

Nursery Manager of the Year

James Crosswell, Kids Allowed, Stockport



'A very strong application. Evidence illustrates that this is a manager who truly merits the outstanding accolade given by Ofsted'
Judge

James is the centre manager at Kids Allowed, Stockport, and has worked for almost 10 years at the nursery group, starting as a nursery nurse and working his way up.

Chief executive Jennie Johnson describes James as an 'extremely safe pair of hands'.

He was the ideal candidate to take on the group's newest setting in 2013, hand picking the staff from scratch to build a talented team of 58 colleagues who provide childcare to more than 260 families.

He is known for spending very little time in the office. 'James knows that being in the rooms with the team and children, and being a shining example of best practice will inspire the team more than anything else to deliver to his exacting standards,' the CEO adds.

The extent to which James has built a happy

motivated team of colleagues is reflected in the nursery's retention rates, with the lowest levels of staff turnover in the group and zero in the first 12 months of running the centre. Staff sickness is also just 1.6 per cent.

James is praised by colleagues for the support he gives them.

One says, 'James has encouraged me greatly through my time at Kids Allowed and has always inspired me to progress. He is an amazing role model and I have learnt so much from him. I truly believe I am in the position I am in now because of James.'

Parents love the fact James is 'a visual presence' in the setting, at the front door every morning greeting all the parents and children by name. One says, 'I frequently saw him with his shoes off, legs crossed and playing on the floor in the baby room. Wonderful.'

The nursery gained an outstanding grade from Ofsted in its first inspection, with the inspector praising James for his 'innovative and inspirational leadership', which means that 'all staff have excellent opportunities to further their professional development and children receive high-quality learning experiences'.

Key people were described in the report as 'highly skilled and sensitive, and help children to form exceptionally strong emotional attachments and feel very secure in the setting'.

The report also said children experienced 'a wealth of exciting and challenging activities and develop their own learning styles in stimulating, enabling environments'.

Jennie Johnson says that James supports his team to be the best version of themselves, and is 'an accomplished inspirational manager who deserves the recognition this award would give'.

Highly commended Jane Bulmer,

Franch Community Primary School, Kidderminster

Described by colleagues as 'an incredible force of energy', Jane is manager of Little Franche Nursery, where she is also 'a born leader' and 'critical friend' to all staff in the nursery and lower school. One parent tells how she helped her family through 'a dark time'. She adds that Jane is 'the cornerstone of the early years department. For whatever reason, your favourite teacher stays in your mind. I know that for many, many children, Mrs Bulmer will be that teacher'.

Steph Rogerson, Sparklers Private Day Nursery, Gretna

Childcare manager Steph is described as 'bubbling with enthusiasm' by the nursery's director Ros White, and a dynamic visionary for childcare in a rural area.

She has developed a number of projects across the whole region, including 'Shooting Stars', which takes play and learning out into the community, and is known as 'a lifeline for local mums'. Steph also provides great support for her team, which includes four Modern Apprentices. One says, 'I wouldn't be in childcare if it wasn't for her understanding, drive and enthusiasm.'

Finalists

Heather Goode, Pear Tree Nursery, East Lothian
David Lord, Kiddi Caru Day Nursery, Torquay

Criterion

Open to any nursery manager in a full day care or sessional setting