



# Building an effective Reception team

Teamwork in the foundation stage can make all the difference to your children’s progress. **NEIL FARMER** shows you how to develop an effective Reception team

**Good teamwork in** the Early Years Foundation Stage can be the key difference between children making rapid or accelerated learning and children making typical or inadequate progress.

Getting the best out of your team is a challenge to any leader, but ensuring you have a team that can take your vision on is crucial to improving the provision for the children, the levels of involvement and wellbeing, and the quality of your team.

Through my years of supporting schools and leading teams I have found that the most important element is empowerment – getting the right people for the right jobs working at their highest level of competency. The point where challenge meets ability is where people will be working at their optimum level.

## What a good leader does

A good leader will identify strengths within the team and put in place personalised support packages that not only develop the individual but also strengthen the core structure of the team.

When you’re trying to match people to the tasks that they are best suited to, you want to balance a few things.

- The level of difficulty of the task versus the competence of the person.
- The fear of failure that the task might create versus the apathy left when someone is not challenged.
- Engagement created by a challenging task versus the disillusionment created by unreasonable demands.

If a task is too demanding and competency not equal to it, anxiety develops; if the challenge is not demanding enough and competency above it, you get boredom. You should be continually reviewing and adapting your system as competency and confidence grows.

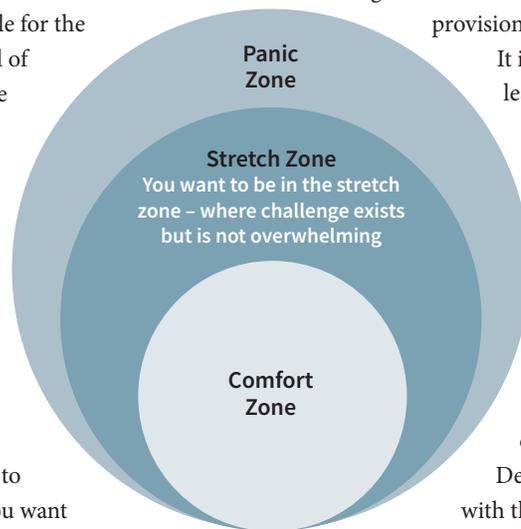
What you want to make sure is that most of the time members of your team are sitting within the ‘stretch zone’ – where they are

not panicked, but their skills are also being tested.

This is what I term initiative based strategy: a proactive not reactive state of leadership, which fosters active decision making from all team makers – with a bias for action.

The basic principle of initiative based strategy is that there are no right and wrong answers: each team member feeds off each other and supports each other’s decisions. A review cycle is used to ensure that decisions made and taken are in line with your agreed vision and work towards the betterment of the provision and practice.

It is hands on and values driven, with leadership showing commitment to all.



## Responsibilities of the Reception leader

Lead your team as manager. As a leader it is through exhibiting your human qualities that you are accepted by the team. Human values require the leader to have a sense of self, and an ability to read relationship dynamics clearly and accurately.

Delegate responsibility. This provides you with the time and energy to better manage the team. Focus on individual strengths when delegating – who works best together and why? Acknowledge all contributions openly within the team and to others.

You should also empower each team member by giving them controlled discretion. Opening up the thinking and solving processes gives team members freedom to wander within the parameters and to possibly find better solutions than the ones originally suggested. As part of empowering the team, ask your team members for their input and ideas.

Use questions such as: ‘What is your recommendation? How would you solve this problem?’ or ‘How would you implement this policy?’

Develop the habit of soliciting ideas at all stages and be attentive to your team’s responses. Not everything they suggest will be credible – but a willingness to listen with an open mind will ensure that team members feel valued. ■