

Sharing observations with parents – digital cameras

At *Stanlaw Abbey Community Nursery, Cheshire*, practitioners wanted to improve links with parents.

A system had already been established of making regular observations about children in the nursery and sharing these with parents. Short extracts from daily observations were written on Post-it notes and placed on a parents' information board at the entrance to the nursery. Parents were encouraged to pick these up and, if possible, talk to key carers about them – and share their own observations from home about their child.

Digital cameras are increasingly used in the nursery to help record children's interests and significant learning steps.

It was decided to purchase more cameras and use these to help increase and enliven the two-way dialogue about learning with parents.

The first step involved displaying photographs so that parents could visualise their child's day. A computer was placed near the entrance, next to the parents' information board, and photos are now shown on a slideshow as children and parents enter the nursery.

Children look at the photos with their parents as they arrive – and then discuss the pictures. They remember and retell events while they are still fresh in their minds.

To develop these ideas further, the nursery staff decided to lend cameras to parents and children so that they could take their own photographs and bring them back to nursery to show and talk with their key carer about what they had been doing at home.

It was decided to launch this idea with a special project based around a nursery bear. The bear, who is called Stan, visits a child's home for the weekend or a few days to play and join in everyday activities with the family.

Parents and children also take a camera home and capture images of the weekend. The photos are then discussed with other children and key carers at group time when the bear returns.



Stan takes a notebook with him

Thank you for having Stan to stay. He is very helpful and would like to see what you do at home. Stan likes to listen to stories at bedtime. He has his own pyjamas and sleeping bag. Please help to look after Stan's things and write in this book and take photos so that we can tell his friends in pre-school what he has been doing.

In order for the children and parents to engage completely with the bear, they were involved in the early planning of the project. Parents were invited to a meeting to discuss how and why the project was being developed. They were delighted with the idea.

A trip was organised to a 'Build a Bear' workshop in Chester to make the bear. The children made choices – how much stuffing to put in the bear, his outfits, accessories and so on.

Stan has now been to many homes and shared weekends with children and their families. It has led to practitioners knowing more about families and gaining greater knowledge about children's individual interests and activities at home.

This information has been used by key carers at the setting to plan themes and future learning. The staff also say that it has had a real impact on relationships between parents and practitioners. A greater confidence and willingness to talk is evident on both sides.

Future plans include buying more cameras and extending this way of working to the under threes.

“Damien's daddy read us a story called 'Maisy's House' – then we fell asleep on the sofa so he carried us to bed.”

“I went to Damien's two nans and I had my photograph taken with them.”

