



## Little Lambs Day Nursery case study

Work placement is a vital part of practitioner training and qualifications. Some trainees even obtain future employment from positive experiences within a childcare setting. We have appointed numerous staff through work placements. One of our nursery managers even started her employment journey with Little Lambs as a student and worked up through the ranks to become the nursery manager.

We remained open during the initial lockdown in March 2020. It was an extremely difficult time and remains a challenging period for us all. However, we were able to continue offering childcare for key workers, as well as offer all our staff their jobs back as the months went on. For us, the key to our success has been focused on communication and preparation.

We furloughed the majority of our staff initially and had only four staff at the start of lockdown due to the low numbers attending the setting. During the staff furlough, we sent regular emails and updates, keeping staff updated with changes to guidance and government plans. We sent questionnaires to staff before they returned to check their mental, emotional and physical well-being, as it was important to us that we confirmed staff were ready and comfortable to return. We communicated regularly with parents as we began to open to more children and families to make sure they were aware of the new practices and procedures.

To guarantee the safety of all our staff, children and families, we introduced a number of practices and procedures, which we communicated to all our families and staff thoroughly via email, social media and our nursery app.

The practices included:

- parents drop off and collect at the front door, and informing them they are not allowed into the setting
- hand sanitiser is available on entry for all children, staff and visitors
- staff are put into set rooms and work with the same groups daily where necessary
- small teams of staff use the staff room during mealtimes
- nursery viewing is carried out over Zoom
- staff interviews are carried out over Zoom.

As well as interviewing staff over Zoom, we have also completed student 'meet and greets' over Zoom – usually these would have been carried out at the nursery. This allows us to discuss the practices within the setting, complete an online risk assessment before the student enters the building, communicate the methods of practice we expect of the student, answer any questions or concerns they may have, and then plan their attendance, and confirm the times and age groups needed for qualification. We have clear expectations of what is expected of our staff and students when working at Little Lambs and we make sure they are communicated to all parties.

It is essential that the students follow the same practices and procedures to support the ongoing fight against coronavirus and that they follow government guidelines, as well as the local authority guidance. We communicate any changes to all staff and students via

email, so students need to make sure their contact details are correct and completed, and that they regularly check their emails.

We communicated with colleges early on to support students to continue with placements, as we feel that student placements are essential to support our future workforce. It is important that students follow any procedures, whether in placement or socially, to make sure there's no risk of coronavirus coming into the setting. We appreciate we may be asking a lot of students. However, as schools and settings are trying to keep a vast amount of people safe, it's essential that anyone who comes into our building protects everyone else. Communication and preparation, as stated earlier, is key to making sure students and placements work effectively together to keep everyone safe.

Students need to prepare for what is expected of them, so settings and schools should communicate what they need and why they need it. Risk assessment conversations can be carried out virtually before they start, which will enable a smooth transition into the setting and they can begin the placement sooner rather than later. If this communication takes place, students can gain exciting and successful experiences, and settings can gain a skilful, additional workforce to support them in what is already a challenging time.

High quality placements can bring a range of benefits and positive impacts. Work placements for the childcare sector give students the opportunity to gain skills that are specific to the role and gives them an insight into what is expected in the real-life working world in the childcare sector. If we do not provide the experiences for these students to benefit from, we are not supporting our future workforce. Set out your guidelines, communicate and prepare, and support our future workforce to gain this important, valuable and vital experience to help further their development and join the childcare sector.

We need all the help we can get to future-proof our sector, so be the change in your community.