



# Diary of a New Nursery

Dr Jane Todd opened Do Re Mi Nursery in Durham on New Year's Day

I came up with the idea of setting up a nursery at the beginning of 2012 when I was on maternity leave with my son Reuben.

I wanted to set up a nursery where music played a central role in the nurturing and developing of well-rounded children.

I was driven by my passion for education and my passion for music and the benefits it has.

I was teaching music at a prep school for children aged from two to 11. I was driving an hour to work and I just had a baby and I decided I wanted to do something closer to home.

I was also leading the PGCE in secondary school education at Durham University. I had just finished my doctorate in education and I decided to marry it all together and play to all my strengths. I also really believed in it and I could see the difference having a nursery with music running through all its activities could make.

I viewed the building last April, which is in a business park, just outside Durham. In July, the building work started as we had to do quite a few things to do to the building like put in children's toilets and a brand new kitchen so we could cook home-made meals for the children each day.

In terms of planning, the building where the nursery is, was used before for offices. The landlord had wanted it to be a nursery so he had already applied for planning permission for it.

Our building is timber-framed with solar panels on the roof. Inside we have a quiet room for our babies and a large, open plan activity space for two to five-year-olds.

There are folding doors in the middle so this gives great flexibility and allows for a variety of play activities and tasks as the space can be organised in numerous different ways, and for different age groups.

I handed in my notice at the prep school in July and started holding musical learning classes in the building. Then we opened as a nursery in January. It has all happened so quickly.



I would say the most challenging side of it all has been the finance side as I had to give up my teaching salary to do this. I also took my son out of an outstanding nursery where he was very happy so that was a very hard thing to do.

The funding for the nursery came partly from my own cash and a start up grant that will need to be paid back plus loans. This past year has definitely been a rollercoaster.

Time has been another challenge as I have a young son and setting up any new business is extremely time-consuming.

I did realise how hard and time-consuming it would be setting up a nursery. I have always been a busy person who gives a hundred per cent. If I am doing something I work and work. It has been hard work but I am so inspired. I just wish there were more hours in the day.



It has been very busy and last year, my son got meningitis and was in hospital for two weeks and I was sorting out a lot of it on my mobile phone from the hospital.

It has definitely been a learning curve and I have had to find out a lot of extra things such as food hygiene and health and safety.

The music learning at the nursery is based very heavily on the Kodály approach, founded by Zoltán Kodály, the Hungarian music educator.

He believed the right time to start music education was not only nine months before the birth of a child, but 'nine months before the birth of the mother'. Our musical journey starts right at the beginning, with ♪do re mi bumps and so we offer tailored classes for each age group alongside our nursery provision. We have been running the musical learning classes since last August.

There are 39 registered childcare places at the nursery. We opened in January with five children. Do Re Mi was officially launched by Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP for the City of Durham.

It is not easy opening a new nursery. A nursery's popularity often depends on word of mouth and parents can be wary of putting their children into a completely brand new setting.

But we currently have nine children and several are booked in to start in the next couple of months. I am really pleased with the way it is growing!

## Ofsted comes to visit Do Re Mi Nursery

Five months after opening, Do Re Mi Nursery has had its toughest challenge yet, a visit from Ofsted.

'We are awaiting our report, but the Ofsted visit went very well and we had very positive feedback,' reveals its owner, Dr Jane Todd.

The nursery is growing quickly and it is a brand new setting so we are really pleased. We are registered for a maximum of 39 children. We now have 16 children on roll, an increase from nine a few months ago. Two more staff have also joined the team, meaning we now have six regular members of staff working in the nursery.

We have also invested more money into the nursery and have just spent over £3,000 on developing our natural resources, which includes our outdoor area, to promote creative and sensory play.

Quality learning, development and care is our priority at the nursery. Within this, we have embedded the do re mi learning programme so that children participate in short, daily music sessions within the provision.

I strongly believe in nurturing happy, well-rounded children who have positive and fulfilling learning experiences in their formative years and am convinced the role of music is key in this.

I decided to integrate music into the daily routine of the nursery as I think it has huge benefits.

We run a group session at the start of each day as we have found it is a very positive way to start the day, for both children and the staff.

Children enjoy the session, they focus well and they get a lot out of it. It settles them and they enjoy it being part of the routine. We have also seen children with behavioural issues engaging more and more through this time and it has really helped our settling in process. I can already see the difference the nursery has made to the children who attend it, which is great.



Parents need to be able to believe in the vision. They are not interested in my qualifications, they are interested in what we are doing on the ground. Parents have been asking if we sing all day. Music runs through everything we do in the nursery. So we do free play with music and guided work, where the children will play with play dough in time to music so music is used as a tool for other areas. We do a lot of rhyme and action coordination.

## Do Re Mi Nursery receives its Ofsted report

At the end of April, we were inspected by Ofsted and we were really pleased to be rated good.

The report said that staff demonstrate a high level of awareness of how young children learn and develop and ensure all children feel known and valued as individuals.

It also commented on the way we incorporate music into everything we do with the report praising the staff for demonstrating exceptional skills in developing children's communication and language skills as they make up songs and rhymes about their actions as they play. This enables children to learn new words rapidly and begin to use them in communicating.

The inspector told us that because we have only just opened, it is impossible for us to be able to show sustained progress which is a requirement if you want to be rated outstanding, which is a real shame. However she did comment that the progress we have made since we opened has been good.

Another element you need to get outstanding is to show how you have worked in partnership with external agencies, but at that point we didn't have any SEN (Special Educational Needs) children, so again this was something we could not do.

However a couple of months down the line and we have been working with Portage, hearing support and looked after children.

So again this is something we will be able to show at the next inspection. It is just a bit frustrating that we may not be inspected for another four years.

Overall I felt the inspection was a positive experience and we did find it an opportunity to share what we are doing.

However, I feel it would really help new nurseries if they were inspected within the first few months as an 'initial' inspection to check compliance, and then receive another full inspection at the one year mark which would give a much fairer judgement of where the nursery is really at.

In general, numbers are growing and I have been so pleased to see the progress of our children. We have built up good relationships with children and their parents, and there really is a 'family feel' at Do Re Mi. I have been very impressed with the commitment of my staff and think we have a very strong staff team, whom I highly value.'

In June, we had four new children start and they have all settled into the nursery so well.

This term we have been making food from the vegetables which are fresh from our nursery garden. One of the things we have made was delicious homemade vegetable soup. We have also been bug hunting in the nursery garden and as a result we now have some new nursery pets in the form of a family of snails.



This summer we have teamed up with Lingotot and we are running a fun Spanish summer school for children aged from three up to eight. Children will learn Spanish through stories, games, play and especially music as we are bringing together the expertise of both companies.

We are getting more and more busy which is great and in September we have children booked in for school pick-ups and after school care from three local schools.

Due to the growing number of children in our nursery, we are recruiting again and this time we are on the hunt for an experienced senior nursery practitioner to act as lead practitioner for our two to three-year-olds. Whoever gets the job will be part of the management team and deputise for the manager in her absence.

Our vision here at Do Re Mi is to create an inspiring and imaginative place and give children the best learning opportunities where they can create amazing memories.

I have been to nurseries where staff are just going through the motions and I would never want it to be like that. Running a nursery isn't the sort of business you go into to make money. I chose it as I knew it would be so fulfilling and it is!