Early Impact Report

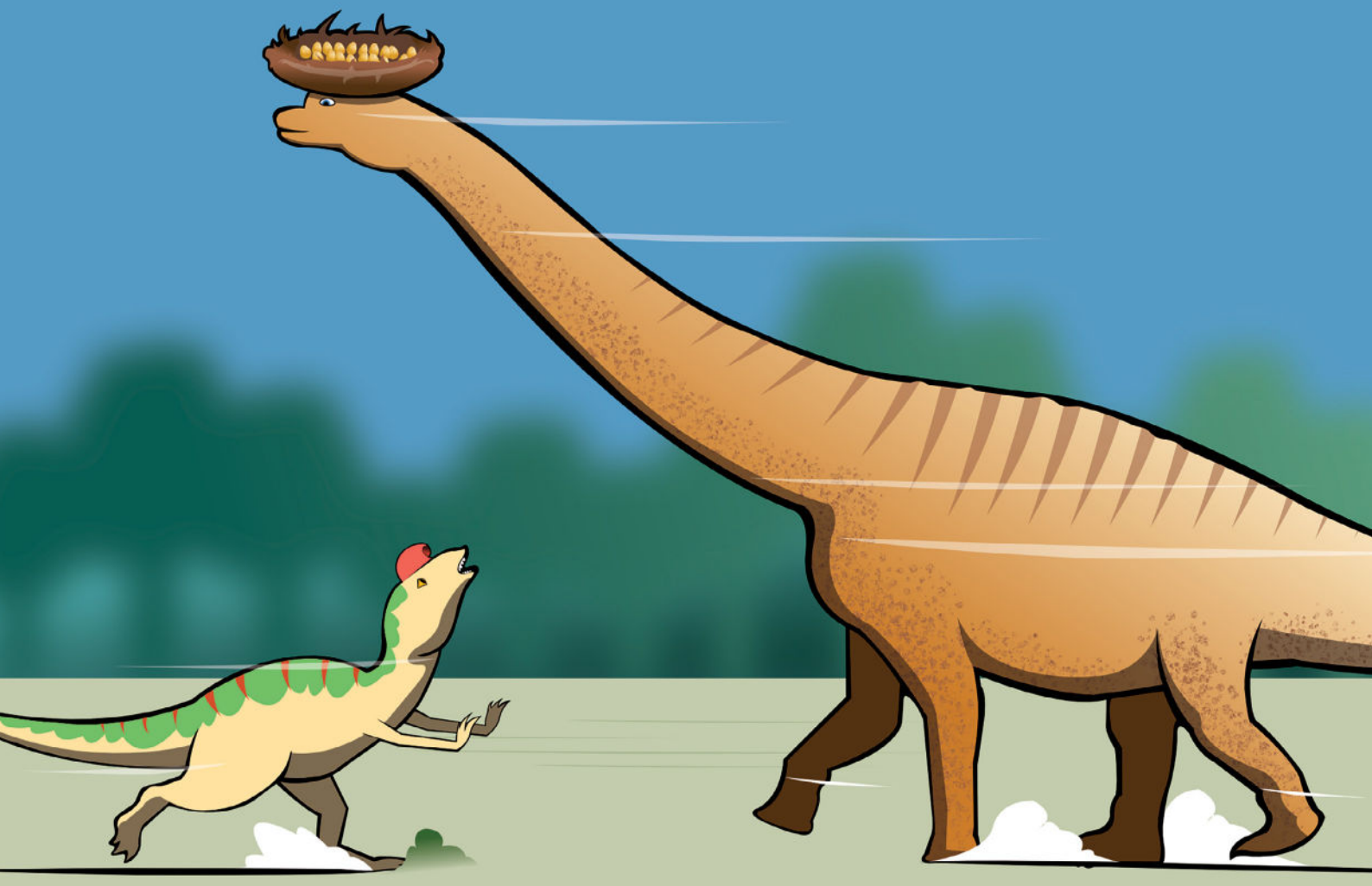
How Little Magic Train's inclusive multi-sensory storytelling supports communication and confidence across early years settings.

Little Magic Train is a multi-sensory storytelling programme designed to support communication, confidence and engagement in early years settings.

Used in over **200 nurseries and preschools**, the programme combines movement, music and storytelling to create inclusive learning experiences that support children across the **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Curriculum for Wales.**

Practitioners report improved participation, increased language use and greater confidence among children taking part in the adventures.

The programme has evolved over more than two decades and is now delivered through a growing digital library used by early years practitioners across England and Wales.



Key Impact at a Glance

200+
nurseries and preschools using Little Magic Train

10,000+
children supported across England and Wales

150,000+
children reached through partner learning events

92%
increased engagement during group activities

88%
improved communication confidence

85%
greater participation from quieter children

100%
of responding settings would recommend the programme

Courtesy of Soar Childcare

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Courtesy of Buttercups Day Nursery

Scalable and Easy to Implement

Little Magic Train has been designed to be easily implemented across a wide range of early years environments, including nurseries, preschools, reception classes and specialist SEND settings.

The programme is delivered through a structured digital library with practitioner-friendly resources. Enabling educators to create multi-sensory experiences without requiring specialist movement or drama training. This allows settings to integrate the adventures into daily practice while maintaining consistency and quality.

Because the core structure of each adventure remains familiar, children quickly learn the routine while practitioners can adapt the experiences to suit different ages, abilities and learning needs.

This flexible approach allows Little Magic Train to be successfully used in mainstream early years provision, specialist SEND environments and mixed-ability groups, supporting inclusive learning experiences for children across diverse settings.

Endorsement

Little Magic Train has received STAR endorsement from Montessori Global Education, recognising its alignment with Montessori principles of:

- hands-on learning
- sensory engagement
- child-led exploration
- independence in learning

This recognition reflects the programme's commitment to providing inclusive, engaging and developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young children.

The Little Magic Train Journey

Little Magic Train began in 2002, when specialist movement educators delivered weekly sessions directly in early years settings.

These sessions used imaginative storytelling and movement to help young children develop fundamental physical skills while supporting language, creativity and participation.

Over time, the programme has evolved in response to the changing needs of children, educators and early years environments. Each stage of development has focused on making the adventures accessible, inclusive and easy for practitioners to deliver while strengthening educators' confidence and creativity.

Courtesy of Buttercups Day Nursery

The 'Why' Behind Little Magic Train

Young children learn best through experiences that involve the whole body and all the senses. Movement, rhythm, language and imagination work together to strengthen the brain's developing neural pathways.

Each Little Magic Train adventure combines movement, music, storytelling and sensory exploration to encourage children to listen, respond and participate.

Through shared adventures children develop:

- Communication and language
- Physical coordination and confidence
- Attention and listening skills
- Imagination and creative thinking
- Social interaction and collaboration

Through these experiences children build strong foundations for learning.

The ‘How’ Behind Little Magic Train

Every session follows a **consistent and familiar structure**, helping children feel confident as the adventure begins.

The train itself acts like the **bread in a sandwich**, providing the familiar beginning and ending of each journey, with the adventure forming the filling.

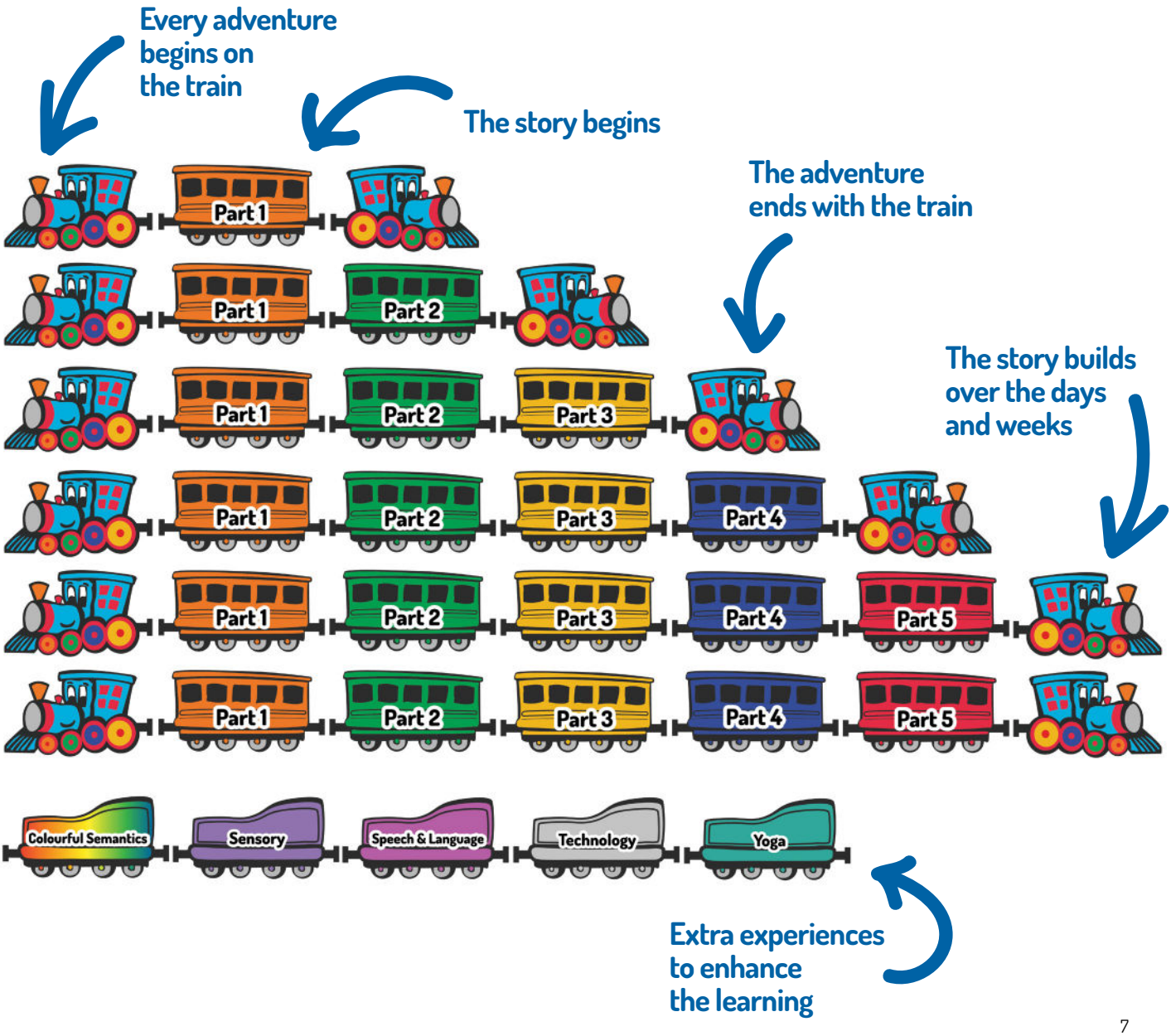
This repeated structure supports:

- anticipation and attention
- memory and recall
- confidence in participation
- understanding of routine

The approach is intentionally designed to be:

- structured yet playful
- familiar yet imaginative
- guided yet responsive to children’s ideas and needs

Predictable routines and repeated patterns are particularly valuable for young children and those with additional needs.



Alignment with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Little Magic Train supports key areas of learning within the EYFS.

Communication and Language

Children develop listening, understanding and speaking skills through rhythmic storytelling and repeated language patterns.

Physical Development

Movement-based activities support coordination, spatial awareness and physical confidence.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Shared adventures support collaboration, participation and confidence.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and Exploring
Children investigate imaginative environments.

Active Learning
Repetition supports engagement and persistence.

Creating and Thinking Critically
Children contribute ideas that shape the adventure.

Little Magic Train also supports priorities within the **SEND Code of Practice** and Ofsted's focus on communication, inclusion and high-quality early learning experiences.

Research Foundations

Little Magic Train has been developed using principles from early childhood development, neuroscience and movement-based learning.

The programme combines **movement, rhythm, repetition** and **storytelling** to support how young children naturally learn. These elements engage multiple sensory systems, helping children to build connections between language, movement, attention and imagination.

Movement and Embodied Learning

Research in **embodied cognition** shows that physical movement supports cognitive development by engaging multiple brain systems simultaneously.

When children move while learning, they strengthen connections between language, action and memory, supporting deeper understanding and recall.

Research references:
Glenberg (2010)
Shams & Seitz (2008)

Supporting Language Development

Research has shown that some children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) demonstrate differences in the development of neural pathways involved in language learning.

This highlights the importance of providing rich, repeated and multi-sensory language experiences in early childhood environments. Structured storytelling, rhythmic language patterns and shared participation can help children practise and strengthen communication skills within supportive learning experiences.

Research reference:
Krishnan, Watkins & Bishop (2022), University of Oxford

Repetition and Neural Development

Repeated experiences strengthen neural pathways in the developing brain through a process known as myelination, where nerve fibres become insulated, allowing signals to travel more efficiently between brain cells.

Learning experiences that combine repetition, rhythm, movement and language help to reinforce these neural pathways. Over time, repeated participation in structured activities can support improvements in attention, memory and skill development.

> "Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes myelin, and myelin makes perfect."
> – Daniel Coyle, The Talent Code

Research reference:
Coyle, D. (2009)

Courtesy of Buttercups Day Nursery

Alignment with the Foundation Phase of the Curriculum for Wales

Little Magic Train supports the holistic, learner-centred approach of the Curriculum for Wales, enabling children to develop through meaningful, multi-sensory experiences.

Belonging

Children develop a sense of belonging through shared storytelling experiences, where they feel included, valued and confident to participate alongside others.

Communication

Children develop listening, understanding and speaking skills through rhythmic storytelling, repeated language patterns and opportunities to respond and express ideas.

Exploration

Children build on their natural curiosity as they explore imaginative environments, experiment with movement and engage in creative, open-ended experiences.

Physical Development

Movement-based activities support coordination, spatial awareness and physical confidence, helping children to develop control and body awareness.

Well-being

Shared adventures support collaboration, participation and emotional confidence, helping children to feel safe, engaged and motivated to learn.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and Exploring
Children investigate imaginative environments.

Active Learning
Repetition supports engagement and persistence.

Creating and Thinking Critically
Children contribute ideas that shape the adventure.

Little Magic Train also supports priorities within Estyn's ALN guidance on communication, inclusion and high-quality early learning experiences.

Resources are available in Welsh-medium.

Supporting Inclusive Practice (SEND)

Little Magic Train enables children with a wide range of communication abilities to participate in shared storytelling experiences.

The structured repetition and sensory engagement support children who may experience challenges with:

- expressive language
- attention and regulation
- social interaction
- imaginative play

Practitioners report that children who previously required 1:1 adult support during group activities were able to participate more independently.

Courtesy of School of Play

Supporting Children with Complex and Profound Needs

Little Magic Train also includes sensory storytelling experiences designed for children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

These experiences focus on:

- sensory exploration
- anticipation and routine
- shared attention
- cause-and-effect interaction

By ensuring each adventure can be experienced at different levels, the programme supports fully inclusive storytelling experiences.

Impact in Early Years Settings

Practitioner Evidence

Feedback from participating early years settings highlights how Little Magic Train supports children's engagement, communication and confidence during group learning experiences.

Practitioners consistently reported that children who previously found it difficult to join group activities became more willing to participate, communicate and share ideas during Little Magic Train sessions.

These changes were particularly noticeable for quieter children and those with additional communication needs.

Settings observed improvements in:

- Engagement and sustained attention
- Communication and language use
- Confidence in group participation
- Imaginative play and storytelling
- Willingness to interact with peers and adults

Engagement and Participation

Many settings reported improvements in children's communication skills, particularly through repeated storytelling, language, and shared imaginative experiences.

New Moston Primary School

"Children really improved in engagement and communication. All the children have really developed in attention during sessions."

Soar Childcare and Education Ltd

"Those with communication difficulties had excellent repetition and therefore opportunities to practise skills over and over, which is often difficult in a busy day. It offers many chances for differentiation in communication and introducing new vocabulary."

Practitioners also noted that children began using new words and ideas introduced during the adventures within other areas of learning.

Confidence and Social Participation

Several practitioners reported that children who were initially hesitant to join group activities became more confident participants over time.

Kennington Pre-School

"Children were more likely to join in with adults and others."

Wootton and Dry Sandford Preschool

"We have a few children who do not engage in any activity but when we do the Magic Train they are fully engaged and join in. Little Magic Train is great for bringing out confidence in shy children."

Practitioners also observed that children increasingly contributed their own ideas to the storytelling adventures, helping shape the direction of the shared narrative.

Example of Children's Progress

Settings shared examples of how individual children developed confidence and communication through repeated participation.

New Moston Primary School

"At the start of the sessions one of our children joined in for only a few seconds and needed 1:1 adult support. Now he asks for Little Magic Train, sits with his train ready and confidently joins in independently for the whole session."

Confidential Setting

"Younger children were more vocal and sure of themselves, more confident."

Across participating settings, 100% of respondents said they would recommend Little Magic Train to other early years settings.

Case Study:

Confidential Setting

A group of mixed-age children at a SEN hub within a Primary School.

Number of children: 5

Before the Little Magic Train Sessions

How would you describe the children's engagement or confidence in group storytelling, movement or imaginative play before the Little Magic Train sessions?

"The SEN hub had just opened and there was a mix of children aged 5-8 with varying needs. Staff were unsure how to support speech, language and communication with the children together as they have different communication skills and preferences. The children were not able to actively participate in a joint session prior to LMT sessions"

During the Sessions

What stood out most about the children's participation during the Little Magic Train adventures?

"The children love the sessions! When I go into the SEN hub to deliver the session, the children are straight away over to the beanbags ready to begin our session. They love telling or showing me where Simon has been hiding!

They also love the repetition of making Simon bigger and smaller and it's been amazing to see them do this more independently. They really respond to the changes in the music and anticipate when it will change to signal getting bigger/smaller again.

The children have really enjoyed the stories and bringing this to life throughout the rest of the week."

After the Sessions

Did you notice any changes in the children's confidence, communication, or willingness to join group activities?

"We are continuing to do LMT each week so it has not finished as such. I'm not in the hub all day or week, but staff have shared lots of positive stories about the children using more language to comment on the theme (related to LMT). Some children have reenacted parts of the session in their own play (a child who does not engage in pretend or imaginary play typically)."

Example of Progress

Please share one small example of something a child did that showed progress.

"One child will now comment on what he can see on the journey. We placed pictures of different planets around the room and as we pass through them on the train he will now say 'I think I can see saturn!'. This child had very little language 1-2 years ago.

Another child has limited gross motor skills. When we did the north pole adventure story we made obstacle courses with the soft play and that child is now able to step up/down more confidently. She couldn't do this before and it was a great way to build in her targets in a fun way!

We used a bilibo for 'blast off' with Picnic On the Moon. The children took turns getting in the 'seat', putting their seatbelt on, spinning or wobbling for a 5 or 10 second count down and then blasting off and running towards a specific spot in school saying whoosh. Initially the adults were modelling this, however, with the repetition the children joined in with the countdown and the 'whoooosh!'. It was a great opportunity to practice turn-taking and the reward of getting to have fun on the seat was motivating for them to watch and wait."

Courtesy of Little Giants Nursery

Case Study:

Little Giants Nursery

A group of mixed-age children at a preschool.

Number of children: 27

Before the Little Magic Train Sessions

How would you describe the children's engagement or confidence in group storytelling, movement or imaginative play before the Little Magic Train sessions?

"Imaginative play was beginning to develop, but was not yet consistent across the group."

During the Sessions

What stood out most about the children's participation during the Little Magic Train adventures?

"Children actively take part and are excited when they know it is time for Little Magic Train."

After the Sessions

Did you notice any changes in the children's confidence, communication, or willingness to join group activities?

"When we first started the Little Magic Train some children would sit on the side lines or need adult support to join in, now most are quick to get to our starting point area where we start our journeys."

Example of Progress

Please share one small example of something a child did that showed progress.

"The Little Magic train was a great success today every child chose to take part. Thought you would like to see the photo of the children all in the 'Little Magic Train' on their way to Africa for their Safari adventure." (above)

Practitioner Reflections

Practitioners consistently described Little Magic Train as a valuable and engaging learning experience that supports communication, confidence and participation for a wide range of learners.

Educators highlighted how the adventures capture children's attention while also supporting speech and language development, imaginative play and social interaction.

"At Buttercups Nursery, our children absolutely love Little Magic Train! The imaginative adventures capture their attention from the very start.

The repetition of words and phrases supports speech and language development, and we have seen real progress in children's confidence to communicate.

The system is easy to use, well organised and makes planning seamless.

Little Magic Train is a truly engaging, fun and educational resource that brings learning to life through movement, storytelling and play."

Buttercups Montessori Nursery

"Outstanding! The Little Magic Train sessions offer great value for money and have added an extra dimension to our Early Years provision.

Gina delivers training with such passion and energy that you can't help but be inspired to do the same with the children.

I would definitely recommend Little Magic Train."

School of Play, Manchester

"Here at Marcham Pre-School, we have been using Little Magic Train with the children since 2012, and we always experience such engagement and joy from all participants..

Our pre-school have children aged from just 2 until nearly 5 and so it's been important to us to have something we can use and adapt to suit all ages and the needs of each cohort. In fact, it's become so popular with the children that they wanted to be involved once they reached Reception class, so much so that we organised shared PE sessions in the hall including children up to 7!

We particularly enjoy the wide range of 'adventures' available that we can explore and find that the extension activities are a useful addition to our curriculum.

The children enjoy the routine of each session and know what to expect. We use the Little Magic Train session to encourage 'school readiness' skills by getting changed and practising taking off, and putting on shoes, etc.

Gina and her team have always been fantastic at providing support, leading 'sample' sessions and answering any questions we may have. We have had an extremely successful experience with Gina and the Little Magic Train.... carrying out sessions over Zoom during lockdown when the schools were closed.... as well as presenting a session during an Ofsted Inspection (and receiving Outstanding!)

The staff always join in, and I can honestly say it's one of the best products we've ever invested in... no parts to break, and nothing for the children to argue over! Little Magic Train is a versatile, detailed and engaging resource which I would happily recommend to any setting."

Marcham Pre-School

"Little Magic Train has added an extra dimension to our Early Years provision"

The Journey Continues

For more than two decades, Little Magic Train has supported educators in creating joyful, imaginative learning experiences for children.

From specialist movement sessions to a growing online library used across nurseries, preschools and schools, the programme continues to evolve in response to the needs of children and educators.

At its heart, Little Magic Train remains focused on what matters most: helping every child feel confident, included and excited to learn through movement, storytelling and shared adventures.

As new stories and experiences are developed, the Little Magic Train journey moves forward, supporting children to explore, imagine and learn together.

With Little Magic Train, every child is invited on the journey.

Children learn best when they are moving and having fun.

Book your **FREE** discovery call today
to find out how we can help you.

Email: **hello@littlemagictrain.com**
or visit **www.littlemagictrain.com**

See you soon!

Little Magic Train®