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## Rural settings

The Childcare in Schools team has been looking at the particular challenges facing rural settings when developing inclusive provision.



### Research

During Autumn 2015 Family Action carried out a short piece of research, which aimed to:

- highlight common challenges facing early years settings in rural areas when developing inclusive provision for 0-5s with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- identify examples of inclusive practices in rural school-based settings.

The process involved a number of steps, such as sending out Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to 20 local authorities described as among the most rural in the most recent (2011) ONS survey documents.

The responses from the LAs indicated:

- that rural settings comprised a number of different models – PVI, children’s centre, CIC, school-run, working in partnership with a local childminder
- the diverse ways in which LAs provide support to EY settings (eg training, resources, funding/grants).

Having reviewed the data received, we selected two areas for further research, and identified a small number of settings from these regions to interview by phone about the development of inclusive practices within their settings.

Family Action went on to visit three settings to find out in more detail how they were overcoming barriers and developing more inclusive practices.

## Challenges

The information gathered indicated that settings face a wide range of challenges in developing inclusive childcare practices, such as: funding; staffing; paperwork; equipment; professional and specialist support available; space; supporting and engaging with parents; training.

While many of the barriers settings face are similar to those faced by non-rural settings, others are particular to rural areas, where bus services may be limited, professional/specialist support may not be available locally, and distances to travel may be greater.

- Some settings, for instance, felt they had to rely on their own experience and knowledge, but do not have access to enough professional input/support for their decisions and way of working, which is often due to LA cuts.
- Where the catchment area is small, settings can struggle to make their provision viable every day of the week.
- In some very rural areas, the pool of staff to draw from is very small, which means that getting short-term and quality extra support for specific children is extremely difficult. Some settings said there is little incentive to apply for extra funding for specific children, as they may not be able to find an additional staff member at all, or 'the quality isn't there'.
- Settings noted an increase in the number of children with speech and language difficulties. In rural communities this is coupled with the difficulty in accessing speech and language therapists (eg due to limited bus services and the therapist not being located locally).

*'difficult to get to children's centre for assessment'*

*'access to speech and language drop-in sessions difficult unless parents have their own transport – buses very sparse'*

*'getting new staff – distance to travel has put people off'*

*'very difficult to access [training] as need all staff all of the time, so only if in evenings or weekends, travel time can easily be 45 mins each way'*

*'no-one to call to discuss concerns if worried' / 'feeling isolated – not knowing what other settings are doing'*

*'cost and distance' / 'distance to travel – will be at least 40 mins each way, cost of travel plus time and staff time'*

## Overcoming barriers

The rural settings we spoke to and visited stressed the importance of:

- having a 'can do' approach (eg being positive, celebrating differences)
- effective communication (eg building relationships with parents and schools)
- disseminating learning (eg paying for one staff member to attend speech and language training and then 'cascading' the learning to other staff in the setting)
- organising in-house training (eg inviting a Makaton trainer into the setting so all staff received the same training directly and travel costs are minimised)
- inviting specialists to the setting (eg inviting the speech and language therapist to the setting's open day so parents can meet and talk to them)
- being creative and open to sources outside the local authority when looking for support for a particular child (eg due to LA cuts and children not receiving professional support, one SENCO gave individual support to particular children each day, due to her concerns that 'time was ticking' before a child's low-level needs escalated)
- being flexible and creative (eg one school-based pre-school that opens just a few days a week supplement the provision by offering childminding for families who need daily support).

## Further information

- Family Action is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) to support school-based childcare providers with developing high-quality and inclusive childcare for 0-5s with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Find out more about the project, and download a wide range of free resources from: [www.learning-exchange.org.uk](http://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](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Learning-Exchange/904749822892733?sk=timeline)

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