

**EYFS**  
**IN ACTION**



**Early Years Foundation Stage**  
**– it's child's play!**



**Getting ready + The professionals' view + Working with parents**



department for  
**children, schools and families**



# EARLY START

The Early Years Foundation Stage needn't bring as big a change to nursery care as you might think – as Montessori settings can confirm

STORY VICTORIA NEUMARK PHOTOS CLAIRE DAVIES

Pictured: Children and practitioners at the Mulberry Bush and Hopes and Dreams Montessori nurseries

THREE-YEAR-OLD ROBERT approaches the nature table. His eyes sparkle with glee at the sight of the tadpoles. "They got their tails and they're swimming now. Soon they get back legs, then front legs – and then they turn into something like a frog. They come out and go boing, boing, boing!" He bounces enthusiastically.

"We strive to offer the very best in early years care and education, a fun and enjoyable learning experience," says Cheryl Knight, who, since 2003, has owned and run the Mulberry Bush Montessori Nursery in Mersea Island, Colchester, Essex. "Montessori





**“We enjoy our work and each other’s company. Children pick up on this.”**



## A DAY IN THE LIFE

We asked a child and his key person to describe their day at the nursery – and found much of EYFS already in action

### FREDDY (AGED FOUR)

I come in and do things, then I go out on the pirate ship. The pirate ship’s got a steam wheel; I pretend I’m a pirate. Then I get some games off the shelf like the screwdriver and spanner. And then I read my books. Cheryl showed me letters in the story. My favourite game is tiddlywinks, with Joe or Robert. I have my lunch. Cheryl said the rats have a different lunch. When I do music, I bang my drum. When we read stories I like the animals. I haven’t got animals at home but we’re getting ducklings here.

### CHERYL (FREDDY’S KEY PERSON)

I settle in ‘my’ children, encouraging them to join activities, and notice how Freddy rushes outside to the pirate ship, telling himself stories. I observe and interact with my named children. Freddy, now with a book, now with the screwdriver, is progressing on his initial sounds, number bonds, fine motor skills. After a healthy snack and singing, Freddy revisits the pirate ship. Socially confident, he enjoys our circle-time visitor with her fancy rats. I enjoy a good chat with him at lunch about animals. Children love afternoon music. Freddy keeps good time on the drum. Goodbyes are when we build up positive relationships with parents and carers. Freddy’s mum enjoys his collage. We clean up, then reflect, discuss and plan.

and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sit comfortably together. Like the EYFS, Montessori sees the child as a competent learner. A carefully and skilfully prepared environment is crucial, as are adults who are positive role models. It all combines perfectly with EYFS in practice.”

People need not worry, says Cheryl, that the EYFS will formalise learning too early. “Here, we continually adjust to the child’s own experience, reflecting on practice so that every child reaches full potential through scaffolding and extending their learning appropriately. If Jack, say, shows interest in emergent writing, in games like I-Spy, and enjoys rhymes and stories, we follow his lead, extending his learning at his own pace with targeted materials and activities.”

The EYFS’s four principal themes match what happens at Mulberry Bush:

**UNIQUE CHILD** A competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable and self-assured. “We encourage independence,” says Cheryl, gesturing around. Eloise plays carefully with the china tea-set; helper Leander encourages Samuel to hang his paintings up to dry. Jack potters up. “Hello,” he says. “Do you know what? I’m Jack.”

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS** Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person. “Our staff interact with the children in calm good humour,” says Cheryl. “We enjoy our work and each other’s company, and children pick up on this.” At the lunch table, Alannah considers her sandwich. “Do you eat your crusts, Joe?” Joe shakes his head. Cheryl and Leander smile and suggest they give the crusts to the birds later.

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS** The environment plays a key role in supporting development. The main Montessori room adjoins a well-stocked art room, a dressing-up corner, and two outside gardens that children can access at will. EYFS, like Mulberry Bush, encourages a range of indoor and outdoor play and the linking of the two areas, so children can move freely between them.

**LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT** Children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates, and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected. “Montessori is as much about active play as active learning,” says Cheryl. First-hand



# WORKING TOGETHER

The new Early Years Foundation Stage can bring benefits not just for children, but for parents and practitioners too. We spoke to a childminder and the parents she works with to find out how

STORY JULIE NIGHTINGALE PHOTOS RICHARD LEGGE





Getting a kick:  
Childminder Jo-Anne  
with Jake and (right)  
Jake's parents, John and  
Diana Carter



**"I only wish I'd been able to  
learn this way myself!"**

FIVE YEARS AGO, mum of seven Jo-Anne Keenan waved goodbye to her job in a call centre to become a childminder. Where once her days were a routine of phone calls and data entry, it's now walks in the woods, messy play and potty-training.

There are those who think that the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) will return Jo-Anne, 45, to the kind of tightly structured world she left behind – and deprive children of the joy of spontaneous play. Not so, says Jo-Anne: the requirements for boosting children's creative play, communication skills and physical activity are simple to meet through everyday activities, and there's no loss of 'fun'.

"As a childminder, you're always teaching children anyway. Even when you're feeding them, you're teaching them fine motor skills. Baking is a wonderful example of how they can learn while having fun, where they're cutting out shapes in pastry, learning about weights through weighing out ingredients or just counting the number of cakes to put on the tray for the oven."

A walk in the local woods can

similarly cover several areas of learning and development. "I ask the children to pick up leaves," says Jo-Anne. "If I can, I name the different trees they come from and I've also bought a book on birds so I can name ones we see. We take pictures in the woods and we then bring the leaves home and the children paint them."



#### TRACKING PROGRESS

The EYFS encourages childminders to make observations of the children at play – but it also helps to prevent boredom, Jo-Anne believes.

"If they're out in the garden playing on the sit-and-ride equipment, you watch and note down how they're responding, how their large motor skills are developing, if they're enjoying what they're doing or whether they want something more demanding. That's fine because, after all, you don't want the child to be doing nothing."

Activities are recorded with photos and notes in a booklet that Jo-Anne has created for parents. "The first few pages contain information from the parents – about the child's likes and dislikes, pets, any allergies they might have, for example. I then add in pictures of what we've been doing and comments on how well the child is doing and new things they've learnt or new interests they've developed. I also do a questionnaire for parents who have been with me for a while to see if there is anything they want to change."

Jo-Anne has an NVQ3 in children's care, learning and development and is looking at taking an Open University diploma in childcare. She's also completed a National Childminding Association course in quality assurance and will also be attending a workshop on the new framework, while extra support and advice comes from local childminding support networks.

"I've already received a pack about the new framework. Some of it looks quite complicated at first sight, but I actually think it will be easier in the long term. On the tracking and assessment, for example, the observations that you do as you go along will help a lot. Overall, it should keep everything in better order."

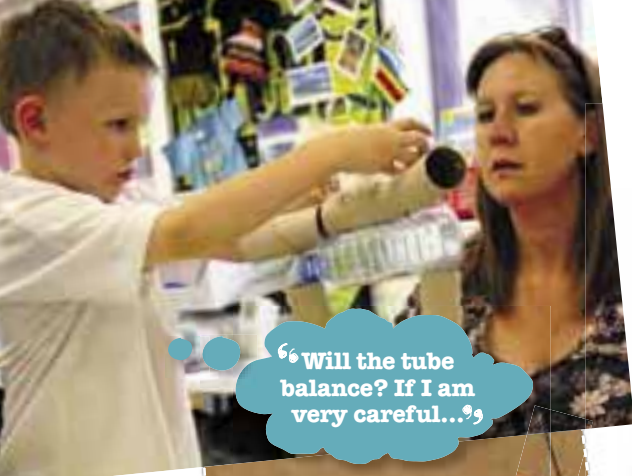


#### GOOD FOR PARENTS

Jo-Anne has looked after Diana Carter's two-year-old son, Jake, since he was four months old. His mum, Diana, 26, works full time; she says that the family has benefited enormously from the relationship.

"Jo-Anne shows us the booklet she keeps every few months so we can clearly see the progress he's making. It's been very useful because Jake is my first child, and I admit I didn't know very much about how playing helps children to learn. Jo-Anne tells us things like 'he's very interested in shapes', so we've started to play games with shapes at home.

"I'm all in favour of children learning this way, and the earlier the



“Will the tube balance? If I am very careful...”

A practitioner observes a child's **problem-solving strategies** and is ready to help develop his understanding if necessary.

“This is the second time today that Jack's asked me to read this book with him. He seems fascinated by bear stories. I'll suggest some other books to his dad.”



**Observational assessment in action.**

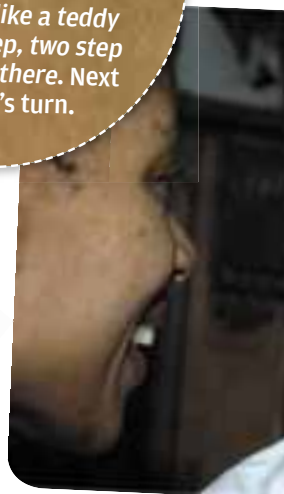
# EYFS IN ACTION

As early years settings across the country prepare for the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in September, our scrapbook illustrates some of the principles and practices



Exploring what paint will do both on and off a brush: creativity emerges as young children become **absorbed in action and exploration** of their own ideas.

Tyler's relationship with his childminder helps him to **feel happy and confident**. Here they are playing Round and round the garden like a teddy bear, one step, two step tickly under there. Next it's Tyler's turn.







Outdoor environments offer children **freedom to explore**, to use all their senses and to be physically active and exuberant. Children should be able to move freely between indoor and outdoor play areas.

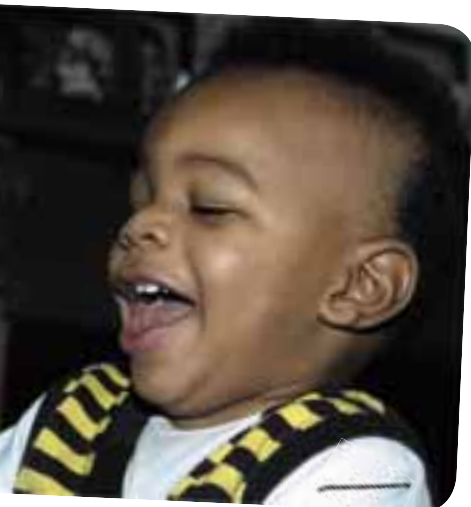
A child's **curiosity and creativity** is supported and extended through a practitioner's skilful questioning.



“It's the spider from under the stone – I wonder what he eats under there?”



Being creative **enables** children to explore many processes, media and materials and to make new things emerge as a result.





**Karen Wickett**

**Children's centre teacher, Acorns and Hillside Children's Centres, Taunton**

We've streamlined our planning and record-keeping so our practice is consistent across the 0-5 age range. This has the added bonus of raising the kudos of staff working with the very youngest children.



**Felicity Marrian**

**Director, Iverna Gardens Montessori Nursery School, London**

We have been working on our curriculum, tying in the Montessori curriculum with the new Early Years Foundation Stage. We've also been developing a more comprehensive record-keeping system.



**Karen Hall**

**Family playwork manager for Bexley, Kent**

We've been updating our planning, training all our staff and making sure parents are informed about the changes. We're also using a self-evaluation toolkit for the Early Years Foundation Stage, so we can ensure best practice.

# ARE YOU READY?

What kind of preparations should you be putting in place for September's launch of the Early Years Foundation Stage? We asked practitioners around the country how they're getting on

STORY JAN MURRAY ILLUSTRATION PETER JAMES FIELD



**Alex Williams**

**Speech and language specialist, Leamington Children's Centre**

We're focusing on how we can help children become competent learners, looking at ways we can work with teachers to support children with speech and language difficulties – particularly those whose families are difficult to engage.



**Amanda Argent**

**CEO, Schoolfriend etc (runs out-of-hours clubs across the country)**

We're looking at the activities that we currently offer and seeing how they fit in with the new EYFS framework so we can build, through play, on what the children are doing during the school day.



**Fiona Crane**

**Registered childminder, Doncaster**

I'm jumping at any opportunity to do any training offered for EYFS. I have done some EYFS training delivered by a National Childminding Association (NCMA) tutor, and a government-funded course, also delivered by the NCMA. I think it's all quite exciting to be honest!