

Case study 6 - Thames Children's Centre

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Background:

Thames Children's Centre is based in Blackpool and is a purpose-built centre. The centre is linked to and shares its site with, Thames Primary School. According to their 2010 Ofsted report *"Most children entering the registered provision in the nursery have skills and levels of development considerably below those expected for their age. The centre has a diverse geographical reach. However, it generally serves a catchment area with some of the highest deprivation levels nationally. Mobility of families is also a key issue for the reach area with approximately 30-35% of families entering and leaving the area each year. Employment levels are very low and many families have a variety of benefits as their main source of income. Most are of White British heritage, although there are a stable number of families of Polish, Russian and Traveller heritage."* Ofsted report from November 2010 in which Thames Children's Centre was deemed outstanding.

Thames Children Centre currently offer childcare for 109 children, with 54 at each session.

It currently employs 17 staff, all 17 have level 3 or above. They have one level 4, one level 5, one level 6, one Early Years Professional (EYP) and three Early Years Teachers

Thames Children's Centre joined the Maths Champion project in June 2014. They are now continuing into a second year to increase the impact through a focused action research project which will hone in on a particular area. This is likely to be home learning and will run alongside new LA project, led by NCB, called "Raising Early Achievement in Maths" (REAM). This will involve working with eight families, completing home visits and family events to work on providing families with knowledge and the resources to help their children develop mathematically. They have just started the initial home visits and the setting can already see how the two projects work together.

Introduction:

Since beginning the Maths Champion programme as Maths Champion, the Early Years Teacher has been able to see a difference in the way mathematics opportunities are provided throughout the setting. The progress can be seen in practice and data collected. The practitioners taking part in the project have started using more maths vocabulary and providing more maths opportunities. The Early Years Teacher has also noted a difference in their observations and because of this the quantity and quality of maths observations has improved. The Early Years

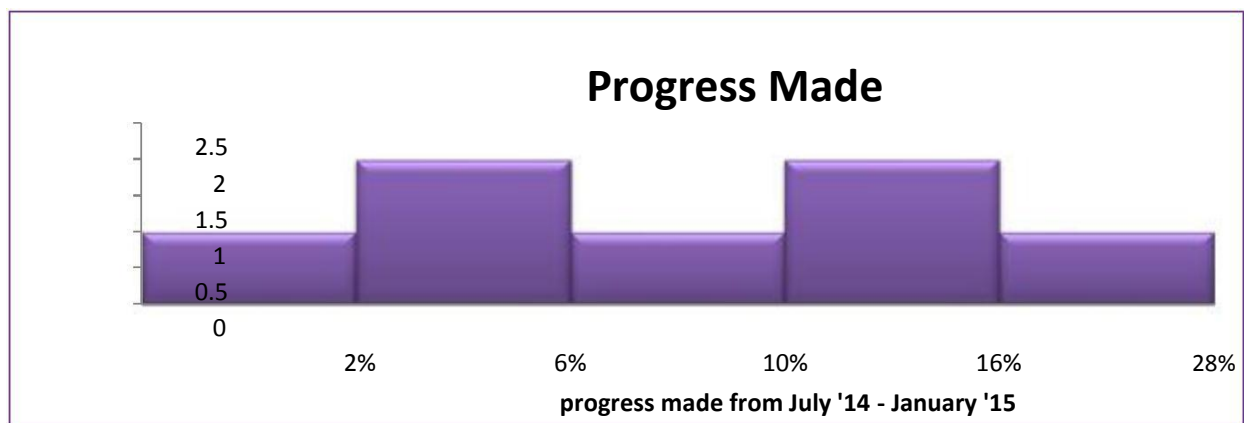
Teacher told us that she feels that in some cases they were already providing the opportunities, they just were not aware they were doing so and since starting the programme they have looked at their observations and picked out maths development where they previously would not have done so. In order to take part in this project practitioners have had to commit to the work and have all devoted a lot of their time to it. Their dedication has led to the completion of the project and will hopefully continue to show in their environments and continue to have an impact on the children's development and learning.

Impact of the project:

The team

Thames Children Centre feel that each practitioner involved within the Maths project has grown in confidence in their maths skills and in planning for children's development in this area.

As part of the project the practitioners had to look at their own maths skills and evaluate how numerate they were. At the beginning of the project they all took a diagnostic assessment, which looked at their strengths and weaknesses. They then had access to workbooks and activities which were appropriate to the level they were working at. At the end of the project they all retook the diagnostic assessment to see if progress had been made. All practitioners had made progress, this ranged from 2% - 28%.



Some feedback from practitioners has shown how useful some have found strengthening their own mathematical skills

- ❖ "I found the first assessment terrifying, which my grade showed. However I decided to do some revision of the things I really found difficult."
- ❖ "I've really enjoyed doing the course it's made me realise things change over time and that it doesn't hurt refreshing your knowledge in subjects."

Practitioners have also had access to three online training courses, these could have cost a total of £50 per practitioner if they had been bought direct through the NDNA.

The courses were very informative and practitioners have given useful feedback on their experiences. The following are quotes from some practitioners about the online training they received:

- ❖ “I feel like the course has given me more inspiration for maths in our environment and activities.”
- ❖ “I thoroughly enjoyed the maths courses I took online linking to early years. I have been able to become more confident and this has made a positive impact on my children's development and hopefully I have shown this through my daily practice to other practitioners. Overall I have really enjoyed taking part not only for my own professional development but for the positive impact it has had on the children at my setting.”
- ❖ “I'm using more maths every day in my group sessions adding and taking away numbers of girls and boys together using visual prompts for lower ability children on my fingers. I feel I'm more aware of using different terms when approaching maths activities too”

The environment

The Early Years Teacher has noticed a huge difference in the nursery environment since the start of the project; even practitioners who are not on the programme have taken on board the importance of having maths in their environment. Here are some examples of the maths in the environment.





The children and their development

There is practitioner on the programme in Thames Children's Centre whose perspective towards maths has completely changed. At the beginning, the majority of her children were working below their age related stage of mathematical development. She currently works with the youngest children and since the start of the project she has been the first to complete her courses and has booked herself on an additional early years maths course via the Local Authority, 'Making maths meaningful for under threes'.

She has expressed how interesting she has found her course and the Early Years Teacher can see the impact it has had on her practice and her learning journeys show the variety of mathematical opportunities she is providing the children with.

When looking at the children's tracking system, the Early Years Teacher has been able to see how all children have made clear progress. When starting the programme 83% of these children were below their perceived developmental norm in mathematical development, this percentage are now all working at the defined age appropriate stage. 40% of these children have speech and language delays. The remaining 17% were at age appropriate level at the start of the programme and have stayed at this level. The Early Years Teacher has been able to recognise this clearly as she spends part of her time in her role overseeing all developmental files and learning journeys and is able to have a clear overview of all children's progress across the setting.

Another practitioner on the programme had a child who was emerging in the 16-26 month age band in both in shape, space and measure (SSM) and number, at 39 months of age. This child is now working steadily in the 30-50 month band in number and the 22-36 month band in SSM, he is currently 44 months old.

This example demonstrates significant progress in the number area and appropriate progress in the area of SSM. This setting also has a child with English as an additional language who at 43 months was working at 22-36 months in number and 16-26 in SSM, now aged 47 months she is working in the 30-50 month age band for both areas.

A further practitioner on the programme has made excellent progress with a child who is on the SEN register and at 24 months age he was working at 0-11 month level in both number and SSM. He is now 29 months old and working at 16-26 month level.

The progress made with the children is clear to see and this can be attributed to improved environmental maths, better observational data and planning, stronger staff confidence and better team work and idea sharing within the setting. All this has developed more opportunities for maths resources and activities therefore improving the outcomes in maths for all children.

Conclusion:

This project has helped to develop practitioners own mathematical skills. Through taking assessments and completing monthly work in order to work on their areas of weakness they have all made significant progress.

The courses they have taken have improved their practice, which has been demonstrated by their improved environments and through the recent data collected on children's progress.

Thames Children's Centre will continue their focus on maths through this project and also the REAM project. Their continued focus on this area will sustain and develop the outcomes they have already started to see in their children.