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Newsletter April 2026



Welcome to our April newsletter edition! As we move into a new season, we are also entering an exciting new chapter for our Stronger Practice Hub. This month marks the transition of national delivery partner responsibilities from the **National Children's Bureau (NCB)** to **Ambition Institute**. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the NCB for their invaluable support throughout the first phase of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. We now look forward to working with Ambition Institute as we continue strengthening early years practice across our region and beyond. Their expertise in professional development will be an asset as we grow our networks, resources, and impact both locally and nationally.

Alongside this change, we are delighted to highlight that **recruitment for the Education Endowment Foundation's Maths Champions programme is still open**. This is a fully funded programme for settings looking to build confidence, deepen mathematical understanding, and support children's early numeracy through evidence-informed practice. We encourage all interested settings to explore the programme and consider applying. Look for further details in this newsletter.

As we look ahead to the summer term, we are also excited to share that our **Beach School and Forest School sessions for May and June** are now available to book. These immersive outdoor learning experiences continue to be some of our most popular offers, supporting children's curiosity, wellbeing, and connection with the natural world, as well as providing practitioners with practical ideas to take back into their settings.

Thank you for being part of our growing community. Thank you to colleagues who attended our New EYFS Nutritional Guidance - Food growing and Sustainability with Lil Newton in March. If you missed the evening online live session, we recorded the session. Please email SpHubNW@evertoncentre.liverpool.sch.uk if you would like a recording to share with your staff teams.

We also have a recording of our Introduction to Physical Development and Communication and Language with Alex Gower-Jones if you would like to share with your staff teams. Again email our email address for a recording.

Thank you to everyone who attended our face to face Play conference in March. We are aiming to offer this online during the summer term. Our three speakers offered an all round overview about play in different contexts. You can read about the speakers in this newsletter.

Finally, we look forward to a season filled with collaboration, professional learning, and inspiring practice across the Liverpool City Region and Beyond area with colleagues. If you have anything to share and would like to feature in a monthly newsletter please let us know.

April 2026 issue

Welcome, Math's Champion, Early Years and SEND Professional Development Network, EYFS Leadership Network, SEND reforms, The Education Endowment Foundation, Inclusive by Nature, Safer sleep requirements, Listening to Children Listening to Trees, New screen time guidance, Starting Reception, Childminder Network Padlet, 'Let's Talk' Childminding Network, CPD Recorded Sessions, CBeebies Parenting, Updates.

Maths Champion



Fully funded places now available



Worth £1205 the Maths Champions programme is FREE for nurseries in England

Secure your funded place today!



Information Sessions

For further details on Maths Champions access the Information Sessions led by a team of expert Early Years Advisors. These sessions provide a comprehensive explanation of the programme, the eligibility criteria for settings to take part, and the commitment involved. There is also an opportunity for settings to ask direct questions to the Early Years Advisors, followed by clear instructions of next steps and how to sign up. Book a session to find out more.

<https://ndna.org.uk/maths-champions-information-sessions/>

Don't forget to join our Leadership Network online:

This will be held the first **Tuesday of each month** on Workplace

Zoom

3.45pm – 4.30pm

Meeting ID: 881 3994 7902

Passcode: 005369

The same ID and passcode for every monthly Tuesday meeting.

May 5th 2026

We also have a SEND/Early Years Network:

This will be held the first Thursday of each month on Workplace

Zoom

6.00-7.00pm

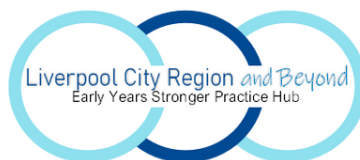
Meeting ID: 874 2439 5942

Passcode: 774607

The same ID and passcode for every monthly Thursday meeting.

May 7th 2026

Please contact sphubnw@evertoncentre.liverpool.sch.uk to book place.





EYFS Leadership Network

Liverpool City Region and Beyond Stronger Practice Hub are launching an Early Years Leadership Network for the Early Years Sector

The aim of this network is to offer, legislation and policy updates, updates on training for your staff teams, a safe space to ask questions to other professionals and share best practice.

Audience: School leaders, EYFS Coordinators, Nursery Manager, Childminder Leads, LA reps

This will be held on **Zoom at Tuesday 7th July 3.45pm – 4.30pm**

Meeting ID: 881 3994 7902
Passcode: 005369

- July 7th
- October 6th
- January 12th 2027

Early Years and SEND Professional Development Network



Liverpool City Region and Beyond Stronger Practice Hub are launching an Early Years Professional Development Network for the Early Years Sector

The aim of this network is to offer bitesize training, legislation and policy updates, a safe space to ask questions to other professionals and share best practice.

Audience: Childminders, early years educators and those working in practice with under 5s

This will be held on Zoom at
Thursday July 2nd
6.00-7.00pm

Meeting ID: 874 2439 5942
Passcode: 774607

- July 2nd
- October 1st
- January 14th 2027

Childminder Champion Monthly Network Meeting :

Childminder 'Let's Talk' Monthly meeting - 2nd Saturday of Every Month 10am – 11am

Topics include:

- EYFS
- Nutrition: Safer eating
- Inspections
- Communication and Language
- Safer recruitment - assistants
- Supervision
- SEND
- Mathematics

Meeting ID: 873 2451 0704

Passcode: 506194

SEND reforms.

On Monday 23rd February, the Department for Education's Secretary of State published the Schools White Paper: [Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#) alongside a consultation on [SEND reform \(Putting Children and Young People First\)](#). There has also been a [series of guidance documents published](#).

Get involved by accessing the consultation at: [SEND reform: putting children and young people first - Department for Education - Citizen Space](#) and to take part with events that will be taking place throughout the consultation period. Please share consultation link with Parents.

Please note the SEND Reform and Early Years webinar has been pushed back to Wednesday 22nd April

You can find further details and sign up via [Eventbrite](#).



The Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation has published a [Practice Review of the Early Years Pupil Premium \(EYPP\)](#) that provides a descriptive picture of how EYPP is currently being accessed, spent, and monitored. Alongside this, they have published a practical [EYPP Planning Tool](#) to support setting leaders to make effective use of the funding. The report found high levels of awareness of EYPP, which was most commonly used for resources, staff deployment and professional development. Most providers monitored impact through observations, progress tracking, staff feedback and discussions with parents. 19% believed their were eligible children for whom they had not made a claim due to parental reluctance or uncertainty. Payment of EYPP in arrears, in small instalments and bundled in with other funding were barriers to long-term strategic planning for use of the funding.

Launched new research projects focused on improving language development, developing self-regulation, and increasing positive interactions among 3–4-year-olds. [Search to find which your setting is eligible to join.](#)

Opportunity for nurseries to take part in an EEF-funded early years trial

Early years settings are invited to help shape national research on supporting young children's development by taking part in the evaluation of the Positive Early Childhood Education (PECE) programme. PECE is a professional development programme that helps early years practitioners create warm, consistent and responsive environments that support children's emotional, behavioural and cognitive self-regulation.

The study is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and independently evaluated by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). Participation is free and financial contributions are provided to recognise staff involvement.

Day nurseries, pre-schools, nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools may be eligible if they have at least 16 children aged 3-4 attending at least 10 hours per week. Settings must also be able to:

- Nominate a setting manager or senior leader who is based within the setting and can undertake the PECE Coach Role
- Confirm that they are not taking part in another EEF trial involving 3-4 year olds during the same academic year (except the Maths Champions Scale-up programme)
- Confirm that they have not delivered the PECE programme within the last five years, and that they do not currently offer a Triple P parenting programme to parents in their setting.

To find out more, visit <https://www.triplep-parenting.uk.net/uk/triple-p/pece-program-eeef-trial/> or contact EarlyYearsPECEproject@triplep.uk.net. Likewise, if you are an eligible setting and would like to take part in the trial, you can express your interest [here](#).

The Ripple Effect, from Garden Classroom to Community Change

Tracie Dowling – Childminder and Strategic Lead Childminder for Liverpool City Region and Beyond Early Years Stronger Practice Hub shares how she tailored her setting outdoors for SEND success.

This case study highlights Tracie's garden classroom project and the positive impact this enabling environment has had on the children in her care. Her diverse, urban early years setting serves children aged 0–13 years, many with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or needing support for communication and language.

Introduction

Our garden classroom project aims to create a peaceful outdoor space for sensory exploration and global responsibility. We use the garden classroom as a tool for exploring the 17 United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) to nurture independence, empathy, and respect for the environment in every child.



Sustainability and Community

For the past couple of years, I have saved and collected recycled materials for this project. I secured an expansion grant from the Local Authority, which allowed us to turn our plans into action and extend our services to the community. This garden classroom project has been a truly collaborative effort, co-designed with children, staff, parents, and community members, creating a shared vision for a greener future.

“This wasn't just about building a garden classroom; the aim was about teaching our children that they can create something extraordinary from what others throw away.”



As a childminder, my setting offers a holistic outdoor learning environment that's unique. This approach focuses on child-led exploration and supports children who may find challenges in a traditional home or nursery setting.



The project transformed our space into a sustainable garden classroom, which in turn directly embodied the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) principle of Enabling Environments by functioning as a 'third teacher.' Moving learning outdoors created a low-arousal setting that removed sensory barriers such as harsh lighting and echoes often found indoors. This change is based on Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplan, 1989, 1995), which explains how natural environments support children, especially those with SEND, recover from cognitive fatigue. By using sustainable 'loose parts' and sensory-rich plants, we fostered agency and belonging, allowing children to regulate their emotions and learn at their own pace.

Our inclusive setting, through the garden classroom project, has created a low-stress environment, particularly effective for children with SEND. We noticed that removing artificial lighting and noisy, echoing indoor rooms helped children self-regulate and focus more during play and learning.

Our childminder setting follows each child's interests through 'Natural Loose Parts play.' Our outdoor classroom is naturally filled with open-ended resources such as sticks, stones, water and mud that children often collect from local parks and forests. These natural items empower children to guide their own play. A stone can become 'treasure' or a 'landing platform for bugs,' fostering deep engagement and creativity.



Staff support children in managing risks, such as climbing and balancing on logs. The children also use real tools such as hammers, drills and screwdrivers for nature crafts. These experiences encourage resilience and help children overcome physical challenges, boosting their confidence and independence compared to a sheltered indoor environment.

Holistic Development and Communication

Children are fascinated with sensory experiences such as “squelching” in mud or listening to the ‘pitter-patter’ of rain on our living roof and canopy. These moments naturally prompt language development. When children engage with their environment, they form concrete concepts that words represent. We use descriptive commenting to label their experiences, which helps them link sensations to new vocabulary. Commenting is suggested by the Education Endowment Foundation as an effective practice for supporting young children’s communication and language development.

One memorable activity occurred on a snowy day when the transparent canopy was covered in thick snow. The children and I pretended to be polar bears diving under icebergs. The children used descriptive words such as “deep, freezing, chilly and icy”. This sparked further learning about polar bears and linked back to the EYFS Statutory Framework for Communication and Language and Understanding the World. As the children developed the polar bear narrative, they had opportunities to retell stories, enhancing their literacy skills.

As a childminder, I have observed positive changes in the children, staff, and my own well-being since we started spending more time outdoors. Regular outdoor activities, gardening, and exposure to sunlight have boosted fitness, improved sleep, and enhanced cognitive function. The list is quite endless!



The outdoor moments of awe and wonder have helped children develop the EYFS Characteristics of Effective Learning, particularly Playing and Exploring and Creating and Thinking Critically. These magical moments foster deep involvement and persistence. Regular outdoor exercise and gardening have also supported Physical Development, promoting fitness and healthy habits including better sleep patterns.

Parental feedback indicated that increased outdoor time had provided significant holistic benefits for both children and families. Parents noted improved sleep patterns, better focus, and enhanced motor and cognitive skills.

"Since Shay started attending the outdoor garden classroom, I have seen a remarkable shift in his sleeping. He is now sleeping through the night, which has been life-changing for my whole family. Shay comes home much more regulated and calmer; time spent in the fresh air and the activities Tracie provides clearly helps him burn off energy and wind down properly. It's had such a positive 'ripple effect' on everyone's wellbeing at home."



Parents also appreciated support with toilet training. We keep children focused while on the potty by listening to birds. Being outdoors has reduced stress and given families more time to enjoy being with each other.

Our 'Inclusive by Nature' project has shown that the outdoors is not just a play area; but a powerful, low-arousal 'third teacher' that removes sensory barriers found in traditional indoor settings.

Our impact findings through our outdoor garden classroom project are:

- For the Children: We have observed increased levels of engagement, especially among children with SEND. The children are now self-regulating, building resilience through measured risk, and reaching EYFS milestones through immersive, sensory-rich play.
- For the Families: The benefits extend into homes. Parents report remarkably improved sleep patterns, calmer transitions, and a shared family sense of well-being.
- For the Profession: As a Strategic Lead for the Liverpool City Region Early Years Stronger Practice Hub, this project showed how childminders can lead in specialised, holistic education. We are not just 'childminding'; we are environmental architects creating a sustainable, inclusive blueprint for the future.
- For the Planet: By co-designing with recycled materials, our children are learning they can create something extraordinary from what is often discarded, fostering a lifelong commitment to global responsibility.

Through this project, we have acknowledged that in our setting, awe and wonder are not just moments; they are the foundation for health, happiness, and success for neuro-diverse children.



References:

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

<https://forest-healing.co.uk/articles/attention-restoration-theory>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years/evidence-store/communication-and-language-b>

Further Reading:

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/learning-environments>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-five-a-day-to-improve-send-outcomes>

<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/>

<https://tracies-treasures.com/>

<https://www.cdchk.org/en/parent-tips/effective-strategies-promoting-language-development-parallel-talk>

Safer sleep requirements

Olivia Bailey, Minister for Early Education and Minister for Equalities at the Department for Education has written a letter to early years providers. The letter sets out the intention to amend the [Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#), to clarify safeguarding requirements for children's sleeping arrangements.

The amendments will make safer sleep requirements explicit within the EYFS framework. The new framework is expected to come into force from September 2026, subject to parliamentary process, although providers are already expected to be compliant with the requirements.

Minister Bailey has emphasised that providers must ensure children are placed down to sleep safely, in line with NHS safer sleep guidance. This includes placing babies on their backs, in a clear, separate sleep space, with appropriate bedding and regular supervision. The updated wording has been developed with input from The Lullaby Trust, medical experts and Ofsted.

Further amendments will clarify requirements for childcare on domestic premises and include a link to updated guidance on screen time and online safety. The full letter from the Minister can be read [here](#).

Listening to Children, Listening to Trees

A new toolkit, [Listening to children, listening to trees](#), has been published to share the outcomes of a UKRI-funded research project led by Abi Hackett of Manchester Met University, called Voices of the Future. It aims to give voice to children and young people regarding the Government's commitment to planting millions of trees.

New screen time guidance

The Best Start in Life website has published new screen time guidance for children under 5, designed to help parents and carers support healthy digital habits in early childhood. It provides clear, evidence-informed advice on screen use, suitable content, and how adults can create positive routines around technology.¹

Full guidance: [Baby and toddler screen time guidance - Best Start in Life](#)

Starting Reception

Easter can be an exciting time for families as they find out which primary school their children will attend. There is some helpful guidance below which can help you and your children prepare for the transition into school.

[Home - Starting Reception](#)

[Skills for starting school - advice for parents](#)

[10 practical tips to help children cope with strong emotions - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

[Tips to help your child focus - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

[Share stories with me booklet](#) - March release: A parent booklet to help make the most of storytelling through everyday moments.



Please find below the link to the **Childminder Network Padlet**, Childminders can access this centralised resource it at any time to fit around your busy schedules and is updated weekly or when latest information is released.

<https://forms.gle/EPBVXAxTvAfiRbiGA>

It is a versatile resource and includes:

- OFSTED updates
- EYFS Framework
- EEF Resources showcasing evidence-based research and showcases good practice
- Food Safety
- Business Matters
- Childminding legislation and Publications
- Safeguarding
- Professional Development
- Evidence based programmes
- Support and signposting
- training opportunities
- Specific LA information

This Padlet will support all your childminding needs in one user friendly space using versatile content through videos, text, links, recommendations and documents. Its showcasing creativity and good practice and created to support you through all your childminding practice.

For more information contact:

Tracie Dowling

traciestreasureschildminder@gmail.com



'Let's Talk' Childminding Network every 2nd Saturday of each month.

We will look at topics for the next six months to ensure it is relevant for your Childminding needs.

This is a monthly Zoom meeting for childminders to have a 'safe space' to discuss 'Childminding Issues' and gain Peer support and foster a Childminder community to building connections.

Each month we have a specific lead topic, invite guest speakers, signpost for further support, recommend CPD and resource recommendations.

Meeting ID: 81654991912 Pass: 369243

'Maths Crusaders' Network'

A Monthly 1hr zoom Network o includes Childminders and their children. It is an interactive session supported by the 'PEEP' <https://www.peeple.org.uk/> evidenced based Programme and is Maths based. Each session we investigate different mathematical concepts to include activities, stories and singing to make it fun. Childminders will be signpost to further evidence-based information, training where needed and resources. The session will support your setting to include parents by encouraging home learning activities initiated by the children. Information and certificates will be emailed monthly, and a WhatsApp group can be accessed for on-going support.

Limited spaces please contact Tracie on traciestreasureschildminder@gmail.com to book a place

CPD AND RECORDED SESSIONS

Beach school session first session theory Wednesday 13th May 1-4p.m.

Beach school practical Wednesday 10th June 1-4p.m.

at Everton Nursery School and Family Centre, Spencer Street, Liverpool 6 2WF

Please email SpHubNW@evertoncentre.liverpool.sch.uk to book a place.

Forest school first session theory Wednesday 20th May 1-4p.m.

Forest school practical Wednesday 17th June 1-4p.m.

at Everton Nursery School and Family Centre, Spencer Street, Liverpool 6 2WF

Please email SpHubNW@evertoncentre.liverpool.sch.uk to book a place.

Here is a list of some of our recorded sessions.

EARLY WRITING 25 minutes with Laura Johnson, Early Years Teacher from Duke Street Nursery School, Chorley.

SELF REGULATION AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTION 25 minutes with Emma Doran, Early Years Co-ordinator from Whitefield Primary School, Liverpool.

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY, PROMOTING INCLUSION, AND ANTI-RACIST CULTURES IN THE EARLY YEARS 25 minutes with Sian Phillips - Anti-Racism Advocate/ Researcher/Consultant.

MAXIMISING THE IMPACT OF PUPIL PREMIUM IN THE EARLY YEARS 20 minutes with Kaya Doyle, Programme Manager.

INSET SESSION 1 TEACHING AND MODELLING LANGUAGE: 30 minutes with Alex Gower-Jones (Independent Consultant). This has an accompany written sheet of activities to support this recorded Inset session.

Please contact our sph email if you are interested in accessing other recorded sessions for your setting.

Information to share with families.

CBeebies Parenting

Check out the BBC CBeebies Parenting collection of expert-backed tips, simple activity ideas, and practical advice to make play easy to fit into everyday life, helping parents/caregivers to support their children's early development. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/play>

There is a range of activities available from [sensory play for newborns](#) and [tummy time tips](#), to [creative crafts](#), [outdoor adventures](#), and [quick 10-minute games](#) there's something for every age and stage.

Updates

Updated- Working together to Safeguarding children

Please see updated version of Working together to Safeguard Children 2026.

[Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#)

Safe Sleep requirement in the EYFS Statutory Framework

Early years providers are required to meet the safer sleep requirements set out in the EYFS statutory framework, which currently links to the NHS safer sleep guidance. To make the existing requirements to follow the NHS guidance clearer, the working will be updated in the EYFS framework so that more detail on safer sleep is set out directly within the framework itself. This is intended for September 2026, subject to the parliamentary and legislative process.

See the following links for more advice on safer sleep:

[Sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\) - NHS](#)

[Safer Sleeping Practices for Early Years Educators - Foundation Years](#)

[Home | The Lullaby Trust](#)

Liverpool City Region and Beyond Early Years Stronger Practice Hub Feedback Form

If you have attended any of our conferences or face to face training, please scan the QR code and send us feedback. Many thanks.



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