

Conclusion

School-based childcare for older pupils

By offering school-based childcare for older children, schools can use their expert knowledge and purpose-built premises to: help parents/carers to be able to work or attend training; give parents peace of mind, knowing their children are in a safe, familiar and convenient environment; and offer pupils the opportunity to engage in enjoyable activities – before and after school and during the holidays.

School-based childcare can also offer offer pupils education, as well as high-quality, flexible and affordable childcare, in one inclusive setting.



Benefits

Offering childcare on a school site can also:

- add a highly desirable benefit to the school's prospectus, which other schools may not be offering
- improve the school's reputation in the local community and develop links with local organisations
- have a positive impact on the school's Ofsted report
- meet the ever-changing needs of the modern family.

In a consultation, parents/carers at Redriff Primary School in London gave these benefits of offering a full programme of school-based childcare:

- education and childcare would be on one site, it would solve childcare in the holidays in a safe environment, and parents would be able to go to work
- the children can mix with their friends, have a consistent school day and be cared for in a safe and familiar environment
- staff could participate/work during the holidays if they should wish.

Key learning points

These are some of the key learning points from the work Family Action did with schools to set up childcare provision in selected schools in the NW and London – what worked well, and what worked less well.

Consultation

Consultation is key to the success of school-based childcare provision. Make sure you consult all relevant stakeholders – not just using paper-based surveys, but by offering people different opportunities to speak to you and give you their views.

It's important for schools to know why they are developing childcare provision on their site, and what they hope to achieve (eg at Castle Hill School, it is not just about supporting working parents – it's about giving children a breakfast and ensuring they start the day 'school ready').

Anthony King, from Family Action, said:

'We didn't initially plan to use any face-to-face consultations, but I was surprised by how useful the focus groups actually were.

We got lots of useful information and insights from these sessions, which we wouldn't have got just from the surveys. It also gives people a chance to ask questions and for the school to explain any issues raised (eg costs, quality). If you find there is no need or demand for childcare at your school, there is no point continuing.'

Even where consultations show parents want childcare provision, and the school sets up a school-based service, this does not necessarily mean that parents will use this service. Anthony King said:

'I recommend schools start with some provision, such as a breakfast club, and evaluate the provision before rolling it out to cover 50 weeks a year. This is an approach taken by Redriff Primary School in London. Include details of your pilot programme in your plans (eg your five-year sustainability plan). When setting up provision at multiple sites, I would also recommend starting at a single site and then scaling up. This will give you the opportunity to see what works, what doesn't and learn from your experience before moving on.'



Kingswood Primary School, London

Flexibility and affordability

Parents value flexibility as much as affordability, as Anthony King said:

'Parents were often willing to pay a bit more to get increased flexibility (eg if a child was sick they wouldn't have to pay for a session, or if they wanted to change their hours they could). However, in order to offer such flexibility a provider has to have the scale to take a financial hit if necessary, and the experience to know what approaches will work and what won't.'

Timings

Schools follow a particular annual cycle (involving terms, holidays, exam time, training days, etc).

Julie Robson, from Family Action, said:

'For any organisation working with a school, whether they are supporting a school to set up its provision, as we have been doing, or whether it is a third-party provider wanting to be commissioned by the school, it's important to acknowledge the school's daily, termly and annual timetables. Make sure you work on the same timetable as the school does. It's also important to know who, in the school, can make decisions about what. Liaising with staff who then have to run decisions by other more senior staff can delay the development of the childcare provision.'

Robust model

Whatever model of childcare provision your school adopts, it's important for it to be as robust as possible. Julie Robson said:

'A robust model of provision firstly needs to be fit for purpose. Take Castle Hill School, for instance. They started taking children from the early years. This meant the school could attract and keep families using their childcare service before they went elsewhere. The model also needs to be flexible, and to change as parents' needs change (eg extending childcare to 7pm, or even offering a Saturday session). A robust model can compete in today's market, can offer something others can't, and is legally and financially sound. Where there is an existing provider, ensure that any issues relating to this business are addressed first before even thinking about what you want to do next. Take legal advice (eg over TUPE) and check any service level agreements in place.'

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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