

STRIKING A balance

Busy Bees offers advice on running a successful nursery business...

At Busy Bees, we do not measure success by the number of sites we have, the number of places we provide or the financial returns alone. Success requires a fine balance between delivering quality service and receiving sufficient financial returns; it depends on a number of key areas, and if any of these are lacking, problems can occur. Crucially, it's important to have a robust business plan and to set realistic but challenging targets.

1 As with any business, a nursery must have at its head a professional individual with a high level of business acumen, someone who can make decisions based on the best interests of your nursery. A bold approach is important, particularly when it comes to payment of fees. It's vital that the nursery fees not only cover the costs, but that there's a surplus to re-invest in the business, ensuring ongoing sustainability. Nobody welcomes a fee increase, particularly in a recession, but a decision to freeze fees could have a catastrophic impact on the viability of a business.

Remember, it's important not to be embarrassed about profitability because profitability ensures sustainability. You need to generate sufficient income not only to meet all financial obligations, but also to pay a fair salary to staff, invest in training and provide extensive resources, ultimately resulting in the best possible outcome for the children in your care.

2 Assembling a highly motivated and supportive team, led by a committed leader who encourages high standards and strong partnerships with parents is essential. Childcare is a vocation and it should go without saying that every member of staff should work hard to ensure that each individual child's needs are met. However, the challenge is to develop a supportive team that recognises the business's aims and financial targets, and understands how they are able to contribute to achieving said targets. An investment in the manager and staff

team in terms of providing ongoing support and training, together with continuous assessment of standards, is necessary. A good leader will facilitate appropriate training opportunities for staff and display a commitment to their continuing development.

3 There must be an absolute commitment to delivering the best care possible (with the facilities and resources available) within the nursery environment. Be sure to establish a good working relationship, based on trust and understanding, with parents too, so that together you're able to work towards the same aim. Although Ofsted inspections are important, they're only a snapshot that captures one or two days in a three-year period – hardly the best way to assess the quality of a nursery's provision. There's nothing like seeing it for yourself to enable you to assess the quality of the environment, the opportunities made available to the children, how the staff support and guide the children and, most important, whether they're engaged and happy.

4 One of the biggest sources of enquiries comes from recommendation and the reputation of the nursery within the local community, so, again, maintaining good relationships with parents is imperative. A proactive approach to communication and marketing is needed to make the local community and surrounding areas aware of the quality of care delivered by any nursery. You will always come up against



competitors, but when it comes to childcare, parents will ultimately place their child in a setting which they believe is safe and which focuses on the best interests of their child.

So, where should you focus your attention to ensure the success of an individual nursery or nursery business? On the provision of excellent service, delivered by highly competent staff, whilst working towards a financially viable business that comes highly recommended by its customers.

taking it further

Established in 1983, Busy Bees is the largest provider of children's nurseries in the UK, offering some 11,500 places across 129 day-care locations.

Visit www.busybeeschildcare.co.uk

