

Insight driving innovation and impact

Healthy Movers Cornwall Case Study: St Meriadoc Nursery

Engaging all children and supporting school readiness through Healthy Movers activities.

July 2022

Introduction

St Meriadoc CE Nursery & Infant Academy Nursery is located in Camborne. It is part of The Rainbow Multi Academy Trust and the Pre-School caters for up to 60 children aged three and four years old.

St Meriadoc CE Nursery & Infant Academy Nursery joined the Healthy Movers programme in 2021. Healthy Movers is delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST), in partnership with Active Cornwall and Public Health Cornwall. The programme is designed to support two to five year olds' physical literacy, self-esteem and wellbeing, helping them gain a better start in life.

Background



St Meriadoc CE Nursery & Infant Academy Nursery is based at the same site as the local primary school, St Meriadoc CE Junior Academy, which is located in a very deprived area. The Nursery has a high proportion of children with special educational needs (SEN); around one in six have additional needs. They have three members of staff but one child has dedicated one-to-one support from an additional member of staff. The Nursery has a large outdoor adventure playground and the children regularly take part in physical activity in the school hall.

The staff at the Nursery observed that children's physical development was behind where they expected it to be. For example, they found that children struggled to walk up and down steps, found it hard to keep their balance when walking up a slope in the adventure playground, or were unable to use the climbing frame at the Nursery. They believe this was, in part, due to Covid-19 and children not being able to go out and do regular physical activities as much. Many families do not have outside space and the financial cost of activities can prevent children from accessing opportunities, for example the rural nature of the area means that the cost of transport to access places for physical activity can be expensive. They also highlighted that the children were struggling with their communication skills, particularly in terms of their speech.

“Their very basic physical skills were a lot lower than we've ever had before. The number of children that were struggling just to climb up a bank or to use our climbing frame was massive in comparison to what we have had before.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Activities

Training and support

The lead practitioner attended the Healthy Movers training and then the Healthy Movers tutor delivered a power hour (a short and focused Healthy Movers training) to all staff at the Nursery, plus the Early Years Foundation Stage lead at the school. This Healthy Movers tutor inspired all the staff and built excitement across all the staff, not just the practitioner that had attended the

initial training. Positively, the day after the power hour, two of the staff members picked up the Healthy Movers resource cards and delivered the activities.

The ongoing support from the Healthy Movers tutor has also been extremely valuable. The tutor has answered questions, shared advice and helped to embed the knowledge they learnt at the training.

“They could understand my level of excitement when I came back because they had that experience.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Embedding Healthy Movers activities

The Nursery delivers Healthy Movers activities throughout the whole day, inside and outside, and at times that suit the children. The lead practitioner highlighted that an advantage of the programme is that it can be short and quick activities that slot alongside, or in between, other activities.

“You can fit it in anywhere. It's the most painless thing I've ever had to do, and I love it.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Another key strength of the Healthy Movers programme that was identified is the way that it can be adapted to all abilities, including children with special educational needs. The lead practitioner emphasized that the activities can be adapted to suit children’s different abilities, for example they can easily be extended for children who have mastered the basic skills, or children can spend more time working on key skills. In one instance, the children were taking part in the ‘Deep Blue Sea’ Healthy Movers activities and were pretending to be sea-horses. Some children balanced on one leg, but those that struggled to balance, lay down on the floor to make the shape of a sea-horse. The children were able to work at their level and be suitably challenged whilst all participating together. A Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) has observed the Healthy Movers activities and is recommending it to children that they work with.

“I think it's made us a stronger team because actually everyone has responsibility for doing this.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Engaging parents in Healthy Movers activities

The children took the Healthy Movers backpacks home. The backpacks were very well received by the children. What is more, the parents have shared photos and updates of the children doing the activities at home through Tapestry and Class Dojo. One parent, who also has an older child, found that the backpacks and resource cards were a great activity for the whole family, especially during the school holidays. The staff have also shared links to videos to demonstrate that they do not need to have lots of equipment to be able to do the activities; instead, they can just use items from around the home.



“The children love their backpacks – they bring them in every day.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

“We've spent all night doing it [Healthy Movers activities]. I've struggled to get them to bed because all they want to do is more.”

PARENT

Benefits

Enhancing children's physical literacy



The staff at the Nursery have noticed that since taking part in Healthy Movers, the children's physical ability, both in terms of gross and fine motor skills, has improved. Healthy Movers has helped the staff to identify areas that the children need to improve and then provided steps to help develop these skills. The lead practitioner highlighted that there is a Healthy Movers resource card for all aspects of physical literacy so if a child is struggling with something, you can easily find a card to support them. Prior to Healthy Movers, many children did not have the core stability to be able to sit up at a table; instead, children would slump or lie over the table. Since taking part in the activities, the children can now sit at the table, or on the carpet with their legs crossed, and hold themselves upright. Children are also more confident at playing in the adventure playground at the Nursery.

“It's [Healthy Movers] just been absolutely phenomenal.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Supporting children's confidence and engagement



Healthy Movers has helped the children to develop their team-work skills, interaction with other children, and confidence to participate. The lead practitioner highlighted that this has helped the older children to be happy and confident to transition to school and ready to join in. In addition, it has allowed all children to participate in activities together so children with special education needs have been actively involved in all the group activities. Prior to Healthy Movers, one child lacked confidence, he tended not to join in activities, and was not keen on trying new things. He has taken part in Healthy Movers activities and is now joining in with every activity and he is talking at carpet time.

“That level of confidence that they've now got is something I could never have pictured ever. It's been amazing.”

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Improving communication skills



The lead practitioner believes the impact of Healthy Movers on the children's language skills has been "huge". The activities tie into everything they do in the curriculum at Nursery and then they build on it in reception at school. Across all topics, the staff have been able to use Healthy Movers activities to help them to develop the topics at a higher level, which means the children have developed their communication skills ready for starting school.

Supporting school readiness



The children transitioning to school this year have spent time with their reception teacher and the teachers have commented how "incredible" this cohort is. Healthy Movers has helped the children going to school to sit at a table, they have developed their muscular strength which has given them better control when holding a pencil and writing, and their listening skills and attention have improved. What is more, they have seen these improvements across all children taking part in Healthy Movers activities.

"Their readiness for reception is leaps ahead of where we were last year."

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Future

St Meriadoc CE Nursery & Infant Academy Nursery has number of key plans for the future:

- The Nursery that is based at the same site and caters for the younger children is also starting to do some of the Healthy Movers activities so the children will have developed some of the basic skills when they move to the pre-school.
- A sports coach that delivers PE lessons at the school is interested in integrating Healthy Movers activities into their sessions so when the children transition to school they will be able to continue to build on the skills they have learnt at Nursery.
- The Nursery is also keen to deliver a stay and play session for parents in the future.

"It's something that I would recommend for any school to do because I think they would be able to notice a huge difference in the children."

CARA MEYERS, NURSERY TEACHER AT ST MERIADOC CE NURSERY & INFANT ACADEMY NURSERY

Top Tips

- ✓ Get all staff on board as soon as possible to encourage Healthy Movers activities to be embedded in all aspects of Nursery.
- ✓ Build Healthy Movers activities into the whole day; "that's when it's best, when it happens all the time throughout the day as and when it suits the children"



Youth Sport Trust
SportPark
Loughborough University
3 Oakwood Drive
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3QF

01509 226600
research@youthsporttrust.org
www.youthsporttrust.org



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