

Starting Reception



Case Study: Coventry

Overview

Coventry's Early Years Team supports around 85 schools and over 300 early years providers, reaching approximately 4,500 children each year as they start Reception. Like many local authorities, Coventry faces school readiness challenges, in particular speech and language development, emotional regulation, toileting independence, oral health and parental engagement – all of which have been amplified by the long-lasting effects of COVID-19.

Why Starting Reception?

Coventry engaged with the Starting Reception definition as part of its broader Start for Life strategy to create a more joined-up, city-wide approach to early childhood development. The definition offers the opportunity to improve parental understanding of school readiness, strengthen transitions into school and enable earlier identification of needs – all while improving collaboration between families, schools and local services.

How it's being used

Coventry personalised the Starting Reception resources to reflect local priorities, adding branding from Family Hubs and '50 Things To Do Before You're Five.' Key services were signposted through the Coventry Families portal to ensure families could access support easily.

A flagship development has been a pilot of 'Ready Steady School', a four session stay-and-play programme delivered in partnership with Family Hubs, schools, libraries, health teams and more. Each session focuses on a pillar within the Starting Reception Definition:

- Building Relationships – with Parenting teams
- Communication and Language – supported by libraries
- Healthy Routines and Independence – with Health Visitors and School Nurses
- Physical Development – with the Be Active, Be Healthy team

Sessions provide families with hands on activities, practical resources (e.g. visual timetables, toilet training guide) and direct access to local support.

Challenges

Engaging families in the Ready Steady School pilot has been a challenge. In particular, it has been hard to find a time and location for the sessions that makes them accessible to all, and works for schools with space constraints. However attendance is growing steadily as word spreads and families begin to see the programme's benefits.

Early Impact

Feedback from parents has been positive. Some now use visual timetables at home to reduce morning stress, and others have acted on signposting on specialist toilet training resources. A number of families also signed up for library cards during sessions, supporting shared reading and home and fostering a love of books.