

Moving the Box: Re-thinking equity in the early years

Coram Hemsall's

In recent years, the ambition to close the opportunity gap in early education has become increasingly urgent. National data continues to show that while overall attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has improved, too many children, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, still start school without a Good Level of Development (GLD).

Against this backdrop, Coram Hemsall's Moving the Box project offers a timely and distinctive response: one that challenges assumptions about fairness, questions "one size fits all" approaches, and places equity firmly at the centre of early years practice.

At its core, Moving the Box is built on a simple but powerful idea that equality, giving every child the same support, does not always lead to fair outcomes. Equity, by contrast, requires educators to understand individual starting points and to respond proportionately, even if that means doing something different or additional for some children. Drawing upon the now-familiar metaphor of children trying to see over a fence, the programme argues that success comes not from offering identical provision, but from "moving the box" so that every child has a genuine opportunity to thrive.

Developed and delivered by Coram Hemsall's in partnership with local authorities throughout the past year, Moving the Box has been working directly with early years leaders and practitioners to strengthen curriculum design, pedagogy and professional confidence. Under the leadership of early education specialist Jan Dubiel, the programme focuses on helping educators make informed, intentional decisions about what to teach, how to teach it, and (crucially) which children need the greatest level of support to succeed. It is not a short-term intervention or a set of prescribed activities, but a structured, reflective approach that empowers settings and early educators to own and grow their curriculum in ways that respond to their unique context.

Currently operating across multiple local authority areas in England, Moving the Box supports hundreds of early years settings and reaches thousands of children identified as being at risk of not achieving a GLD. Its aim aligns closely with the Government's Best Start in Life strategy ambition to increase the proportion of children reaching a GLD to 75% by 2028 and goes further by asking how those gains are achieved, and for whom they matter most. In doing so, Moving the Box reframes improvement not as raising averages alone, but as changing trajectories for individual children whose outcomes might otherwise be constrained by circumstance.

During 2025-2026, the programme has worked with the local authorities, providers, and schools in Durham, Sandwell, Westmorland and Furness, Cumberland, East Sussex, and

Sefton. With sign-ups for 2026-2027 increasing steadily to make the programme bigger and better for the year ahead.

We offer continuous professional development that supports EYFS provision to strengthen the leadership of early years practice and improve knowledge and understanding of early years curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Enhancing the ability of senior leaders to ensure and assure the quality of early years provision. This needs much reflection on exploring and defining values and aspirations for children and understanding and articulating the needs of children in EYFS provision. A key outcome is the creation of an evidence base of effective practice to demonstrate: What an effective curriculum should look like and how it is developed, designed and implemented in the context of the provision. How this is most effectively delivered. And how this relates to supporting outcomes.

Find out more: <https://www.coramhemsalls.org.uk/hey-title/moving-the-box>

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