and schools both in their localities and further afield. Meetings and training sessions are held in each Nursery aimed at sharing skills and best practice in a variety of areas.