

## Case study: Watercliffe Meadow Primary School, Sheffield

*Watercliffe Meadow is a two-form entry primary school with a 104 place nursery in the north east of Sheffield. Almost 90% of families are in the socio-economic 'hard pressed' category. Free school meal allocation is almost 50% and over a third of children have special educational needs. On-entry language is extremely low with the vast majority of children entering school at 18 months to 2 years behind in their language development.*



The school has a strategic vision which emphasises 'getting things right from the start'. Continuous professional development around language development is a high priority and complements the support from the speech and language therapist employed for a day and a half each week.

Early intervention for basic language skills is key, with all children assessed at ages 3, 4 and 5 and this will be rolled out to all Year 1 pupils in September 2011. This means the number of children entering Key Stage 1 at ARE has been at, or above, national average in Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) over the past 2 years. Also the Special Educational Needs (SEN) distribution of needs clearly shows how children's speech, language and communication needs are identified immediately and then are very quickly addressed through the intervention for all Foundation Stage pupils.

Engaging parents and carers is a high priority so the school designed a series of five workshops, for all families to attend, based on Sue Palmer's 'Toxic Childhood', with over 75% of new parents attending. The workshops include guidance and important messages about early language development and the importance of developing language skills through play. Each session involves an introduction by staff at adult level. The parents then work alongside their child on practical activities to support their learning. Then they take home a piece of learning to do together which feeds into the next session.

The school looks at the school day through the eyes of the child. A quarter of the school day is spent in play situations when children naturally talk and practice their speech, language and communication skills. As a result the school has developed a whole school 'Plan for Play', which focuses on the importance of learning through play. The school café has 'social seating' to promote talk and is open for parents at the start and end of the day and throughout the day for children. Emphasis on quality play during lunch and playtimes has led to a dramatic reduction in the number of 'serious incidents' of behaviour at this time. In 2008 there were over 200 recorded incidents over the year which dropped to below 50 last year and is even lower this year.

The curriculum is rich with visits and experiential learning to promote turning talking into writing. The school uses Ros Wilson's 'Big Write' and Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation (VCOP) strategies, as well as Pie Corbett's strategies around 'oracy into writing'. Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Quality Circle Time give children language structures that enable them to have deep conversations and discussions on issues that are important to them. All staff are level 1 P4C trained and 4 staff are at level 2. Additionally, all staff are Quality Circle Time trained. This has given children the ability to solve their own and each others' problems as well as being able to debate deep issues and share opinions.