DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Early Years Newsletter

September 2026



Helen Ellison

Head of Education Partnerships

helen.ellison@darlington.gov.uk



Debbie Patterson

Curriculum and Standards Advisory Lead

debbie.patterson@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07384 459151



Andi Brennan

Childcare Development Officer

Andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07467 461641



Dionne Evers

Childcare Development Officer

Dionne.Evers@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07825 906172



Catherine Monaghan

CDO/ Advisory Teacher

cathrine.monaghan@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07384 459123



Claire Allred

Advisory Teacher

Claire.Allred@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07384459145



Angela Bradley

Early Years Inclusion Co-ordinator

angela.bradley@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07825 262784



Lorraine Cook

Early Years Inclusion Co-ordinator

lorraine.cook@darlington.gov.uk

Mobile: 07867 195155

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Welcome to our Early Years newsletter which is a half-termly newsletter designed to share relevant information, news and updates for the sector. We have included a handy contents page, where you can click on a title and be taken straight to that page. Or you might want to read through from start to finish! We encourage you to share information with parents via your socials and communication platforms where appropriate – we always include shareable items: look out for this symbol next to links & articles.



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HEY: Celebrating success

The updated Healthy Early Years Award aims to help early years settings create environments where healthy choices and routines become part of everyday life for children. It encourages a whole-child approach by combining nutrition, physical activity, and oral health into daily care. Many childcare settings across Darlington champion healthy lifestyles, and the HEY Award recognises the fabulous work that is being done every day in nurseries and by childminders. Whether you are starting out on the journey to achieve the Healthy Early Years Award or wish to renew and upgrade to reflect the recent changes, help is available. Contact andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk

Congratulations to childminders **Mandy Littler** and **Helen Robson** who have recently achieved the updated Healthy Early Years Award.

Early Years Education Strategy Group (EYESG)

The purpose of the Early Years Education Strategy Group (EYESG) is to understand the local, regional and national picture, and to facilitate communication, involvement and activity to support the quality and sufficiency of Early Years provision in Darlington.

The EYESG discusses and advises on cross sector work which the local authority undertakes. It seeks to aid collaborative approaches to activity that impacts on Early Years and will respond to and seek to influence national policy and share local and national best practice with partners.

The EYESG seeks to influence relevant wider local authority initiatives and provide input from an Early Years perspective as appropriate.

The group meets once a half term for an hour. Your current representatives are:

- Helen Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools)
- Nic Aitkin (Harrowgate Hill Primary School)
- Helen Mulholland (BHCET)
- Ella Long (The Play Hut)
- Gail Wilkinson (Eastbourne Preschool)
- Mandy Littler (Childminder)

We are seeking 2 more representatives for the PV sector and 1 childminder to join the EYESG for 2026 – 2028. If you are interested in representing your sector, please contact earlyyearsteam@darlington.gov.uk

Updates to the EYFS from September 2026

Strengthened welfare and safeguarding requirements

Both new EYFS frameworks include updates which:

- bring explicit wording on the safer sleep requirements into the main body of the EYFS, so that providers do not need to refer out to separate guidance
- prohibit the provision of registered childcare from any premises where a banned dog breed is kept or is present
- require providers to inform Ofsted or their childminder agency (CMA) of allegations of 'harm' (instead of 'serious harm') by anyone living, working, or looking after children at the premises
- require enhanced criminal records checks for volunteers (including those who are supervised) and prevent new employees from commencing employment before receiving their check
- amend the requirements for what providers must tell staff they have to disclose, as part of information that may affect their suitability to work with children
- The group and school-based version also requires providers of childcare on domestic premises to notify Ofsted or their CMA of changes to persons aged 16 or over living or working at the premises. This aligns with existing requirements for childminders.

The Early years qualifications requirements and standards document will also be updated from 1 September 2026, to clarify the Level 2 English requirements.

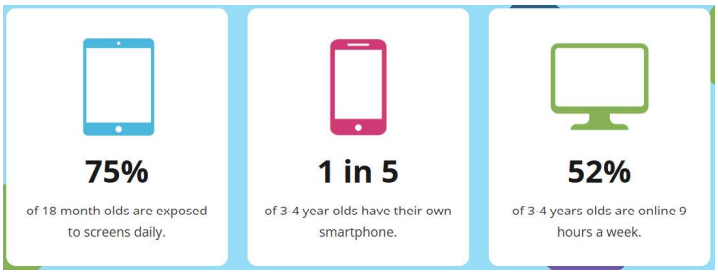
Children's screen use in early years settings

Both new frameworks also require providers to have regard to screen use guidance for early years settings. The screen use guidance builds on the guidance for parents published in March 2026 and has been produced with contributions from sector experts including the Digital Standards Early Years Action Group and Early Years Screen Time Advisory Group.



Share Best Start in Life screen time guidance and information with your parents via your app.

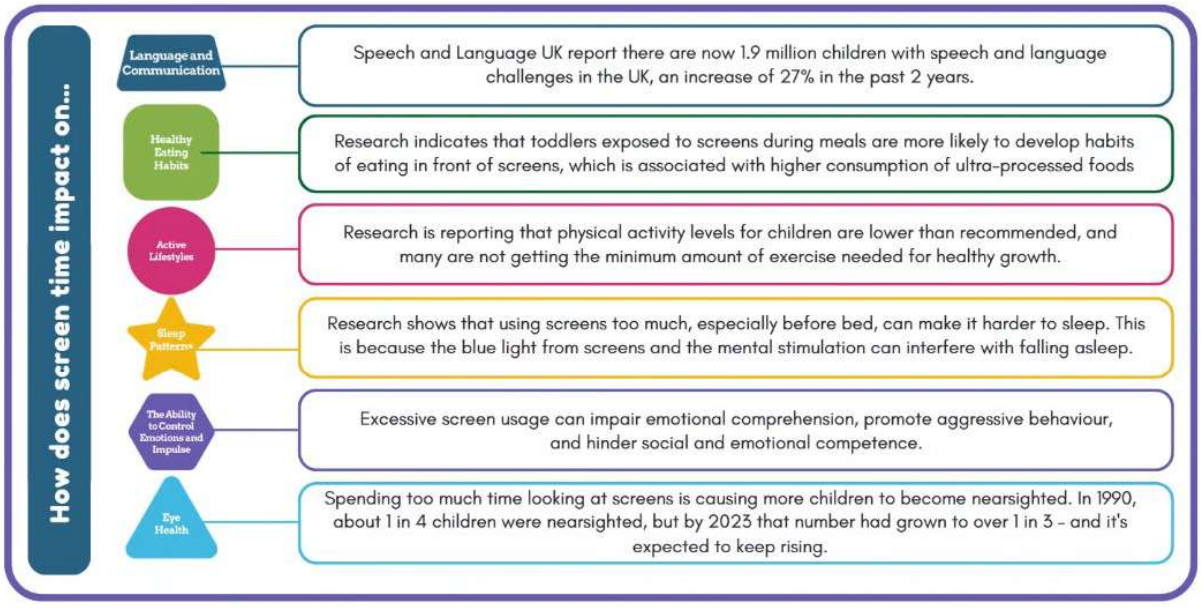
The impact of technology on children under 2



Screen time for babies, toddlers and infants is now normal, yet existing evidence is unequivocal: Screen time offers limited developmental benefit, but carries significant, measurable risks. Research commissioned by the 1001 Critical Days Foundation highlights how early experiences are shifting from human interaction to digital engagement.

The researchers reviewed thousands of studies, finding a growing body of evidence linking higher screen use in babies to poorer developmental outcomes.
Impacts of Screen Time, Media and Technology Use on Under 2s during the first 1001 Critical Days: A Systematic Review **Read more** here.

The message is clear: babies under the age of two are now using screens at levels that far exceed current health guidance. This is a pressing public health issue because the foundations of future health outcomes are laid down in the time from pregnancy to age two.



What can settings do?

Act as a positive role model: use books and singing instead of digital stories and songs; ensure meal and snack times are screen free; use screens thoughtfully, out of children's view.

Share messages with parents: share data about screen use; suggest activities to do instead of screen time.

Breastfeeding Friendly Scheme Darlington



A number of settings and childminders in Darlington have now achieved the breast feeding accreditation.

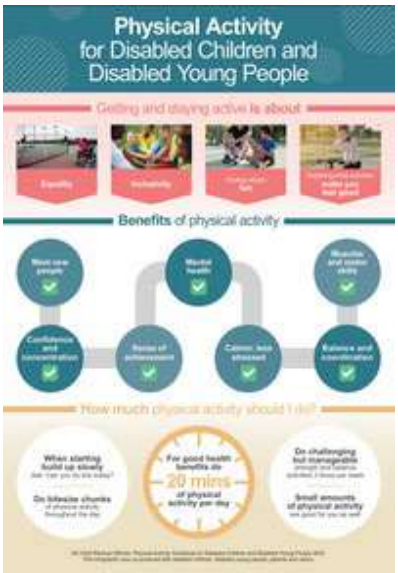
If you are interested in achieving the accreditation, please contact Kath Lane kathryn.lane@nhs.net and she will arrange to deliver the 30 minute breastfeeding accreditation training for your setting/school (if you did not attend the May briefing sessions). As long as your setting meets the eligibility criteria for the accreditation, you will then be given stickers and pledges to display within your setting/school to highlight you are a breastfeeding friendly setting. Once the accreditation is gained, your setting will also be promoted as breastfeeding friendly to the local community and included in all appropriate publications and within the 0-19 Growing Healthy app.

Physical Development

Physical activity in the early years and beyond helps children to be happy, healthy, sleep better and become school ready. The Chief Medical Officer has updated the physical activity guidelines which include guidelines for children aged 0 – 5 years, 5 – 18 years, and for disabled children and disabled young people.







In addition to this, and as part of St Edmunds Early Years Stronger Practice Hub transition webinar series, Yorkshire Sport Foundation have created a webinar which explores the link between brain development and physical development Physical development webinar | Stronger Practice Hub

Additional resources can also be found here Folder - Google Drive (please note, the Chief Medical Officer infographics included are different in this folder as they have recently been updated. Please refer to the above infographics). An updated version can be found here.

Colin the Caddy

For settings

Public Health and Darlington's new food waste collection service have recently put together an exciting opportunity for early years settings. 'Colin the Caddy' uses a chatterbox/story sack principle and promotes the importance of clean hands, washing fruit and vegetables before preparing and eating them and the importance of sustainability.

Inside the caddy, there is a fruit and vegetable activity (fabric so easy to keep clean), a song about hand washing, a planting activity on the topic of sustainability and a book.

These resources and caddies are free and yours to keep and use in your setting to support children's understanding and knowledge of healthy practices and sustainability. All settings should have received their caddies. If you have any questions, please contact Jemma Ransom Jemma.Ransom@darlington.gov.uk.

Ten settings across Darlington initially piloted Colin the Caddy in the summer term and shared the following feedback:

> The children in preschool have taken a keen interest in recycling. We have now placed coloured recycling bins in the rooms to encourage children and staff to do more.

> The impact on children's learning has been extremely positive. The children have developed an early understanding of sustainability and the importance of reducing waste.

> The children have developed a greater awareness of sustainability and the importance of reducing food waste. They have engaged in meaningful conversations about recycling and decomposition, demonstrating a growing understanding of environmental responsibility. The impact has extended beyond the setting, with one child sharing what they had learned about food waste decomposing with their parents at home!

Colin the Caddy for childminders

For childminders, access to the caddies is via the library service. The resources and caddies will be available to loan from the library from **week commencing 28th September.** If you have any questions, please contact Jemma Ransom on Jemma.Ransom@darlington.gov.uk as she will be happy to help.

Water Safety Awareness

The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) educate people to enjoy water safely, to keep families and friends safe and to know what to do in an emergency. The Royal Life Saving Society (RSS) UK's Splash Safely at Home is a water safety campaign designed to educate parents and carers of babies, infants, and young children about the importance of home water safety precautions.

The 'Splash Safely at Home' campaign runs twice a year:

May – focusing on water safety in the garden (paddling pools, hot tubs, ponds, etc.)

October – focusing on water safety during bath time.

According to Child Drownings in England: An Overlooked Public Health Issue, every year an average of 33 children drown in England.

RLSS UK exists to prevent drowning and support everyone to enjoy water safely. Below are a series of helpful guides to support parents to keep children safe in water activities.



Splash Safely in the Garden

Water safety tips to keep children safe in the garden.

Read more



Splash Safely around Hot Tubs

Water safety tips for keeping children safe around hot tubs.

Read more



Splash Safely at Home Downloadable Resources

FREE resources to help educate everyone about water safety at home.

Read more



Splash Safely in the Bath

Water safety tips to enjoy bathtime safely.

Read more



Splash Safely in Bath Seats

Bath seats can provide support but are not a safety device.

Read more



Child Drowning Update September 2024: England

On average in the last four years, one child a month has drowned at home.

Read more

To view the above guides or for further information, please see,

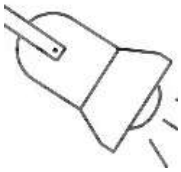
Useful Water safety websites and information:

Splash Safely at Home | Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK)

Keeping children safe in and around water - Twinkl

Water safety this summer – a guide for children and parents

DARLINGTON Borough Council



Spotlight on Inclusion

Inclusion Training Opportunities

Teesside Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy Service

More Than Words

We are offering a 3-hour training session to professionals working in Early Years, Primary and Specialist settings. The training is aimed towards those working with children with a diagnosis of Autism and/or social communication differences. It is especially relevant to those children who are at a pre-verbal, non-verbal or early language developmental stage.

We aim to provide information about Hanen's 'More Than Words' approach. Participants will gain a greater understanding of how children with social communication differences learn to communicate. We will give advice and support in developing children's social interaction and social communication skills within your setting.

Dates:

Wednesday 23rd September 2026
Wednesday 21st October 2026
Wednesday 18th November 2026
Wednesday 9th December 2026

Venue: The Trinity Centre (next to Trinity Church) James Street, North Ormesby, Middlesbrough, TS3 6LD

Time: 9:30am – 12:30pm

Please email stees.salttraining@nhs.net to book your place on one of the dates above. You will receive a confirmation email of your place. There are two places available per setting per date.

Places will be offered on a first come, first served basis.

PLEASE CONFIRM:

- name of who will be attending;
- date they would like to attend;
- setting name & contact number

Please note, this course is free of charge; however, if you sign up for a session but do not attend without giving us 24 hours' notice, you will be charged a £30 administration fee. Refreshments are not provided so feel free to bring your own.

Bekki Allen & Helen Shand: Specialist Speech and Language Therapists

Early Years Training

The **SEND for new and aspiring SENCOs** training will take place on *Tuesday 15th September 4 – 5:30pm* via Teams.

This session will support new and aspiring SENCOs to understand the statutory responsibilities in working with children with SEND and examine inclusive early years practice.

Needs based provision and the graduated response in the early years training will take place on *Wednesday 21st October 1 – 2:30pm* via Teams.

This session will look closely at the graduated response and needs based provision for all children in early years settings, including early intervention to support children with special education needs and disabilities.

To book or for further information, please contact Claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk

EY SENCO Networks

Do you know about the EY SENCO network?

The next *EY SENCO network* will take place on Thursday 22nd October 4 – 5:30pm at Tandem Hub Morton Park.

Whether you are an experienced EY SENCO or new to the role, this is a great opportunity to hear local and national updates as well as network with fellow SENCOs across Darlington.

Needs Based Provision in the Early Years survey

Thank you for all your support in completing the Needs Based Provision survey last term. This has allowed us to capture a full picture of the support that is available across settings in Darlington. Settings and childminders are warmly invited to a session where we will review this information prior to publishing the final support document later in the autumn term.

Thursday 17thSeptember 1:30 – 3pm at Morton Park

Wednesday 30th September 6 :30– 7:30pm via Teams (childminders)

To confirm your attendance or for further enquiries, please email Claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk

Council for Disabled Children E-Learning Modules

The Council for Disabled Children has launched the new ***SEND Basic Awareness*** e-learning course. It is a free, self-guided e-learning tool & is intended to improve level 1 and 2 practitioners' knowledge & understanding of the Children & Families Act, the SEND Code of Practice, the Local Offer, the graduated approach, the EHC needs assessment process and many other topics around SEND.

Click on the following link for more information: Council for Disabled Children - NCB

Early Years SENCO Level 3 Overview

All Early Years providers are required to have arrangements in place to identify and support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and to promote equality of opportunity for children in their care, as set out in the EYFS Framework.

The Early Years SENCO Level 3 qualification meets the requirements of the EYFS Framework providing Early Years SENCOs with the knowledge, understanding and skills to support children and their families. This programme is accredited and fully funded by the DfE.

Best Practice Network has been allocated 9,500 funded places by the DfE over the 2026 to 2028 period.

There is a free webinar to explore the course content. Early Years Webinar Recordings | Best Practice Network

For more information, please see Early Years SENCO 2026 | Best Practice Network

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One Point Panel Dates 2026-27

Deadline for Form A To be submitted by 5pm	One Point Panel date 9.30 – 11am
24th September 2026	8th October 2026
29th October 2026	12th November 2026
3rd December 2026	17th December 2026
24th December 2026	7th January 2027
21st January 2027	4th February 2027
18th February 2027	4th March 2027
1st April 2027	15th April 2027
29th April 2027	13th May 2027
27th May 2027	10th June 2027
24th June 2027	8th July 2027

Wraparound Network and Training

Do you know we have a wraparound network?

Our Wraparound Network is for professionals who lead and deliver wraparound provision in schools and settings. This is also a valuable opportunity to work together and share good practice across Darlington. Thank you to all who have attended networks and training so far.

The next network will take place on *Thursday 1st October 1:30 – 2:30pm via Teams*.

Do you know about our Wraparound Xtra page?

The Darlington Xtra Wraparound page features a toolkit with a range of information and resources, including recently recorded training sessions to support the delivery of wraparound provision. Updates of networks and future training opportunities are also shared here too. The page can be accessed here, Darlington Xtra - Wraparound Childcare

Should you wish to be part of the Wraparound Network or for further information of training opportunities, please email Claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk

Networks and Training

Dates of upcoming networks can also be found on the Darlington Xtra page.

EY Leads Briefing
Thursday 24th September 4 – 5pm (Teams)
Catherine.monaghan@darlington.gov.uk

PV Briefing
Wednesday 7th October 1.30 – 3pm (Teams)
Dionne.evers@darlington.gov.uk

Childminder Briefing
Tuesday 13th October 6 – 8pm (Teams)
Andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk

EY SENCO Briefing
Thursday 22nd October 4 – 5.30pm at Tandem Hub, Morton Park
Claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk

2-Year-Old Network
Tuesday 20th October 5 – 6pm (Venue TBC)
Dionne.evers@darlington.gov.uk

Good Practice Meeting
Tuesday 10th November 4 – 5pm (Venue TBC)
Catherine.monaghan@darlington.gov.uk

Baby Network
Thursday 19th November – time and venue TBC
Andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk

Level One Safeguarding Training for PV Settings
Wednesday 23rd September 6 – 8pm via Teams
Dionne.evers@darlington.gov.uk

Needs based provision and the graduated response in the early years
Wednesday 21st October 10am – 12pm via Teams.
Claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk

Level One Safeguarding Training for Childminders
Wednesday 25th November from 6 – 8pm via Teams
Dionne.evers@darlington.gov.uk

For a bespoke staff meeting training session, please see the training offer on the Darlington Xtra page and contact your link officer or earlyyearsteam@darlington.gov.uk to discuss your needs.

For Early Talk Boost training in your school or setting, contact andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk or catherine.monaghan@darlington.gov.uk