

Helping families and children get ready for school: Mayflower Primary School

URN: 100913

Region: London

Remit: Schools

Provider background

[Mayflower Primary School](#), in Poplar, east London serves a culturally diverse area that is densely populated and has high levels of unemployment and social need. Almost all pupils come from minority ethnic heritages and speak a language other than English at home. The school is part of the Poplar Partnership, a small charity set up to fund and support early intervention projects within the community

Brief description

What does being 'ready for school' mean? At Mayflower Primary School it means helping parents and carers to be ready as well as their children. Staff use simple, practical ideas to get them involved in their child's learning even before they start school.

This example is part of a [set of six](#), published in conjunction with the survey report *Are you ready? Good practice in school readiness*.

The good practice in detail

Most children join the school's nursery in September having previously spent all their time at home with their parents and carers. Very few have ever been to a large building with other children or met adults outside of their immediate family. Many do not know how to share toys; some say very little.

Nursery staff hope that children will be active and able to make choices, show interest in playing with others and be curious about what they find at school. But not all children begin school with these attributes. Simply separating from their family is a huge challenge for some children. Some cannot put on their own coats and shoes and some are not toilet trained. So what is it that staff at Mayflower do to help parents and carers help their children to make the first big steps into school?

Getting ready for school

Even before their children have a place in the nursery, parents and carers are invited into school. They bring their children to the 'stay and play' sessions that run all year round. Here, they are shown how to play with their children and given lots of ideas to try at home that need few resources. They borrow toys from the toy library that they have used in the session.

'This serves several purposes', says Dee Bleach, headteacher. 'It gives the children



chance to meet staff, see the space that will be a big part of their lives from September, and establishes an expectation that families are truly partners in their children's learning.' School staff also pass on details of other sessions at the nearby children's centre that parents and carers can attend with their child.

This work helps children to make the step from home to school and so it is not surprising that the [school's inspection report](#) noted that 'arrangements for transition from home to school are valued by parents. One commented, reflecting the views of many, "Staff make it easy for the children

to make the move... my child wants to spend forever in this school because she loves it so much".'

A warm welcome

At Mayflower, the way that families and their children are welcomed when they start school sets the scene for the future. All parents and carers have an interview with their child with the headteacher in the summer term before they start. In the past, Dee's nursery staff, led by Early Years Phase Leader, Rosie Lucas, took responsibility for holding these 1:1 meetings with families. But this year the format has changed and Dee has met with individual parents and carers herself.

Dee says: 'It is a huge investment in time but I think it pays off. It helps me get to know the children and their families. It gives me a chance to welcome them properly to the school as well as to talk about our expectations of them.'

- The welcome meeting is attended by a number of key staff, such as the parent support partner, as well as governors.
- Bilingual staff are on hand to help with interpretation, where necessary.

- Information about letter sounds and high-frequency words is given alongside ideas of things to do in the holidays before their children start school.
- Families and children look around the nursery and staff make appointments for the all-important home visits.

Nursery staff carry out home visits towards the end of the summer term to all families whose children are starting nursery in September.

During the visit, staff:

- give families a leaflet entitled 'Steps to settling in' and information about ESOL classes for adults
- show the family and the child how to write the child's name on a piece of card in the school's preferred style, so that the child becomes familiar with seeing it written down
- take a photo of the child with their parents or carers which is stuck into their 'special book' in school
- discuss any concerns that parents and carers may have and offer advice where they can – they find that advice is often sought on toilet training
- give the child a gift, such as a packet of play-dough or some bubbles, to begin to establish a relationship with the child to help them settle in and build confidence
- work with families to complete an 'All about me' form which also goes into the child's 'special book' – where information on sleep patterns, toilet training, independence, eating habits, fine and gross motor control, language and number skills, and other experiences are shared to help staff gain an initial view of the child and their needs.



All this information helps the staff to plan activities and support for children from their very first days.

Starting reception

Over several years, staff noticed that children who transfer from the nursery settle more quickly than those that join reception without any previous nursery experience. To offset this difference, they invited parents and carers to bring their children to the reception class in the second part of the summer term before they start:

- At first parents or carers stay with their children and then gradually they leave them. This helps the children and families to get used to being separated. It also gets children used to the expectations of the reception class so that they learn to follow instructions and conform to expected behaviours.
- All children new to reception have a home visit which follows the same format as described for nursery starters.
- Their parents and carers also have an interview with the headteacher and attend a 'welcome' meeting with other families.

Help with learning

Whether they join Mayflower in nursery or reception, parents and carers are engaged from the start in their child's education.



During the first half of the autumn term, they are invited to a meeting where a 'home learning pack' is given out. Staff emphasise the importance of reading every night and helping children develop a love of books.

The meeting shows parents and carers how they can help their child's learning at home. The pack includes: a small

whiteboard, pen, rubber, exercise book, pencil, scissors, and a number line to 10.

Staff run workshops throughout the year on topics such as 'letter formation' and 'reading with your child'. The school's [calendar for the autumn term](#) gives an indication of the range of events that staff provide. Occasionally, certain groups of parents and carers are invited to specific workshops but, by and large, such opportunities are open to all.

Throughout the Early Years, families receive regular '[topic letters](#)' that tell them the activities children will encounter in each area of learning and staff share observations of the children's learning with their parents and carers.

Staff teach children some of the key skills they need to learn to read:

- Letter sounds are taught throughout their time in nursery and, in the summer term, children are taught key words. These are attached to the key ring on their book bags so that they can practise them at home.
- Before the summer holidays, parents and carers of children in the nursery are given a copy of the first 100 high-frequency words to practise with their child along with more [ideas for things to do in the holidays](#).
- In reception, a routine is established for parents and carers to come into class each morning to share a book with their child; most do.
- Reception workshops on phonics, mathematics and health matters are well attended.
- Ideas for [holiday work for children in Reception](#) and target setting help families to know how to help their children.
- The school's focus on story-telling to promote communication encourages them to participate in story-telling sessions.

Moving on...

And so, you may ask, is that the end of the parents and carers' role in getting their children ready for school? Absolutely not! It is just the beginning of their role in supporting learning.

As each year passes, parents and carers play a part in pupils' transition from one year group to the next and home learning packs change to suit the pupils' needs. Like many schools, Mayflower encourages parents and carers to become involved in social events such as coffee mornings, Christmas fairs, Eid parties, and International week.

But staff also encourage involvement in children's learning through the many workshops and projects that they and visiting specialists provide. The ideas that staff give families are simple; it is the scale and range of the opportunities and the relentless way that staff never stop trying to get parents and carers involved that makes Mayflower unusual.

And what is the impact of this positive start to school life? 'We have seen our results rise year on year' says Dee, 'Importantly, the results of those children who are eligible for free school meals who, nationally, do not do as well as others are rising more quickly here at Mayflower. We are closing the gap. We believe that parents and carers have a vital role to play in helping to achieve our motto to encourage pupils to "Set sail for success".'

Other good practice examples in this set

Ann Tayler Children's Centre Nursery
Little Stars Childcare Centre
Mayflower Primary School
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Stanton Bridge Primary School
The Village Nursery

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
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