

Appendix 5: Interview notes from meeting with an Early Years teacher

Interview with Teacher A on Tuesday 13th December 2022 at a local Camden Primary School. A has taught for twelve years in this school and in at least one other school. She is a very experienced early years teacher. Currently she supports Reception and Early Years Teachers across the three schools in her school's Federation, as well as having her own class of 30 children which is supported by a Teaching Assistant

Background supplied by A

- The children enter school with low social emotional skills, she sees this as a common trend in Camden - many of the children are from disadvantaged backgrounds and, in her experience, the higher levels of disadvantage are linked to higher social emotional needs. The disadvantage goes hand in hand with gentrification - houses are bought up by wealthy people, then rented out through Airbnb, so families are in the affordable housing and often don't have sufficient space.
- The children come from a range of backgrounds, some families need support from social workers, family workers, CAMHS or Mosaic - if they have Special Needs. Although she noted that the bar is very high for children to get that support, there are other children who, especially since Covid, need continual re-assurance.
- There is pressure on the service and insufficient therapists. A further issue is that children don't always keep their appointments.
- They may have received some Early intervention in Nursery if they attended nursery – this school has an onsite Nursery.

1. What is your understanding of speech and language development for children and why is it important?

- Speech and language development for children is key - ensuring they have a good structure of language, good vocabulary, and that they are speaking in terms of age-related experience.
- Need to ensure the children have conversations and are actually speaking, and not just gesturing or grunting. They should be familiar with the use of pronouns - 'he' and 'she', grammar- plurals, and have the ability to use words in a sentence

2. Thinking about the Reception/Year One children in your school, has their language development been hindered as a result of Covid-induced school closures and restrictions regarding interaction with others outside the home? If yes, in what way?

- Yes, definitely – expectation to speak, level of speech, number of words children are using, vocabulary, ability to name and describe – all much less than the

teachers were used to seeing in children pre-Covid, especially unusual words like 'anorak' or 'jug'.

- Social Emotional needs are higher- see above- also self-regulation not as high, the children need extra support for participation, they need reassurance and their families do too.
- The families need to be introduced to the expectations of their children at school. Many families have much lower expectations in terms of independence of their children than the school expects.
- This has meant that they have all needed to go at a much slower pace than before Covid- providing reassurance, supporting the children into independent learning- dressing, self-management, and self-organisation.
- There are also much larger gaps in learning - vocabulary is the main thing- the children have not had social interaction – they haven't experienced their environment as much as they did pre covid because their parents have been scared to take them out. Across the board, parents have taken their children out less, but it is noticeable most with White British children.
- The children's language development is lower than expected than previously. You can see this in the words and the language used, social interactions, and the amount of anger they have. Teacher A felt this was because of the pressure their families are under and children of this age cannot identify or name the emotion.
- There have been breakdowns in family relationships.
- Some parents do not accept that their children are functioning at below-expected norms, so you have to be very careful to explain it, so that the parents don't feel criticised. During Covid the school ran lessons on Zoom and A felt that she got some insight into the home life of the children - some of them had nowhere quiet to do the learning- they were sat at the kitchen table with their mother and other siblings working round them and talking, they had very small rooms with lots of other siblings, the parents and siblings were busy and were often shouting- one child appeared to be left entirely alone, so A reported this to her Head. These are indications of the pressures the families were under.
- Getting the children into school on a consistent basis has taken more time than usual sometimes - the parents themselves were anxious.

3. If yes, what has your school done to try to close this gap in language development?

- Giving children time to answer questions- some children talk very fast - they have learned to, as they have had insufficient attention at home for their own needs.
- Building time into the curriculum and timetable for speaking and listening, for storytelling and for children to share their ideas and thoughts.
- As the need is greater now, the time has been planned in more frequently in shorter bursts.
- Outreach support, liaising with local authority- workshops in school for parents, working with speech and language team, and Mosaic- training for staff to understand language development – parents coming into the classroom to work

alongside the children- liaising with Family support. Learning Support have led training and also work across the RC faith partnership with each school

4. Which strategies have you found that have been effective?

- Good systematic phonics, use Read Write Inc - Ruth Miskin - government sponsored scheme - is very prescriptive, but it is what the children need- those with higher attainment can progress at their level too.
- They go from 'mark-making' through to the 'use of sounds,' to 'understanding of writing'. She gets the children to tell her what they have written and values everything they do, including mark-making.
- Use the interventions the speech therapists recommend - some individually, some in groups.
- Best interventions are those that the speech therapists do in the school because then you can keep track of them- also the therapists can give feedback right there and then.
- Have used "Buddy" schemes- the biggest problem with intervention is space - lack of it for children to work one-to-one or in small groups.

5. What would help you/your teachers most, right now, to enable children to catch up?

- More teachers, experienced teachers - a very experienced Early Years teacher just didn't come back- she had Long Covid, and she just couldn't come back, and they all miss her very much because of her experience.
- Increased skilled staff to be able to plan and implement training.
- Smaller groups of children – need more trained adults to work with much smaller groups of children.
- More space to do it all in – the structure of the Reception classroom is key – pupils need to manage their own learning independently.

6. Did you receive CPD before Covid about strategies to help children with language delay? Have you received CPD since Covid on this issue?

- Yes, have had PDMs - Professional Development Meetings -once a term for the whole staff- run by speech therapists so all staff understand language development and what to do if a child is not progressing. They also attend training run by the Early Years Hub and the Early Years Team- Camden Learning - and they go on courses run by an independent company commissioned by the government called Early Excellence.
- The Early Years Advisor from Camden Learning is very helpful.
- The three schools are also getting back into the working habit of visiting each other's schools and discussing practice

7. Have the parents of your children expressed anxiety about their children's language development/development associated with language delay, such as phonics. If yes, has this been easy or difficult to manage

- Parents going back to work when their children enter Reception so there is pressure from parents to drop the children off earlier-we run a Breakfast Club, but they want earlier than that – it's understandable but not do-able.
- Also, emotional state of parents and children – the separation when the children do start school – very hard for some parents - can be in tears- try to prepare the parents for the journey by having visits before the children start school.
- Some parents have asked for interventions as they think their children are language delayed - even at expected levels of progress other parents whose children are below don't ask- have to try to do interventions where appropriate.
- There is more concern, however, about the parents who don't engage with staff.

8. Are you aware of any best practice that is currently being shared in your school or between schools- if so, what is it?

- Just 'Talk Boost' and 'WellComm.'

9. Are you/your teachers worried about the impact of the baseline level of language of their children in terms of making 'expected progress'?

- Yes – the baseline in October is very useful but need to adjust the expected level of progress in line with baseline- DfE are just saying 'use the phrase not typical.'

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

- Need more members of staff to help us run the interventions consistently – volunteers are good, but take time to organise- brilliant for KS2 reading

11. To what extent has the pandemic affected language development in children at your school?

12. Is there anything Camden Council /Camden Learning can give you to help you in your role supporting this area of development?

- Already getting a lot of support – interventions and Family Support from Camden Learning.
- Good teachers leave to become Leaders in other schools - it's regrettable.