A matter of opinion

Positive Steps Nursery has set up a children’s council to help plan their activities. Marianne Sargent reports

Nursery manager

Leanne Miller brings with enthusiasm as she explains the children’s council she has set up at Positive Steps Nursery in Guildford, Surrey. The council has been running since January this year and children, parents and practitioners are all extremely pleased with the results so far.

The purpose of the council is to give the children an arena within which they can voice their ideas and opinions about the provision they experience every day. The children are encouraged to talk about what they enjoy doing and which aspects of the learning environment they find most stimulating. During council meetings the children are invited to suggest changes and come up with their own ideas for activities.

Mrs Miller describes the council as a positive approach to planning for the children. ‘It’s all about giving children a voice,’ she says. ‘It’s their nursery and it’s all about asking, what do they need and what do they want?’

She explains that the council would not work without the full involvement and commitment of all the practitioners in the setting. ‘The key thing is that it is all about their knowledge of the children,’ she explains. ‘It’s thinking about how we listen to the children. It’s about the inclusion of everybody and meeting the needs of everyone.’

Age is no barrier

The nursery caters for children from three months to five years old and the children are divided into four rooms according to age. One child is chosen to represent each room on the council. These representatives come together once a week to talk about what they have been doing and how these activities can be extended and developed into projects that further extend the children’s needs and interests.

Babies and very young children are accompanied by their key workers, who share observations and talk about the children’s interests on their behalf. Mrs Miller explains how this works.

‘We had one baby who really enjoyed messy play but also enjoyed being outside. His key worker told us about this at the meeting and we decided to set up some messy play activities outdoors.

‘We had another baby who really liked shiny objects. We noticed that he was always looking up to the ceiling so we hung shiny things from the ceiling for him to look at.’

Older children, who are more able to speak for themselves, often make comments that lead in surprising directions. This can result in the development of full-scale projects.

‘One of our older pre-school children who was on the council said she enjoyed collecting objects. She said she would like to go outside of the setting on walks to collect things. We thought about this and decided...’
As Mrs Miller points out, the display helps to include working parents who are busy and have little time to stop and talk.

Mrs Miller and her staff are very committed to the future of the council. ‘It gives the children a voice and it excites the staff and gives them a passion for what they are doing.

‘When you know a child is really into something and really enjoying it, it encourages you as a practitioner to embrace it.’

Mrs Miller and her staff are very committed to the future of the council. ‘It gives the children a voice and it excites the staff and gives them a passion for what they are doing.

‘When you know a child is really into something and really enjoying it, it encourages you as a practitioner to embrace it.’

Music Express Online includes:
- Over 400 songs in a song bank searchable alphabetically or by age, theme, style or format
- Physical, vocal and focus warm-ups for different age groups
- Over 300 lessons, divided by age group and term and searchable by subject or theme.

One year’s subscription costs £25; www.musicexpress.co.uk/

Sound Children — part of the award-winning Drums for Schools — provides a comprehensive package of music resources and support for early years practitioners.

It aims to help them develop their own musicianship, giving them the confidence and skills to deliver music sessions that bring out children’s musicality and foster their all-round development.

Key features available are:
- musical instruments made from natural, sustainable materials
- music kits, including ‘nursery rhythm’ and ‘musical baby bonding’. Each comes with ideas and advice for running inspiring sessions, information about the instruments, and free after-sales support.
- videos illustrating the Sound Children approach and the results you can expect to achieve
- a library of early years songs and rhymes, music-making ideas, recordings and research
- free online support from early years music experts plus indexed FAQs
- one-to-one and group training, tailored to your setting’s needs.

Kits from £27, training from £177; www.soundchildren.co.uk; www.drumsforschools.com