

## Case study: developing partnership working and supporting children's transitions

Little Stars Nursery (“The Nursery”) is owned and managed by two early years teachers, Emma Matthews and Marie Ellis-Jones. It has been operating for over 20 years, based in Mamhilad, Pontypool. The Nursery provides high quality care for children aged 0-4 years and is registered for 65 children per day, with the pre-school department having 30 children attending daily. The Nursery receive nursery education funding for 3- and 4-year-olds and provide the Childcare Offer.

The Nursery has been recognised by Estyn through inspection reports, sharing events and effective practice resources, for their excellence in education and training. Emma and Marie work closely with both Estyn and the Educational Achievement Service (EAS) consortia (the education improvement service for the five local authorities in South East Wales: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, and Torfaen) to support other setting leaders and practitioners.

Due to their wealth of knowledge and experience in nursery education and childcare, Emma and Marie were invited to be an active part of co-construction groups developing Curriculum for Wales guidance with the Welsh Government. They have both participated in working groups co-constructing the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings and the Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

### Implementing changes in practice – where did you start?

During our journey of implementing Curriculum for Wales, we reflected on what the four purposes could look like for 3 and 4-year-olds. We determined that exploring child centred pedagogy was key to support us in realising the ambition of Curriculum for Wales. We reflected on our environments and the learning experiences we were offering to children and considered how these reflected child-centred pedagogy and how this could be further developed. Another focus for us, was ensuring we created more opportunities for children to have relevant and real-life experiences, which were hands on and meaningful.

We reached out to local schools that our children would be attending and invited staff to visit the Nursery, our staff and of course – the children. Goytre Fawr Primary School Headteacher, Mike Gough, and Reception teacher visited the setting to share discussions with staff, view the environments available to children and observe children engaging in the environments and

experiences on offer. The school staff shared their observations of the increasing levels of independence the children were developing and how ambitious and capable they were.

In order to build upon children's learning and development, we collectively felt a need to work closely with each other (The Nursery and school) to gain a shared understanding of what effective environments looked like and ensure children could experience smooth transitions and build on skills and concepts acquired in nursery moving into Reception. We feel our partnership with Goytre Fawr Primary School is a key part of our transition success and is based on mutual respect and professionalism.

### **Were there any challenges you had to face in developing relationships and partnership working?**

Time is always the most challenging aspect of implementing new procedures or enacting change, especially with two different settings working to different routines and different governance. We believed in the benefit of partnership working and the positive impact it would have on children's transitions. This inspired us to prioritise time for staff to be able to engage with the school in order to facilitate rich conversations and shared professional learning. We worked hard to consider how we could allow for this time within the Nursery's busy schedule. We wanted the partnership working to not only happen, but to thrive and so negotiating time was as integral part of that.

### **What have been the success stories of the changes you have implemented?**

Mike Gough, the Headteacher at Goytre Fawr Primary School, shares our vision for high quality nursery education. We both believe this lays the foundations for children to have positive dispositions to learning, which if nurtured, last a lifetime. We were both keen to strengthen our relationship during this period of change, and ensure we had a shared understanding of the three enablers and the principles of progression.

Staff from Goytre Fawr Reception class and Teaching Assistants in the early years, visited the Nursery to look at provision. The focus was on the three enablers and how they were interlinked and interdependent. In addition, we focussed on dispositions of learning, like independence, curiosity, persistence, and creativity. Children were given the opportunities to mix their own paints, make their own play dough and cut their own fruit etc. School staff were able to capture what experiences children have at the Nursery so that they could ensure these opportunities were available to them moving into Reception, to support progression. Staff were also able to have a better understanding of what a day looked like, in terms of play and play-based learning, being in the outdoors and the role of the enabling adult.

These visits have ensured smooth transition arrangements and allowed school staff to give children similar experiences when they do their transition visits, giving them a more familiar environment and routine, which in turn, will help them adapt to their new school environment.

When we received the Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained settings, this was the final piece to the puzzle. The icing on the cake! We relish the opportunity to share meaningful assessment information with schools, which captures and celebrates children's holistic development, their strengths, the ways in which they learn and their areas for development. Many discussions took place with the school, as we developed our own narrative style of reporting on children's progress. Our aim was to achieve a shared understanding of what progression looks like, applying the five principles of progression alongside the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

The ongoing professional dialogue with the Reception teacher supports our reflective practice and allows us to have a better understanding of the progress children have made in the setting, and facilitate a smooth, positive transition experience for all children. The Nursery staff were also invited to attend a school INSET day to share our journey of curriculum realisation. We presented on how we were exploring effective pedagogy, the twelve pedagogical principles and our culture for learning. We celebrated how we created a shared vision and brought everyone along on our 'journey.' The presentation received extremely positive feedback.

Our partnership working with Goytre Fawr Primary School has gone from strength to strength over the years. We have a mutual respect for the knowledge each party has about our children. We feel that the headteacher values the quality education we deliver, and the partnership is an important component in the success of providing smooth transitions for children.

### **What are your future plans to build upon this effective practice?**

We will continue to nurture our partnership with Goytre Fawr Primary School. Preparation for supporting children's transition isn't a one-off event, it's an ongoing and meaningful process. We aim to continue to share understanding across our setting and the school to support smooth transitions and ensure continuity of progression along the learning continuum.

Our transition arrangements with Goytre Fawr Primary School are the benchmark for what we believe effective transition should look like. Due to the location of the Nursery, we feed around 10 different schools, with childcare being sought with us due to parents working in the area but not necessarily living in our community. We strive to emulate these positive transition arrangements with Goytre Fawr Primary School, with all our receiving schools and continue to look for ways to engage with these schools on a regular basis.

## Has the setting collaborated with other settings/schools to share good practice and setting-to-setting support? (Networks, case studies, LA meetings/training)

We share our good practice during NDNA network meetings, local authority network meetings and training opportunities, and Estyn non-maintained setting stakeholder forum meetings. As a lead setting for the EAS we also share our knowledge and experience with other leaders and managers when delivering leadership training – including our top tips.

### Top tips:

- Ask your local authority Early Years team to help you gather names of key people in the schools your children are transitioning to e.g. Headteacher, Reception class teacher, ALNCo. It's more personal, and you can establish a relationship which can be built upon. Making connections is key to success
- Start the process early, so you can have those meaningful conversations as the year progresses. If children have emerging needs, invite the ALNCo or Reception class teacher to attend any summer transition meetings. This will help facilitate an enhanced transition package
- Share the assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings with the schools and stress the importance of gaining a shared understanding of progression to ensure the continuity of progression moving into a new setting
- Be proud and confident in how well you know your children. This information will be important to schools to support each child and their families
- If you have previously been unsuccessful in connecting with a school, please try again. Staff changes or a culture shift may mean you are more successful this time. Don't give up!

*“Our partnership with Little Stars has benefited all of our staff, pupils and the people at home, exceptionally well. Its bedrock is a shared vision around the importance of early development and the deep levels of pastoral care that permeates each setting.*

*Not having a nursery attached to our school, and having around 80-85% of our children coming to us from Little Stars each year, it is vital that we have an effective working relationship with each other. The transition process is highly valued by both sides and begins early in the school year. The formal and informal avenues that we pursue together, the regular site visits of leaders, staff and children, and the excellent ALN liaison that regularly occurs across the year, means that when the children arrive with us, we have a deep understanding of their individual developmental and pastoral needs. The children and families arrive to a familiar setting where the staff are well-acquainted with the pupils and where we can rapidly meet their needs. A large part of that is down to the continued shared work and positive, innovative approaches that Emma Matthews and the Little Stars staff undertake alongside our Goytre Fawr Primary staff.*

*The partnership and the transition work is hugely beneficial to our school and to our families.”*

**Mike Gough, Headteacher, Goytre Fawr Primary School**

## Further support

- **Transitions and partnership working toolkit:** toolkit of 10 different resources to support development of partnership working and transitions, NDNA Cymru:  
<https://ndna.org.uk/product-category/wales-early-years-factsheets/>
- A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings: **modules and supporting information**, Hwb - <https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/resource/d34b921e-3b07-4524-87b5-e461540c5ff7/overview>
- Professional learning: foundation learning support for practitioners in schools and settings (Including **Transitions online module**) – modules -  
<https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/resource/b8781f79-5eb7-4548-a20e-a17b0da88df2/overview>