

Examples of Good Practice



'...Ensuring every child has the best possible start to their day'

How one West Sussex school uses soft starts to nurture wellbeing and improve attendance

At Forge Wood, we recognised that improving attendance needed to begin with ensuring **every child felt genuinely safe, welcomed, and ready for their day**. Across Reception to Year 6, we were seeing more children finding it harder to come into school and a rise in EBSA, with many pupils needing significant adult support just to walk through the door - an emotional experience for children, parents, and staff alike. To address this, we reviewed our universal offer and introduced soft starts in every classroom. Initially, some staff were concerned about fitting the curriculum in and maintaining the expected pace; however, **we recognised that children cannot learn effectively until they first feel comfortable, secure, and included**.

Soft starts now take place over a 20-minute period each morning, including a 10-minute arrival window and 10 minutes for children who arrive just on time or slightly late to settle without pressure. This flexible, welcoming start also means that children who benefit from sensory circuits can take part without missing the beginning of a lesson; instead of returning to a class that has already begun formal learning, **they rejoin their peers at a calm, relational moment, helping them feel connected rather than "behind" before the day has even started**.

During soft starts, children engage in gentle, low-pressure activities such as quiet reading, mindfulness tasks, fine-motor challenges, table-top games, and creative choices like colouring, drawing, and simple crafts, including much-loved options such as crochet and other tactile activities. **This time allows children to reconnect with friends, build positive relationships with staff, and organise themselves at their own pace**.

Since introducing soft starts, we have seen a significant **reduction in the number of pupils needing support to come into school each day**, alongside overwhelmingly positive feedback from both staff and children. **Mornings now begin more calmly and confidently, with pupils feeling settled, included, and ready to learn**. Soft starts have become a key part of our commitment to nurturing wellbeing and ensuring every child has the best possible start to their day.

Mrs Kathryn Knab

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