



Co-producing the Early Years Hub in Newham

Co-production and collaboration have been crucial to the success of the Early Years Hub in Newham.

A partnership between Newham's nursery schools and the borough's early years advisory team ['Learning Without Limits'] applied for Mayoral funding for an Early Years Hub in 2017, with the support of the then interim Head of Early Years. By early 2018, when the Hub started, the interim Head had moved on and two of the Early Years Advisers were appointed interim leads of the Best Start in Life early years team in Newham, and played a key role in the development of the Working Together Hub.

Learning Without Limits had already created networks around each of Newham's seven maintained nursery schools to support self-improving systems in local Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings through peer-to-peer learning. Building on this collaboration to improve quality further, increase the early years workforce and improve take-up of free early education for disadvantaged two year olds presented wider leadership challenges.

Working Together and the advisory team leads facilitated a meeting between the borough's Best Start in Life team and the nursery school Heads to develop a shared vision in early 2018. This wasn't easy – some of the Best Start in Life team were understandably anxious that the Hub might take on more of their advisory role, and threaten their future employment at a time when government cuts meant that all local authorities were looking to make savings. At the same time, some of the nursery school Heads were worried that their teachers could be pulled away from their main role in maintaining high quality early education in their own school to support more local settings, and would be stretched too far if this was extended to improving take-up of free places for two year olds and developing the workforce. At the end of the day-long meeting (helped by a lovely lunch provided by the local authority!), a shared vision had been co-produced:

Working Together – our vision

We aim to develop:

Inspirational staff

- a skilled and enthusiastic early years workforce who are leaders in taking learning forward, committed to learning, responsive and adaptive to changes, and reflective about their practice
- recognition and value for the key role that practitioners play in early intervention

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- clear pathways for local people to become part of a motivated and knowledgeable workforce

Effective partnerships with parents

- a variety of opportunities for parents to participate, learn and feel supported in partnership with settings
- resilient staff, children and families
- meeting the needs and aspirations of all children and families, improving outcomes and overcoming disadvantage

Seamless quality and equality

- a differentiated and inclusive approach that celebrates the unique needs of every child, supporting them to maximise their potential
- fantastic environments
- projects that promote reflective practice, are well evaluated – and make a big difference!

The shared vision was reviewed by the Early Years Hub Steering group each year, and this helped us to keep working together towards the same aims. It was particularly helpful that the borough leads for early years were advisory teachers at that point. Another positive result of the first vision day was to clarify the roles of each of the partners. For example, in relation to quality improvement it was made clear that the local authority advisory team would lead on work with all new settings, and any that were assessed as inadequate or requiring improvement by Ofsted – in line with their statutory duty. So the Working Together Mentors based in the nursery schools would be released for half a day a week to work alongside the ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ settings. This included visits to and from the settings in their network, quality audits using the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-3) and co-produced action plans.

Learning from the initial project was taken forward, with the aim of improving engagement with PVI settings, who already had a close professional working arrangement with their advisory teachers and mentors.

A Strategic Collaborative Early Years group was set up, bringing together representatives from the Working Together Early Years Hub Steering group, together with additional representation from PVI settings across all networks, the Early Education Practitioners responsible for quality improvement of childminders, strategic representatives from Health, Newham Adult Learning Service and the SEND Hub.

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Co-production and collaboration were achieved through a series of meetings and activities, allowing representatives to draw up a shared outcomes framework and delivery plan.

The meetings were chaired by an independent and highly experienced volunteer who had been Corporate Director of Children's Services in a neighbouring borough. All representatives were able to put forward their views and discuss their non-negotiables.

The Collaborative Early Years group brought together partners at a strategic level, so that the overall outcomes framework was aligned to the Early Years Hub outcomes, the Newham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Best Start in Life Childcare Sufficiency Assessment action plan and statutory responsibilities. This raised the profile of the Hub throughout Newham, and ensured support from all partners.

The fact that every participant was able to have their part in the production of the implementation plan meant that there was greater ownership and commitment from all.

Every representative had their own sector to feed back to, so there was two-way communication throughout. All participants contributed to a termly report, so that data evidenced progress and areas that we needed to focus on.

The implementation, planning and effective delivery of the project was supported by the Working Together Early Years Hub Steering Group, which includes the seven maintained nursery school Heads, the local authority interim Head of Early Years and Quality Improvement Managers, the Local Authority 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-ordinate evidence-based, innovative interventions that have improved quality and increased access to early education for the most disadvantaged two years olds.

The local authority advisory team updated their Pathway to Quality assurance scheme to bring it into line with the new ITERS-3 and Ofsted inspection frameworks, so that there would be a seamless approach to quality improvement by all partners. This was subsequently aligned to the Healthy Early Years London (HEYL) Programme.

A joint professional development programme was co-produced by the local authority advisory team and the Hub; the Mentors and Early Years advisors delivered training in network meetings, in response to needs identified by settings, and also contributed to the cross-borough Continuing Professional Development programme administered by the Best Start in Life team. The Early Years Hub budget included an element of cover costs to enable PVI settings to release staff for professional development, and the borough leads generously took on administration of this funding.

The borough early years leads also made sure that informal working between partners was supported by clear job descriptions and terms of reference. For example, the Early Years Hub and borough leads co-produced job descriptions for the Mentors, in consultation with the Mentors, who at that point were nursery school Deputy Heads or Heads.

One of the most effective outcomes of the close collaboration between the early years leads and the Hub was that the local authority agreed to provide some additional funding for the Mentors so that they could offer peer-to-peer support to more settings. The borough also funded three additional Mentors to support quality improvement: the manager of an outstanding PVI setting, one from a College nursery, and a teacher from an Infant school. This brought the number of Mentors to ten, supporting ninety group settings across Newham, by extending the model to include peer-to-peer support by PVI and Infant school leaders. Like the other Mentors, the three new Mentors were trained as ITERS-3 assessors through the Early Years Hub, and the ten Mentors meet together regularly as a team.

Health partners contributed to the promotion of the Free Early Education for two year-olds (FEE2) offer during health checks, and Health Visitors now take leaflets about the offer with them when they visit families, so a more embedded partnership has resulted from co-production and collaboration.

The Local Authority commissioned Early Start Healthy Eating award was aligned to HEYL, together with the Pathway to Quality, enabling a joined up approach and greater engagement in the HEYL scheme in Newham.

Close monitoring of the outcomes framework and regular review of the shared delivery plan enabled us to respond to aspects of the project that were more challenging and to adapt our strategy to these.

The collaborative approach also meant that other grants applied for by the Local Authority would be used in a unified way, for example a small grant from the the Mayor's London Early Years Campaign enabled Parent Champions to support the uptake of the free early education entitlement for two year olds, as well as producing promotional films about the offer in key languages in the borough.

The positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to leadership with the local authority also give us hope for the future. We are very grateful for the funding from the Mayor that made the Early Years Hubs possible, and evaluated their outcomes, but this successful model can only become sustainable - and more widely adopted - if local authorities continue to play a key role in co-production.

'the success of the Hub project is hugely down to the collaborative approach and think this is why some system leadership models may not have been as successful in other boroughs. It took a lot of work, and weathering of storms initially to get to a point where the PVI settings and Mentors worked so well together, and the co-production of the model was key to this'. (Newham 0-5 Collaborative Early Years Quality Improvement Manager)