

Supporting On-Campus Childcare (SOC) Meeting

18th July'23

Attendees :

Pauline Young (Childcare Services Manager),

Lucy Farr (Interim Deputy Childcare Services Manager),

Fiona Dickinson (Parent),

Shamin Sadrafshari (Parent)

Tamsin Willis-Stovold (Parent)

Chris Young (HR Deputy Director: Safety and Employee Wellbeing Services).

Apologies:

Blake Walker (Student Union community Officer)

Introductions

Each attendee introduced themselves and provided an overview of their role. Shamin, the new parent representative, was welcomed to the group. CY noted that the group had not met for some time and that the intention is to get the SOC Meetings back to a quarterly schedule.

1. Matters Arising November '22 SOC:

AV / Website: CY explained that this item has been held in abeyance whilst the Nursery review is concluded. The reason for this is that it is hoped that the review will include advice and recommendations on marketing and communications that will help inform website content going forwards.

Food Hygiene – LF confirmed that the spray tap has been installed and that the other improvements that were identified have been completed. BANES Environmental Health has not as yet returned to re-inspect the Nursery, but it is anticipated that this will be happening in the near future.

Children's lunches & Food Provision –

PY / LF advised that due to staff changes at Bath Spa and reported difficulties with sourcing certain foodstuffs, the provider has struggled to cater the number of meat-free meals that had been requested. Currently, this is only being achieved on a very limited number of occasions.

FD noted that meat-free options were being offered every day to children who were vegetarians and asked why this couldn't simply be extended to all children to achieve the two meat free days.

LF explained that there had been a slight improvement in numbers of meat free days over the last few weeks since the change to the summer menu and that the Nursery is achieving 4 to 5 meat free days over a four-week period.

LF advised that there had been some changes in staffing at Bath Spa and that as a result of this a considerable amount of work had to be done to ensure that the menu was “child-friendly”. There had been a couple of occasions where meals had not been popular (due to texture, seasoning) and this had resulted in a lot of waste. Bath Spa has been responsive to the feedback provided and this has vastly improved. LF advised that menu is frequently reviewed, and discussions held with Bath Spa to identify what is working, what is not, and where we can make changes. This has included ensuring that there are fewer beef options on the menu and to try more vegetarian options. LF noted that there is a degree of trial and error with introducing new dishes; the Baby Room children will usually eat most things whereas children in the Nursery and Pre-School rooms can be a bit fussier if the food looks different to what they are used to.

CY noted that the change to Bath Spa came after the previous provider, Mini Meals, had significantly raised their prices, whilst at the same time reducing portion sizes. Bath Spa brought significant other benefits as the food is being transported less far and their delivery vehicle is an electric vehicle. However, it was agreed that more needed to be done to reduce the meat consumption. **Action: PY / LF to liaise with Bath Spa to discuss how this can be achieved.**

Forest School – PY provided an update on this area and explained that the overgrowth had all been cut back and the space was ready to start using. It has been roped off and temporary signage has been put in place. There has been no further damage from students to the area.

Christmas Time – Parents were pleased to have shared some festive activities when invited into the Nursery.

T W-S – asked if it could be more than one parent attend. PY explained that because the nursery is relatively small the numbers had to be limited to ensure that fire safety occupancy limits weren’t breached. T W-S asked about the possibility of hiring another venue on campus to hold more people and this was agreed it could be a possibility with some forward planning to get somewhere booked in advance.

PY advised that sometimes taking children out of their environment for events like this can cause some children difficulties as they do not always cope with that type of change so an alternative venue might not be suitable for all children, but for children in Pre-School it might be ok.

FD, T S-W and SS – did say they could get a few parents who could probably help to decorate somewhere so it was festive for the occasion if a different venue is booked.

Teams: LF has had some training on teams. LF noted that she is intending to set up a new group from Sept’23 (after those children going to school leavers have left Nursery) to make sure that users are restricted to current parents only. LF said that she would also look at using the site to publish key information, such as the Sickness policy, as this is an area where parents and carers would like greater clarity.

CY raised concern if the policies for example are in multiple places they could be forgotten to be updated when the master copy is changed. That maybe a link is shared on there to the website where the relevant policies should be available.

Action: LF to amend Teams site in September.

1. Terms Of reference

It was agreed that the Terms of reference would be reviewed by correspondence in advance of the next meeting. The new version would then be discussed as an agenda item at the next SOC meeting.

Action: LF to circulate a copy of the ToR.

Old version to be updated before the vacancy is advertised. TBC.

2. Childcare Service Manager's Report

Recruitment: PY advised that Nursery is continuing to struggle to attract applicants for vacancies. The last two adverts only drew one vacancy for each position, luckily, they were both good candidates and each accepted the eventual job offer.

Sam has joined the NR and Jess is due to start in Sept in the BR.

The meeting discussed the issue, and it was noted that this is an industry related problem. The Nursery has links with Norland and Bath College and will continue to forge links with these providers to engage potential job applicants.

Occupancy: It was noted that occupancy for the coming year is looking very stable. There are only 11 children leaving for school this year. It was noted that there will be a sharp increase (26 leavers) the following year. T W-S – asked if we could advertise the nursery to help with the large numbers leaving in Sept'24 if needed. LF advised that there are quite a few people waiting for childcare places and this should mean we can fill the Sept'24 spaces from the existing waiting list.

Maintenance. Scaffolding has gone up to give access to the roof to fix a leak with the new roof covering. CY explained that there had been significant delays due to the original contractor going into liquidation half-way through the job and a second contractor is now trying to rectify the issues. CY advised that he has impressed on Campus Infrastructure the need for this to be resolved quickly.

3. Finance

The proposed fee increase was discussed. FD said that feedback she had received was that parents had anticipated this would be higher and that she felt this was not too great a rise.

CY advised that he had not had any feedback from parents and carers following the announcement. CY said that the change in the way fees would be charged (removal of enhanced rates etc) would make bills and fee schedules easier to understand.

CY said the intention was to get new fee schedules out to parents in advance of the new fees coming into force.

Action: LF to work with finance to get new fee schedules issued in advance of the new financial year.

4. Childcare Provision Review

Jigsaw Consultancy were appointed to undertake the review and they started work in May. They have carried out several visits to nursery over the past 4 weeks. The consultants have also held various meetings with stakeholder groups from across the university.

It is anticipated that a draft initial report will be received in late August. The draft will be shared with Nursery in advance of it being finalised to ensure there are no factual errors.

Once the report is finalised, CY anticipates that there will need to be further work undertaken to decide which recommendations should be acted on and how this will be done.

5. Parents Feedback

Communication – FD raised that a couple of parents had commented on why there had been several emails from CY and not PY. CY explained that issues such as fee increases or other central information tended to be signed by him (as any queries would then be directed to him), whereas general nursery issues would be sent out under PY's name. CY noted that he sends very few emails to the parents and carers but that whoever signed, the emails went out under the general parent and carers list from a generic nursery account.

Field Area – FD asked whether it would be possible for the Nursery to have some of the field area next to the nursery for the children to allow them to run at full speed, play games. FD noted that the nursery garden was lovely but wasn't sufficiently large enough to allow children to run. CY advised that he would need to discuss this with Campus Infrastructure as he wasn't sure what the process was to extend the existing garden facilities. CY noted that during covid an additional area of the field was used by the Nursery but that this had to be "given back" as the area was then used for recreation space for the adjacent student residences.

Action: CY to make enquiries to CI about the field.

Reps TEAMS meeting with the Parents. T W-S reported that she had held a teams meeting with the parents at the beginning of July. She provided an overview of the feedback received:

Communication – parents had asked for more regular communication between the Nursery and the Parents. It was agreed that this should be improved, and this will include changes to Teams sites and also the nursery web pages as previously discussed. It was noted that updating the web pages and Teams site may take some time, particularly considering the review. TWS asked if there were some quick changes that could be made, such as publishing the sickness policy as this was an area where parents and carers felt that there was uncertainty over what the rules are and possible inconsistencies in how this is applied. **Action: It was agreed that publication of this policy would be prioritised. PY to review policy and provide CY with an up to date copy so that this can be added to the Nursery web pages.**

Parents have asked that minutes from SOC meetings are provided more quickly than is currently done so that they know what has been discussed and what actions have been agreed. CY acknowledged that this could be improved and agreed that a deadline for issue should be included in the Terms of Reference.

General information on Curriculum – TWS advised that some parents had asked if there could be more information on the nursery curriculum and what their children are doing and how they are progressing. PY advised that each child has a key contact and parents could discuss activities and progress with the contact. This could include updates on what Nursery is working on and where their child is at within the 7 stages of the EYFS. PY said that parents can access their child's Learning Journal on request. TWS advised that some parents seemed unaware of the journals and had said that their 1:1 parent meetings with key workers don't routinely reference the EYFS framework.

LF suggested that it should be possible to share their individual child's Cohort with the parent so they can see where the child is within the framework. **Action: PY to discuss with room leaders to standardise provision of updates from key contacts and to include reference to the EYFS curriculum. Key workers to remind parents that they can access the individual learning journals.**

FD asked if parents could be advised of any projects that are planned for the children i.e. Autumn/Spring/ as this would help parents to be responsive to their child's learning. PY explained that day-to-day activities (but not learning outcomes) are often decided with the child daily in line

with the EYFS expectations for child-centred learning. However, there are broad themes that are planned in advance and details of these could be provided on the Teams site. **Action: LF to include this information on the updated Teams site.**

Closure Days – TWS advised that one parent had asked why Nursery had closed for the Snow Day when other parts of campus were open. CY explained that the University's position on this was very clear. It had asked all staff and students to not travel due to the treacherous conditions. The campus had been closed and was only open to deliver essential services to the students who are resident on campus. There was an added complication that many Nursery staff are parents themselves and most local schools were shut meaning that they would not have been able to attend campus even had it been considered safe to travel. CY advised that the notice went out later than usual due to the timing of the snowfall and these procedures are currently being looked at by the University's Emergency Management Team.

Waiting List – SS asked if it was possible to give people on the waiting list an estimate of how long they may need to wait for an extra day or for new parents, when a space is likely to become available. LF explained that Nursery is trying to look further ahead with planning who will join us and fill spaces as they become available at the nursery. Usually for extra sessions/days, these may only become available when someone resigns their child's place, which isn't very often, so it is normally unknown how long the wait will be.

Any Other Business

PY noted that this would be FD's last meeting as her child would be leaving Nursery in August. The group thanked FD for her work as a parent rep and for all of the support that she has given Nursery, especially with the Forest School area.

CY noted that Janice had retired from Nursery since the last meeting and the group also wished to thank her for her hard work and commitment to the Nursery and particularly to the children in the setting who had required additional educational support.

CY explained that the deputy role was currently being shared between Lucy and Tara whilst a review was undertaken of the scope of the role. In the lead up to her retirement, Janice had advised that certain aspects of the role, such as managing waiting lists and occupancy had become disproportionately time consuming, leaving her with little time to focus on other essential duties such as supporting children with special needs or progressing other project work. It is intended that the role, and the role of the administrator, will be looked at in more detail in advance of this being formally re-advertised.

Next Meeting – Scheduled for 17th October'23