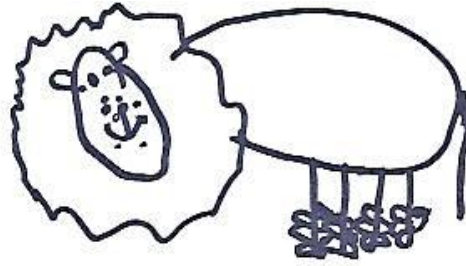


Bristol Boys' Achievement Project



Bristol University

Day Nursery

How can a flexible and diverse early years curriculum influence the well-being of summer born boys?

Action Research led by Alex Parker

Bristol Boys' Achievement Project

Bristol University Nursery

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The Bristol Boys Achievement Project is being carried out in numerous settings throughout Bristol, including nurseries, preschools, and schools, to help identify gaps in learning amongst boys. Data amongst boys show their achievements at the end of the reception year is historically low, and continues to be so as they progress through school.

Before starting the project, parents were informed of what we would be doing, and it was explained they had a right to withdraw if they wished, and permission was gained for the use of observations and photographs.

Identifying a need

- Staff have a good awareness of children's needs regarding the EYFS, including how they use the Characteristics of Effective Learning.
- We have 5 summer born boys due to start school in September 2018
- Some of these parents questioned their son's 'school readiness'.
- From experience, parents of previous boys born in the summer have also shown concerns over whether their child was ready for school.
- It is very rare (within our setting) that the parents show concern over their summer born daughter's school readiness.
- More often than not, this relates to the Personal, Social and Emotional Development of the child.

During discussions with management and with the team, we decided to implement a series of activities to help influence the development of PSED- many of these activities have an element of taking responsibility, risk taking, following rules and boundaries, turn taking, and being exposed to new or unfamiliar situations or activities, with the support of a familiar adult.

Assessment beforehand

Children's progress is tracked regularly by their key person, and cohort tracking is carried out. We also analysed our current provision, and discussed where we could make improvements. Observations using the Leuvens Scale of well-being and engagement were also used, however it was decided that although this is a useful observation method for certain monitoring and evaluation, it didn't seem to provide an accurate picture of individual children, relating to their PSED development as recorded in the cohort tracking.

Planning appropriate activities

Activities were provided for all children to access. These included:

- Forest School sessions being changed so the children would visit a real forest, travelling on a minibus, rather than using local gardens we could walk to. Eight children were to attend Forest School for a 6-week block, before rotating to another group.
- Woodwork. Katie attended a woodwork course and has been carrying out woodwork activities with the children over the last 4 months.
- Cooking activities carried out on a more regular frequency, at least twice a week. To link to this, we have also asked parents to provide us with a recipe from home, so we can encourage stronger home to nursery links.
- Story Squares have been introduced to the children. During this process the children tell us a story during the day, and then have the opportunity to act it out, choosing their own part, with other children having the opportunity to take on different parts.
- Taking account of emotions. We purchased some more books to have readily available in the book corner, as well as displaying words and pictures of different emotions around the room. This helps to encourage staff to talk to the children about their own emotions. We also extended the book corner into a 'quiet room' adding more cushions, blankets and cuddly toys.

In addition to this the nursery had the opportunity to take part in a 'living egg' programme, where we had 10 eggs delivered to us, of which 9 successfully hatched into chicks. This helped the children with taking responsibility and confidence when holding the tiny chicks. We then decided chickens would make a good nursery pet, so we adopted 3 chickens, named Minnie, Ginger and Hazel. The children love the chickens coming out, and will stroke them, as well as help to feed and clean them.

Forest School

“Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland environment.”

Forest Education Initiative, *cited in Pace, 2014*

The above quote suggests that children develop self confidence within a forest setting. By providing children with achievable targets at each session, it was hoped that children’s self confidence and self esteem would improve. Below are some examples of how this has worked.



The children discovered these stepping stones almost immediately at one of our locations. Some children showed confidence straight away, others needed the help of others. Likewise, the log over a hole (below) was discovered, and the children spent most of the session practicing walking over it. The children initially needed help from an adult but later in the session realised they could all help one another, as the photo on the left shows. Eventually, all of the children were confident enough to try this independently, some still needing the reassurance of an adult nearby.



This photo shows one of our 'summer born' boys, playing on the swing. When this particular child first started coming to Forest School he was reluctant to join in with every activity, generally sticking to the things he was familiar with, such as bug hunting. When first playing on this swing he needed reassurance, and an adult would hold him on. He soon began to use his upper body strength independent of the adult to keep himself on the swing and would often ask an adult to lift him onto it.



Here we can see another of the children using the rope in a different manner. We had enjoyed using the rope as a swing for quite a while, however soon the piece of wood that was attached disappeared. The children used their knowledge of the forest and their problem solving skills to find another piece of wood, however we couldn't get one to fit as well as before, whilst still being safe. The children discovered another way to enjoy the rope as a swing by hanging onto it and swinging.

Woodwork

“Children are empowered by being respected and trusted. They gain confidence and a sense of responsibility when allowed to work with real tools... When children discuss and plan a project together, their social skills develop.”

Moorhouse, 2015



The children have enjoyed woodwork and show a sense of pride towards their creations. Woodwork has encouraged concentration, focus and the ability to pay attention to details.

There was some noticeable improvement in some of the children's ability to persevere with a challenge such as hammering a nail, whereas before if they were unable to do it the first time they were quick to give up. The children also showed pride in themselves when they completed each small challenge, such as making holes, then using screws to attach a bottle top.

There has been lots of talk about the boundaries set and the need for safety, which the children have taken account of and have demonstrated an understanding of this. The children have also been able to work together to identify tools and to share the resources successfully.



Cooking

“Hands-on cooking activities help children develop pride and confidence in their skills and abilities. The act of following a recipe can encourage self-direction and independence, while also teaching children to follow directions and use thinking skills to problem solve.”

Growing Minds Farm to School Program



The children have been enjoying a wide variety of cooking activities, being able to use tools and techniques they wouldn't always have the chance to use, which has given them an opportunity to take account of their personal safety, giving them more chance to take responsibility. The children have made a variety of foods, including cakes, brownies, cheese

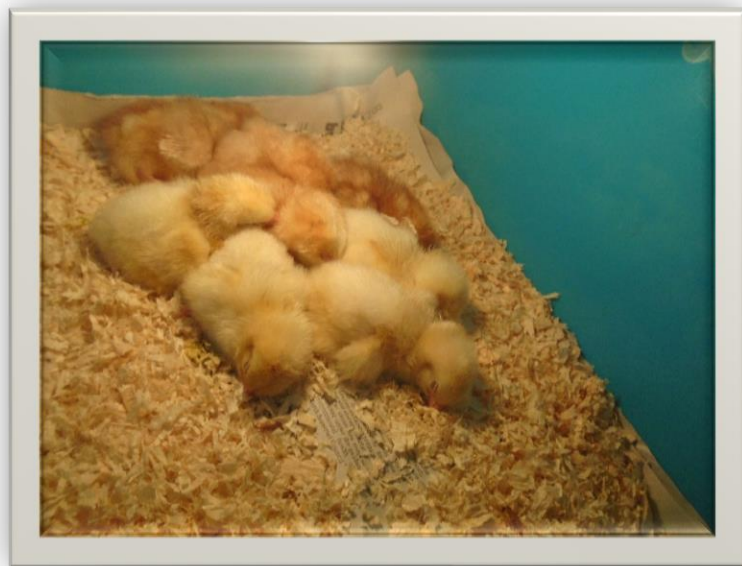
straws, bread, fruit smoothies, spring rolls, pancakes, and much more! The children have had the opportunity to use knives, a hand-held blender, cheese graters and the induction hob.



Chicks

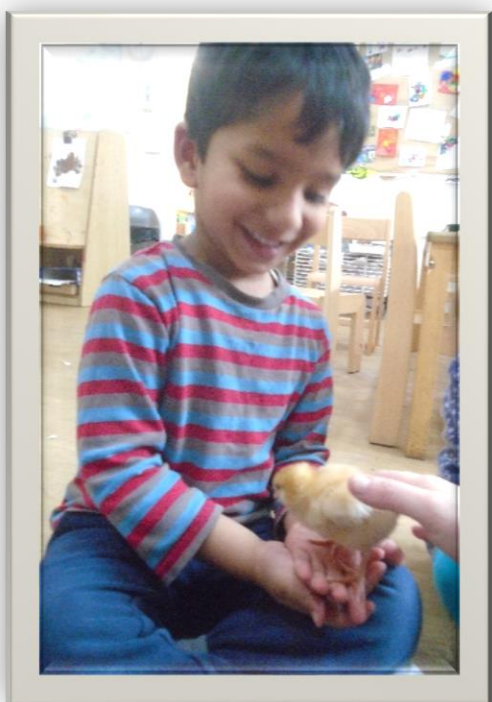
“Children develop a set of rules to care for chicks. Take turns to feed, water and help clean chicks. Circle time to share feelings about looking after chicks and caring for living things/each other.”

The Living Egg Company PSED thematic planning



The children became excited about the prospect of watching chicks hatch when we had our brooder and eggs delivered to the nursery. Facebook updates meant the parents also became very interested, and children from other rooms visited our room to see the progress of the chicks. We ended up successfully hatching 8 chicks, with a ninth needing a little assistance from the staff. We then decided to keep 3 of the chicks, and purchased them some suitable accommodation in the garden, which we then expanded twice! The children and parents were involved in naming them, many of them are still quite interested in how they are doing and will often visit them.

One of the children in the target cohort has a keen interest in animals. The prospect of helping with the chicks has given him more chance to take responsibility, as well as given him more opportunity to turn take and wait for his turn when holding the chicks or helping with the chickens.



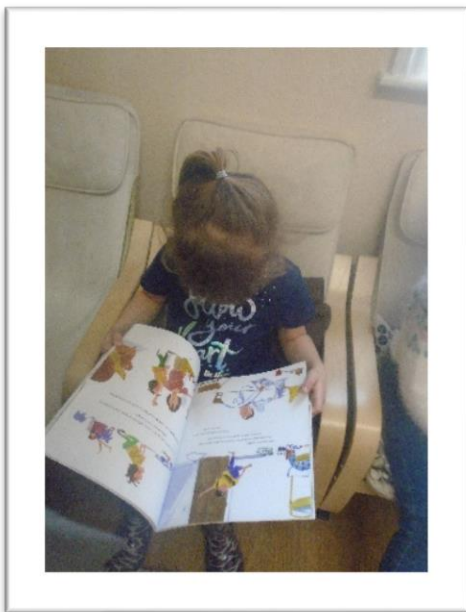
Over the summer the chickens have started to lay eggs- the children are enjoying being able to collect the eggs, which in turn has provided lots of mathematical opportunities.

Emotions



We have been speaking to the children about their feelings, and the different ways we may make our friends feel. To help prompt the staff, we put some different feelings words around the rooms, and have been talking about our own feeling as well as encouraging them to say how they feel (i.e. "I'm so excited about going to forest school today!"). This was something we have always done, however there are not a vast range of words as prompts for the staff. We also placed 'word mats' around the room, with expressions on them. The children have been enjoying looking at these and trying to copy the faces.

We have extended our book corner, added more cushions, some blankets, and some cuddly toys, to help make the children feel safe. We have also purchased books which explore feelings, which are a permanent feature in the book corner.



One of the children (who is a summer born girl) enjoys looking at a book about emotions. As she looks at each picture she talks about what she can see, making comments about the different expressions "he as a sad face!" "That one looks funny, I think he's laughing. What is he laughing at?"

Story Squares

The supportive framework when using story squares means each child's story is valued, which helps develop their confidence and self esteem. Children are told at the start of the session (normally in an afternoon session) that they can come and tell me a story if they would like. During the first few weeks I gave some examples beforehand. Many of the children wanted to tell me a story, some started as very brief stories:

"All about penguins, There's these babies. And mummies and daddies. The end."

Others were long, elaborate stories, generally about a child's experiences, however often repeating the same ground. One of the children who was very keen at first to tell stories used his own experiences, and spoke about his friends throughout the story. He used lots of "and then"(s) throughout, with very little flow or connection, however by the fourth week of story squares he started to tell stories with a beginning, a middle and an end, as below:

"Yesterday there's a Lego dragon, he's old. He was to go to Legoland, and he found water and he went on the water. Then he went home, then he went to sleep. The end."

The children enjoy the opportunity of being able to act out the story. When it came to the acting out part we go into the staff room, which the children see as a special treat. Two of the children would always be quite keen to come to this part of the session although they wouldn't tell me a story, and would not act a part out if they were offered. After about 8 weeks of story square sessions, both children quietly told me they wanted to tell me a story, both were able to tell stories with a beginning, middle and end, and both focused on their own interests (one about dinosaurs, the other about a fire submarine). The two children both took on parts in their own story, showing confidence and being able to 'act' the role appropriately using actions and even sound effects. Here is one of the stories:

"About dinosaurs. A dinosaur hit his head and then he go to the doctors, and then he had a broken head, and a broken arm. And then a dinosaur doctor came and he mended the bones. The end."

The addition of story squares into our weekly routine has given the children a different opportunity to use their imaginations, and to convey their interests through storytelling. The opportunities given to the children to act out a story has been important for them. With the last two children mentioned, who took a while to warm up to the idea of story squares, they both showed confidence when it was their story being read out, which in turn helped to value them personally. Story squares are a great learning opportunity to use with the children, and we plan to carry on using them in the future,

Findings

Below is our tracking for the 5 target children, showing the progression of their Personal, Social and Emotional Development in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage development matters, indicating whether we feel that child is entering, developing or secure in this area, with the August 2018 column showing that some children are working towards the Early Learning Goals.

	August 2017	December 2017	April 2018	August 2018
Child A	22-36 D	30-50 D	30-50 D	40-60 E
Child B	30-50 D	40-60 D	40-60 S	ELG
Child C	22-36 S	30-50 D	40-60 E	40-60 D
Child D	30-50 S	40-60 E	40-60 S	ELG
Child E	30-50 E	30-50 S	40-60 D	ELG

All the children have made significant progress within the last year, with 3 of them ending their time at nursery having accomplished many of the Early Learning Goals. Their development in this area has progressed well, it seems to have accelerated over the last 6 months, whilst the project has been ongoing.

Of the other 2, child A has a delay with speech and language, and has been accessing Speech and Language Therapy over the last 6 months. Coupled with the activities we have been providing he is now able to talk about his abilities and has started to make friendships with other children. He has a good understanding of routines and boundaries, which has been enhanced through Forest School and woodwork in particular.

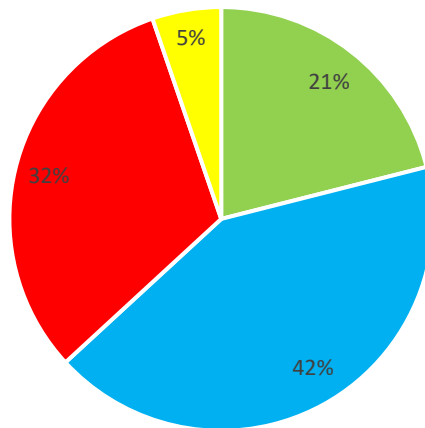
Child C has also improved greatly within his PSED. He often struggles with emotions; however this has improved over the course of the last year, he is more likely to wait his turn for something, has developed further friendships with other children, and shows higher levels of confidence when accessing new activities.

Parent Feedback

We handed out questionnaire to the parents at the end of the project, and below are some of the results we found, from the 19 questionnaires returned.

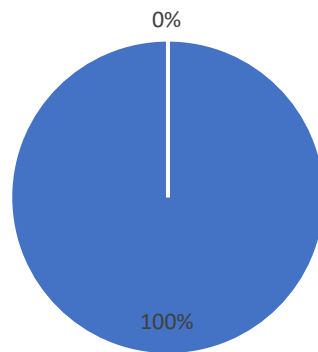
When asked about improvement in their child's PSED, the results were:

How much do you feel your child's PSED has improved over the last 6 months



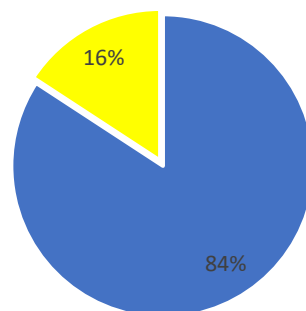
■ Greatly improved ■ Somewhat improved
■ slightly improved ■ No difference noticed

Does your child understand basic emotions?



■ yes ■ no

Does your child understand complex emotions?



■ yes ■ no

Parent Comments

"It's a brilliant project for our children to make a clear future."

"I think it's really positive if girls and boys are encouraged to talk about their emotions"

"He loved woodwork, he would talk about it all the way back home"

"I feel that the BBAP has had a significant positive impact on my child. I definitely think his confidence has grown and can see this when he interacts with other children."

"He talks about the activities he has done, he acts in ways that demonstrate the skills and awareness that he has learnt from these activities."

Summary

Overall, the response from parents and staff has been positive about the Bristol Boys' Achievement Project. The data shows improvement throughout PSED for the target group of children, yet these children may have still made progress without the implementations we have made- there is no way of knowing how much or how little. However, looking at the overall data, testimonies, case studies, and responses from parents, we feel that the children have made significant progress over the last 6 months in both PSED and other areas of development, and our view is that much of what we have carried out with them has really helped the children's overall progress.