



Document: **Response to consultation on *Draft Financial Management Standard and Toolkit for Schools***
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Background

The Pre-school Learning Alliance is a national educational charity that supports 15,000 affiliated, community-based pre-schools, which provide funded nursery education and childcare for 500,000 children. The Alliance is the single largest contributor to the Sure Start local programmes and to the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative and – it hopes to be – to the development of Children’s Centres. The majority (87%) of affiliated pre-schools do not own their own premises, with 16% located on school premises in 2003.

For more than 40 years, the charity has also provided vocational training for staff working in pre-schools and adult and community learning for parents. Among other things, the Pre-school Learning Alliance is an initiator of training for parents as well as a collaborator in DfES initiatives such as *Step Into Learning*.

Pre-schools operate as community mutuals and can help to increase the social capital of the local community, resulting in their engagement in the provision of community activities, including the mainstreaming of services such as childcare, education and family learning.

A study, *The Contribution of Pre-schools to the Community* (McGivney, 1999), examined the impact of pre-schools operating in neighbourhoods affected by crime, drug abuse and high levels of unemployment. The research was able to demonstrate a range of outcomes for the parents involved in the pre-schools, which include a return to education and involvement in other forms of community self-help.

The defining characteristic of pre-schools is the involvement of parents. Each year, 20,000 adults participate in courses of study – vocational or otherwise – as a result of their involvement in their children’s pre-schools. Typically, these are adults who left school early with minimum or no qualifications, many are lone parents and a substantial proportion use this experience of learning as a springboard to further training and then finding employment.

Current Initiatives

There are a number of current government initiatives including the Children Centres and Extended School initiatives which encourage greater use of school premises to provide integrated health, education, childcare and community services for families.

In the Queen’s Speech in November 2003, the Government announced that a new ‘Children’s Bill’ will take forward the proposals contained in the Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* published last summer. This paper looks at a framework for planning across all sectors, including the voluntary and community sector. The Government hopes that the

framework will ensure services properly protect children at risk of neglect and harm by promoting services which prevent negative outcomes and offer support to every child to develop to their full potential.

Suggestions for the Toolkit

Managing Premises S 4.4

Currently nearly 2,500 pre-schools operate on school site, often with either a short term lease or no lease agreement. The toolkit should encourage schools to implement appropriate leases, which recognise the contribution that voluntary sector providers offer to the wider community. On occasions pre-schools are unable to access grant funding to develop premises due to the lack of an appropriate lease.

Managing Relations with LEAs and Other Partners S 4.6

Every Child Matters also recognised that ‘Research suggests that parenting appears to be the most important factor associated with educational attainment at age 10, which in turn is strongly associated with achievement later in life. Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers’. Research also shows that best effects are obtained when parental involvement planning was integrated fully into the schools teaching and learning plan.

Sometimes schools feel the need to integrate all services under their direct management structures. Yet this can reduce the opportunity for community empowerment. In a parent managed pre-school, parents are empowered through their involvement in their own child’s education to take on governance roles and pre-schools build up a good standing in the community. It is possible to increase formal involvement of the school in the running of a pre-school without removing the responsibility for governance from parents.

The majority of affiliated pre-schools are registered with the Charity Commission and subject to charity law with regard to the disposal of their assets. The Pre-school Learning Alliance regularly supports pre-schools that are put under pressure to transfer their assets to their host school, which contravenes charitable law. Schools are generally not aware of the laws governing charitable assets but in fact, this action is misappropriation of public funds. It would help if the toolkit could alert schools to this issue.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance would be pleased if the toolkit encouraged schools to develop partnership arrangements with voluntary sector providers that recognises and values the knowledge and experience that each bring to the partnership, and allows schools to support and influence the operation of the pre-school without removing the governance from pre-schools. Recognition that the voluntary sector is successful in engaging parents, **especially those hard to reach parents.**

School Effectiveness R18

‘The Cultural Imperative’ A guide to Culture Management

The Green Paper – *Every Child Matters* recognised that ‘Research suggests that parenting appears to be the most important factor associated with educational attainment as age 10, which in turn is strongly associated with achievement later in life. Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers’.

In light of this research, an addition should be made to the toolkit within the School Effectiveness ‘*The Cultural Imperative*’ Guide to Culture Management, which focuses on the schools work to involve parents as active partners in their child’s education, and recognises that their involvement can be the most important factor associated with their child’s educational achievement.

Pre-school Learning Alliance resources

In addition to resources to support the delivery of good quality childcare and education, the Pre-school Learning Alliance provides a range of resources to support community managed pre-schools, including publications on governance such as *Pre-schools as Employers; Pre-school Committees and Constitutions; Management in Pre-schools* and *The Complete Guide to Incorporation for Pre-schools*. A benefit to members is a direct line legal advice service *Lawcall*. Members of our Expansion Team are able to provide advice and support to develop pre-schools on schools sites.

As previously mentioned the Pre-school Learning Alliance provides a programme of vocational training for staff working in pre-schools, along with adult and community learning for parents. The charity is currently developing a pilot project with a couple of LEAs that aims to help children to succeed and to build learning communities by developing models of good practice in parental involvement and family learning for use by workers in education and childcare settings for children before and during statutory schooling.

For the vision set out in *Every Child Matters* to be translated into practice and provision on the ground, it will be vital that the roles of pre-schools and the Pre-school Learning Alliance are recognised as an integral part of the development and implementation especially when the provision is to take place on school sites.