



# From Good to Outstanding | The Journey of Collaborative Working

September 2024

By Stella Arends, in collaboration with SIL Early Years Education Partners and Kids in Bloom, The University of Liverpool.

## Support and Partnership Work

Throughout 2023–2024, the Early Years Education Partner (EYEP) and manager collaborated through:

- **Learning walks**
- **Joint observations**
- **Reflective discussions** with staff across all age groups

## Key elements of EYEP support included:

- **Curriculum Conversations:** Strengthening staff understanding of curriculum progression and intent.
- **Staff Development:** Coaching staff to articulate learning intentions and support children's next steps.
- **Reflective Tools:** Introducing structured self-evaluation (e.g., RAG-rated audits, verbal case studies, alignment with Ofsted descriptors).
- **Leadership Coaching:** Supporting the manager in delegation, empowering room leads, and evidencing impact through supervision and performance management.
- **Environment and Cultural Capital:** Reflecting on continuous provision, including allotment area and emotion regulation zones to support wellbeing and independence.



## Observation Feedback

EYEP celebrated strengths in:

- Relationships
- Communication
- Independence

Refinements suggested included:

- Reducing carpet time
- Explaining SEND adaptations to visitors

## Context

**Kids in Bloom** is a large day nursery at the University of Liverpool, caring for children aged 0–11. It has a strong reputation for high-quality early years education and care.

Following a **Good** Ofsted rating in 2018, manager **Stella Arends** aimed for **Outstanding**. Partnering with EYEP **Sam McKenna**, the focus was on:

- Deepening curriculum understanding
- Enhancing reflective practice
- Refining systems to consistently evidence excellence

## Initial Focus (2023)

- Preparing for Ofsted inspection
- Strengthening leadership for learning
- Ensuring children met expected development levels in communication, language, and emotional wellbeing by age 5
- Improving staff articulation of curriculum intent, implementation, and impact.



## Early EYEP visits emphasised

- Building professional relationships
- Validating safeguarding culture
- Securing statutory responsibilities

The manager's leadership in fostering reflective, evidence-based practice was highlighted as a key strength.

## Developing Staff Confidence

### Impact and Outcomes

Through sustained partnership, the setting showed continuous improvement in both education quality and leadership. Staff became more:

- **Articulate**
- **Reflective**
- **Confident** in describing their practice and children's progress

## Ofsted Outcome

In August 2024, Kids in Bloom achieved an Outstanding judgment across all areas.

The Ofsted report highlighted themes nurtured through the EYEP partnership:

- ***“Staff build strong bonds with children and know them exceptionally well.”***
- ***“There is a highly ambitious curriculum for all children.”***
- ***“Staff continually reflect on what children need to learn.”***
- ***“Leadership and management are outstanding.”***

These strengths were linked to the EYEP-supported development journey and the manager's consistent drive for excellence.



## Specific Outcomes Achieved:

- **Enhanced Staff Confidence:** Practitioners could clearly explain learning objectives and link activities to developmental outcomes.
- **High-Quality Curriculum Implementation:** Rich experiences like environmental projects and sensory exploration embedded language and emotional literacy.
- **Outstanding Partnerships with Parents:** Strengthened communication and collaboration via digital platforms and daily engagement.
- **Leadership for Learning:** A robust cycle of supervision, training, and evaluation fostered team ownership and pride.
- **Wellbeing and Safeguarding Culture:** Emotional health initiatives for staff and children were embedded and highly visible.

## Key Learning

- **Sustained, reflective support** can elevate practice from Good to Outstanding
- Emphasising **staff articulation** of curriculum intent and impact builds **ownership and confidence**
- **Leadership coaching** and peer reflection strengthen **collective accountability** and quality
- Embedding **wellbeing and emotional literacy** supports both **staff retention and children's outcomes**



## Next Steps

Following their **Outstanding Ofsted outcome**, the setting plans to:

- **Share best practice** with other local nurseries via cluster groups
- **Develop accredited awards** in areas like communication, wellbeing, and sustainability
- **Continue reflective partnership** with the EYEP to sustain excellence

## EYEP Reflection

***“It has been an absolute privilege to work alongside Stella and the dedicated team at Kids in Bloom.***

***From the outset, their passion for early years education and their unwavering commitment to continuous improvement were evident.***

***Together, we engaged in open, reflective practice—sharing ideas, observing learning in action, and celebrating progress at every stage.***

***What stood out most was the team’s growing confidence to showcase their work, articulate their curriculum intent, and demonstrate the real impact on children’s learning and wellbeing.***

***The Outstanding outcome was a true reflection of the shared vision, hard work, and collective strength within this remarkable setting.”***

*Sam McKenna  
SIL Early Years Education Partner*