

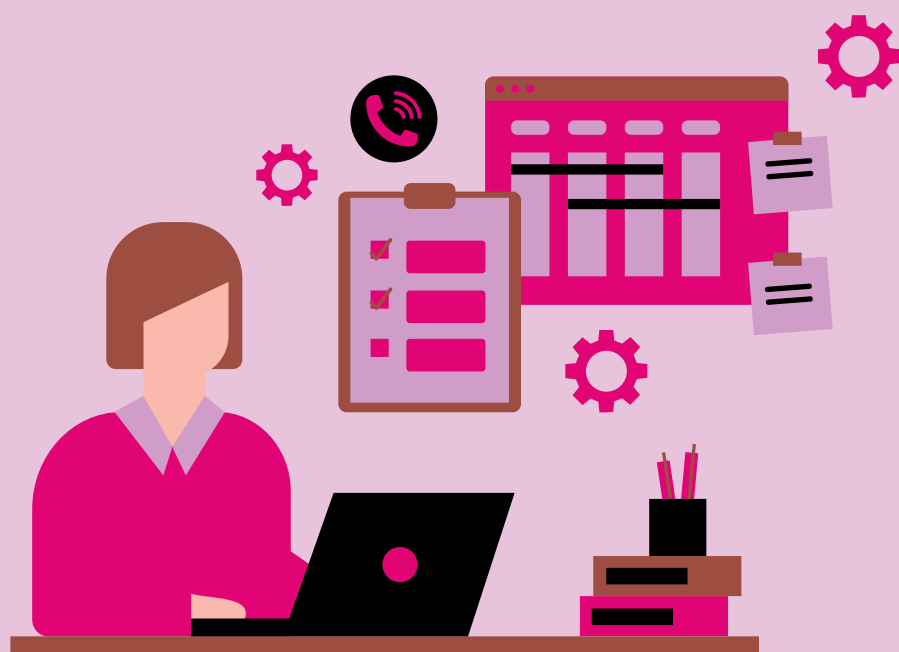
Financial Sustainability

Top Tips For School-based Nurseries

1 Use break-even analysis

Calculate the minimum occupancy needed to cover staffing and overheads.

This ensures your nursery remains financially viable even during periods of fluctuating demand.



4 Consider appointing an administrator

Employ someone with expertise in early years funding and occupancy management.

Their role can be crucial in navigating funding streams and ensuring smooth operations.



2 Leverage shared school resources

Consider integrating utilities, admin teams and leadership structures with your school to reduce costs and streamline operations.

5 Maximise outreach and visibility

Hosting weekly open mornings, maintaining a photo-rich website, and distributing flyers in spaces such as GP surgeries, Family Hubs and Children's Centres can all help reach parents in your area.

3 Highlight your unique strengths

You may want to promote distinctive features like Forest School accreditation or flexible wraparound care options to stand out in a competitive local market.



6 Plan for holiday provision strategically

Decide early whether your nursery will operate term-time only or year-round.

This affects staffing contracts, budgeting, and the ability to offer continuity for children and families.

Adapting the school environment for nursery provision

Top Tips For School-based Nurseries

1

Invest in durable, sustainable resources

If possible, choose furniture and materials with a 10-year lifespan to reduce replacement costs.

Well-designed furniture supports independence and safety while withstanding daily wear and tear.



4

Plan nursery infrastructure in advance

Ensure plumbing, electrical points, and room layout are planned before construction begins.

Designing and planning your space early can avoid costly and disruptive retrofitting in the future.



2

Create outdoor spaces that connect children with nature

It can help to develop spaces like wildlife gardens and mud kitchens to offer sensory-rich experiences

These spaces are especially valuable in urban settings where access to nature may be limited.

5

Repurpose existing school spaces

You may want to think about cosmetic changes like low partitions and movable shelving, to transform underused areas into vibrant nursery zones.

3

Include calming and sensory zones indoors

Designate a cosy area with soft furnishings, dimmable lighting, and sensory resources.

Breakout zones allow for small-group and one-to-one work, as well as providing an inclusive retreat for emotional regulation.



6

Support sensory and SEND needs

Consider including tactile strips on steps, acoustic tiles, and a sensory corner with fibre optic lights and weighted cushions.

Use visual schedules and “now and next” boards to aid transitions.

Staffing, recruitment and CPD

Top Tips For School-based Nurseries

1

Recruit for values and potential, alongside qualifications

Prioritise candidates who demonstrate warmth, adaptability, and a genuine interest in early years education, alongside qualifications and experience that align with the role.

Assess candidates through observations with children to ensure suitability.



2

Establish a mentoring system for new staff

Consider pairing less experienced practitioners with senior colleagues to support professional growth.

Consider running a Manager-in-Training programme to upskill high-potential staff and build leadership capacity from within.

3

Schedule CPD creatively

You may want to use inset days and after-school sessions for CPD sessions, to balance training needs with staffing requirements during nursery hours.

Offer bespoke early years training and joint development sessions with Reception teams to ensure continuity.



4

Engage with local authority support

Tap into free training, peer visits and structured feedback from early years representatives in your local authority teams to enrich staff development and maintain high standards.

5

Track progress and tailor training

Use formal staff observations and learning walks to identify gaps, then deliver targeted coaching and CPD.

Embed children's voices in provision planning by simply asking "What did you enjoy today?"

6

Recruit for emerging needs; rather than like-for-like replacements

When a highly experienced practitioner leaves, consider appointing someone with expertise aligned to anticipated needs (e.g. SEND, emerging literacy, physical development).

Pair them with a senior team member to provide in-house mentoring and support.

Leadership and Governance

Top Tips For School-based Nurseries

1

Integrate nursery governance into whole-school structures

Consider including nursery matters in school leadership meetings and strategic planning.

This raises the nursery's profile and ensures alignment with school values and priorities.



2

Appoint a dedicated early years link governor

You may want to assign a governor with a specific remit for early years.

Their role should include monitoring quality, supporting compliance, and advocating for nursery needs at board level.

3

Prepare for dual inspection frameworks

It's important to understand both Ofsted's EYFS and school inspection criteria.

This enables leaders to present a coherent narrative of quality across the nursery and school.



4

Strengthen SEND oversight and accountability

Educate governors on the EYFS framework. Ensure governors are equipped to ask about interventions, learning journeys, and inclusive practice.

This promotes transparency and drives improvement in provision for children with additional needs.

5

Hold regular leadership check-ins

Consider scheduling fortnightly meetings between nursery and school heads to coordinate calendars, risk assessments and events.

Include nursery leaders in curriculum planning and school improvement discussions to ensure alignment with early years pedagogy, developmental milestones, and whole-school priorities



6

Embed a culture of inspection readiness

Treat inspections as everyday reflections of quality, not high-stakes events. This mindset reduces pressure on staff and improves consistency.

Ensure every team member can articulate the pedagogical rationale behind daily routines and activities.

Setting up a School-based Nursery

Checklist

Define your strategic vision

Start by answering three core questions:

- Why do you need a nursery?
- Who will it serve?
- When will you know you have succeeded?

Make sure governors, senior leaders, staff and parents are united around those answers



Work closely with Reception staff to support children's transition

Early years leaders working closely with school staff helps ensure continuity for any children moving from the nursery to the school.

Educators can record a child's progress through online learning journals to ensure that Reception staff receive a detailed handover.



Develop a clear understanding of the funding required

Understand what capital funding is available and explore additional funding opportunities and partnerships.

Consider how childcare support schemes like Tax-Free Childcare and Universal Credit enhance family access and nursery sustainability.

For further information, please view the [Childcare Works](#) website and [DfE guidance](#).



Plan for an inclusive provision

Collaborate closely with the school SENCO.

Setting clear agreements on roles, training and inclusion from the beginning strengthens inclusive practice and eases the path for children with additional needs.



Map out key resources and facilities for your setting

Facilities such as accessible changing rooms, secure indoor-outdoor flow, nap spaces and access to nutritious hot meals are important.

Precisely calculated staffing ratios and clearly defined timetables are key to success.



Visit multiple settings and speak with Early Years leaders

Each visit leads to a new insight - whether it's a fresh approach to continuous provision, a clever use of space, or a novel parent-engagement strategy.

This ensures success when designing and operating your own provision.