

Developing childcare in schools

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An evaluation of Family Action's Childcare in Schools project (2013–15) and recommendations for schools across England



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Introduction

Many schools provide some kind of childcare in the form of supervised activities before/after school or over the holidays. This report has been commissioned by the charity Family Action, which has been delivering a two-year project supporting a number of schools in London and the North West to develop and deliver flexible and affordable childcare, provided between 8am and 6pm, 50 weeks a year.

This 'Childcare in Schools' project provided participating schools with consultancy and other resources to support the development and running of their childcare provision. This included: help with the planning process; providing 'off-the-shelf' versions of policies and other key documents; identifying potential external providers and sources of funding; as well as assistance in running consultations and ongoing evaluation.

This report looks at the lessons that have emerged from these schools and aims to show how childcare in schools can be made to work on the ground. It is aimed at those who want to set up new childcare provision in their school, or to scale up their existing clubs. Detailed case studies for the schools involved in the project, including their background, demographics and their particular journeys are available online on the Learning Exchange website (for a full link, please see the bibliography).

Terminology

For the purposes of this report, 'childcare in schools' or 'school-based childcare' will be taken to refer to supervised activities commissioned or delivered by a school that take place before/after school or during the holidays. These activities can include breakfast clubs, supervised use of computer labs or libraries before school, after-school music clubs or sports clubs during the holiday.

In the report these various forms of childcare will often be referred to using the terms 'clubs' or 'childcare provision'. Although the term 'childcare in schools' is sometimes used to cover the activities of nurseries attached to a school, this is not how the term will be used in this report.

The role of schools

Childcare for school-age children has expanded significantly in the last 15 years, although research shows that there are still significant gaps in provision for this group (Rutter & Stocker, Annual Childcare Costs Survey 2014, 2014). Schools are well placed to address this need, and the role of schools in childcare is a central feature in current policymaking. The Family and Childcare Trust believes that schools have an important role to play in addressing the childcare needs of school-aged children.

As well as supporting families with childcare, childcare in schools can promote a range of other outcomes:

- It can provide a safe environment for children with challenging home circumstances.
- It can promote parental engagement with the school and their children's learning.
- It can smooth children's transition to and from school.
- Breakfast clubs can help prevent children attending school hungry and ensure that they arrive on time.
- The wide range of other activities that fall under the heading of 'childcare in schools' can also promote child development in a number of ways e.g. sports activities can promote children's health and confidence.
- Many children enjoy attending before-, after-school or holiday clubs run by their school and appreciate the chance to socialise and take part in fun activities.

Previous reports associated with the 'Childcare in Schools' project provide step-by-step guidance covering all the individual areas of setting up or scaling up provision of childcare in schools (see next section). There is an extensive body of information, guides, templates and how-to documents available online that have been produced during the course of this project.¹ This report is not intended to duplicate these materials, but rather to identify the key factors that have contributed to the successful development of the participating schools' childcare provision and to present a set of recommendations to help other schools develop school-based childcare.

Fieldwork for this paper was conducted during late 2014 and early 2015, with visits to the schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project to see their clubs, talk to pupils and conduct interviews with key members of staff, including head/deputy headteachers, before-, after-school and holiday club managers and workers. Members of Family Action's Childcare in Schools project were also interviewed as part of the research process.

This report hopes to share some of the best learning from the 'Childcare in Schools' project with schools that are thinking of setting up or scaling up some kind of childcare provision. Hopefully, this will help these schools set up their schemes more easily and effectively, and will better enable schools to support their pupils and their families through their childcare provision.

¹ Materials available on the Learning Exchange website at www.learning-exchange.org.uk

Background

In the popular imagination, childcare is associated with the under 5s. But a family's childcare needs do not end when children start school. Indeed, for many families, childcare challenges get more difficult, as parents have to contend with before-, after-school and holiday childcare.

Schools have an important role to play here, which will be highlighted by examining: patterns of childcare use and provision; historical policy initiatives; the current direction of policy; and some recent research into the role of schools.

Childcare use, provision and cost

Research shows that childcare use changes when children start school. In England in 2013, some 6 per cent of families with children under 15 were using breakfast clubs and 36 per cent were using after-school clubs (Huskinson, et al., 2014). Parents may also use registered childminders to pick up and care for their children after school, with five per cent of them using this provision in 2013 (ibid). They may also use childminders in the school holidays, or group-based care in the form of holiday clubs or playschemes particularly during half-term periods and over the summer holidays (Lugton & Rutter, 2014).

When children reach secondary school age they still require supervision, but rarely attend formal holiday clubs. Instead, they may attend arts, sports and leisure activities, which function as a surrogate form of childcare. Other families rely on informal – unregulated – childcare, turning to grandparents, other relatives, friends, babysitters and au pairs to provide childcare.

According to the most recent *Childcare and early years survey of parents* (Huskinson, et al., 2014) around a quarter of school-aged children (23 per cent) accessed breakfast or after-school clubs only, 14 per cent accessed informal childcare only, and 14 per cent accessed some combination of out-of-school and informal childcare. At this age, children were most likely to be accessing childcare for their own benefit – to promote their development or to have fun. (These sorts of reasons applied to 72 per cent of children.)

Childcare was also accessed by this age group for economic reasons in about half of cases (47 per cent) – for instance to allow their parents to work or search for a job. In 17 per cent of cases, children at this age accessed childcare to give their parents more free time to do other things such as domestic work.

Around half of families with children of school age accessed some kind of childcare over the school holidays (46 per cent). This was most common among working parents. Parents who worked during term-time only were much less likely to use childcare over the holidays. Economic reasons were the most common for children to access holiday childcare (63 per cent), whereas reasons relating to the child's immediate benefit were slightly less significant (55 per cent).

In 2014, primary schools in England provided a range of childcare out of school hours: 64 per cent provided access to before-school childcare, 70 per cent to after-school childcare, and 19 per cent to some form of holiday club. 53 per cent provided access to both before-school and after-school care (Lugton & Rutter, 2014).

Childcare represents a significant expense for parents. Recent research by the Family and Childcare Trust shows that all childcare for under-fives has risen by at least 27 per cent over the course of the last Parliament. The average cost of part-time care from a childminder has risen by 4.3 per cent in one year, and now costs £104.06 per week or £5,411 a year.

Childcare costs vary widely even within small areas of the country, and the systems of financial support that exist to help parents with childcare are complicated and difficult to navigate. In addition, parents face difficulties finding childcare that matches their needs in their local area. See, for example, (Rutter & Stocker, Annual Childcare Costs Survey 2014, 2014) and (Rutter & Lugton, 2014).

A range of research gives a richer picture of current childcare needs and provision. See, for example, (Brind et al., 2014); (Huskinson et al, 2014); (Booth et al. 2013); and (TNS BMRB, 2014). One particular area of difficulty that this research highlights is the availability of childcare for children of school-age and for working parents, especially those working atypical hours. See, for example, (4 Children, 2011); (Lugton & Rutter, 2014); and (Rutter & Evans, 2011).

The recent Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children highlighted the extra difficulties and costs that parents of disabled children face in securing appropriate childcare (Contact a Family, Every Disabled Child Matters, Family and Childcare Trust, Working Families, 2014). For instance, it found that “Families with disabled children pay eight times more towards childcare costs compared with other families”. The provision of childcare has important implications for parental employment, for instance, by allowing parents to work longer hours or take on a full-time job.

Historical background

Until 20 years ago, there was little childcare available in the UK for school-age children, with just 350 clubs and 5,000 places in England and Wales in 1990. In 1997 the Government set up the Out-of-School Childcare Initiative and in 1998 new support for out-of-school childcare was announced through funding from the Lottery’s New Opportunities Fund. The New Opportunities Fund was UK-wide and provided start-up grants for breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs where the market had not responded sufficiently.

A further ten-year childcare strategy, published in 2004, committed the Government to creating an out-of-school childcare place for all children aged 3–14 (HM Treasury, 2004). In England this was now to be achieved through the Extended Schools Programme, in which schools would be open to children, families and communities beyond the school day and deliver a range of services, including homework and sporting clubs, before- and after-school childcare, and activities targeted at the wider community using school facilities. Extended schools

were viewed as a means to improve educational outcomes, child poverty, support disadvantaged families and contribute to neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion.

The number of childcare places in out-of-school childcare has continued to increase after the end of the New Opportunities Fund and ring-fenced extended schools funding in 2010. Ring-fenced funding for extended schools ceased in 2011, with the money merged into the local authority block of schools funding. Given continued pressures on budgets, the ending of this ring-fencing means that, in many cases, funds have been diverted to areas seen as more urgent priorities.

Current policy initiatives

Alongside other policy initiatives, such as the new tax-free childcare scheme, the current government has emphasised the role that schools can play in addressing the challenges outlined above. There was recently an enquiry in the House of Lords into affordable childcare and in two recent policy papers, *'More affordable childcare'* and *'More great childcare'*, the government set out a vision of the role schools can play in the childcare agenda. (Both: Department for Education, 2013)

"The traditional school day of 9am to 3pm does not always fit the demands of working parents in modern society. Too few schools offer activities before or after school that match the childcare needs of parents in full-time work."

"Schools are central to their local community, trusted by parents. The government would like to see primary school sites open for more hours in the day, from 8–6 if possible, and for more weeks in the year, offering a blend of education, childcare and extra-curricular activities."

Schools are seen as having an important role to play in addressing a variety of the challenges above – meeting the needs of working parents, helping promote parental employment, and helping promote affordable childcare that parents can access. This is because schools have access to facilities such as rooms, equipment, infrastructure, management structures and have access to potential economies of scale. Their position at the centre of communities – and being somewhere children already travel to and from each day – make schools an attractive setting for childcare.

Recent research

Two recent pieces of research associated with the 'Childcare in Schools' project are the guides *'No limits'* and *'Dismantling the barriers'* (Family Action, 2013) and (Family Action, 2014). These feature a variety of case studies from schools involved in the project and look at the journeys of some of the schools that have been expanding their childcare in this area. They also provide an overview of the individual steps and processes involved for a school considering setting up or expanding their provision, as well as detailed advice and guidance.

There is a wide range of research into the value of childcare in schools. A recent qualitative study of out-of-school care gives a rich sense of the impact that this provision can have, and covers areas ranging from its impact on children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), children and families in areas of deprivation, minority ethnic children and their families, its social and educational impact on children, and its impact on families in general (Barker, Smith, Morrow, Weller, V., & Harwin, 2003). For additional research suggestions, including those that relate to specific activities, please see the bibliography.

A number of reports into childcare in schools and extended schools provide some lessons that, while they do not translate perfectly, are potentially of interest to schools thinking of setting up or scaling up their own childcare provision. New Opportunities Fund evaluations of term-time schemes and summer schools concluded that it was vital to plan and prepare at an early stage and keep plans flexible (Mason & Pye, 2003) (Mason, Pye, & Easton, 2004). The schemes looked at in the evaluation mostly approached financial sustainability as an issue for the second and subsequent years of setting up their provision – suggesting that the first year was largely understood as a time to get provision ‘up and running.’ It was found that to be cost-effective, schemes needed to recruit children and retain them at close to capacity.

Attendance was found to be best promoted by: well-targeted publicity (including reminder letters); timing the provision to meet parents’ needs; putting on activities that children would find attractive and that meets their needs; and promoting the purpose of provision. One successful strategy was to give the provision a high profile in the lead-up to the holidays; ice-breaker events were an effective way of doing this. Having provision that offered something different to the experiences that children would have at school was identified as a key requirement of making attractive provision

A recent report to the Big Lottery Fund suggested that out-of-school hours childcare was most difficult to make sustainable in disadvantaged areas, and found grant-funding and fundraising to be a crucial factor in making many of the schemes financially sustainable. (SQW Limited, 2005).



Starting off on the right foot

The experience of the schools in the 'Childcare in Schools' project demonstrated the value of good preparation and planning before setting up their clubs. Schools ran consultations with parents and staff, which gave them the best possible information about what childcare was needed, when, and how much to charge for it. These consultations involved surveys (paper and offline), focus groups, meetings with members of staff, 'coffee mornings', 'drop-in discussion sessions', and discussions with Family Action staff.

The information provided by these consultations was particularly important for fleshing out the financial plans for the provision, and reduced the degree of uncertainty that schools had in their planning processes for the provision. Consultations allowed schools to start conversations with parents, establish channels of communication, and help spread the word about their provision. Significant progress could be made towards making provision a success before any club was even set up.

Establishing the purpose of provision

The most successful provision had a clear purpose and direction. In the best cases, a concerted effort was made to work out the aims and goals of the clubs in advance – who it would be for and how it would fit in to the school's ethos and wider plans.

Working this out involved a number of meetings and conversations among the senior staff responsible for the overall direction of childcare in the school, among the wider staff body, with parents and with pupils. For more information on how to best have these sorts of conversations, please see the section entitled 'consultation' on p. 12 below.

Schools that had a clear idea of the purpose of their provision and a clear idea of what it contributed to the school's mission and objectives found it easier to communicate the importance of their new club to parents and staff, and found it easier to gain support and interest for it.

Different stakeholders will inevitably have different ideas of what quality childcare looks like, and different ideas about what school-based childcare should deliver. Any childcare provision delivered by a school is going to be a compromise between different priorities. Establishing a conversation about these issues, taking the time to reflect on them and making sure that – whatever decision is made – all stakeholders understand the purpose of the club, is something that begins at the consultation stage.

Examining the school's resources and the local context

Many of the schools conducted an in-depth assessment of their resources – and those of the wider community that it could potentially access. This involved looking at timetables, discussions with the school site manager, thinking about which rooms in the school could be used in new ways without having to alter their furniture or layout, which rooms could potentially be re-arranged or re-purposed,

and which spaces outside of classrooms or halls could be used. This also involved an audit of staff and their skills.

In some cases, new space in the school was identified and new staff skills were brought to the attention of the school. Examples include identifying unused outside space that could be used for growing vegetables, realising that kitchens could be used to host certain activities, and identifying previously overlooked childcare skills among some of the cleaning staff.

Having a good understanding of the local childcare situation was very important to the success of provision. Looking at alternative providers (and other schools) to see what they were offering and how they operated was an important part of this fact-finding process. In the best cases, this sort of work included a number of components such as finding out:

- what parents and children need (hours, activities, locations)
- how much they can pay
- what other provision exists in the local area
- how much other local provision charges
- how much informal childcare families were using (e.g. grandparents looking after children after school).

Some schools were surprised to find that demand for childcare did not follow the hours that they initially expected – for instance, in some schools, childcare was demanded much later in the day than they had anticipated.

Each local authority should produce a childcare sufficiency assessment, in which they audit their area's supply of childcare to see if it satisfies parental demand – and to identify actions to take to address any gaps or shortages. These childcare sufficiency assessments might usefully supplement a school's own investigations – for instance, by giving a picture of the patterns of childcare use in the local authority, noting particular types of shortages of childcare, and so on. Sometimes, however, these documents are not perfectly up to date, and might not speak in a detailed way to the specific geographical area that the school is located in.

This fact finding is a wide-ranging and ongoing piece of work, and it is important to bear in mind that it may not be entirely accurate (for instance, parents may not accurately predict how much they would pay for a club at their school), and the situation will likely change as time goes on. The initial scoping and fact finding is just the first step of a longer process.

Setting up governance and leadership

Setting up governance and leadership is a key part of setting up a new club. This involves a number of tasks, including: securing someone to lead the provision in your school (if not the headteacher). It involves the recruitment or identification of someone to work as a day-to-day manager to work on the ground in the club. This

is also a good time to set up oversight and leadership and strategic and management structures so that the club can respond appropriately to change and can plan appropriately as it goes forwards. A steering group or focus group involving parents can be an important part of this. The choice of an internal or an external model of provision is an important decision, and is considered in the next section.

The most successful schools had a strong appreciation of the fact that the plans for their clubs would likely develop and change over time. This understanding was vital in ensuring that the school would be able to work through challenges and be able to address any issues with its provision flexibly, without being demoralised. The most successful schools had very realistic expectations about their provision and did not expect it to reach maturity overnight.

Even the schools which had the biggest and most well-attended and established clubs found that it was a good idea to start on a small scale and then build them gradually over time as knowledge and capacity increased. A smaller club is less risky and allows for gradual and organic expansion.

Rye Oak Primary School now offers before-, after-school and holiday childcare, with a breakfast club that is attended by about 150 children. This was not achieved overnight, however – they started a number of years ago with a small after-school club and expanded gradually from there.

Financial planning

One component of effective planning for school-based childcare was to establish a clear picture of the resources that will be committed to the club and to set up a clear financial planning in advance. It was often a good idea to plan the entire road-map to establishing financially sustainable provision before any club was actually opened. It was also found to be helpful to audit the resources the club will have access to – many schools identified previously untapped resources (staff, space, possibilities for partnership working).

Establishing relationships and buy-in

The most successful clubs established buy-in from staff, children and parents as soon as possible. When the club has a clear purpose and connection to the ethos of the school, it is easier to do this. Establishing buy-in can be achieved through having a consultation process that involves all these different groups, allows them to express their thoughts and opinions about the provision and to shape its direction. Some parents can also be recruited to a steering group at this stage, which is an important part of ensuring that the childcare provision can adapt and evolve.

Relationships and communications that are established at this stage (for instance with parents who are using the club, and between its manager and the school site

manager) are extremely important for the club's long-term success. The overriding importance of good relationships with school site managers was a recurring theme among schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project, and these relationships were found to be helped by personal overtures from the headteacher, or wine and chocolates.

At Castle Hill Primary School, the children attending the new holiday club were encouraged to come up with their own 'ground rules' about how they should behave and what the club was about. These were then formally collected and typed up into a final set of rules. This helped establish the ethos of the club and gave the children a sense of ownership over the rules.

Consultation

One recurring theme from the schools involved in the project is that activity in each of the areas covered above can be kicked off by a consultation process that takes stock of what the needs are on the part of parents and children at the school, and what childcare various groups would like to see provided.

These consultations typically involved: focus groups with parents, staff and children; surveys and questionnaires sent out to parents and pupils; coffee mornings/similar discussion forums; and the recruitment of parents to a steering group for the provision. Such a consultation allows all these groups to feel involved with the club and have a greater sense of ownership over it.

Consultations involved a range of questions, including: (for parents) when they needed childcare (before, after school or over the holidays), what hours they would want this provision to start, how much they were willing to pay, how they would want to pay (up-front in a block sum or week-by-week; by cash, direct debit; through an online system or in person), how frequently they would use it, what they wanted most from the potential childcare provision, how they understood 'good' childcare. Questions for children included: what sorts of activities they would most enjoy and what they would hope to get out of going to a club at their school. Focus groups were useful to help identify issues and opinions that might not have been previously anticipated and might not have been captured through a survey.

A wide-ranging consultation also allows for a range of important perspectives to contribute to the running of the provision. Such a consultation often flags needs that were not previously known to the school. Understanding parental needs made the difference between well-attended and sparsely attended clubs. Many schools found previously unknown needs when conducting a consultation, and gained new insights into the circumstances of their pupils' families. This suggests that running a consultation with parents to try and identify potential need for out-of-school childcare is important for any school – even if they do not believe that there is any need for childcare.

Parents who are harder to engage with in the consultation (for instance, those who do not like to fill in online forms) could be engaged with through: providing a paper copy of the survey; inviting them to an event or focus group where they can feed back their thoughts verbally; incentivising survey responses through prizes for filling in a survey; promoting interest in the possible childcare provision among other parents (for instance by asking them what they want from it) to encourage as much interest as possible.

The above areas of action allow schools to approach setting up childcare with their eyes open, with good knowledge of the needs for childcare, the associated challenges – and some ideas of how to address them. Proper planning gives schools an idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the option they are choosing for childcare; it also helps schools establish a clearer grasp of what the aims and objectives are for their club and how these ties in to the work and ethos of the schools.



Models of ownership and governance

A school looking to provide childcare has a number of different options. It can deliver the provision itself, commission an external agency to run it, or adopt some blend of the two – for example, a school could run its own after-school club, but arrange for an external sports instructor to run particular activities on certain days. Another option is for a school to set up a new company or charity specifically to run a club – which, in some cases, might employ a number of staff who also work at the school during the day, but on a different contract.

Almost all schools had their plans change, and many switched from one model of ownership to another for at least some of their childcare provision. Many of the schools initially wanted to run their childcare provision themselves, because they felt it allowed for more direct control of all the elements of the provision and to integrate it as closely as possible with the rest of the work of the school. External providers were found to be a useful option in cases where they could provide extra capacity and confidence that some of the schools lacked in certain areas (staff, equipment, training and administrative capacity).

Some schools found that using an external provider for at least some of their childcare provision gave them ‘breathing space’ to gain experience and confidence. Being assertive in negotiations with external providers was a particularly effective strategy, which was helped by having a very clear idea of what the school wanted from their childcare provision. Establishing clear expectations with external providers from the beginning was another effective strategy for making external provision work effectively.

Different needs, different models of ownership

The different schools involved in the ‘Childcare in Schools’ project all found that they had a slightly different set of needs, meaning that different models of provision and ways of implementing them were appropriate in each case.

All of the different options have their own advantages and disadvantages, and different options will be appropriate in different circumstances. What is right for one school might not be right for another, and what is right for a particular school at a particular time might not be right after a few years have passed. The process of comparing and weighing up the different options is a valuable exercise even if a school already has its eye on a particular model – it allows for them to get a better sense of the particular challenges their model might face and helps highlight and clarify any issues or challenges they might have.

Some factors influencing what model of provision is appropriate included:

- What existing arrangements the school has regarding childcare provision.
- Whether its staff have knowledge and experience of running this sort of club.
- The level of staff capacity to run the club.
- The contractual arrangements of existing staff.

- The administrative capacity of the school to run the scheme.
- The predicted cost of running the scheme in-house relative to the cost offered by a provider.
- The ‘match’ between an external provider and the school’s ethos.
- The level of demand the school felt the provision might attract.

Running a consultation and undertaking a period of planning before setting up or scaling up provision allowed schools time to work out what the aims of the provision were and to identify the main qualities they were looking for in a model of provision. Having a clear idea of these issues in advance helps inform the choice of model of provision.

Several strong lessons emerged from the schools involved in the project. Firstly, the choice of model of provision was not a once and for all decision. Many schools changed ownership models as their needs and capacities changed. Some schools reported success with starting off with a private provider, using this time to build the capacity to run the club ‘in house’ several terms or years later (e.g. after they have recruited appropriate new staff, have developed stronger systems and practices and ways of working).

Redriff Primary School had success bringing their after-school club entirely ‘in-house’ after an initial period of using an external provider.

The schools in the project also demonstrated that the decision of model of provision is not a binary choice between internal and external provision. Some schools used a mix of different models – e.g. running a breakfast and after-school club themselves, and having an external provider to run a holiday club. Some schools used a mix of providers on the same club – for instance, having an external provider running activities on some days of a holiday club.

Oakfield High School and College, for example, arranged for an external jujitsu instructor to run some training sessions on one of the days of their holiday club. This allowed the children to access an entirely different type of activity than they would otherwise be able to access due to the specialist nature of the trainer’s skills.

If the right procedures are followed and appropriate contractual changes made, schools found that it was possible to retain staff through transitions between different models. This is often a good idea because their relationships with parents, pupils and other staff are an important resource of the club and a key part of their success.

Finally, a number of key lessons emerged regarding how to most effectively set up and operate external provision. Some of these lessons related to the initial stages of setting up a club: interviewing a number of different external providers allowed for a meaningful decision to be made between them (instead of being left with a particular option 'by default').

Being assertive in negotiations with potential external providers was found to be important for schools to get the best deal possible and to secure certain important provisions or agreements up front. Having a clear idea of what is important for the school in setting up the club allows for clear identification of key demands in any process of negotiation. Rigorous interviews can help distinguish between providers who 'talk the talk' and those who actually fit with the school's ethos.

The Gipsy Hill Federation found that it was helpful to have a parent on the interview panel for any potential providers, as this often brought up perspectives and lines of investigation that would otherwise have been neglected. This gave a better insight into the different external providers that were being interviewed.

The Gipsy Hill Federation arranged for an external provider to deliver some of their clubs. Their new provider adopted certain key policies of the Federation, and applied these to the club they were operating in the school. This helped ensure continuity of ethos and was a way for the external provider to signal its commitment to the aims of the school.

Some of the lessons emerging from the schools related to the successful operation of external provision. Foundations for a good working relationship with an external provider included: establishing a watertight Service Level Agreement, setting out clear responsibilities and expectations, and reaching agreement regarding access to resources.

A key element of a successful ongoing relationship with external providers was to establish effective lines of communication and mechanisms to identify and resolve issues quickly. Allocating a good amount of time and energy to resolving teething issues was found to be vital to establishing an effective relationship with the external provider, as was identifying a key contact from the external provider who was sufficiently 'close to the ground' to resolve day-to-day practical issues. Periodically evaluating and reviewing the relationship with the external provider as time went on was also found to be a good way of ensuring a healthy ongoing relationship.

The most successful schools found ways to establish respect and co-operation between teachers and external providers/people working in the club. Having staff from the external providers attending the same inset days/training days and daily meetings as members of the school staff was an effective way to do this. Inviting external staff to all other activities run in the school was another effective way to deepen this relationship. Giving them their own space to store equipment in the school (and making sure that it is a good quality space) was another effective strategy that was used by some of the schools.



Staffing

The schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project identified a range of ways to make staffing work for their childcare provision. Staff were generally employed on a pay scale similar to a teaching assistant, and in some cases a playworker. Sometimes new contracts had to be set up for school staff to allow them to work over the holidays (in some cases, they worked on the childcare provision under a separate contract). Developing teaching assistants and appropriately skilled non-teaching members of staff was a successful strategy for many of the schools.

Finding and developing staff

A recurring theme was the overriding importance of recruiting staff who were committed to the ethos of the school's childcare provision and who wanted to be working with children for its own sake. This was crucial for finding staff who were dedicated and who could be retained for an extended period of time.

The schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project often said that recruiting staff was a potential challenge, but in practice the different schools found a number of ways to overcome it. Two effective strategies were to either skill-up existing staff who worked in other areas of the school or to recruit people who would not have initially considered applying for a job.

Teaching assistants and dinner supervisors were recruited, trained up and ended up working very effectively in the clubs at some of the schools in the project. This sort of approach was used at the Ferns Primary Academy, which allowed for several new members of staff to be identified, who subsequently integrated well into the before- and after-school clubs.

In some of the schools, parents were recruited to work at the school's childcare provision. These members of staff brought a range of skills to the job, as well as a network of relationships with other parents and children, which proved extremely useful (for instance, in communicating to other parents about the ethos of the club, and information about its activities).

Some of the parents from less advantaged backgrounds who were recruited to work at the clubs in some of the schools in the project did not even consider applying for a job at the school, and the work brought about a profound change in their self-confidence and aspirations. This was particularly true for parents who had previously been unemployed. Some staff who quickly settled in to their role in some of the schools' childcare provision were initially not confident enough to put themselves forward for a job.

This emphasises the importance of proactively identifying potential members of staff and getting the message out to them to recruit them as early as possible and begin benefitting from their contributions. The initial consultation process is a

valuable opportunity to identify such people and to encourage them to apply for any new posts.

In some cases, schools recruited volunteers to help at their clubs. This has seen success either as a stand-alone strategy (it helps build capacity of the club in certain areas, even if volunteers do not contribute to staffing ratios) or as a potential channel for testing, developing and recruiting new members of staff.

Atherton Community School, for example, was helped by some Duke of Edinburgh volunteers.

Starting potential staff off as volunteers allows them to build confidence and skills, and allows for their potential to be demonstrated and assessed. Newly 'discovered' members of staff who were recruited to work in a school's childcare provision – either parents who may have previously been unemployed, or existing members of staff working in other areas of the school – had a strong personal commitment to the club they worked at. Some schools found that previously overlooked members of staff were a very valuable resource for school-based childcare.

Effective ways of managing staff contracts

Schools reported success in introducing new contracts for members of staff working in their childcare provision – for instance, contracts that allowed staff to work outside of term-time on a holiday club. Some schools gradually transitioned all new staff over to 'new style' contracts, which allowed them to work on the school-based childcare, building potential staffing capacity over time. In some cases, schools employed staff to work on the provision as a distinct job, with its own contract and, in some cases, different pay arrangements.

Some schools found that paying a different (often lower) wage rate to staff working on their childcare provision was a necessary part of making the club financially sustainable. In some cases, this was combined with benefits such as allowing the children of staff who worked at an after-school club to attend it for free. Some schools also reported success in using zero hours contracts for certain groups such as students who were back at home from university over the holidays and wanted a small amount of work.

The importance of the day-to-day club manager

All the schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project found that the day-to-day, on the ground manager of the club was one of the single most important members of staff for the success of the school's childcare provision. Good managers were able to proactively identify problems, work round barriers, deal with staff sickness or absence, help plan effectively for the future of the scheme, train staff, and develop a team ethos that really mattered to the staff working there. Good managers also helped promote staff commitment to the purpose of the club, which is very important to its success and to staff retention. These managers were able to build team identity, commitment, flexibility and resilience – all of which are vital to successful childcare provision. Common traits in these managers were flexibility and a can-do attitude.

When scaling up existing clubs or introducing a new one, a number of schools found success in replicating and expanding existing staffing arrangements. For instance, the same manager who runs an after-school club could use many of the same staff and protocols in a new holiday playscheme. Staff commitment to the ethos of the childcare provision, the personal relationships between different members of staff, and a sense of team identity, were crucial in encouraging these staff to work in a new club that was being set up.

How external providers can be used to cover staffing gaps

Finally, using an external provider for some of a school's childcare provision can help cover any gaps in staff availability in the short or long run – for instance, a school could arrange for an external provider to run a specific activity (e.g. martial arts or music) at an after-school club that is otherwise run by the school. External providers can be used to provide 'breathing space' to build up a school's own staff capacity. Some schools found that taking on an external provider was seen to be a less risky option – for instance, if demand was not sufficiently high for provision, then the school would not be as financially exposed. In the best cases, external providers were able to represent a predictable service at a predictable cost, which schools that had never run a club before might not be able to achieve initially and might not have been confident in delivering.

Schools involved in the project found that it was possible to maintain many of the same members of staff despite changing contractual arrangements regarding who was providing the childcare. This was very important for continuity of service, and maintaining existing relationships those members of staff had with pupils, each other, and parents. For instance, a school that had previously been using an external provider that now wanted to run all of its clubs for itself could recruit a key member of staff from the external provider, recruiting them to deliver the same sort of activities as part of the school's own provision. Schools considering this option should take legal guidance before proceeding.



Space and equipment

Some of the schools running before- or after-school clubs where food was served held these in their school halls. This allowed them to use the school's dining tables and catering equipment more easily. Some schools had breakfast in a specific classroom and then conducted activities in the school hall, which meant that dining tables did not have to be packed away before other activities could commence. Holiday clubs used a wider variety of facilities – some used sports halls, some used specific classrooms. These clubs, however, often had to work around building work in the school site, and sometimes had to relocate. Site managers were crucial to resolving space and equipment challenges; schools found that establishing a good relationship between the site manager and the member of staff responsible for the school's childcare provision was essential.

Identifying space and equipment

Many schools found that their clubs benefitted from identifying spaces and facilities that had previously been overlooked. In some cases school kitchens were used to run additional activities; in others, previously unused outside space was used to set up a vegetable garden. Sometimes these assets were in the wider community, for instance, a local town hall. Identifying potentially overlooked facilities allows for a greater range of activities to be run. It also allows for greater flexibility by providing more options to turn to in changing circumstances.

Establishing a good working relationship with the school site manager

A number of staff who headed up their school's childcare provision reported that establishing a good relationship with the site manager was one of the most important components to its success. Early consultation and establishing a dialogue and relationship was crucial to setting off on the right foot and ensuring that the site manager had a good idea of the purpose and needs of the club. In some cases, wine and chocolate were found to be very effective. As the site manager is the lynchpin for so many resources in the school and can help with so many potential issues, it was found to be crucial to have them 'on-side' from the beginning.

Strategies for working around short-term space difficulties

A number of clear strategies emerged for how to deal with short (or longer) term problems with the availability of facilities. Firstly, in cases of building work, it was sometimes possible to have the building work scheduled for hours or days that the club was not running, or it was possible to target the building work in specific areas at a time, so as to minimise the area of the school that was shut down at any one moment. Site managers were vital in understanding and helping with these logistical issues.

As a response to building works taking place at their school, the Ferns Primary Academy arranged for the children attending to be transported by bus from the school site to the sports hall at Kearsley Academy to have a day of activities, and they were transported back to the Ferns for pick-up by their parents at the regular time.

Another effective option to deal with short-term lack of facilities was to have an 'away day' or trip to take children away from the normal rooms that the club uses. For a more extended period of time, schools found success with finding other venues to run their provision in – such as a community hall, or a room or hall in another nearby school. Arranging transport to take children to and from the current site of the provision for children allowed parents to drop off and pick up their children as normal, without having to disrupt their usual arrangements.



Financial sustainability

Delivering childcare in schools requires money and a clear plan for where this is going to come from. The financial sustainability of the childcare provision is one of the crucial issues determining its long-term viability, and a range of different lessons emerged from the schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project.

None of the schools ran their childcare as a money-making venture (although it was common to aim to make a small profit to act as a 'buffer') and the clubs took a reasonable amount of time to break even. Making a loss for the first year and a half was not uncommon.

Establishing financial objectives

Many schools aimed to make a small profit to cushion the clubs against future uncertainty (and to ensure that the schemes could 'stand on their own two feet' by funding themselves), but these profit margins were not large. Relatively small fluctuations in demand and attendance could cause a club's finances to deviate significantly from its original financial plans, which encouraged schools to find ways to get children signed up to the clubs as early as possible, and to have parents pay regularly or in advance (see below). Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs were generally perceived to be less risky for a school to start with than a holiday club. The shorter hours of care involved in these schemes meant a smaller number of hours to potentially make a loss on.

The schools in the project highlighted the importance of establishing and communicating the financial objectives of club from the start.

- Is it intended to make a small profit to give it a small safety buffer for the future?
- Will it aim to generate a profit to pay in to a contingency fund for the future or to fund staff development or quality improvement?
- Is it going to be run at a loss?
- Will there be different charges for different pupils?
- Will it be part subsidised?

No answers to any of these questions will suit every need, and every school might have different answers to these questions. For instance, free childcare provision is much more accessible, but might be hard to fund and squeeze other areas of the school's finances. The initial decisions made about the purpose of provision and its relation to a school's ethos have an important role to play in deciding these sorts of questions. Whatever decisions are made, it is important that staff and parents understand the option that has been chosen and that this is appropriately factored in to the plans for how the provision is to be run.

Financial planning

Getting a business plan in place before setting up a new club was found to be an effective strategy for promoting its long-term resilience. This allowed a financial roadmap for the club to be established, and helped financial planning going forward. For instance it can give the scheme an idea of how it will transition from its start-up phase, where it may be benefitting from start-up grants or start-up funding, to standing on its own feet.

Clear financial planning in advance also allows a clearer assessment of how well the club is doing relative to expectations, and gives a more precise idea of what financial changes might need to be implemented. Having a roadmap established in advance gives a greater sense of confidence and predictability and helps contingency planning. These are all important for the initial phases of setting up the club, where there will likely be unexpected challenges and changes needed. Having clear business plans in place allows for a more informed decision to be made regarding which model of provision is most appropriate for the school.

The schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project found that it often took a good deal of time for their clubs to become financially sustainable. This was often due to demand taking time to build up to a sufficient level to bring in enough money. Having a financial plan that is long term enough to account for this sort of time-scale is important, and it allows for a controlled and planned transition from start-up funding to the scheme supporting itself. Having a well-run consultation also helped in this area as it allowed schools to have more detailed financial planning and have a better idea of contingencies. An effective consultation can be a key component of successful long-term financial planning.



Changing plans and changing prices

Even the most successful clubs found that initial plans for pricing had to be adapted to reflect developing understandings of use and demand. For instance, some schools found that in their consultation, parents had suggested that they would pay a certain price for a club, whereas in practice, it was found that another price was appropriate for parental budgets. In some of the schools, low initial demand was addressed very quickly by a slight adjustment to price. In these cases, talking to parents and getting an idea of their needs and situation was important to flagging this issue and the way of resolving it.

Talking to parents regularly allowed for better identification of the factors driving demand – for instance, whether price, quality, opening hours, or some other factor was influencing demand. This extra information allowed schools to respond more effectively to changing patterns of demand. Having an effective channel of communication with parents was also vital to ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made with any parent in financial difficulties, to prevent difficulties from becoming more severe.

Parental debt

Making sure that parental debts were never allowed to build up was very important. It was found to be crucial to maintain engagement with the parents who had built up any debts with the club. Having a private and open conversation with the parent at an early stage was a key part of this. Establishing clear expectations regarding payment, debts and late payment from the beginning helped these conversations to happen more easily. Some schools found it to be better to get parents signed up to a repayment plan where they were able to pay off their debt little by little than to have the parents ‘walk out’ entirely. Getting parents to commit to regular payments such as direct debits, or having them pay in advance was found to be effective in preventing parental debt from building up. Lowering the cost for parents who pay by such methods was an effective way to encourage this.

Different approaches to payment

Many of the schools were creative in finding ways to get their parents to pay as early as possible and trying to be as flexible as possible with their payment arrangements. Some schools reported that parents responded well to not being expected to pay for days of childcare that they did not use (for instance, if their shifts changed at late notice), whereas others found that parents liked to pay in advance for blocks of childcare, so that they could have their plans ‘locked in’ a long time in advance.

Making arrangements for children to attend the school’s childcare provision in advance was often found to be to the benefit of both the school and the parents. Parents valued the stability and security of having places arranged and booked in (and their plans secured), and schools valued the greater predictability of numbers, and the greater confidence in having places filled. This was achieved through having accessible and flexible online booking systems, or simply by sending out registration forms and information a long time in advance of the club

starting (particularly in the case of holiday clubs). Other options included early bird bookings, sibling discounts and 'refer a friend' schemes.

Sources of funding

Some schools reported success in identifying sources of funding for their clubs. This money sometimes came from charities, trusts, the local council, housing associations, etc. Some businesses such as Greggs and Kellogg's provide funding for clubs, and similar arrangements can be made with local businesses.

Rye Oak Primary School received funding from the charity Magic Breakfast, which provides funding for their breakfast club.

Sometimes, schools made use of pupil premium money to contribute to the funding of their clubs and, in other cases, they identified opportunities to work with local businesses. Applying widely and re-using some of the same material between applications (with appropriate alterations) was found to be a successful strategy. The Learning Exchange website provides an overview of different funding sources. (For a full link, please see the bibliography.)

Marketing and promotion

For the childcare offered by a school to have the most impact, it needs to be effectively promoted so that all parents and pupils are aware of its existence, purpose, and the details of its day-to-day operation. Good promotion and marketing of provision maximises interest in it and can address any misconceptions on the part of parents or pupils before they arise.

The most effective strategy with promotion was to start it early and to use a range of different materials, and to engage with parents directly as a way of creating interest and of encouraging parents to spread information through word-of-mouth. Getting out materials in advance ensured that parents were targeted before they had already made alternative plans for childcare (especially over the holidays). Effective promotional strategies including putting banners outside the school, sending leaflets home with pupils, including information in any regular school newsletters, on social media or on the school website, and distributing materials to parents at local events.

The most effective clubs were in schools that understood the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations from both parents and pupils (often the most important form of promotion), and appreciated that providing something that parents and children wanted makes promoting it much easier. Some practical ideas that have proved effective in both cases will be considered below.

Producing materials

One essential component of marketing and promotion is the production of materials such as posters and leaflets. Many schools found that there was no need to re-invent the wheel to be successful here – many schools were able to draw inspiration from other resources or materials they had produced in the past, or from promotional material they had seen used locally.

Schemes that have been running for any length of time could re-purpose existing promotional materials without having to make major changes (for instance, last year's summer playscheme flyer can be re-used, once the date and activities are updated). For new schemes, it is worth investing some time in making the marketing materials as good as you possibly can in the first place – you will continue to benefit from them in later years.

Some tips for making effective promotional materials include:

- Keep the messages short and simple.
- Make the graphics eye catching and easy to read.
- Get others – colleagues and friends – to give feedback on your promotional material.
- Test out your promotional material on actual parents to see whether it is clear and whether it leaves any important questions unanswered.

Some example materials

The schools that were the most successful in promoting their clubs used a mixture of different approaches to do so. Some of the materials used included items in school newsletters/emails, content added to the school website or posted through social media, leaflets for children to take home with them or distributed at particular events. Some had success with setting up banners outside their school so that parents can see them coming into and out of school and when they are walking/driving past the school site. Some schools used the local media to promote their childcare provision.

Special events were found to be another good promotional tool: new events (such as one-off 'taster-sessions' showcasing the activities that take place at an after-school or holiday club) or an additional component added to existing events (such as bringing a stall or banner to a community event or something already taking place on the school site such as a concert). Another successful option was to run seasonal special events as part of the club – for instance, in the run up to Christmas.

Park Lee Community Primary School ran a special event at each after-school club on Fridays in the run up to Christmas, where children could have hot chocolate and special snacks. The children's clear appreciation of a special Friday event has meant that this was carried on after Christmas, for the rest of the winter – and a special Friday event is likely to continue into the future in some form or another.

Such outreach activities were found to be most useful when they aligned with the desired target audience's needs and interests – e.g. making sure that events run at times that the parents you are targeting are able to attend. These sorts of events were most successful when there were strong staff (or parental) advocates for the scheme present to help explain and 'sell' the clubs.

Establishing dialogue with parents

Many schools found that establishing a dialogue with parents about the childcare provision was a particularly effective way of promoting it – this could be combined with holding events such as those above, and with running a consultation. In many cases, the consultation a school conducts is effectively the first piece of marketing or promotion that the parents receive about childcare in that particular school. The consultation itself could be seen as part of the marketing process. For instance, any parent stakeholders engaged with as part of a school's consultation could become advocates of the scheme.

Any consultation or feedback will also give you a better idea of what it is about your club that appeals to children and parents – focus on this in your promotional materials. An ongoing consultation process will also allow for a continuing dialogue with parents about the direction of the club and give them a sense of ownership

over it. This helps promote parental interest in the club and helps spread the word about it. The consultation mechanism and ongoing feedback can be understood as part of the marketing and promotion mechanism as well.

In some cases, building trust with parents takes time – especially when they have had bad experiences with previous childcare provision, or if they have had bad personal experiences at school. The example of the schools in the project show that even challenging legacies can eventually be overcome.

Parents also responded well to having information circulated to them a long time in advance of the deadline for signing up for clubs (especially with holiday clubs). In some cases, it took a while for information to reach all the parents who might be interested. This is particularly true with word-of-mouth – which is often the most significant promotional tool.

On-going marketing

A similar mix of approaches were effective for on-going marketing as well. The importance of staff's relationships with parents takes a more prominent role for established clubs, with pick up and drop off times being a chance to be updated on future plans for the school's clubs by a staff member and to be given information or promotional materials.

Parents spreading information among themselves was a particularly important form of on-going marketing. For this to happen effectively, parents needed to be positive about the club delivered at the school, and for at least some of them to have received up-to-date information to share among the group – this sort of peer to peer information sharing can amplify any messaging put out by the school and help it to spread further.



Leadership and ongoing running of the provision

A number of lessons emerged regarding effective leadership of childcare in schools. Firstly, the headteacher was found to be the lynchpin of the success of a school's provision. In cases where the headteacher was committed to making their school's clubs work, a wide range of challenges and difficulties could be overcome. Without the priority and resources that a committed headteacher could allocate to the childcare agenda in their school, certain challenges could be fatal for the school's childcare provision. The most effective clubs had senior management providing a good deal of drive, enthusiasm and political backing for their work.

Having the right person to lead the drive for childcare in schools and to deliver it day to day was crucial. In addition to the headteacher, the larger schools often had a member of staff who championed and oversaw the childcare agenda, as the headteacher could not be expected to take such hands-on ownership of all elements of the school's activity. This 'champion' role was vital for ensuring good planning and strategy, and for promoting childcare provision in the school. Those who were particularly effective in this role were enthusiastic, committed to the idea of the provision and had a can-do attitude with regards to problems that arose. This role was often performed alongside other significant responsibilities.

Finally, the actual manager of the club who is there on the ground day to day was a crucial element for success. Strong managers were able to lead a team – be flexible in responding to issues, help develop and train and motivate their staff and build capacity. Recurring traits were a commitment to the club, flexibility and a can-do attitude. Having a good day-to-day manager of the scheme provided continuity and stability for both the team of staff working there and for pupils and parents.

The ongoing leadership of a school's childcare provision was found to work best when parents had a real input into the process. This was often achieved through a mixture of formal and informal channels – having parents represented on a steering group, having formal questionnaires, providing a forum or meeting for parents to express their views, informally chatting with parents at pick up/drop off time, asking children what they enjoy about the clubs.

Some schools found that incentivising questionnaire responses with prizes ensured a good number of responses in cases where parents might not otherwise want to spend time filling out a form. Developing new activities and making changes to how things are run in conjunction with children and parents both helped make the clubs more appropriate to their needs, and also strengthened the sense of ownership that parents and children have over how it is run.

Day-to-day practicalities

Some specific practical lessons emerged from the 'Childcare in Schools' project, covering a number of areas: transitions, transport, food, co-operating with other schools, timetabling and policies.

Transitions to and from school

Having a quiet reading activity at the end of an after-school club (instead of a high-excitement game that children might be reluctant to leave) was found to help prepare them for going home. Late pick-ups were a challenge from time to time for some of the schools; one strategy to address this was to talk to the parents about difficulties they may be facing. This is made much easier if members of staff had already established a good relationship with the parent.

Fenstanton Primary School found that having coloured sashes on their after-school club pupils at the end of the day helped keep track of the children who needed to go to the after-school club among a large number of other pupils, and helped make the hand-over to the after-school club as smooth as possible.

Atherton Community School also ran a holiday club as a way of helping ease the transition for new pupils about to join the school.

Transport

Transport is a key issue for the practicality and accessibility of childcare.



Oakfield High School and College, which is a state special school, has been using a transport co-ordinator to secure concessionary bus passes for pupils using its after-school clubs. This allows them to use the ring and ride service for free, providing another transport option for families and improving the accessibility of these clubs.

As mentioned above, The Ferns Primary Academy, which had to temporarily run its holiday club from another school's site due to building works, arranged transport to shuttle children from their school to the temporary site. This allowed parents to make the same pick-up and drop-off arrangements as before.

Food

Some after-school clubs found that ordering food online and having it delivered to the school weekly was a more efficient use of time and money than having a member of staff go shopping specifically. Having a regular order also ensured that no key items were overlooked. Some schools also found that being prepared to drive a hard bargain with the food contract for their after-school, breakfast or holiday club was able to save them a good deal of money over time.

Co-operating with other schools

Co-operating with other schools brings a range of practical benefits – it allows for pooling of resources, sharing of risk, sharing information and best practice.

Some of the London schools involved in the project have gained a great deal from sharing ideas and discussing challenges they have faced. This co-operation might initially seem surprising because schools might be expected to be anxious about helping those that might be perceived as their 'competitors'.

However, the London schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project that ended up having a good co-operative relationship were located far enough away from each other that they did not feel that they were competing over the same pool of pupils, but – at the same time – they were located closely enough together for there to be common issues and challenges for them to discuss (i.e. in the same local authority). This could be replicated as a model for 'learning networks' for schools to share best practice and ideas.

Rye Oak Primary School found that sharing the same basic structure of timetable between the school day and the holiday club provided children with a useful sense of continuity and structure.

Similar continuity was achieved through having school policies taken on (as far as possible) by the before-, after-school and holiday clubs (including by external providers).

Elm Wood Primary School run their breakfast club internally and have their after-school club run by an external provider. The after-school club has a flexible booking system, which was more flexible than the school was able to offer for its breakfast club. In this case, arrangements were made for this booking system to be used by the breakfast club as well to allow parents more flexibility.

Key messages

A number of shared key messages arose from the experiences of the schools in the 'Childcare in Schools' project.

Running a consultation and conducting proper advance planning were vital.

To make an informed decision about childcare, schools need to understand the needs of the pupils and families they serve. Effective consultation also forms the vital first step to a number of areas of work related to setting up or extending childcare in schools – marketing the scheme to parents, establishing buy-in from staff, pupils and parents, and informing financial and strategic planning. The consultation also provides an excellent opportunity to think through some of the key questions about the childcare provision – what is its purpose? What needs is it intended to address? What are the financial objectives for it? What is the financial plan for the scheme in the short, medium and long term? Even schools that believe that there is no need for childcare could benefit from running a consultation process, to allow them to be more confident of this.

Starting off small and building capacity over time was a successful model of expansion.

Even the largest clubs in the project originally started small scale and built up over a number of years. Allowing schemes time to grow lets ways of working be established, relationships between staff, pupils and parents be strengthened, staff capacity be developed, and the club to become known to and valued by the parents and pupils. Schools already running some form of childcare – for instance a breakfast club – often found they could call on existing staff or replicate existing arrangements when setting up a new club.

Some of the fixed costs of running a club could be spread across subsequent years, for instance, re-using promotional materials and equipment. Many of these schemes built new capacity as they went (as staff expertise grew, new members of staff were identified and existing members of staff received new training.)

Flexibility – and anticipating the need to change and develop plans – was crucial. The schools in the project all changed certain components of their childcare offering, and will continue to do so in the future. What resources are available may change, and the needs of children and their families and the school might change, and your understanding of them may develop. This also applies to the model of provision offered – the choice of internal or external provider is not set in stone, and might need to be changed as circumstances alter.

Many schools took some time for their childcare to become financially sustainable – it was not unusual for a school to make a loss on its provision for the first year and a half. Growing demand to a sufficient level was a key component of reaching financial sustainability. Knowing this in advance and planning for it is extremely important for setting up a club that lasts.

Any school considering setting up childcare provision has a wealth of resources and experience to draw on. The Learning Exchange website collects together a considerable range of ready-made materials, plans, checklists, and signposts to other resources (and has a range of in-depth case studies for the schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project).

For many of the parts of work involved in setting up childcare in school, there is no need to re-invent the wheel, and schools can benefit from the considerable leg-work that has already been done by others. Schools can also learn from each other as they set up childcare. One effective technique is to reach out to other schools that are not close enough to be direct competitors but that are still close enough to have similar experiences.

Key practical suggestions

Starting off provision on the right foot

- Planning and research gives childcare provision the best chance of success. Run a consultation with parents and staff. This can involve:
 - Surveys (paper and offline)
 - Focus groups with parents, pupils and staff
 - Meetings with members of staff
 - ‘Coffee mornings’ or ‘drop-in discussion sessions’ to engage parents
 - Incentivise survey responses with prizes if needed
 - Allow parents to engage with the consultation in a number of different ways – some may be more confident in writing or in person.
- Research in advance to find out what the need and demand for childcare is:
 - Ask what childcare people would like (what activities, what hours)
 - Ask how much parents would pay for it and how they would like to pay (direct debit, cash, online booking system)
 - Find out how much informal childcare families are using (e.g. grandparents or friends looking after their children)
 - Look at other childcare provided in the local area – how much it charges, when it runs.
- Establish the purpose of the provision:
 - Who is it for? What are its main objectives?
 - How does it fit in to the school’s ethos and wider plans?
- Set up governance and leadership:
 - Find someone in the school to act as a ‘champion’ for the childcare provision, to oversee plans and to get others invested in it.
 - Consider setting up a steering group with parents represented.
 - Make sure those involved appreciate that plans will change over time.
- Financial planning:
 - Set up a financial plan that maps out the future for the scheme.
 - Extend plans for finances beyond ‘start up’ funding.

- Ideally establish a roadmap to making the provision sustainable (e.g. through achieving a certain level of attendance, grant support).
- Establish relationships and secure buy-in:
 - Establish buy-in from staff, children and parents as soon as possible.
 - This is promoted by a consultation process and early marketing.
 - This is most easy to do when there is a clear goal for the provision.
 - Establish a good relationship with the school site manager.

Ownership and governance

- Both internal and external models of provision have their own combinations of advantages and disadvantages. The choice of provider is not a 'once and for all' decision .
- Factors influencing the model of provision include:
 - What existing arrangements the school has regarding childcare
 - Staff knowledge/experience.
 - The level of staff capacity to run the club.
 - The contractual arrangements of existing staff.
 - The administrative capacity of the school to run the scheme.
 - The predicted cost of running the scheme in-house relative to the cost offered by a provider.
 - The 'match' between an external provider and the school's ethos.
 - The level of demand the school felt the provision might attract.
- Tips for good working relationships with external providers include:
 - Be assertive in negotiations.
 - Involve a parent in interviewing the providers – this will help provide new perspectives and lines of questioning.
 - Establish clear expectations in writing at the start of the relationship.
 - Establish a 'key contact' at the external provider who is sufficiently 'close to the ground' to resolve day-to-day practical issues.
 - Involve the external provision's staff in the wider life of the school, e.g. through inviting them to events and inset days.
 - Ensure external staff have their own space for equipment.

Staffing

- Staff were often employed on a pay scale similar to a teaching assistant, and in some cases a playworker.
- Consider setting up new contracts up for school staff to allow them to work over the holidays / consider having a distinct contract for their work at the childcare provision.

- Look for previously overlooked members of staff who might have the skills needed to work on the provision (e.g. dinner supervisors).
- Consider starting potential staff off as volunteers – this allows for their potential to be demonstrated and assessed.
- External providers can be useful in covering staffing gaps (e.g. by running a specific activity).

Space and equipment

- Look to see if the school has any space that has been overlooked.
- Consider possible resources in the local community that you might use.
- Talk to the site manager to help work around building works over the holiday.
- Arrange trips off-site when building work makes normal rooms inaccessible.

Financial sustainability

- Anticipate taking a while to break even (1.5 years was not uncommon).
- Clarify the financial objectives for the childcare provision up-front.
- Establish and maintain a high level of attendance.
- Small fluctuations in demand could have large implications for breaking even.
- Talk to parents and consider adjusting prices / hours if demand is low.
- Be proactive about parental debts. Talk to parents about their difficulties.
- Consider making ‘up front’ payments or payments by direct debit cheaper, to incentivise parents to pay in this way.
- Look for sources of funding from charities. Consider holding fundraising events for the provision.

Marketing and promotion

- Start it early – parents often make plans for childcare long in advance.
- Use a range of materials.
- Understand the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations.
- Consider running ‘taster’ events or special events, (e.g. for Christmas).
- Tips for effective promotional materials:

- Keep the messages short and simple.
- Make the graphics eye catching and easy to read.
- Get others – colleagues and friends – to give feedback on your promotional material.
- Test out your promotional material on actual parents to see whether it is clear and whether it leaves any important questions unanswered.

Leadership and ongoing running of provision

- Have a senior member of staff leading the drive for childcare in schools and championing the provision.
- Ensure parents have an input in to the running of provision through steering groups or on-going consultation, surveys or informal chats.

Day-to-day practicalities

- Consider having ‘quiet reading’ at the end of after-school clubs to make children less excited and easier to pick up.
- Be creative about using transport (e.g. local ring and ride service) to support transport to make provision more accessible for children with SEND.
- Consider ordering food online.
- Talk to other schools in your local area to share ideas and best practice.



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Electronic sources

'Dismantling the Barriers' guide, case studies and other resources are available on the Learning Exchange website: www.learning-exchange.org.uk

Schools involved in the 'Childcare in Schools' project

School	Local Authority	Type of school	Pupils	Breakfast club	After-school club	Holiday club
Atherton Community School	Wigan	Secondary Sixth form	261	X		
Castle Hill St Philip's C of E Primary School	Wigan	Primary	200	X	X	X
The Ferns Primary Academy	Bolton	Primary	370	X	X	X (From September)
Oakfield High School and College	Wigan	Secondary and Sixth form. SEND emphasis	160		X	X
Park Lee Community Primary School	Wigan	Primary	303	X	X	X (Easter trial)
Redriff Primary School	Southwark	Primary	439	X	X	X
Rye Oak Primary School	Southwark	Primary	510	X	X	X
Fenstanton Primary School	Lambeth	Primary	631	X	X	X*
Crawford Primary School	Southwark	Primary	480	X	X	X*
Paxton Primary School	Southwark	Primary	234	X	X	X*
Kingswood Primary School	Lambeth	Primary	811	X	X	X*
Elm Wood Primary School	Lambeth	Primary	364	X	X	X*

NB: all of the Gipsy Hill Federation schools have their holiday childcare provided through Kingswood.

For case studies of many of the schools, see the Learning Exchange website, linked in the bibliography.

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About the author

Duncan Lugton is Policy and Research Assistant at the Family and Childcare Trust. He graduated with an MA in Philosophy from Brandeis University in America and has a BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University.

About the Family and Childcare Trust

The Family and Childcare Trust works to make the UK a better place for families. Our vision is of a society where government, business and communities do all they can to help every family to thrive. Through our research, campaigning and practical support we are creating a more family friendly UK.

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About Family Action

Families come in all shapes and sizes. No matter how they are constructed, Family Action is committed to supporting them to realise their potential. All families encounter difficult and challenging times and many will find ways to deal with their problems, getting the support they need from friends and relatives. There are times, however, when problems can seem too overwhelming to manage.

Family Action works to tackle some of the most complex and difficult issues facing families today – including financial hardship, mental health problems, social isolation, learning disabilities, domestic abuse, or substance misuse and alcohol problems.

These issues can have a huge impact on the stability of family life, and will have a significant impact on the health, wellbeing and development all family members. Family Action believes that families facing these difficulties should have the support they need to become stronger, happier and healthier. With the right kind of support, families can overcome their difficulties and find hope for a brighter future.

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