

Faith and Society Files: Church and School - Church Support for the Early Years Foundation Stage

During the early years children develop spiritually but they need opportunities to do so. This resource will help your church find opportunities to contribute to children's development and offer support to those who already provide it.



Why bother with the Early Years?

The importance of early childhood in all-round development and in laying the foundation for the rest of life is well-known. It is now increasingly recognised in government documents and provision. One report (Alan Sinclair, 2007) states that, 'What happens in the very earliest years of life makes the biggest difference'. During the early years children also develop spiritually but they need opportunities to do so. Caring and supportive environments lay good foundations for a growing openness to the spiritual dimension of life. Churches have a great opportunity to contribute to children's development by providing or enhancing their learning environment or by offering support to those who already provide it.

Why now?

- The introduction of a Foundation Stage of learning¹ for children aged three to the end of the reception year has opened up new opportunities for church involvement.
- There are now specific curriculum requirements for children to meet and engage with the local community, including faith groups.

What can churches do?

Any involvement requires commitment but the amount of time given can be tailored to your resources. If you think and pray about which of the approaches below best suits your situation, you may be surprised at how much you can offer.

¹ Introduction of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):

- EYFS introduced in September 2000 (publication of Early Learning Goals in 1999 and Curriculum Guidance in 2000);
- EYFS given legal force in 2006 and 2007.
- Statutory Framework for the EYFS (2008) - <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/151379> - and Practice Guidance for the EYFS (2008) - <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/84490> - supersede earlier documents and set out standards for learning, development and care from birth to five. Published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families

1 Offer general support to a local nursery or pre-school

Some suggestions – choose just one or two to start:

- **Pray** for the pre-school setting² in your church prayer times.
- **Invite** the head teacher/pre-school leader for coffee, ask about the setting and if there are ways in which the church could help.
- **Volunteer!** Church members who have children at the setting may already volunteer as helpers on visits etc. You could ask whether any additional helpers are needed. Volunteers would need to be checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and from July 2010 will also need to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)³.
- **Invite** the head teacher/pre-school leader to be interviewed in the 'This Time Tomorrow' slot in the Sunday service and offer to pray for her/him if that seems appropriate. This will be natural if the setting is church-run and not too difficult if it meets on the premises; otherwise, it is more likely to work once a relationship has been established.
- **Offer** to prepare tea and cakes for the staff occasionally at the end of the day. (Again, this is easier on your own premises.)
- **Give** copies of *Get Ready, Go!* (See Books and Resources) to all children leaving the nursery/pre-school to start school.



² All pre-school groups are now covered by the term 'settings'.

³ www.isa.gov.org.uk



2 Run your own nursery or pre-school

This is an excellent opportunity to build positive and supportive relationships with families in the locality and to lay spiritual foundations for the children. A stated Christian ethos is fine as long as you follow the full Foundation Stage curriculum⁴. You could use the ideas in Section 4 to involve church members who are not part of the pre-school staff team.

You would need to:

- have suitable premises (Check against the criteria: Statutory Framework p 33-36)⁴
- have suitably qualified personnel (Check against the criteria: Statutory Framework p 29-32)⁴
- follow the Foundation Stage framework and curriculum guidance⁴
- be inspected by Ofsted (www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The following nurseries or pre-schools run by Baptist churches have had very positive inspection reports and would be willing to offer advice to others who are considering this option:

- Samuels Christian Nursery Group, Broadmead Baptist Church, Northampton. 01604 721144; samuels@broadmead.org.uk www.samuelsnursery.uk.org
- Buckhurst Hill Baptist Church Pre-School, Essex. 0208 505 9299
- Queen Street Pre-School, Godalming Baptist Church, Surrey. 01483 414544

⁴ Statutory Framework for the EYFS can be downloaded from <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/151379>
Practice Guidance for the EYFS can be downloaded from <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/84490>

3 Offer the use of your church buildings for a nursery or pre-school

Although you would not have control over the school ethos, allowing a nursery or pre-school to use your premises would provide opportunities to build relationships, particularly with the school staff. It would also allow families to become familiar with the church premises and hopefully feel welcome. You could offer the use of the worship area for a special event (eg harvest festival, nativity play); the minister and others could offer support with the event eg with story-telling or music. You could also use the ideas in Section 4 below.

You would need to:

- have suitable premises which are free for day-time use. (Check against the criteria: Statutory Framework p 33-36)⁵
- set up a formal agreement to cover finance, use of the building etc.



⁵ Statutory Framework for the EYFS can be downloaded from <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/151379>

Samuels Christian Nursery

What could be a greater challenge and a greater delight than having the privilege of managing a Christian pre-school?!

Twenty years ago, at a rally in London, I heard these words – “claim education back for God”. I was aware of the strategic importance of education in the foundation years of young children’s lives so, with the support of my church, Samuels Christian Nursery was established in Northampton in 1990. We reach out to our local community, encouraging families of all faiths and none to come and share in a fun-filled time of play and discovery.

The task is a huge one and not for the fainthearted. However, with the commitment of a dedicated staff, I have to say it is a most rewarding experience! As I watch these beautiful little people develop and mature, they sing ‘I’m special cos Jesus made me’, talk about their friends and family and begin to trust and build relationships. Every day is a new experience to be explored and discovered, from building a boat and sailing across the sea, to being a ‘policeman’ for the day, or feeling the texture of cornflour, clay and sand, digging in a muddy puddle or sharing a story together!

Yes, we have to deal with the tears and traumas as they seek to take their first steps into independence, yet we are confident that we are playing our part in shaping these little lives, helping them to build firm foundations for the future. Even after they have left us and moved on to new schools, I regularly hear stories of children reflecting on their ‘Samuels experience’, with great fondness. Yes, my role as manager is a very special one and I thank God for the gifts and opportunities he has given me to enable me to fulfil this task for his Kingdom.

Ruth Andrews

Manager of Samuels Christian Nursery, Northampton





As a **small Baptist church**, our premises were not being used to capacity. In addition, a lot of local families had a particular need for support with child care. Linking these two facts led to the idea of using the building for a nursery. We now lease part of the building to a national nursery group from Monday to Friday each week and some of the more needy families are benefiting from it. A spin-off is that we are able to use their wonderful facilities for the Sunday morning crèche! The nursery gained an 'Outstanding' Ofsted grading at the last inspection.

We have a good relationship with the nursery and I go in once a month to say 'Hello' to staff and children. As my front door opens onto the car park, everyone has to pass so I have frequent incidental contact. At Christmas and Easter, children knock on my door (with a staff member) to deliver cards and greetings. During the period of heavy snow, I got up early to clear a path to the nursery; I was quite touched when children arrived with a 'thank you' present a few days later.

More links are gradually developing. Several church families now have children at the nursery; the older nursery children attend collective worship sessions which the church hosts and runs for the local school; there is an annual joint summer fair; a teddy bears' picnic has been planned by the church, the Sure Start group at the local Community Centre and the nursery; there is a shared community garden, where the children can plant and watch things grow. We hope and pray that from these small beginnings God's kingdom will grow too.

Jenny Elliott

Shirley Warren Action Church, Southampton

For further information or advice,
contact Jenny on jenny-elliott@fsmail.net
or 02380 772970.

4 Offer to support aspects of the Foundation Stage programme in a local nursery or pre-school

You could offer support to any nursery or pre-school with which the church is establishing a relationship. If your church does not have a natural link with a pre-school setting (eg through church families or use of premises), a list can be obtained from your Local Authority. The ideas below could also be used in the nursery section of your local primary school, if it has one, and in the Reception Class, as they follow the same curriculum.

The programme for the EYFS is divided into six 'Areas of Learning':

- *Personal, Social and Emotional Development;*
- *Communication, Language and Literacy;*
- Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy;
- *Knowledge and Understanding of the World;*
- Physical Development;
- *Creative Development.*

Full details are in the national Early Years documents.⁶

These six areas interact with each other and are delivered through planned play activities. The four areas in italics have been selected as the ones in which a church is most likely to be able to offer support. They are set out below in the order which we hope churches will find most useful.

The ideas in each section are suggestions only. Choose just one as a starter. Every journey begins with the first step!

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Communication, Language and Literacy is all about children becoming confident with speaking and listening and enjoying books, stories, rhymes, poems and music. The setting is expected to provide a wide range of books.

What can churches offer?

- **To donate some books**, choices agreed with the school.

The books should:

- be well-written
- be attractively illustrated
- use a clear and simple font
- tell stories in an engaging way

They should not be 'preachy'!

For some suggested books, see Books and Resources. (Books with pop-ups, flaps, tabs, wheels etc are easily damaged in a group setting so may be best avoided.)

- **To donate a toy or a piece of equipment**, agreed with the school.

For example:

- a fabric nativity set, advent calendar (See Books and Resources)
- story blocks, jigsaws, games eg Lion Hudson, Scripture Union.

- **To make a BIG BOOK** (scrapbook size) to show what happens in church.

Suggestions:

- use large photos of activities: singing, praying, reading the Bible, baptism, communion, weddings, dedications, Sunday club etc.
- add printed captions (brief, lower case, large font).
- put a picture of your building on the front
- include photos of key people (which would help if they visit)

The book could be used on a first visit to the setting and left as a gift.

The ideas in this section may be the easiest ones to use to help your church to begin to establish a relationship with the setting.



Creative Development is all about children exploring their thoughts, ideas and feelings through art, music, dance, role-play and other imaginative activities.

What can churches offer?

- **A story-telling session with a puppet group.** Choose stories with care for pre-school children and keep the performance short.
- **A short performance by musicians or a dance group.** Agree length with pre-school staff (5-10 minutes). The aim would be to enable the children to enjoy the dance/music and to see the instruments rather than to present 'Christian' content. Two or three group members would be plenty.
- **A visit from an artist**, who could take a painting or sculpture for the children to look at, touch (if appropriate) and talk about.
- **A gift for the role-play box** (agreed with pre-school staff). For example: clerical collar, a small version of any special baptismal wear, a tiny wedding dress made from a charity shop purchase, simple percussion instruments such as a tambourine or maracas.





Knowledge and Understanding of the World is about enabling children to find out about and make sense of the world around them. This includes the opportunity to learn about different cultures and beliefs through meeting people, visiting places of worship, listening to stories and music, handling artefacts etc.

What can churches offer?

- **A visit from a minister or church worker**, who could:
 - talk simply and answer questions about their work
 - talk about what happens in church (possibly using the BIG BOOK)
 - show a Bible and tell a short story from it, perhaps using a 'story bag' (See Books and Resources)
 - show them the cups, plates, bread and wine used for communion.

It will be natural, in showing artefacts, to say something very simple about what Christians believe. Agree with the school which aspect you will talk about and keep it brief and interactive. Hopefully, you'll be invited back!

- **A visit to the church** This is straightforward if the pre-school meets there; if not, the staff will have to prepare a risk assessment. Activities for children of this age are organised in small groups with a high adult/child ratio, so you might need to host several visits.

- Keep it simple
- Have an agreed focus eg Christmas crib, Easter garden, music, banners
- A few people could sing a couple of songs
- Someone might tell a story from the Bible, perhaps using a 'story bag' (See Books and Resources)
- Allow children time to ask questions
- Let the children look at and ask about items in the church (eg pulpit or lectern, banners, cross, picture windows, keyboard, drum kit, Bibles, song books, communion table). If they want to see the baptistry, there will need to be a risk assessment by the pre-school staff and a careful plan, even if the school normally meets on the premises.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

is about helping children to develop respect for themselves and other people, including their beliefs, and to relate well to others. It also includes 'sharing and celebrating a range of practices and special events'.

What can churches offer?

- This section is primarily about developing attitudes and so is mainly in the hands of the pre-school practitioners. However, the way that a church responds to and interacts with the staff, children and their families will speak volumes about the respect it has for them and will determine whether or not the culture and beliefs of the church are respected.
- If you have built good relationships with the nursery/pre-school, it is likely to welcome support, where appropriate, in enabling the children to share in celebration of Christian festivals and other special events, either in the church building or in their own setting.

We will be pleased to hear about your work with an Early Years setting.
Contact the Faith and Society Team on faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk to share your stories.

Welcoming Children with Additional Needs into your group or setting

We have a significant, privileged role to play in sharing the inclusive nature of God's love, including children with additional or special educational needs (SEN) and their parents or carers. It is also important to note that the parent may be the one with Special needs; this practice will be helpful to them too.

- Parents/carers with a child with SEN needs can often feel isolated and alone.
- The child will come before the condition and so we refer to a child with Downs Syndrome or a child with autism not an autistic child.
- For the child who has a condition such as autism any outing or unexpected event can become traumatic for child and parent/carer.
- Inclusive practice is good practice and should be part of the normal running of the group.

Top Tips for an Inclusive Setting

- 1 Listen and talk to the parent/carer about the child and their individual needs then use the information when planning a session.
- 2 Identify a leader who will relate, get to know and support the child/family each session. Be consistent.
- 3 Produce clear notices and signs for equipment – avoid too many words and include a picture. Use a visual time table, a series of pictures showing what is going to happen in a session. Display this so that children and adults can see it. Pre-warn children and families of any changes in the routine.
- 4 Give simple instructions in stages. Keep sentences short and speak clearly and with confidence.
- 5 Use objects or pictures when telling a story or singing a rhyme.
- 6 Keep the structure and layout of a session similar each time so that the children learn the routine and where activities are situated.
- 7 Step back and take time to observe what the children are enjoying most. Include some opportunities for sensory play at each session.
- 8 Include a calm area with cushions and books and puzzles. Use positive phrases

such as 'time to calm down'.

- 9 Use simple signing to underpin spoken language. Be consistent and ensure they are used by all leaders. Contact your LEA who may be able to signpost you to courses. The BBC produces excellent DVDs from the series *Something Special*. Display pictures for everyone to see of the signs being learnt.
- 10 Enjoy being with the children and have loads of fun playing together.

Special Educational needs Code of Practice

In 2002 the government produced this document which provides advice on carrying out their statutory duties to identify, assess and make provision for children's special educational needs. All pre-schools have to adhere to the advice in the Code of Practice. Your local Education Authority will advise and support your work, giving practical guidance on how to support children who have been identified as having SEN needs. This may include visits from an Early Years SEN teacher/advisor. This document is available through the Dfes Publications, PO Box 5050 Sherwood Park Annesley Nottinghamshire NG15 0DJ
e-mail dfes@prolog.uk.com
reference DfES 581/2001

Alison Swift

An Early Years SEN inclusion teacher supporting early years children in their homes and settings in early learning through play skills.

See also:

Top Tips on Welcoming special children - practical pointers for anyone working with children

Published by Scripture Union

ISBN: 1 8442 7126 9

Price: £2.99

Books and Other Resources

Animal Tales (hardback)

Imaginative retellings of stories from the life of Jesus for top end of age group

Authors: Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen

Publisher: Candle Books (2006)

ISBN: 978 1 85985 637 6

RRP: £6.99

The individual stories are also available separately in paperback.

Baby Jesus

Hardback and 'touchy feely' - suitable for the lower end of this age group

Author: Caroline J Church

Publisher: Lion Hudson (2007)

ISBN: 9780 7459 6016 6

RRP: £5.99

The Beginner's Bible (hardback)

Publisher: Candle Books (2005)

ISBN: 978 1 85985 554 6

RRP: £11.99

The Beginner's Bible for Toddlers (hardback)

Author: Kathryn De Vries

Publisher: Candle Books

ISBN: 978 1 85985 741 0

RRP: £4.99

Get Ready, Go!

For children about to start school.

Author: Marjory Francis

Publisher: Scripture Union (2005)

ISBN: 1 8442 7132 3

RRP: £2.99 each or £10 for pack of 10



God's Quiet Things

Rhyming text, lovely illustrations

Authors: Nancy Sweetland / Rick Stevens

Publisher: Lion Hudson (2004)

ISBN: 9780 7459 4889 8

Currently out of print.

In the Beginning

Poetic retelling of the creation story, with wonderful illustrations

Authors: Steve Turner/Jill Newton

Publisher: Lion Hudson (1997)

ISBN: 9780 7459 3605 5

RRP: £8.99

Currently out of print.

The Jesus Bible Storybook (board)

Author: Maggie Barfield

Publisher: Scripture Union (2008)

ISBN: 978 1 8442 7351 5

RRP: £5.99

The Little Bible Storybook (board)

Author: Maggie Barfield

Publisher: Scripture Union (2007)

ISBN: 978 1 8442 7318 8

RRP: £5.99

Noah's Ark

Hardback and 'touchy feely' - suitable for the lower end of this age group

Author: Caroline J Church

Publisher: Lion Hudson (2007)

ISBN: 9780 7459 4979 6

RRP: £5.99

Stories Jesus Told (hardback)

Delightful retellings for whole age range

Authors: Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen

Publisher: Candle Books (2005)

ISBN: 978 1 85985 588 1

RRP: £7.99

Individual stories also available separately.

The Teddy Horsley Bible Series

Designed to build bridges between the young child's day-to-day experiences of the world and biblical themes and stories.

Authors: Leslie J Francis and Nicola M Slee

Publisher: Christian Education

<http://shop.christianeducation.org.uk>

The series includes:

A Day with Teddy Horsley

ISBN: 9780 5640 8195 0

Out and About with Teddy Horsley

ISBN 9780 5640 8185 1

RRP: £6.50

There are also three A2 size books at £7.50 each and a range of small paperbacks from £2.25

Fabric books:

In the Beginning

(Drawback: upper case letters for captions)

Learning about Christian Celebrations

Available from: www.mintyhen.co.uk £20 each
or www.articlesoffaith.co.uk £22.50 each

Fabric activity resources:

Nativity Set

Available from:

www.mintyhen.co.uk £25 or

www.articlesoffaith.co.uk £24.26

Advent Calendar

Available from www.mintyhen.co.uk £30 or
www.articlesoffaith.co.uk £19.95

Noah's Ark

www.tts-group.co.uk

Small £11.81; Large 39.95 (both excluding VAT)



Story-telling resources:

A range of Christian resources, including hand and finger puppets, figures, wooden story-telling pieces and Big Books are available from: www.articlesoffaith.co.uk and www.tts-group.co.uk (Choose with care as both supply multi-faith resources!)

Bible Storybags

Instructions for making bags and knitting characters; it contains scripts relating to the life of Jesus which could be adapted for pre-school children.

Author: Margaret Cooling

Publisher: BRF Barnabas (2008)

ISBN 978 1 84101 532 3

RRP: £12.99

You can make up your own 'story bag', using an attractive bag with a picture relevant to the story on the outside. There may be people in your church who would make the bags. Inside the bag you can put the story book, toys or finger puppets to represent the main characters, props/scenery, anything else which might help children to engage with the story.

DVDs:

Dottie and Buzz

Christian themes (eg belonging, forgiveness) presented in five ten-minute programmes, using life-sized puppets. Highly recommended. Available from www.tts-group.co.uk
RRP: £29 (excluding VAT)

Animated Bible Stories

Stories from the life of Jesus in five ten-minute programmes, suitable for the upper end of this age-range. Available from www.tts-group.co.uk
RRP: £25 (excluding VAT)

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