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Staffing

Persuading school staff that running childcare on the school site is the 'right thing to do', finding suitable people to run the provision, dealing with TUPE regulations and meeting staff:child ratios are just a few challenges schools have to face when developing school-based childcare provision for older pupils.

This section covers some of the ways in which schools have overcome staffing barriers.



Get people on board

You may find that some staff are resistant to your proposals to develop childcare provision on the school site, fearing changes to their job role, increased noise, more hours, and so on.

Teachers, caretaking and cleaning staff will be more likely to appreciate the importance of the school-based childcare if the benefits to the children and to the school as a whole are discussed with them at the outset.

Highlight benefits that teachers and the school will gain from having childcare on the school site.

Staff working at St Bede C of E Academy in Bolton are offered reduced childcare costs for using onsite provision. At another North West school, a childcare worker can bring her child to the provision for free.

Having childcare in a school can be helpful for teachers who might need after-school childcare, for instance.

Rework job descriptions

If you are running the childcare provision yourself, consider reworking existing job descriptions (eg for teaching assistants to cover holiday provision).

At one free school, the school's teaching staff have wraparound childcare and holiday provision duties written into their job descriptions. Many of the school's learning support assistants run the after-school clubs, and some also come in to help the children at lunch and break times.

The Ferns in Bolton uses in-house staff to run all its provision; any member of the school staff can be called upon to help out in the childcare provision (eg to provide cover in the case of staff sickness).

Ensure you follow up-to-date employment legislation (eg TUPE) when reworking job descriptions.

Use local people

It can sometimes be difficult to find people prepared to work the few hours required for a childcare setting (eg before- and after-school clubs).

A club in Bolton has employed local people with school-aged children who can work the odd hours that childcare requires. Some staff have children at the schools from which the club collects children.

This means they can arrive at the club at 7.30am with their own children, who have breakfast there and are then taken to school with the other children and brought back to the club at the end of the day.

Use agency staff

Offering flexible childcare can be excellent for parents, but may create pressure for the childcare provider around having the right number of staff in place to meet staff: child ratios.

Some providers keep lists of childcare workers who can be called upon to fill in when other staff are absent and can work the odd hours that childcare requires.

Take on an apprentice

Some schools and childcare providers are hiring childcare apprentices to boost staff capacity. One academy has taken on four apprentices to work at the school, including an older person who is undertaking a career change. All the apprentices work as classroom assistants, as well as in the childcare provision.

Use volunteers

Some school-based childcare providers have volunteers providing activities for children. It is important that all volunteers are checked in the same way that employees are.

Volunteering in a childcare setting, or running an after-school activity or holiday club, can also be a good way for parents to find their way back into working, gaining more confidence and developing new skills.

In order to deal with recruiting staff, Family Action registered with the local Wigan and Leigh CVS and contacted the local Duke of Edinburgh scheme about using volunteers.

Commission a provider

Consider commissioning an external provider to run your school-based childcare. They will be responsible for recruiting and training staff to run the provision, saving you time and money.

Sometimes, bigger childcare providers might consider that it isn't viable to run a childcare service from the site of a small school. In this case, contracting a sole trader provider may be a solution.

Develop trust

You might find that school staff and the childcare provision staff keep themselves to themselves, especially if the childcare workers are employed by a commissioned third-party organisation.

If you are commissioning an external provider, involving childcare staff on INSET training days can help teachers and the childcare staff build mutual understanding of and respect for each other's roles.

Involving childcare staff in appropriate and relevant training could also keep the childcare provision in tune with the school's improvement goals and curriculum developments; having that input could inspire new play activities, for example.

Work in partnership

Providers and schools can work closely together to find staffing solutions for breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday programmes.

At a school in Wigan, staff are employed by both the school and the onsite club, ensuring continuity and familiarity to pupils. Each member of staff has two separate employment contracts.

Use a blended approach

Using a 'blended approach' to staffing can have numerous benefits. If activities are run by a combination of school and childcare staff, children experience a seamless transition from breakfast clubs to their classrooms, then after school to their clubs and once those are over, into the childcare part of provision.

And, if teachers or teaching assistants who run after-school activity clubs are absent for any reason, and clubs are cancelled, the children are simply taken care of by the on-school-site childcare provider until their parents collect them.

Take on a manager

Some schools employ a manager to oversee the development and running of their childcare provision. Depending on the school and its childcare model, this role may involve tasks as varied as:

- overseeing the commissioning of a third-party, and monitoring their activities
- being the key liaison person between a school and its external provider
- co-ordinating the development of new provision at several schools within a cluster
- managing day-to-day operations within a school-run provision (eg dealing with staffing, administration issues).

Depending on your school and the size of the childcare provision, the childcare manager's role could be carried out by an existing member of staff (eg by reworking their job description) or by a dedicated childcare manager.

Try out different methods

It can be difficult to recruit playworkers for just a few hours a week. To overcome this barrier, a Devon setting has used a range of different recruitment methods:

- advertising cheaply (£20) via DISCS (Devon Family Information Service)
- taking on school staff who wish to add to their hours (lunchtime assistants, etc)
- inviting local Exeter University students to work in the holiday club alongside other playworkers
- taking on staff who also work part-time at a local primary school (eg teaching and lunchtime assistants) and other local schools and nurseries (eg a school library manager, a nursery playworker).

A previous method they tried out was to recruit mums from the school, with the incentive being that their own child(ren) can attend the provision without paying.

Rye Oak Primary School in London recognised the importance of having effective management for their holiday programme, and therefore decided to employ a manager to run the provision.

To support them in this process, Family Action contacted Southwark Council's play manager to request examples of job descriptions and pay scales for holiday childcare managers and playworkers, which Rye Oak then used when recruiting their own manager and playworkers.

Dawn Henry explained that:

'The school felt that someone who understands Rye Oak should really manage the holiday provision, preferably someone internally, but it's important they are not overworked with having to work 52 weeks of the year. Rye Oak decided to employ two part-time managers, by extending existing contracts to enable two staff to run the holiday provision on a rotating shift pattern.'

The Assistant Head successfully recruited a 'Holiday Play Manager' internally.

Further information

- Family Action was funded 2013-15 by the Department for Education (DfE) to support schools to develop wraparound and childcare provision. Find out more about the project, and download a wide range of free resources from: www.learning-exchange.org.uk
- Our Learning Exchange Facebook page gives links to events, suppliers, equipment, training and venues that might be of interest to school-based childcare providers: www.facebook.com/pages/Learning-Exchange/904749822892733?sk=timeline

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