

Appendix 3: Evidence for consideration: Interviews with Early Years settings

We sent over the questions we had originally intended to ask in advance:

- Have you noticed anything different about the development of language in the children in your care during and since Covid ?
- How would you best describe the children in your care?
- Have you noticed anything specific about disadvantaged groups
- In your own experience what have been the most effective strategies for helping children's language development?
- Can you briefly outline how the teachers /early years workers in your settings know about/access training on these best practice strategies?
- How else does best practice get shared e.g., from other settings?
- Based on your recent experience what would most make a difference in helping the children who currently seem to be behind in their language development? What would you want and need?
- Do you have concerns about the impact of this delay in language development for the measurement of expected progress for the children in your care?

We had representatives from fourteen organisations:

Belsize Village Nursery, NW3 4QP
Bluebells Nursery, NW5 2XT
Centro Infantil Menchu, NW6 4AT
Harmood Nursery, NW1 8DQ
Kentish Town Day Nursery, NW5 3EH
Maiden Lane Pre-School, NW1 9YA
Montpellier Nursery, NW19 5AH
Regent's Park Children's Centre, NW1 3TJ
PACE Pre-school, NW61DR
Puss in Boots (PVI), NW3 2NT
Sidings Early Years, NW6 2BA
Swiss Cottage Nursery, NW3 3NR
Turtles Nursery, WC2H 9RF
UCL Day Nursery, WC1H 0PQ

The Early Years Quality Support and Training Manager from the Council's Early Years team chaired the session.

The practitioners were well briefed and, as there were so many of them, we let them simply introduce themselves then speak in turn rather than answering the questions. There was a bit of time at the end to ask them what they might want to say to the Department for Education, as one person had raised this and it was taken up by another, and finally to ask if there was anything else they wanted to say.

Camden officers:

Early Years Quality Support and Training Manager, Early Years
Learning and Development Co-ordinator, Early Years
Service Support Officer, Early Years
Teacher, Early Years

Teacher A- Nine children in first year and then full cohort- during Covid - parents came in to settle children - not for too long because of Covid- child spent a lot of time with key worker – managed to settle the child first - took 4 weeks for every child to settle- we used a lot of rhyming and physical moves- ‘happy and know it’- ‘hokey cokey’ – then circle time- 3 per day and one rhyming time – free play and talking – staff role model the shop keeper and sitting and down and seeing what children want to do.

Teacher B- Gap in learning – social and emotional, solitary in learning and play- created small groups to gain confidence share again and take turns and those especially who didn’t have siblings- play with each other again- children now can contribute ideas- own language – bucket time strategy – tool to promote language- 1-2 children with one practitioner take items out of the bucket model and repeat back- talking tubs items around themes – e.g. transport noises e.g. ambulance bus and racing car- build sentences – songs and stories- repetition repeat over and over – everyday modelling language. Work with small groups then bigger groups- work with parents- daily phonics sounds in a song then parents sing at home- weekly letter reinforced at home – Inspection last week – asked at end what goals were- redress the balance – emotional mental health- calm down – much more anxious- separation from parents – nurturing children. In September this year spent less time alone etc – library Stay and Play, pre 2 year olds take children from 2 ,less affected than previous year- big gap but feel optimistic .

Teacher C- Day Nursery Manager- large % NHS children- lots of ‘Teams’ calls to get parents to join in. The Camden Learning Advisor and the Early Years Intervention Team sent a lot of activities -we sent them out to the parents every day- got them involved every day- opened up quickly – late opening for parents because they wanted children to settle- Makaton champion. EAL and young and Covid children use Makaton – old Macdonald – join in from a very early age- difficult but a good challenge- focus on language and social emotional got very good feedback- not just term time, open all year round have possibility of getting parents involved – quite well resourced and quite affluent- haven’t noticed a huge effect more Covid baby babies- support from Camden was excellent.

Teacher D- Trouble with children not wanting to go outside- in first wave when only shut for 10 weeks was ok, and moved them on to school, but now have got the 2-3 year olds - with dummy in – on the bottle- children want 1:1 with adults- separation anxiety- do in small groups modify everything- quite challenging but every day different- Personal Social Emotional Development – how in tune you are with the children trying to plug the gaps.

Camden Officer Also, teachers have said to me, it’s the lack of independence skills- going to the toilet, washing hands, sitting down to listen to a story - now they have from January to July to get them ready for Reception- children having been going to Nursery. Parents are putting children to bed at 9-10 at night- getting them up at 5.00 am and putting them back to bed till 9.00 am. Children watch YouTube and iPads - parents not having conversations with children- different parenting skills – parents haven’t been to drop ins - so parents not talking to each other or nursery staff- lax bedtime routines.

Teacher E- More Social Emotional Development, more so than language – until they settled couldn't do anything- settling hard for group activities- put that down to finish that- lots of things didn't have in home e.g., transition moving to outside and coming inside- confidence and independence – lots of children had things done for them. Didn't play together at home with same age- maybe on other children or older siblings- playing with toys - not knowing how to play – make believe role play, they have just not done- it. Story time is very difficult- sitting and listening and interacting- props puppets and masks didn't understand – the children were talking but not necessarily in the context of Nursery.

Teacher F -We are piloting the *Camden Kids Talk* materials- we are not in a disadvantaged area, but listening in a group is definitely delayed – older 3- and 4-year-olds used to 1:1, cannot listen. Now many more- language development harder to tell as a lot of the EAL listening in a group that no parents can recreate- being in a group- social emotional development – can be aggressive in a group, inappropriate behaviour- overwhelmed by being in a group- one-to-one language development – worried for these children next year- phonics – and sitting still is going to be real problem –

Officer- Not all children suffered in lockdown, but those that didn't – Personal Social Emotional Development still needed work. They need to feel settled, secure and belonging, they need to know they have got an attachment so that they can do the language development.

Teacher G- The main area is Personal Social Emotional Development – that is to say relationships. The children have boundaries and communication difficulties but SEN overall- working with parents- children themselves bouncing off their parents – parents are anxious -wanting to understand hygiene routines

Teacher H- We are a dual language nursery – a lot of children EAL not doing well in either language – parents afraid of child being labelled- now after 2 months children have started to settle - they have seen very little green so we take them to the park- some children are afraid of going out- can stay in and do soft play, then hopefully gradually will get more confident.

Teacher I - Yes, it's the Social Emotional Development – the separation of parent and child presents a difficulty and has gone on and gone on – resettling plans. Then there is attendance – the children come as a treat, not as a routine, every day. Some are very articulate – they speak like mini adults- leading- articulate -but emotional side not so developed – 2-3 children with EAL not doing well in either language– unsure about whether ok. They do normal things with familiar words in home language then realise that cannot do it in English language – one very warm child but no speech – managed to get Speech and Language, a lot of input in the past with bucket training and done to one work – feels a bit strange- didn't close during Covid, did activities – worried about first cohort and did 6 weeks before left for summer, hadn't seen us face to face- were talking really well – contrast between then and now – those born in Covid and then gone into second year- not as emotionally equipped.

Teacher J- We have 1/3 of children marked down for needing Speech and language- Welcome pilot- traffic light system- children who thought would be green are not. Resilience of children less than before- separation anxiety from parents- this

September it's taken longer than last September, 2-3-4 years olds also need speech and language support. Personal Social and Emotional Development is behind- things like turn taking – they are playing 'in parallel' not together – more children seem to have SEND issues.

Teacher K–During and after lockdown things imploded significantly – lots of referrals for speech and language- stammers, delay, dyspraxia - never had this before - open all the way through- complex needs coming through behavioural stuff – hard to process root cause at the moment, lots of emotion coaching- fearful of the world and not understanding the world. I was in pre-school and now come back to baby area- pre-school very worried about the world- children gone to reception and now want to come back – their parents worked for such long hours and 5 days a week and weekend child minders and baby sitters because they were NHS workers - had to switch focus onto emotional well-being - these children have now gone into school separated from carers and peers/carers lost those friends- transition to school difficult – many children traumatised.

Teacher L– I came to work here in June – I noticed the children were very attached to parents- parents themselves have anxiety- have to explain to parents that is best to drop them – reassure the parents- referred a child to speech and language therapy. Parents working from home and mother pregnant, so no contact with outside world- sent staff to training – bucket time- emotion coaching training- silent cries- children can't tell them what's up- model speaking about feelings- some parents in denial – can see some developments might need some support in Nursery- parents don't do it e.g. using the toilet- can say it's scary – at home parents put a nappy on and say 'it doesn't matter how many times do it in nappy' they also read at home on their iPads.

Teacher M– The cohort that was there at start of pandemic - it did not have such an impact on them- that cohort of parents gelled together and supported each other through the period not open, next two cohorts - language very difficult, a lot of referrals- 3-4 year olds- challenge with speech that was delayed had an impact on all seven prime areas - so the government wanting us to focus on the three prime areas of early learning goals means the government doesn't understand the inter- relatedness of the Social emotional development and language learning. Parents haven't been able to gell together as a group – children with physical special needs had a big impact – parents very worried about the children getting Covid on top of everything else, so kept them away.

The link between behaviour and language – Ofsted- self regulation link in - cross-phase language eye opener – what behaviour is like in primary and secondary – free-flow curriculum is there in some primary schools- schools trying really hard.

What would you most want DfE/central government to do to help with this?

Officer – say to the DFE and government and Ofsted from Early Years. Ofsted used to have a statement on what is teaching and learning- removed that statement and said that 3–4-year-olds should be having formal phonic type lessons- very worrying concern- what happens in Reception doing KS1 then that pushes down to nursery phase ½ phonics.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Teacher N- Yes, the next stage for these children is massively over formal- sitting on the carpet- crowd control and I think this is going to come a cropper- these children cannot do it- economically advantaged children can barely sit and listen to the story, so goodness knows what's going to happen – phonics activities, no play – too formal – transitions are so hard – moving them from the garden to inside to lunch takes every ounce of energy and been there for 20 years. Expectations of writing a sentence by end of reception- children should be experiencing EYFs to minimum end of reception.

Teacher O- I would like government to know it's what we need to do with parents- a lot of children do sit on the iPad there's a lot of that going on - my own daughter -in-law is worried about her 3-year-old insisting that she writes her name- my son works in a school – he thinks they need to. But I know what three-year-olds need! Parents are fearful, they think that academic and writing is everything- we know it's Personal and Social and Emotional Development and confidence is everything. If they are forced to do formal reading and writing too early... it's through parents and home life- they keep adding school readiness - in EYFS it should be learning through play. pressures- school and teacher will have a parent standing to attention.