Early years: working in partnership

Starting School Together:
A case study
Starting School Together focuses on partnership working between schools, childcare providers, parents and the local community, sharing knowledge and experience. The project is a great opportunity to build on the good practice of nurseries, childminders and schools who already work together to ensure children coming into full-time education have the best start possible. It demonstrates how children starting school can be best supported to settle quickly and easily into school life.”

Sam Gyimah MP
Childcare Minister

PACEY’s Starting School Together project, initially funded by a grant from the Department for Education, aims to help improve children’s transition from childcare into full-time education, focusing particularly on children in areas of disadvantage.

The project draws on evidence from Ofsted and elsewhere that disadvantaged children are significantly less likely to be ready for school than their peers. It also draws on findings from a PACEY survey which highlighted high levels of anxiety among parents about their child starting school.

Its central goal is to help children make the transition into full-time education by building their confidence and emotional wellbeing, and easing the anxiety felt by their parents and carers.

By encouraging early years settings, primary schools and families to work collaboratively, Starting School Together provides an innovative model of partnership working which can be built upon for the future.

Its central goal is to help children make the transition into full-time education by building their confidence and emotional wellbeing.
Starting School Together first ran as a pilot project in four schools in Skipton, North Yorkshire and Littleport, Cambridgeshire. The project involved 120 families (60 in each area) with children entering reception in September 2015. Funded for one year by the Department for Education, the project supported children and their families from May 2015, once they found out which primary school they were attending, until the end of their second term at school (March 2016).

Central to the project was encouraging early years settings, primary schools and families to work collaboratively. The project supported reception teachers and early years practitioners to share best practice, learning and joint planning to help children prepare for school. Early years settings, including nurseries, pre-schools and childminders, met with teaching staff to talk through a shared plan for transition, including shared goals and expectations. School staff and early years representatives from the local authorities also met to help plan and progress delivery of Starting School Together locally. This all helped to build strong partnerships between professionals.

Early years settings, including nurseries, pre-schools and childminders, met with teaching staff to talk through a shared plan for transition.
Families received guidance and support through face-to-face meetings and online support to help their children prepare to start school. All participating families received a Starting School Together resource pack including books, learning activities, a teddy bear named Jofli (short for ‘Journey of life’) and an adventure journal, which were all used to help children talk about and prepare for starting school. Networking events were held in the run up to the start of school to give children the chance to meet one another alongside parents, early years practitioners and school staff.

Findings from the pilot projects clearly demonstrate the benefit to children and their families of early years providers and schools joining together to help children make a smooth transition into full-time education. Children’s wellbeing scores, confidence and independence were higher when compared to the national average, whilst parents reported feeling confident about the transition process and demonstrated a higher level of engagement with schools than parents not involved with the project.

The Starting School Together pilot provides an innovative model for partnership working and demonstrates that early years providers, schools and families working collaboratively can bring benefits for children and ensure that they make a positive start to school life.

Benefits of the project

PACEY is now looking to scale up the project in other areas, so please get in touch at schools@pacey.org.uk
Project insights

We were nervous about Leo starting school, so being part of the Starting School Together project was amazing. It provided Leo with the opportunity to meet other children starting at his school and enabled him to make friends, so when he started school he had familiar faces which settled him. This project has made starting school happy and easy. After speaking to friends and other mums I truly believe every child should have this opportunity.”

Charlotte Follen
Mum to Leo

Starting School Together has really benefited the children, making starting school more of an adventure than a big change. It was really valuable to work more closely with the school.”

Julie Double
Leader
Busy Bees Pre-School

As a result of Starting School Together, I found the parents were more knowledgeable about the expectations for their child being school ready and the children seemed more relaxed and excited about starting school. The information obtained via the website and the meet ups with the coordinator to share ideas and experiences were invaluable. Working with others has also given me more ideas on how I can support children in the future, through preparing for transition early and liaising more with the schools.”

Karen Jeffries
Childminder, Cambridgeshire

Through Starting School Together, we saw heightened levels of involvement with parents in the run up to the school term. The children themselves were noticeably more confident and more self-assured when they started school, engaging really well in activities and quickly developing relationships with other children in the setting. From our perspective the project has been positive all round.”

Deborah Hannaford
Headteacher, Millfield Primary School
Cambridgeshire

The project is great for parents to help their children to build their confidence, wellbeing and readiness for engagement in learning at school. It also helps the school to know the children better as they begin to start their learning journey at their new school.”

Ellen Woodthorpe
Headteacher, Skipton Primary School
North Yorkshire
Key successes

Children are more confident and settled
- Children's wellbeing and engagement have increased, as well as their self-confidence and independence (evidenced through teacher assessment scores compared against national averages).

Parents are more confident about their child starting school
- Families report that participation in the online forum and at local meetings has made them feel more confident about the transition process.

Parents are engaged in the school and in their local community
- Schools have reported that parents are engaging more with school curriculum sessions and local community resources such as children's centres and libraries. This will hopefully pave the way to increased long-term involvement in their school and local community in the future.

Schools and early years providers are working together in new ways
- Joint planning and partnership working between schools and early years providers has given each a better understanding of their unique role in the transition process and how integral both are to children's confidence and wellbeing.

CPD is highly valued by both schools and early years practitioners
- Schools and early years settings have valued the opportunity to access free high-quality and relevant CPD to enhance staff skills and knowledge.

The role of the central coordinator is key
- The role of the PACEY coordinator has been cited as being integral to facilitating the collaborative working between schools and early years settings and to supporting parents and children, especially between July and September when schools are not accessible and teachers less able to engage in joint working.

Resources have proved invaluable
- The Jofli bear had a particularly positive impact, providing security and promoting visible links between home and school. This was especially noticeable for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
To arrange a free consultation to discuss PACEY’s Starting School Together project and find out more about our work with schools, please contact:

**Sue McVay**  
*Director of Partnerships, PACEY*  
*schools@pacey.org.uk*  
*07734 734112*

For further information about Starting School Together, go to *pacey.org.uk/startingschooltogether*

---

**PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years**

Formed in 1977, we are a charity dedicated to supporting everyone working in childcare and early years to provide high quality care and early learning for children and families.

We provide training, practical help and expert advice to practitioners working throughout England and Wales and peer support and encouragement through our nationwide network of PACEY Local volunteers.

We represent the views and experiences of practitioners and champion their vital role in helping prepare children for a bright future.