

In brief...

Nursery World is conducting a salary survey for all staff working in early years settings. Help us to create the most accurate results by filling in the short *Nursery World* and Hays Early Years survey form at www.nurseryworld.co.uk by 7 August.

The University of East Anglia and the National Children's Bureau have been appointed to carry out the independent evaluation of national children's trusts. The final report is due to be published in April 2007 and will be looking for features associated with successful implementation.

Sure Start director Sheila

Scales has written to local authority directors of children's services outlining future guidance for the performance management of children's centres and local authority early childhood services. A consultation will take place this summer with a view to publishing the updated guidance in the autumn. To view the early outline visit www.surestart.gov.uk.

Ofsted has published its first

major survey on health and well-being in education since the beginning of the Every Child Matters agenda. The report aims to disseminate good practice and encourage improvement in settings and institutions. *Healthy schools, healthy children?* is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Mark Dudek, the leading figure in early years architecture and design for many years. He established Mark Dudek Associates, in which he led a variety of public and private projects, as well as providing consultancy and research. Mark wrote many books on design for children and educational settings, including two editions of *Kindergarten Architecture*. An award-winning career in both building and research allowed Mark to explore and experiment with new ideas, making him an innovator in the sector.

NURSERY EDUCATION GRANT

MPs support call for NEG review

By Catherine Gaunt

More than 40 MPs are backing a call for a review of the new funding rules for the nursery education grant.

Shadow education secretary Maria Miller tabled an Early Day Motion two weeks ago calling for the Government to stop the introduction of the Code of Practice (CoP), to allow for an assessment on its impact on the sustainability of private, voluntary and independent nurseries.

Meanwhile, nursery owners in Kent are still waiting to hear what will happen in their area. Their protests led to Kent County Council suspending the CoP to hold talks with the DfES (News, 27 July).

Nursery World has seen letters from providers across the country who have written to their MPs, children's minister Beverley Hughes and Chancellor Gordon Brown to voice their anger at the new funding terms.

This week the Pre-School Learning Alliance joined the debate by calling for an independent review of early education funding. Chief executive Steve Alexander said that the principle

of early education for three- and four-year-olds free at the point of delivery must be protected, but urged the Government for more supply-side funding.

He said, 'We know our members share this aspiration, but some are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve sustainability in the current climate. Nursery education funding in some areas is simply not enough to provide a viable service in the long term.'

He added, 'The Government must acknowledge that current levels of nursery education funding without the facility to "top up" fees means many providers could be threatened with closure, and many parents will find their choices greatly reduced.'

Meanwhile, one private nursery owner in Norwich told *Nursery World* that she intends to opt out of the NEG from January.

She said, 'I'm losing thousands of pounds a term because the funding does not cover the costs. The viability of the nursery is paramount. We'll just have to become a nursery for nought-to-threes or parents will have to pay nursery fees.'

View EDM 2581 at <http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/>.

PROVISION

New chain looks to spend £10m

By Nicole Weinstein

A new London-based nursery chain is making plans to expand after securing £10m funding.

Active Learning, which opened its first 92-place flagship nursery in Hornsey last October, has raised an initial £10m from William Pears Group, a private company specialising in property investment and venture capital, to finance up to ten nurseries over seven years. Next year will see the opening of three Active Learning nurseries in West Hampstead, Guildford and Fulham.

Major shareholders in the business include the co-founders of Teddies nursery group, Amanda Johnson and Nick Botterill, and property developer Edward Cahn.

Bill Zuckerman, ex-Ernst & Young partner, and founder and chairman of the company, said, 'The £10m will be used for equity capital. We will require more finance on a site-by-site basis and we are trying to raise as much bank debt as possible.'

'We will buy freehold and leasehold property, but will not grow larger than 15, as we don't believe you can control the quality otherwise.'

The flagship's new purpose-designed building is set in three acres, and incorporates performing arts, art and science studios. Specialist teachers are employed to cover science and technology, the arts and sport.

Mr Zuckerman said, 'The concept behind Active Learning is to "bring the outdoors in" and put more emphasis on healthy childhood development, providing solid pre-school education but within a more creative environment. To ensure consistency in quality, all specialist staff – apart from the ballet teacher and some of the sports coaches – are employed by us.'

For more information visit www.active-learn.co.uk.



Photo: Tert Pengilly

Striking a pose at Pineapple Studios in Covent Garden, London, as part of Big Dance, organised by the Mayor of London and the Arts Council England. Big Dance saw events for children and families all over the capital, including tap dancing in tube stations, a Brazilian Carnival and Samba event, and a London Youth Dance performance by the Thames.