

## The Role of the Mentor/Key Person

In Homer's *Odyssey*, **Mentor** was the son of Alcumus and, in his old age, a friend of Odysseus. When Odysseus left for the Trojan War he placed Mentor in charge of his son, Telemachus, and of his palace. Mentor was responsible for helping Telemachus through his adolescent years and developing into adulthood as well as advising and protecting the entire royal household. In fulfilling his role in Odysseus' household Mentor, displayed the admirable qualities of counsellor, teacher, nurturer, guardian, trusted adviser and role model.

In modern use the word mentor means a trusted friend, counsellor, teacher or role model - usually a more experienced or older person. Some professions have mentoring programs in which newcomers are paired with more experienced people in order to obtain good examples and advice as they advance, and schools sometimes have mentoring programs for new children or children who are having difficulties. At London Preschool, a Mentor is a member of staff who helps a child assigned to their care to develop in a way that maximises the child's needs, talents, interests and abilities, and truly earns the respect of their Mentor children through leading by example. They are responsible for monitoring and fostering all elements of the child's intellectual, social, physical, personal and cognitive development, serving as a valued role model, as well as the child's pastoral care. Mentors work closely with our teachers, and coaches to ensure that each child develops at an appropriate pace.

Every child is allocated a mentor within their room who helps them settle in, looks after them and who is responsible for their overall well-being, pastoral care, social and intellectual development. The Mentor is the person who introduces the child and their parents to the nursery, feeds back on the child's progress and who offers cuddles if the child is distressed, feeds the child their meals and changes their nappies whenever possible. Even if they are not present they must have knowledge of their key child's entire day by making sure they have the information from other staff. Mentors are expected to make written or mental notes as to the mealtimes, sleep or rest details and any other interesting points of note or anecdotes that a parent may find interesting, useful or funny. In a more formal way, Mentors are also responsible for maintaining all the developmental records, including detailed observations and assessments, and a child development folder of all their key children's work including artwork, photographs of activities and other records. If a Mentor leaves for lunch or at the end of a shift, they must ensure continuity by handing over to another member of the staff so that information is not missed on the child. If this other staff member will be handing over to the parent, the parent must be made aware of this in advance. They must take the time to get to know the child and understand their character traits, their needs and their fears, what they like to do, their favourite foods and subtle behavioural characteristics. Only in this way, can any changes in a child's behaviour patterns be detected early which may indicate something is a problem or the onset of an illness. It is also the responsibility of the Mentor to build a child's trust so that in the absence of a parent, the child has someone in whom he / she can turn to and talk to during the day. It is also someone with whom the child can share achievements and exciting moments while at nursery.

Finally, the Mentor is responsible through observation and interaction for determining a child's needs, talents, interests and abilities, and deciding the pace of learning for each child. For example, in the event that a child shows signs of being interested in words and numbers at an early age, our philosophy is to foster and develop this actively through focused education, if the child shows such an inclination, specialist work in Science and Discovery, IT, music, dance, drama or sports. However,

using the exciting and varied curriculum available, all Mentors should ensure that each child is encouraged to broaden their learning opportunities and in so doing, begin to enjoy discovering new concepts and experiences.

Overall, it is the Mentor's responsibility, in conjunction with the nursery teacher and specialists, to develop a tailor-made curriculum for each of their children that will help them to achieve the best possible results, and to exceed the results achieved by other nursery schools in terms of social, physical, cognitive and intellectual development. The Mentor system establishes and maintains continuity of care for the child and provides an easy access of support and first point of contact for the parent. The role of the Mentor is vital in establishing strong relationships between the nursery and the parents, and overall, the happiness and well-being of the nursery.