

Day Nursery- Project Evaluation

Background

The Day Nursery falls under the Early Years Team element of the Sure Start programme, that aims to provide quality childcare and play opportunities to support families and other professional organisations, working towards improving child development and the ability to learn.

The Day Nursery project provides care for children from 7.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday. There is accommodation for children from 0 to 5 years, spread across 3 rooms according to age group.

Project objectives

The Day Nursery is working towards Early Excellence Centre standards to offer the following:

- To develop and deliver high quality, integrated education and childcare for young children and their families;
- To improve children's life chances; and
- To offer a homely environment which is safe and secure.

Although no formal project appraisal documentation was evident, there is a great deal of documentation provided in the form of a prospectus. This includes the following.

1. A three-page summary detailing:
 - a welcome to the Nursery
 - description of the Nursery's response to the needs of the child
 - details of registration with Ofsted and the Local Education Authority
 - description of the Nursery Day
 - nutrition for children, including accommodation for special dietary requirements
 - Training and qualifications of the nursery team

Denaby Main & Conisbrough Sure Start Programme- Evaluation of the Day Nursery

- Equal opportunities
 - Safety and security
2. Details of sessions and fees, illustrating the flexibility of services offered
 3. Registration Form, gathering details about the child and his / her carers for a comprehensive record to be kept
 4. A copy of all of the Early Years policies:
 - Equal Opportunities Policy
 - Settling in Policy
 - Parents as Partners Policy
 - Special Needs Policy
 - Early Years Behaviour Policy
 - Day Nursery Admissions Policy
 - Complaints Procedure Policy
 - Nappy Changing and Bodily Fluids Policy
 - Child Protection Policy
 - Uncollected / Missing Child Policy
 - Administration of Medicines Policy
 - Exclusion Procedure for Illness / Communicable Disease
 - Sleeping Policy
 - Pet Policy
 - School Collection / Drop Off Policy
 - Food Hygiene Policy
 - Health and Safety Policy

Although this appears to be a rather long and daunting list, the detail is thorough without being jargonistic. Most of these policies are simply one page long. Information is bullet pointed rather than text heavy and a bright colourful folder is used to present the documentation in an ordered way.

Contribution to Sure Start Delivery Plan

The Day Nursery provides cross-cutting support to all four Sure Start Objectives but in particular to Objective 3, *'Improving the ability to learn'* and Objective 4, *'Strengthening Families and Communities'*. The Delivery Plan incorporates a range of Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Sure Start Delivery Agreement (SDA) targets attached to each broader objective, several of which have relevance for the Day Nursery (see Table below).

Sure Start Programme Objective	Performance Target
<p>Objective 3: Improving the ability to learn. In particular, by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promote early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with special needs.</p>	<p>PSA Target: Achieve by 2004 in the Sure Start area a reduction of five percentage points in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring specialist intervention by the age of 4.</p> <p>SDA Target: All children in Sure Start areas to have access to good quality play and learning opportunities, helping progress towards early learning goals when they get to school.</p>
<p>Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities. In particular, by involving families in building the communities capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty.</p>	<p>SDA Target: All Sure Start Programmes to work with their EYCDP to help close the gap between the availability of accessible childcare for 0-3 year olds in Sure Start areas and other areas.</p>

Source: Sure Start Delivery Plan: Denaby Main & Conisbrough 2001

Linkages with partners and other Sure Start projects

This project has strong linkages with a variety of external partners and most other Sure Start projects.

External partners include:

- Mexborough Social Services;
- Social Services, Rotherham MBC;
- Health Visitor, Denaby Clinic;

- Rotherham Management Agency;
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership;
- Family Support Childcare Scheme;
- Inclusion Team; and
- Dearne Valley College.

Project operation

Story Book Day Nursery is open from 7.30am – 6pm. Care is available on a variety of flexible approaches, with 4 timed sessions throughout the day, full day sessions, hourly care between 4pm and 6pm, school collection, and full week. Term time or full year care is also available. There are 38 full time equivalent places, although there are plans for expansion of the baby rooms, to give an additional 10 baby spaces. The nursery did have a waiting list until recently, however the ‘Denny’s Den’ room has been made available temporarily. Respite and emergency places are also kept available.

There are separate rooms for each age group, with individual toilet and changing facilities, outdoor space and designated areas within the indoor space for different activities. Activities include crafts, reading, puzzles and a variety of toys laid out. A library is planned with each child having an index card on which borrowed books can be recorded. Sleeping areas are also provided. Each child has his or her own key worker, and each worker is only responsible for 5 or 6 children at a time, ensuring a close link between worker and individual children. This ratio is less with the younger children, where the ratio is one staff member to two children. Each child has their own peg with a name card – this helps learning as first they learn to recognise their picture, then their first name, then their whole name.

If a parent is interested in placing their child with the nursery, they are welcomed to come and have a look around in the first instance. The relevant Senior Nursery Nurse tours round the facilities with parents and explains what each area is for and who the individual staff members are. When a child first comes they begin with short visits with his or her parent, then some time without his or her parent (who is likely to still be in the building should there be any distress). It often takes approximately 2 weeks to get the child settled.

Parents are encouraged to be thoroughly involved in their child's experiences at the nursery. A notice board is featured for communication purposes. Planning sheets are available, which are used to structure the sessions with children. All children work towards suitable learning objectives, including 3 to 5s following 'Stepping Stones' guidance from DFES for the government's Early Learning Goals. These include Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Language, Communication and Literacy, Mathematical Development, Knowledge and Understanding of the world, Physical Development and Creative Development. A new topic is chosen each month and sheets go home to parents showing the activities that the child will be or have been taking part in. There is also a sheet provided with reference to what the child eats, number of nappy changes or trips to the toilet. A Parents Night was held in July and for one room, 8 attended out of 10 parents invited. They could talk directly with the child's key worker, it was commented that they "*listened closely*" and that "*it was very worthwhile*". Parents are encouraged to come into the room instead of hovering outside.

The opportunities for staff development are comprehensive. All members of staff have at least NVQ level 2, some are training for level 3 and others are qualified beyond. There is a priority for staff to make sure that all are kept up to date with changing legislation and necessary qualifications. Additionally, staff members can access a directory of training courses and can pick any they would like to attend. There are clearly some restrictions in terms of ensuring that there is enough coverage within the children's rooms. In house training is offered as well. Trident Placements are taken from schools (Year 10 and 11 students). There are college placements as well, for example, NVQ Level 2 trainees are placed in Sure Start for their practical training and Sure Start employees are training for NVQ Level 3 with classroom-based training delivered in Story Book House. It was commented that local colleges find it difficult to find nurseries with baby places in the local area, and it is a requirement of the higher level NVQs that experienced is gained with this age group. As such, the Sure Start nursery is in demand.

Project targeting

The places available in the nursery for children are split with 50% being dedicated to those living in Denaby Main / Conisbrough and the remaining 50% being available for

Denaby Main & Conisbrough Sure Start Programme- Evaluation of the Day Nursery

those living elsewhere. Where there is a waiting list for Denaby Main / Conisbrough but spaces available in the other areas allocation, children will be accommodated. The other area place will revert back once a Denaby Main / Conisbrough place becomes available. It is understood that the majority of parents who place their child / children with the nursery are working or are at college and that they find out about the nursery through word of mouth, although referrals also come from health visitors and social services.

There are different ways in which places are funded. Places can be paid for privately, funded according to the allocation from the Government, funded by Social Services or funded by Sure Start (for respite). Children are entitled to 5 x 2.5hr sessions per week free until the term following their 3rd birthday. In order to try and maximise take-up of places, all those parents with eligible children were written to with an invitation. Additionally, it has been found that it is sometimes difficult to split the shifts according to the sessions offered by Sure Start whilst maintaining a routine for all of the children. Often, therefore, the child receives 3hrs instead of 2.5, with Sure Start absorbing the cost of the additional ½ hour.

It was commented that the Sure Start nursery is of *“real benefit to families”*, in particular they are very flexible and willing to fit around shift patterns, etc. Some nurseries will not do this, one lady in particular had been turned away from all nurseries except for Sure Start. Additionally, the Sure Start nursery has the ability to take children from 0 years, whereas most others start at 2 years.

There is a dedicated team member who provides structured support for children with special educational needs, supported by the Inclusion Team, helping with looking at policies and all of the paperwork side which is quite time consuming and complex. The importance of providing written evidence tracking the progress of children has been emphasised. Currently there are 6 children of different ages with special educational needs in the nursery. Such needs include autism, speech and language difficulties, behaviour problems and global delay. They each have timetabled one to one sessions, in addition to sessions with the rest of the group. All children work towards a development booklet and one child also has an Individual Education Plan.

Beneficiary and external partner feedback

Comments received from parents were all positive. It is apparent that with something as sensitive as childcare, places would not be filled if parents did not think the nursery was a good place for their children. It was also clear that if there were any particular difficulties or problems, parents were happy to raise them with nursery staff in order to come to a resolution. The *“children come on so well”*. Comment forms do exist, but it was explained that most parents make a direct approach with any issues. *“They can pop in and chat whenever they want to”*. There is a clear Complaints Policy which details how parents can raise issues; in the first instance with the child’s key worker or the Senior Nursery Nurse, or with the Early Years Coordinator. Discussion will take place as appropriate with the Sure Start Management Team. Additionally, parents are also given the contact details of Early Years Ofsted, offering them the opportunity to progress in such a manner.

Parents also bring ideas to the nursery, for example, the record sheet mentioned previously relating to feeding came from a parent; staff simply record ‘ate well’, ‘ate sufficient’ or ‘ate little’ which is less time consuming than recording minute detail as they had been trying to do previously. Parents also have come up with ideas for fundraising or saving money.

General comments were made that *“Sure Start are lucky in the resources they have”* and that *“they are a fantastic initiative for the community”*. The nursery has been described as *“very accommodating”* with *“brand new resources”*. Some concern was expressed that although there is awareness of Sure Start in the community, some think it is Social Services or that it is *“just a day nursery and are not aware that it is more than that”*, i.e. the flexible approach of the nursery in terms of timing or accommodating an anxious parent wanting to stay close by initially. Other nurseries are not so sympathetic in this way. The nursery also seems to have good *“dads involvement”* – with some fathers notably picking up their children. It is said that there are fun days held *“but people still don’t know about what is available”*.

Project Management

The Early Years Coordinator is responsible for the overall management of the Day Nursery. There is also a Senior Nursery Nurse in each room. The Early Years Team has administrative support, responsible for managing enrolments, funding and monitoring information. There is a dedicated computer package for the Day Nursery called 'First Steps' that collates the new registrations, financial information, records and has the ability to pull off different types of reports. There is also an 'at a glance' board so that the number of children attending each session each week is obvious, so that spare places are clear in case of enquiries.

The January term is understood to be the busiest as during September, new state nursery places are taken up. It may be of value to pre-empt this by undertaking a concerted marketing effort throughout the summer in order to maximise the number of families who are able to benefit from the nursery as soon possible. An advert was transmitted on Trax FM, however, there does not seem to have been any notable impact from this. Direct marketing seems to be effective, similar to those letters sent directly to eligible parents, in turn generating word of mouth.

It is apparent that the Day Nursery is appropriately managed, with detailed and transparent policies in place, DFES guidelines are followed and Ofsted inspections are undertaken. The environment is secure and well arranged to ensure safety and fun are not compromised in any way. There are numerous staff and a willingness to take temporary placements, subject to a satisfactory trial period. All record keeping and documentation is detailed without being bureaucratic. Although staff have some difficulties at present accessing space for planning their schemes of work, the plans for the building extension include a dedicated space for this.

Milestones and Outputs (as per appraisal/actual/variance/unexpected)

As there is no formal project documentation for the Day Nursery it is not possible to compare the project against any specific project milestones or outputs. It is clear, however, that the project supports a number of PSA and SDA targets.

The outcomes of services offered by the Day Nursery are marked. The childcare provision contributes to improving health and social welfare, aiming to provide a sure foundation from pregnancy through birth and childhood, with opportunities for both parents and children to access activities that promote physical, emotional and social well being. It helps to remove a barrier to getting people back into work, whilst additionally creating jobs and training opportunities for local people. Training is provided for all staff, including NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Childcare. By having the Day Nursery facilities available, parents are able to access training opportunities offered within Sure Start. The children who are looked after not only have a play environment but also a learning environment.

The facilities are safe environments in which parents can leave their children. The staff have training in Child Protection and Health and Safety and the buildings, or areas within the buildings, are secure and require visitors to identify themselves before being allowed in. Parents can seek parenting advice and a break from parenting, allowing them to have time for their own interests and personal development.

Value for money (with appropriate comparisons if available)

There are few similar nurseries nearby, other than school provision, with the closest understood to be in Sprotborough, Mexborough and Swinton. Some of these are also limited to 2-5 year olds as opposed to being able to accommodate babies.

A community nursery based in Hull has been used as a comparator and it is found that Sure Start is approximately 25% more expensive per week, however, Sure Start is open for longer hours, is 17.5% cheaper for its morning and afternoon sessions, cheaper per hour and offers more of a discount for siblings. The comparator nursery does not charge a registration fee, however, children aged 2-5 years receive a bag, a polo shirt and a sweatshirt and those aged 0-2 years receive a bib, flannel and bag included within the £35 registration fee. Overall, therefore, it is apparent that the Day Nursery offers similar value for money to the comparator.

The nursery is starting to consider sustainability now. Its funding has been extended until 2006, however the amount of money awarded is getting less and less. Stalls were featured at the parents appointments evening, in order to generate some revenue.

Access funding is provided for. Parents can access many opportunities for discount and help with payment for childcare, for example, a number of sessions for anyone with a child who is up to 3. The fees paid for sessions include snacks, meals if applicable, and cows milk. Working Families Tax Credit can also help towards childcare costs.

Summary and recommendations

The Day Nursery is a good example of a project providing more than just childcare. It facilitates training, employment, access to other activities, respite and multi agency links; opportunities that probably would not exist without it. The children benefit longer term from the educational and socialisation opportunities that the programme provides as do parents, who are able to focus their energies on themselves and their ambitions. It also helps to remove a barrier to participation in activities, i.e. allowing parents to ensure their children are well cared for whilst they access opportunities.

Money has been gained from Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative for extending the nursery space. The extension will include extra baby rooms, a new team room for planning purposes, and its own reception area for security and better ease of access for parents (who currently have to walk through main reception, security doors and corridors; difficult with a pram / pushchair). **It will be important for management to keep marketing regular and direct in order to ensure that the places are taken up and are not left empty for too long.** This may also help to save the lull in September following take up of state nursery places. It is also understood that an audit is being undertaken of early years provision in the area, with a view to developing a strategy and action plan for the integration of services.

There is scope to link more closely with the Male Inclusion Worker as it was notable that some dads were dropping off and collecting their children and it was commented that the Nursery has quite good involvement from fathers. It is also of great benefit that the Nursery employs a male nursery nurse, particularly as national encouragement is being given towards Sure Start local programmes employing more male members of staff.