

Appendix 2 – Guidance to support the development of quality lunchtimes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The value of lunchtime in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Lunchtime is a valuable learning experience for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Meals are important times for learning about being with others, taking turns and making choices. The EYFS framework urges practitioners to aim for continuity and consistency of approach between this part of the day and rest in order to enhance the experience of children, their confidence, skills and emotional well-being. Any provider wishing to provide lunchtime as part of the free entitlement funded by Nursery Education Grant must ensure that children have a high quality experience that is shaped by the statutory requirements of the EYFS.

Lunchtime provision recognised as excellent may be described by Ofsted as follows;

“Children learn about healthy foods at snack-time and when they help to cook and bake. The arrangements for taking lunch provide excellent opportunities for them to sit together with an adult to talk to and help serve the food. These are enjoyable social occasions.”

Factors to consider

In every setting in the EYFS mealtimes should be a planned part of the daily routine. There are a number of factors to consider:-

- Lunchtimes needs to reflect the principles of EYFS just as much as the rest of the day
- Lunchtimes for children in the EYFS need to be carefully managed due to developmental needs of children
- Additional members of staff will be needed to cover the lunch time period, as practitioners need to take lunch breaks away from the children. It may be necessary to stagger staff lunch breaks to ensure continuity for the children.
- Lunch times need to offer a quality experience which is enjoyable, sociable, educational and emotionally safe for EYFS children. At this age children benefit most from eating in small groups with an adult.
- For some children the indoor environment is like a second home. The environment needs to meet the needs of all children as a place they feel at home and a place to learn. Developing a calm environment with soft music, napkins and fresh flowers on tables may help to keep stress levels at a minimum for practitioners and children and add value to the aesthetics of the environment

- Including children in preparation – there are many opportunities for helping to set the table and clearing away, gives them ownership. Making choices about foods, and serving themselves, develops independence.

What does this mean for children with an entitlement to free Nursery Education?

All nurseries will provide the free nursery entitlement on a flexible basis. This will enable parents to access their child's 12.5 hours per week in sessions of different lengths agreed with the setting, across 3 – 5 days rather than fixed sessions. From September 2009 this entitlement will be extended to 15 hours for children living in disadvantaged areas and for all nursery aged children from September 2010. (Primary Schools in Cheshire Booklet – Nursery admissions 1009/10)

If lunchtime is part of the free entitlement then it should be part of your approach to high quality EYFS and have been planned for in accordance with EYFS principles. When the main class teacher is not timetabled to teach the class and when no other teacher is present, one of the remaining members of staff must meet each of the following conditions:

- They must be assisting or supporting the work of a qualified teacher
- They must be subject to the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher in accordance with arrangements made by the head teacher
- The head teacher must be satisfied that they have the skills, expertise and experience necessary

This would mean that a qualified teacher is on hand in the event of an emergency and that lunchtime, (as part of the free entitlement); can be staffed by two suitably qualified non-QTS, working to a 13:1 ratio. It may be appropriate for the school to draw up a risk assessment to ensure that the levels of support are appropriate during lunchtime, taking into account the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children in the EYFS.

In conclusion, the EYFS Practice guidance states clearly:-

Children need adults to set a good example and to give them opportunities for interaction with others so that they can develop positive ideas about themselves and others. (p22)

What are the links across the areas of learning?

The lunchtime period presents many opportunities for learning across much of the EYFS;

Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL)

Lunchtime offers varied opportunities to interact with others and to use a wide variety of resources for expressing their understanding. Time and relaxed opportunities for children to develop spoken language through sustained conversations between children and adults, both 1:1 and in small groups and between the children themselves. (See Principles into Practice card – CLL - Enabling Environments)

Physical Development (PD)

Mealtimes are an opportunity to promote children's social development, while enjoying food and highlighting the importance of making healthy choices. (Principles into Practice card – PD – Learning and Development)

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy (PSRN)

Encourage children to explore real life problems for example how many spoons do we need for everyone. Use mathematical terms during play and daily routines. (Principles into Practice Card – PSRN – Positive Relationships)

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)

Lunchtime gives opportunities to give encouragement to children, with practitioners acting as role models and develop children's independence. Children need adults to set a good example and to give opportunities for interaction with others so that they can develop positive ideas about themselves and others. (Principles into Practice card – PSED – Positive Relationships and Enabling Environments)