School-age Childcare – Breakfast Club Quality Toolkit

A supportive toolkit to enhance quality development for school-age childcare providers.

2026 Edition - Produced by Cambridgeshire County Council Early Years, Childcare, and School Readiness Service (CambsEYC)

Introduction

Cambridgeshire Early Years, Childcare and School Readiness Service (CambsEYC) have a range of toolkits to support with school-age childcare provisions relating to quality and best practice.

Every child deserves the Best Start in Life. A high-quality breakfast club plays a vital role in this, offering children a calm, welcoming and nutritious start to their day. Breakfast clubs support children's wellbeing, learning readiness, social development and healthy routines.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities."
Breakfast clubs honour this right by combining nutritious food, positive social interaction, and meaningful play opportunities before the school day begins.

The Department for Education's (DfE) Free breakfast clubs programme provides eligible schools with free, healthy breakfast food to ensure that no child starts the day hungry. Breakfast clubs should align with this national ambition by offering accessible, inclusive and nutritionally balanced provision and use the supporting information to ensure that the breakfast served offers all children a healthy and balanced breakfast.

This toolkit supports breakfast club leaders, playworkers and practitioners to create high-quality environments that promote:

- Healthy eating habits.
- Social connection.
- Play and autonomy.
- Emotional wellbeing.
- Inclusion and safety.
- A positive start to the school day.

It should be used alongside wider guidance such as the 'School-age Childcare Quality Framework' and the 'Playwork Principles', which underpin effective practice.

What is a breakfast club?

A breakfast club is more than a meal service. It is a holistic wellbeing space where children can:

- Eat a nutritious breakfast.
- Socialise with peers.
- Engage in light, meaningful play.
- Prepare emotionally and mentally for learning.
- Build independence and routine.

High-quality breakfast clubs balance nutrition, care, and play, ensuring children feel settled, valued and ready for the day ahead.

Why breakfast matters

A healthy breakfast gives children the fuel their bodies and brains need to start the day feeling calm, focused and ready to learn. After a night without food, eating a balanced breakfast helps stabilise energy levels, improves concentration and supports memory key ingredients for successful learning. Children who eat well in the morning are more able to regulate their emotions, participate confidently in class and engage positively with peers. A nutritious breakfast also reduces morning stress, helping children arrive at school settled, prepared and able to make the most of their day.

Emotional wellbeing

A healthy breakfast plays a powerful role in supporting children's emotional wellbeing. When children arrive at school having eaten, they feel more settled, secure and ready to cope with the social and emotional demands of the day. A balanced breakfast helps stabilise mood and energy levels, reducing irritability and supporting better emotional regulation. It also creates a positive morning routine offering connection, calmness and a sense of belonging which helps children start the day feeling confident, cared for and emotionally prepared for learning and friendships.

Physical health

A balanced breakfast helps stabilise children's energy levels, supports healthy growth and gives their bodies the nutrients they need to function well throughout the morning. When children start the day well-fed, they are more physically prepared for the demands of school and better able to sustain their energy until lunchtime. This strong physical foundation directly supports school readiness. Children who have eaten breakfast are more likely to arrive on time, engage positively with learning, maintain attention and regulate their behaviour throughout the day.

Equity and inclusion

The DfE's Free Breakfast Club Programme supports equity by ensuring that all children regardless of background, family income or circumstance can access a nutritious start to the school day. As part of the programme, schools must offer at least 30 minutes of breakfast provision free of charge, removing financial barriers that might prevent children from attending. This universal access helps reduce stigma, supports families experiencing food insecurity and ensures that no child begins their day hungry. By providing free, healthy breakfast foods such as cereals and bagels, the programme enables schools to create inclusive, welcoming environments where every child can benefit. This approach reduces hunger-related barriers to learning and helps all children arrive in class feeling settled, focused and ready to engage.

Providing a healthy breakfast offer

Food served at breakfast will need to be compliant with the school food standards practical guide.
These food-based standards specify which types of food should be served at school and how often.
The standards define the foods and drinks that:

- Must be provided.
- Are restricted.
- Must not be provided.

They apply to food and drink provided to pupils on school premises and during an extended school day, up to 6 pm, including breakfast clubs. School food standards: resources for schools has a checklist for school food other than at lunch. This sets out what should and should not be served across the school day, including at breakfast.

Being compliant

When operating a breakfast club, providers must ensure they meet all legal and regulatory requirements relating to food safety, hygiene and staff training. Because breakfast clubs store, prepare and serve food on-site, they must be registered with Environmental Health through the local district council. This registration is a legal requirement for any non-domestic premises handling food and helps ensure that appropriate standards are maintained.

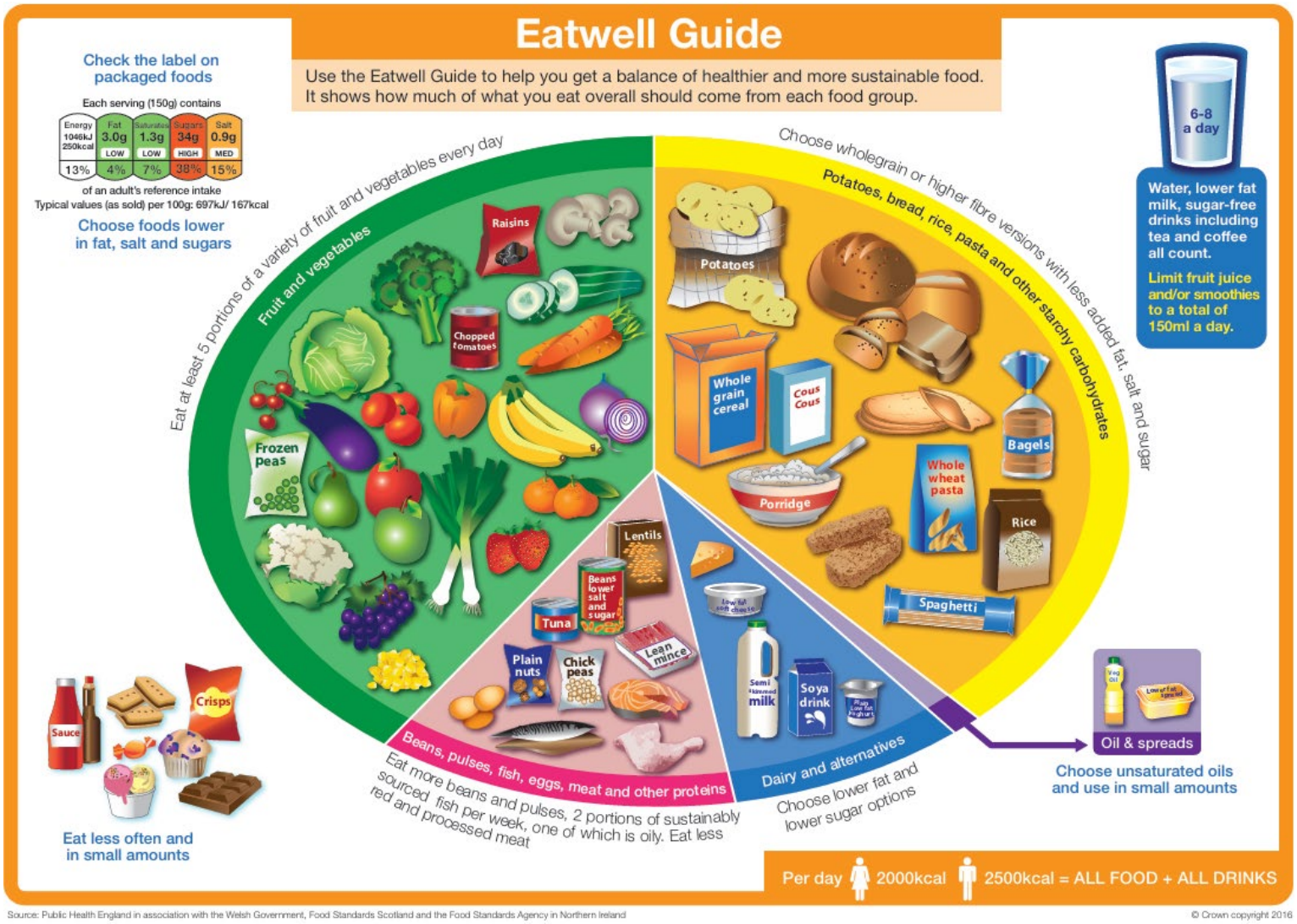
To keep children safe, it is essential that all staff involved in food preparation or serving have completed relevant training. At a minimum, staff should hold a Level 2 Food Hygiene and Safety in Catering qualification, along with allergen awareness training. This ensures they understand safe food handling, cross-contamination risks, correct storage procedures and how to manage allergies confidently and safely.

In addition to staff training, providers should implement robust environmental hygiene practices. Completing the “Better Food, Safer Business” (SFBB) catering pack is strongly recommended, as it supports settings to develop consistent, safe routines for storing, preparing and serving food. The pack includes guidance on cleaning schedules, temperature control, record-keeping and allergen management key components of safe and compliant breakfast provision.

Nutritional guidance for a balanced breakfast

Breakfast clubs should follow the school food standards practical guide and the DfE's expectations for healthy school food.
A balanced breakfast includes:

- **Wholegrains**
  - Wholegrain cereal, low sugar.
  - Porridge.
  - Wholemeal toast.
- **Fruit and vegetables**
  - Fresh fruit.
  - Dried fruit, in small portions.
  - Vegetable sticks.
- **Protein and dairy**
  - Yogurt, low sugar.
  - Milk.
  - Eggs, where appropriate.
- **Hydration**
  - Water.
  - Milk.
  - Avoid juice, unless diluted 1:10.
- **Foods to limit**
  - High-sugar cereals.
  - Pastries.
  - Chocolate spreads.
  - Fizzy drinks.



Breakfast clubs should model healthy choices while still allowing children autonomy and dignity in selecting their food.

Category	Guidance	Examples/notes
Starchy carbohydrates	Provide a slow-release energy source to help children stay full and focused throughout the morning.	• Wheat biscuits. • Shredded wholewheat. • Unsweetened puffed wheat. • No-added-sugar muesli. • Plain porridge. • Corn flakes. • Rice pops. • Higher-fibre breads; wholemeal, higher-fibre white, fruit breads, crumpets.
Low sugar, higher fibre cereals	Choose cereals labelled low (green) in total sugar on front-of-pack labels. No-added-sugar muesli may not be green due to dried fruit but is still suitable. Sugar should not be available for adding to cereals.	• Low-sugar wholegrain cereals. • No-added-sugar muesli. • Plain porridge oats.
Fruit and vegetables	Must be available every day as part of the breakfast offer. Aim for variety across the week.	• Fresh fruit. • Dried fruit, no added sugar. • Canned fruit in juice, not syrup. • Vegetables such as mushrooms or tomatoes, for hot options.
Lower fat and lower sugar dairy	Offer dairy or plant-based alternatives that are lower in fat and sugar.	• Semi-skimmed milk. • Soya or oat drinks. • Milk for cereal. • Lower-fat, no-added-sugar yoghurt. • Plant-based yoghurts.
Fresh drinking water	Water must always be readily available for pupils.	• Drinking water accessible throughout the session.
Foods high in fat, salt and sugar, not permitted	These items must be avoided under school food standards.	• Packaged cereal bars. • Processed fruit bars. • Pre-packaged croissants. • Chocolate or chocolate-coated products. • Confectionery.

Play and breakfast clubs

Breakfast clubs should provide opportunities for light, calm and freely chosen to play that help children ease into the school day. This type of play supports emotional regulation, social connection and a positive morning routine, complementing the nutritious breakfast offered. Activities might include creative tasks, board games, construction play, reading corners, imaginative play or gentle outdoor movement where staffing allows. These options give children autonomy and choice while maintaining a peaceful atmosphere that prepares them for learning.

This approach aligns closely with Cambridgeshire's Creating Quality, the Beyond Quality toolkits, and the School-age Childcare Quality Framework, all of which emphasise the importance of child-centred environments, responsive practice and high-quality interactions. Breakfast clubs are encouraged to use these tools to reflect on how their morning provision supports children's wellbeing, independence and readiness for school. By embedding the playwork principle of "low intervention, high response", staff create a space where children feel ownership of their morning experience while still benefiting from skilled, sensitive support. This balance of healthy food, calm play and reflective practice ensures breakfast clubs contribute meaningfully to a high-quality start to the day for every child.

Supporting children's morning routines and being active

A high-quality breakfast club does more than provide nutritious food it helps children settle into the day with routines that support their physical and emotional wellbeing. Alongside a healthy breakfast, providers may wish to offer light outdoor or indoor physical activities that gently activate children's bodies and minds. Low-impact movement helps children feel alert, regulated and ready for learning, complementing the calm, structured start that breakfast clubs aim to provide.

Incorporating simple physical activities into the morning routine can make a significant difference. The Daily Mile, for example, is an accessible way for children to enjoy fresh air, move their bodies and boost their energy levels before lessons begin. It requires no equipment, can be completed in a short time and supports both physical health and mental clarity. Similarly, yoga or stretching activities whether indoors or outdoors can help children develop balance, focus and calmness. These gentle movements support emotional regulation and can be especially beneficial for children who may arrive feeling tired, anxious or dysregulated.

By offering a combination of nutritious food and light physical activity, breakfast clubs create a holistic start to the day that promotes healthy habits, supports children's wellbeing and prepares them to engage positively with school.

Inclusion in breakfast clubs

Breakfast clubs must ensure:

Inclusive food provision
- Alternatives for dietary, cultural or religious needs.
- Clear allergy procedures.
- Dignified access to free food.

Inclusive communication
- Welcoming families.
- Sharing menus and routines.
- Using accessible language or visuals.

Creating a calm, welcoming atmosphere
- Greeting children warmly.
- Supporting emotional regulation.
- Offering reassurance.

Supporting inclusion
- Adapting routines for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND).
- Ensuring all children can access food and play.
- Working closely with families.

Inclusive play opportunities
- Adapted resources.
- Calm spaces for children who need them.
- Visual supports for routines.

Ensuring safety and wellbeing
- Managing allergies.
- Following food hygiene standards.
- Monitoring attendance and absences.
- Safeguarding children.

Facilitating light play
- Providing accessible resources.
- Observing children's needs.
- Ensuring play remains calm and purposeful.

Promoting healthy eating
- Encouraging children to try new foods.
- Modelling balanced choices.
- Supporting independence, for example, pouring cereal, clearing plates.

Inclusive ethos
- Staff trained in SEND, equality and inclusive play.
- Policies that reflect the needs of all children.

Setting up a breakfast club

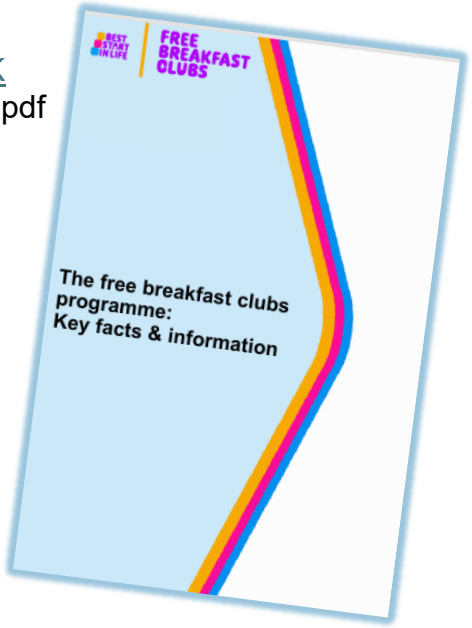
The Free Breakfast Club (FBC) is for 30 minutes before the start of the school day, and schools cannot place compulsory additional charges on families. The FBC can be operated on the school site by the school, by a third-party provider, or by the school in collaboration with a third-party provider. Alternatively, the FBC can be operated off the school site by a third-party provider or by a partnership school. However, if the FBC is being operated off-site the school should ensure that pupils are at the school by the start of the school day.

The school or third-party provider can operate a paid for breakfast club alongside the FBC, for example, starting the breakfast club at 7.45 am whereby families pay for 7.45 am to 8.15 am, then access the FBC from 8.15 am to 8.45 am. The school/third-party would charge families for the first half an hour only. Before opening a new chargeable breakfast club, schools/third-party providers should survey the families in the school and new families, that is Reception intake, to see if there is demand for this service and how many children are likely to attend so financial viability can be ascertained.

The school or third-party provider will receive a payment from the DfE to set up a new FBC, and this should be used for staff recruitment and training, infrastructure, systems, such as a booking system so families can book their child's breakfast club place, equipment, and materials.

Useful links

Free breakfast clubs: guidance for schools and trusts for phase 1 of the national rollout from April 2026 - GOV.UK
The free breakfast clubs programme: Key facts & information PowerPoint Presentation. Size: 315KB File format: pdf



Considerations:

- School-run or operated by a third-party?
- On- or off-site?
- Free breakfast club for 30 minutes before school day or a chargeable element beforehand?
- Operated from school hall, classrooms, and so forth?
- Staffing?
- Booking and administration systems?
- Fees for chargeable element, if applicable? In line with local competitors?
- Pupil premium used to support eligible families with any chargeable element?
- Food and nutrition standards The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014.
- Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) providers – Register a Food Business with the local authority.

Advertising/marketing

Advertising and marketing a breakfast club may attract more families to the school, particularly working parents, or may attract more children to the breakfast club. The breakfast club should be advertised on the school website, in admissions packs, in the school newsletter, and on social media platforms. The school/third-party may also consider a banner or sign at the entrance to the school site, and posters on local notice boards or on notice boards in local businesses. Marketing of the breakfast club should focus on the Unique Selling Points (USP's) of the breakfast club. USP's are features of the breakfast club that make it different from and better than its competitors. For example, it could be the time the breakfast club is available from, or the range of activities available to the children.

Some marketing ideas for a chargeable breakfast club:



Finance and sustainability

For a chargable breakfast club the school/third-party should understand their break-even position and also an affordable fee for families. Competitor research should be carried out so the school/third-party is aware of breakfast club fees being charged by other local providers.
For the FBC the school will receive a set amount per day for fixed costs, such as staffing, which is paid in advance and a per child amount based on pupil attendance per day, paid in arrears. The FBC income can only be spent on the free breakfast club costs, therefore the income and expenditure should be monitored separately by the school/third-party. The DfE have produced a “ready reckoner” for the FBCs: FBCsReadyReckonerApril26.xlsx*, and this will give an indicative annual funding figure.
*Size: 43.4KB File format: excel

The CambsEYC Business and Governance team also have a suite of financial tools to assist schools and third-party providers with school-age childcare finances. The Business and Governance team can also provide sustainability support to both schools and third-party providers.



Additional income

There are also grants available for UK schools from various organisations to fund a breakfast club: Funding Your Breakfast Club: Grants Available for UK Schools - Grants4Schools.

Task list:

- Agree financial plan and operating model with governors.
- Write action plan.
- Agree operating hours.
- Agree space and equipment/resources needed.
- Plan staffing.
- Agree suppliers.
- Plan menus.
- Agree invoice terms and payment policies for chargeable element.

Staffing, staff ratios and qualifications

Delivering school-age childcare provision non-statutory guidance* states schools “should use their judgement to identify the most appropriate people” to deliver the breakfast club. This could include school staff, staff specifically employed for breakfast club, or PVI providers, including childminders.

*Size: 535KB File format: pdf

“The staff-to-child ratios depend on the age of the children and qualification levels of staff. Staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children and ensure their safety. Schools and providers must ensure that children are adequately supervised, especially while eating, and decide how to use staff to ensure children’s needs are met”.

If children who normally attend receeption class during the school day, or younger children, aged five or under, threre must be sufficient staff as stated in the EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers*, Section 3.
PVI providers registered on Ofsted’s Childcare register should follow the ratio requirements set out in Childminders and childcare providers: register with Ofsted - Registration requirements - Guidance - GOV.UK. Otherwise the breakfast club is “subject to mormal class size regulations, although in many cases higher ratios will be deemed more appropriate”.

*Size: 711KB File format: pdf

Schools are “responsible for considering the qualification and training requirements for any staff who deliver childcare” and should provide or arrange any necessary training to ensure staff have suitable skills and experience. For example, safeguarding, welfare and safety, and child protection. The safeguarding and welfare requirements in the EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers, Section 3, when children in reception year or younger are cared for.
If a school/third-party provider has a need to recruit staff, various recruitment resources are available on the Do something big - Early Years Careers website. There is also a workforce toolkit* aimed at recruiting, retaining and supporting staff.

*Size: 4.8MB File format: pdf

Aspect	Useful resources
Inclusion	SEND Support: Resources Cambridgeshire Development Journal 2024. Size: 1,064KB File format: pdf OAP Audit Tool_Final. Size: 966KB File format: pdf EY SEND Toolkit What is Inclusive Practice? Supporting Inclusive Practice
Health and Nutrition	The Eatwell Guide. Size: 7.8MB File format: pdf School food standards practical guide. School food standards: resources for schools. The Daily Mile. Safer food, better business for caterers | Food Standards Agency.
Playwork	The Playwork Principles - Play Wales Play Wales Play England Play Scotland
Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routine	Supporting Positive Interactions Talking Together in Cambridgeshire - Practitioner resources Early Years Transitions Toolkit 2026
Children's welfare and wellbeing	Help for early years providers : Health and wellbeing Physical Development in the EYFS Forest School Cambridgeshire HAF & Wraparound Providers - Knowledge Hub Cambridgeshire Early Years and Childcare: Designated Safeguarding Lead for Early Years & Childcare (PVI) - Knowledge Hub

Induction into your new role as a playworker in breakfast club

As a new member of the staff team, you will be given a job description and a copy of the settings policies. You will also undergo an induction process and be given a mentor to help you settle into your new role. As part of the induction, your mentor will discuss and talk through the settings practices. The following table help you to understand what you need to know to be an effective playworker and a valued team member.

By the end of day one you will have…		
Had a meeting with your line manager, and discussed: • The job role responsibilities. • The aims and mission statement. • Confidentiality. • The history and governance structure. • Your personal mentor. • Safeguarding and child protection. • Human Resources. • Induction process. • Training and continuous professional development. • Grievance and disciplinary matters. • Sickness Absence notification. • Holidays how to book them. • Supervision and Appraisal System. Had a tour of the provision and briefly discussed: • Setting security including doors and boundaries. • Indoor and outdoor play spaces, including which areas are accessible for children. • Location of resources and equipment. • Car parking, break facilities, toilets, lockers/facilities for personal items during work hours. • Notice boards and where to find key information. • Routines, daily timetables. • Health and safety information. • Fire evacuation procedures and exits. • First aid facilities. Been introduced to your colleagues and briefly discussed their roles, including: • Your mentor.		

• Designated person for safeguarding. • Designated person for special educational needs (SENCo). • Designated person for equalities (ENCo). • First aiders. • Been provided with keys/passes and/or alarm codes, if applicable.		
By the end of week one you will have…		
Spent time with your mentor, and discussed: • All club policies and procedures. • Daily routines, for example, how to answer the telephone, arrivals/collections, and the processes that need to be followed. • Health and Safety including setting boundaries, fire evacuation, first aid. • The location of accident and incident forms and how to use them o How to engage with parents/carers. • Playwork and best practices, for example, how, and when, to engage with children. Met with the settings Designated Person for Child Protection, and discussed: • The setting safeguarding policies/procedures. • The location of specific forms and how to record concerns about children or adults. • Been booked on to Basic Child Protection training, that provides information on local procedures preferably with the local authority. Met the designated person for SEND, and discussed: • Policies and procedures. • Individual children's specific needs. • Medication and allergies. Met with ENCo, and discussed: • Policies and procedures. • The location of prejudice related incident forms and how to use them.		
By the end of month one you will have…		
Ongoing support from your mentor, including discussion, job shadowing, effective peer-on-peer observation, to gain confidence in all areas of your role: • Growing confidence to engage appropriately with children, knowing when you should stand back and when to interact. • Growing confidence to discuss and implement the setting policies.		

• Growing confidence to discuss the aims, vision and governance structure of the setting and be aware of the statutory requirements that it needs to follow. • Identify and celebrate your successes. • Identify areas for development and actions to support your continuing professional development, including qualifications. Met with the setting Designated Person for Child Protection, and discussed: • Your understanding of safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures • The signs and indictors of abuse and neglect. • How to record concerns about children or adults. Met the designated person for SEND, and discussed: • Yours understanding of relevant policies and procedures • How to support individual children with SEND so that they can engage in all areas of the setting. • Administering medication and considering allergies to keep individual safe. Met with ENCo, and discussed: • Your understanding of relevant policies and procedures. • How to support the setting to accept difference and be fully inclusive. • Your understanding of prejudice related incidents and how to record them. Undertaken a monthly probationary review with your line manager and set up regular monthly meetings.		
By the end of month six you will have…		
Ongoing support from your mentor, including discussion, job shadowing, effective peer-on-peer observation, to build upon your confidence and expertise in all areas of your role: • Acquired full knowledge of all essential policies and procedures. • Identified key people for on-going support/networking, for example, designated persons • Undertaken a three, four month and five-month review with your line manager. • Achieved key objectives set during your induction to the standard required. • Demonstrated capability to meet the requirements of the role to the standard set. • Following successful completion of probationary period, undertaken an appraisal with line manager and devised key objectives and an on-the-job training plan for the next six to 12 months.		