

## Case Study: Working Together

### Improving quality through collaboration

#### The challenge

Newham had made good progress to improve the quality of early education, and outcomes for children and young people, before successfully bidding to become a GLA funded early Years Hub. But we were ambitious to achieve even more, striving towards a world-class early education system which could help all young people in Newham fulfil their potential.

We were aware that we still faced substantial challenges at the start of the Early Years Hub (which we named Working Together) in January 2018. The large majority of children were developing well in Newham. But levels of disadvantage were high and some children and families were at risk of being left behind.

We were determined to tackle this through the Early Years Hub Programme, which enabled us to bring our existing early learning networks closer together, include all key partners, focus more effectively on improving access to high quality early education for the most disadvantaged two year olds, and co-ordinate joint working to evidence impact.

#### The journey

Newham has high levels of complex disadvantage, and had a history of low quality settings. In response to this, a partnership between the borough's nursery schools and early years advisory team ['Learning Without Limits'] had created early learning networks around each of Newham's seven maintained nursery schools to develop self-improving systems in local settings, schools and childminders in 2015.



The collaborative networks grew out of the Community Childcare and Early Education Hub at Sheringham Nursery School, funded by the Department for Education (DfE).

The success of the Hub in improving the early years system in Manor Park provided the main evidence for Sheringham's successful application to become a National Teaching School in 2015, which enabled

Sheringham to access one year's funding to roll out its project across Newham as a collaboration between the seven Nursery Schools, the local authority, and a Primary School. The seven networks developed shared leadership for quality improvement through peer-to-peer learning with local PVI settings, in partnership with the Newham Early Years Advisory team. The GLA Hub Programme enabled us to sustain and expand this project.

Through the Working Together Early Years Hub, 146 PVI settings, childminders and schools took part in evidence-based collaborative professional development programmes. All settings, childminders and schools worked together, supported by Mentors through peer to peer learning using the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-3) framework to assess quality. In the first six months of the Hub, seven Mentors were trained as ITERS-3 assessors, then they each worked with a group of local PVI nurseries to undertake audits of the quality of those settings.

We chose the ITERS-3 framework to assess progress resulting from the Early Years Hub as it is the only early education quality framework that has been evaluated through Randomised Control Trials.

**The baseline ITERS-3 assessments at the end of 2018 found the 40 settings that participated had an average score of 3.9, just below the level (4) that the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study found indicates that early education has a positive impact on children. Following a year of mentoring, action plans and peer support, the second round of ITERS-3 audits completed at the end of 2019 found that the quality of the settings had improved by 23% since 2018, averaging 4.8 – well above the level required to indicate that early education has a positive impact on children's learning and development.**

We had hoped to be able to show an improvement in Ofsted ratings for Newham settings during the three year funding for the Early Years Hub from the GLA, but were aware that with inspections due every three years or longer at that point, this might not prove possible.

In 2017, 84% of Newham settings were assessed as 'good' by Ofsted (compared with 68% in 2015, and 55% in 2012). However, the proportion of 'outstanding' Newham settings remained stubbornly low at 7% compared with a national average of 19%. Key issues identified in Ofsted reports include adult interactions, communication and language skills, and leadership and management. We developed an evidence-based, co-ordinated professional development programme to address these issues.

**The proportion of outstanding settings in Newham had more than doubled to 14% by 2019.**

This was still below the national average for outstanding settings; Newham was on course to exceed the national average by the end of 2020, but the COVID pandemic led to the suspension of Ofsted inspections, so comparison was not possible.

## **Working Together**

Our aim was to develop collaborative, self-improving systems that would drive up outcomes for all children, and narrow the gap in attainment between the most disadvantaged children and the rest. The overall strategy of the Working Together Early Years Hub focused on effective professional development, quality assurance and inclusion.

A hub professional development programme was delivered by teachers from the nursery schools through local network meetings, borough wide courses, and (after the pandemic made face-to-face meetings impossible) online courses accessible to all practitioners.

The programme was aligned with the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) toolkit, and included:

- ITERS-3 Assessor qualification course for Mentors

- Initial introduction open to all settings about using the evidence-based ITERS-3 audit tools for self-evaluation and improvement
- Leadership Development based on the cross-sector Outstanding Early Years Teaching programme led by Sheringham Nursery School
- Good to Great, a two-part leadership development programme
- Every Child a Talker (ECAT)
- Maths in the EYFS: building on evidence to improve outcomes
- Forest Trek
- Early Years Educator Level 2 + 3 qualification courses
- Supporting Teaching and Learning Level 2 and 3 qualifications
- Improving children's outcomes through evidence-based professional development: with a focus on Language and Communication and Personal, Social and Emotional Development

The Early Years Hub Mentors organised local half termly network meetings for professional development for local PVI settings. They visited the settings in their network, arranged visits to their school, and mentored participating practitioners.

Evidence from the large scale, DfE-funded EPPSE Project had showed that maintained nursery schools promote the best outcomes for disadvantaged children. EPPSE research found that there was no correlation between a disadvantaged child attending a school rated as good by Ofsted, and better outcomes. But EPPSE did find a correlation between attending a school rated as outstanding, and better outcomes.

Statutory guidance for local authorities emphasises the role that nursery schools can play in supporting local settings: 'local authorities should . . . Make full use of their maintained nursery schools, if they have them. Maintained nursery schools are almost exclusively good or outstanding, the majority are located in disadvantaged areas and they have early years expertise and experience that can be used to benefit the whole local area. Local authorities should ensure that they have a role in the pedagogical leadership for the local early years system.

What this means in practice will depend on local need, but it might include for example: commissioning nursery schools to develop and deliver a quality improvement strategy for the area; having nursery schools work with other providers to share their experience and expertise to raise the overall quality of provision across the area; helping nursery schools to work in partnership with other providers to offer the 30 hours entitlement; and providing funding to nursery schools to allow them to deliver family support services'. (DfE, Early Education and Childcare 2017 p15).

Systemic, cross-sector support for improving quality throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage was provided by the Working Together Early Years Hub, led by the Newham Nursery Schools. At the beginning of the Hub, the seven Mentors were all Deputies/teachers in nursery schools. In 2019, the local authority co-funded the nursery school Mentors to enable them to extend their support to more settings, and the Hub trained a further three mentors in outstanding settings: one from an Infant School, one from a College nursery and one from a PVI setting, supported by L.B.Newham.

The Working Together Early Years Hub members brought together and strengthened a range of existing partnerships to increase access to high quality early years education for the most disadvantaged two year olds, and develop outstanding teaching across Newham.

Core members of the Hub Steering Group include the seven maintained nursery schools in the borough (four of which are outstanding), the local authority, the SEND Hub, a Primary School, three childminders, two PVI group settings, Newham Adult Learning Service, health representatives and the East London Early Years and Schools Partnership Teaching School Alliance.

The Steering Group members co-ordinated planning for evidence based, innovative interventions that improved quality, increased access for the most disadvantaged two years olds, and narrowed the gap in outcomes. They brought together work that had been in separate silos, and ensured that progress towards agreed outcomes was rigorously evaluated.

## Conferences

The Newham Early Years Hub and local authority organised conferences that played a key role in sharing effective practice and improving quality in each of the three years of the Hub.



Over 300 practitioners from Newham settings and beyond attended in 2018, 500 in 2019, and over 600 in 2020. The conferences were opened by the Deputy Mayor of the GLA with responsibility for Education, and the Mayor of Newham, and combined national keynote speakers with locally led workshops on all the elements of the Working Together professional development programme.



Feedback from the conferences has been excellent:

*'The best part of the conference was the variety of workshops, particularly – multi-sensory workshop, Forest School, dance and movement, maths and sign a long'*

**(‘What About Me?’ conference evaluation January 2019)**

The Working Together partnership between the Early Years Hub and the local authority played a key role in the success of the conferences, and the professional development programme as a whole, in improving the quality of early years education in Newham.