

## THE PORTAGE MODEL

### What is Portage?

Portage started as a home-visiting educational service for pre-school children with Special Educational Needs (SEND) and their families. Today, Portage Principles are also applied in Early Years practice within a range of settings, many of which are registered with the National Portage Association and bear the NPA Stamp of Approval.

### Portage aims to:

- work with families to help them develop a quality of life and experience, for themselves and their young children, in which they can learn together, play together, participate and be included in their community in their own right.
- play a part in minimising the disabling barriers that confront young children and their families.
- support the national and local development of inclusive services for children.

### Why 'Portage'?

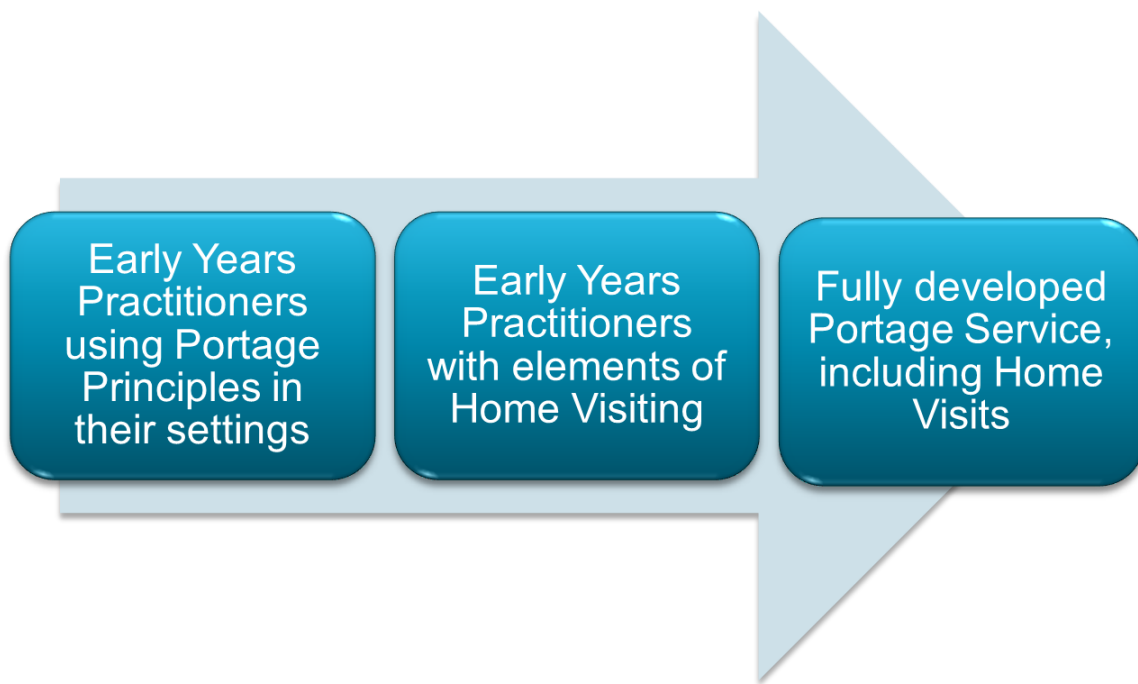
**Portage** is a town in Wisconsin, USA where the first home teaching scheme began. The town is situated between two rivers and takes its name from the French word '*porter*' – to carry – since travellers had to carry their canoes overland between the two rivers.

---

**Portage is a model of support for children and families which can be adapted and used effectively both in the home and in Early Years settings**

---

There are approximately 110 Portage Services in England and Wales registered with the National Portage Association. The services vary in size and nature but their NPA registration identifies the elements of Portage that make it different from other Early Years provision and more importantly ensures that families across the country are guaranteed the same high level of Portage Service delivery.



*Different Models of Portage Practice in England & Wales*

Fully developed Portage Services are characterised by:

- regular home visiting
- supporting the development of play, communication, relationships and learning for young children within the family
- working together with parents/carers within the family, with them taking the lead role in the partnership that is established
- helping parents/carers to identify what is important to them and their child and plan goals for learning and participation
- keeping a shared record of the child's progress and other issues raised by the family
- responding flexibly to the needs of the child and family when providing support
- Portage Practitioners accessing support through regular team meetings and supervision, on behalf of the families with whom they work
- working closely with other agencies

## THE NATIONAL PORTAGE ASSOCIATION

The National Portage Association was established in 1983 to offer support and information to parents and professionals involved in Portage and has been at the forefront of developments in support to young children and their families since then.

---

### NPA Mission Statement

***“Improving the learning of young children with disabilities and the skills of their parents, through the provision of quality training and support for Portage Practitioners and the Early Years workforce.”***

---

To develop and promote the Portage model, the NPA undertakes the following specific activities:

- offering a Code of Practice as a framework for delivering Portage and reviewing this Code as appropriate
- supporting quality of service by providing training with an agreed curriculum as a standard for Portage Practitioners and Early Years practitioner
- listening and responding to members individual or selective concerns at local, regional and national level
- encouraging new developments in the delivery of Portage support
- developing a training curriculum that responds to the training needs of parents, Portage services and Early Years practitioners associated with the Portage Model
- working collaboratively with other organisations dedicated to supporting families and young children
- campaigning for all families with a young child with SEND to have early access to Portage
- keeping NPA members informed about Portage developments via social media, an online support Hub, local/regional study days and a national annual conference.

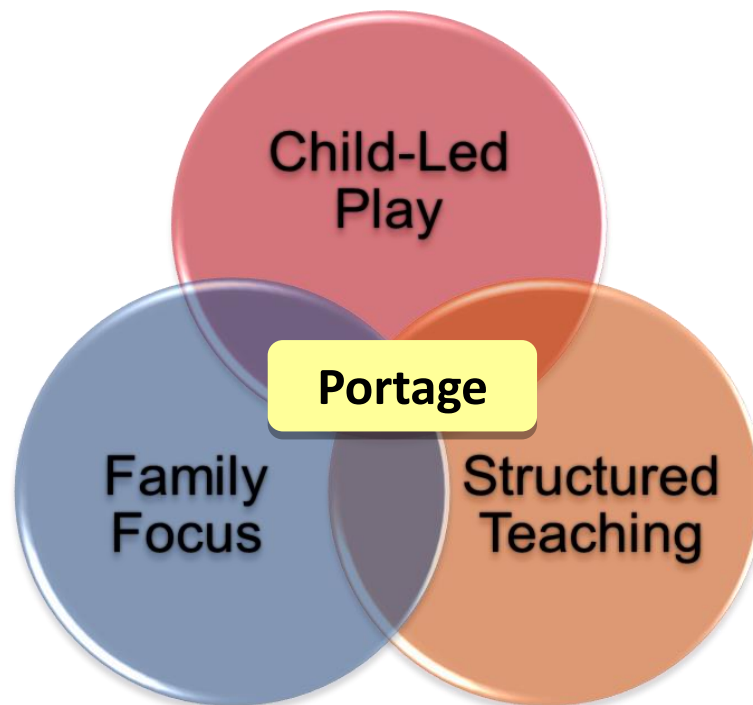
## **NPA Membership**

The Association welcomes applications for membership from any individual who supports its aims and objectives. Benefits of membership include:

- access to a Code of Practice as a framework for delivering Portage Services
- training opportunities through the Curriculum for Professional Development
- contact with others involved in Portage
- voting rights on matters affecting the association
- members only area on the NPA website <https://www.portage.org.uk/> – an online resource of Portage expertise including:
  - training and development
  - peer mentorship
  - case studies
  - resources
  - community talk/forums

## THE PORTAGE MODEL

The three essential elements to the Portage model are:



### **Child Led Play**

This is time spent reviewing and planning opportunities for child's independent play either at home or during free play in a setting and includes:

- ▶ responding to child-led free play
- ▶ generalising newly acquired skills
- ▶ discussing play with parents
- ▶ recording significant play observations

This is central to Early Years practice. Play experiences are crucial for children to learn to communicate, interact and gain independence.

### **Family Focus**

This relates to time spent sharing and addressing family priorities, for example:

- ▶ sharing daily experiences and routines
- ▶ addressing needs and looking forward

- ▶ sharing information
- ▶ empowering parents
- ▶ promoting inclusion

This may be easier to achieve in the home environment than in a setting, for example finding a time and place to talk with busy parents can require careful planning, whereas in the home it tends to happen more naturally. Nevertheless, settings that use Portage Principles must strive to create regular opportunities for this essential element of the model.

### **Structured Teaching**

The time spent reviewing and planning teaching activities, for example:

- ▶ joint planning and practice of a teaching activity
- ▶ checking what happened since the last visit/teaching session
- ▶ deciding what to do next with parents/key worker
- ▶ trying out a new activity and reviewing its success

This part of the model complements the plan, do, review approach of the SEND guidance for Early Years settings.

The Portage model is flexible and the time spent on each element during a home visit or within a setting will vary depending on the needs of the child and the family.

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

In Portage, partnership is with:

- ✓ children and families
- ✓ other professionals
- ✓ the Portage Team

Effective partnership depends on flexibility, good relationships, trust, confidentiality and valuing individual needs. In practice this means sharing skills, ideas, responsibilities, anxieties and successes.

**Working in partnership is fundamental to the Portage approach. It is at the heart of all planning and decision-making around the child and family.**

It helps provide a holistic view of the child which takes into account the needs of the wider family and helps coordinate the support that the Early Years setting and other agencies can provide.

Many children and families have a large number of agencies working with them and having to coordinate professionals and appointments can put additional strain on families who may already be struggling. The Portage Home Visitor is often in an ideal position to help bring these agencies together to jointly plan for the child, as they work closely with the family, building up a trusting relationship which enables them to take on a pivotal 'Key Worker' role.



The Key Worker role was advocated by *Early Support*; an approach which provides a first point of contact, emotional and practical support, coordination with all other professionals involved and signposting to local and national information and specialist support. The Early Support programme was funded by the Department for Education until 2015 and is now embedded in many SEND services around the country.

Its aim is to improve the way that services work with parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities from birth to adulthood across health, education and social care. It played an integral role in coordinating and bringing together key professionals from across the education, health and social care sector to support the transition and implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability reforms (2014).

The ethos of both Early Support and Portage are complementary and focus on partnership working which puts the child and family at the centre of any decision-making process.

---

## **The Importance of Working in Partnership**

For very young children local authorities should consider commissioning the provision of home-based programmes such as Portage, or peripatetic services for children with hearing or vision impairment.

**Parents should be fully involved in making decisions about the nature of the help and support that they would like to receive.**

SEND Code of Practice 2015 9.144

---

## THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING WITH PARENTS

The importance of working effectively with parents, valuing their knowledge and expertise and respecting their role as the first and chief educator of their child is increasingly being recognised and encouraged as a critical element of high quality services for children and young people. It is a key priority of the 2014 SEND reforms. Portage services have always supported this principle and aim to empower families to be confident in their role, whatever their child's needs may be.

---

**Partnership with parents is the keystone of Portage.**

---



Parents know their child best and are a vital element in helping professionals who work with the family to understand how the child learns. The Portage Home Visitor's role is to take the parent's knowledge and help them to see how they can move their child forward with their learning through play, events and routines that happen naturally throughout the day.

---

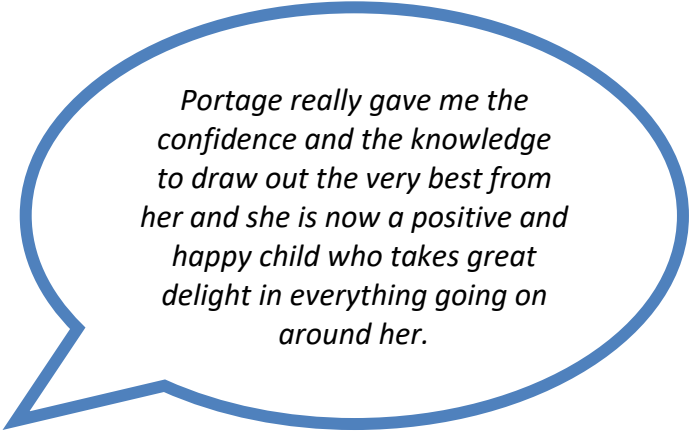
### The Importance of Working in Partnership

Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time.

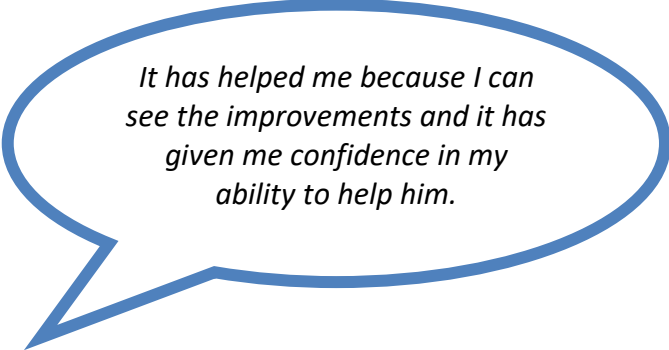
**Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.**

EYFS 2021

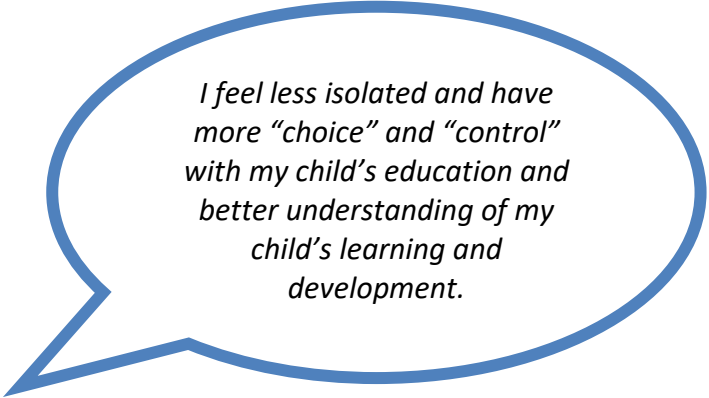
---

**Parent Quotes:**

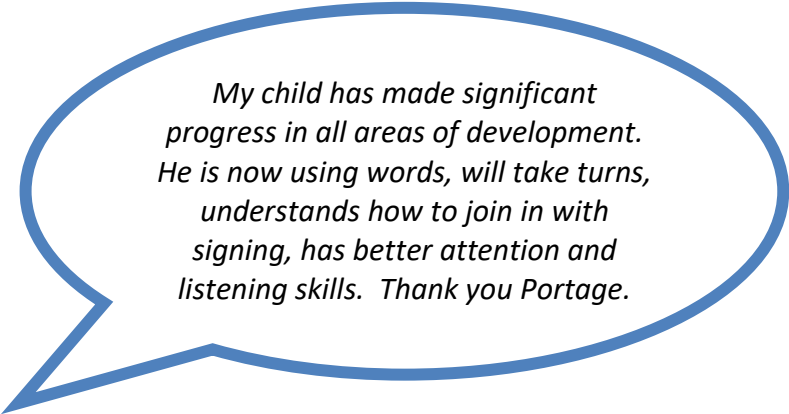
*Portage really gave me the confidence and the knowledge to draw out the very best from her and she is now a positive and happy child who takes great delight in everything going on around her.*



*It has helped me because I can see the improvements and it has given me confidence in my ability to help him.*



*I feel less isolated and have more “choice” and “control” with my child’s education and better understanding of my child’s learning and development.*



*My child has made significant progress in all areas of development. He is now using words, will take turns, understands how to join in with signing, has better attention and listening skills. Thank you Portage.*

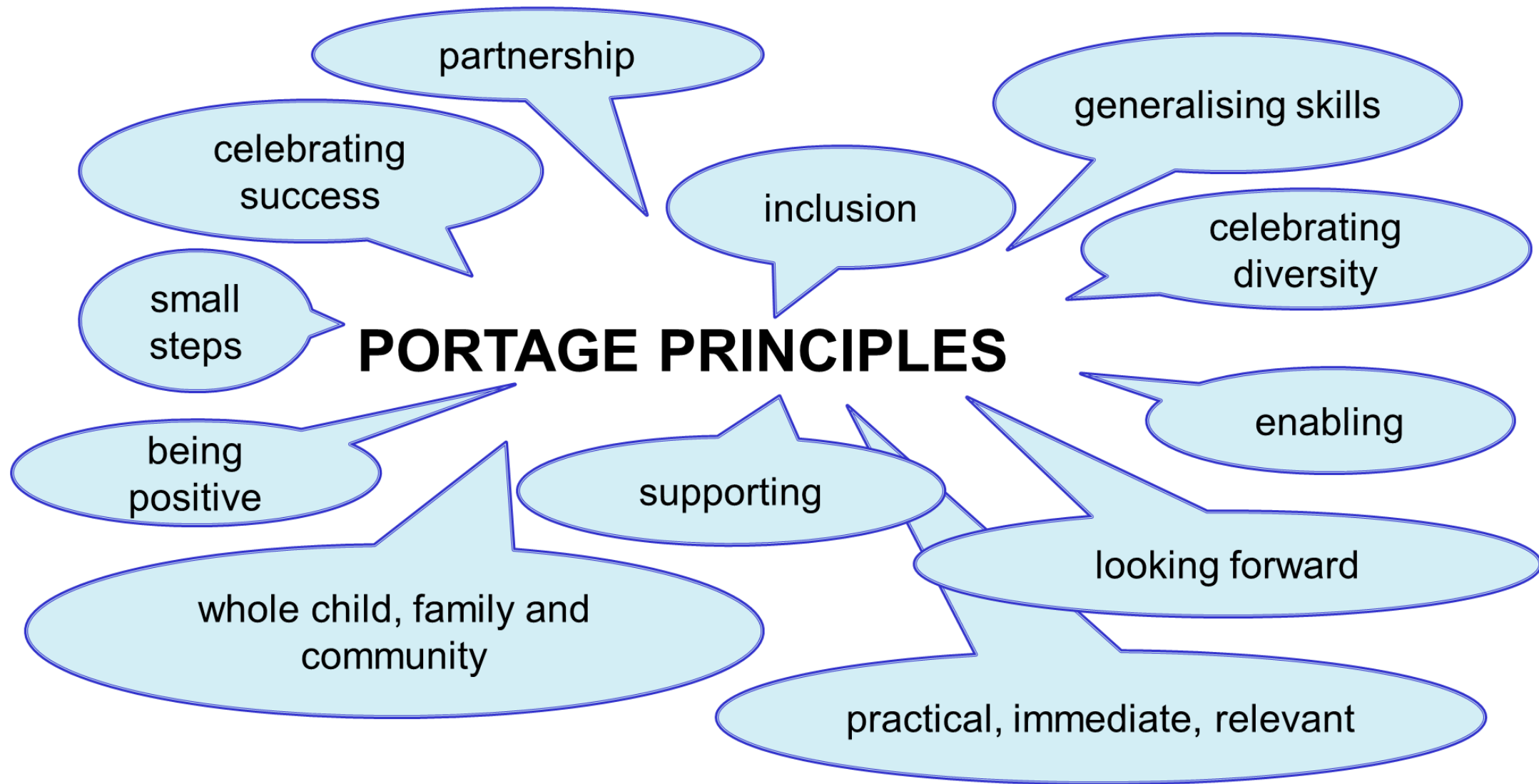
|                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| <b>UNDERLYING VALUES OF PORTAGE</b> |
|-------------------------------------|

The National Portage Association is committed to a number of key principles which are reflected throughout this workshop.

**Portage is founded on the following values and principles:**

- every child and every family are of equal worth and has the right to be valued for their individuality
- every individual has the right to participate and be included in the community in their own right
- families have the right to make choices and decisions for themselves about things that are important to them now and in the future
- all children have the right to enjoy the widest range of play experiences, as these are the foundation of learning and development
- early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives: it is not just a preparation for the next stage - it is vitally important in itself
- parents play the key role in supporting the young child's core development
- everyday contacts, relationships and activities are fundamental in nurturing development, quality of life and experience
- services for families are most useful when they support everyday living and are delivered within the child's natural environment
- all children are able to learn. Building on abilities and strengths, rather than focusing on difficulties, best supports their progress

These Principles are summarised in the diagram on the next page and are referred to throughout the workshop:



## HOW THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE THEMES CORRESPOND WITH THE PORTAGE PRINCIPLES

The four themes of the EYFS underpin the current guidance. These themes are as follows:

### ✓ **A Unique Child**

Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

### ✓ **Positive relationships**

Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.

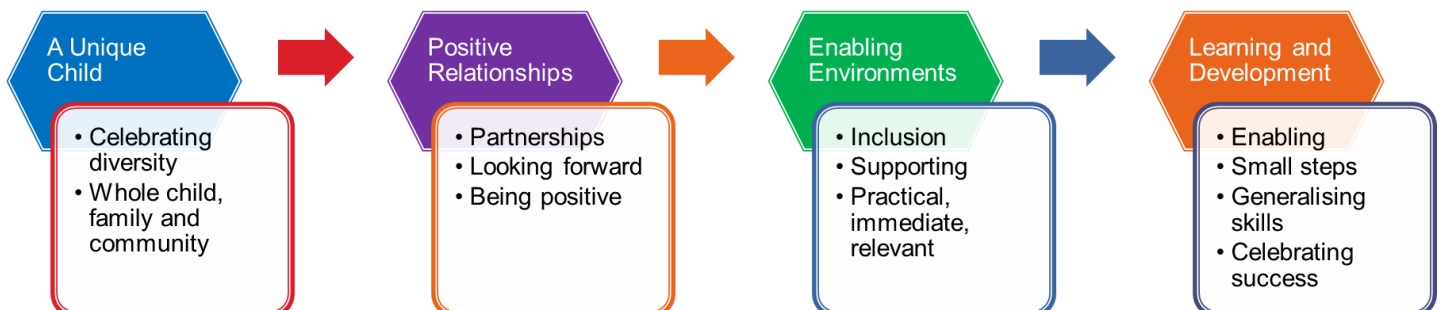
### ✓ **Enabling Environments**

Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and carers.

### ✓ **Learning and Development**

Children develop and learn in different ways. The framework covers the education and care of all children in Early Years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

If we map the Portage Principles onto the four themes of the EYFS, it is clear that all they all fit naturally within at least one of the four themes:



In this way, it can be seen that the Portage Principles are in line with current EYFS practice and that they complement each other.

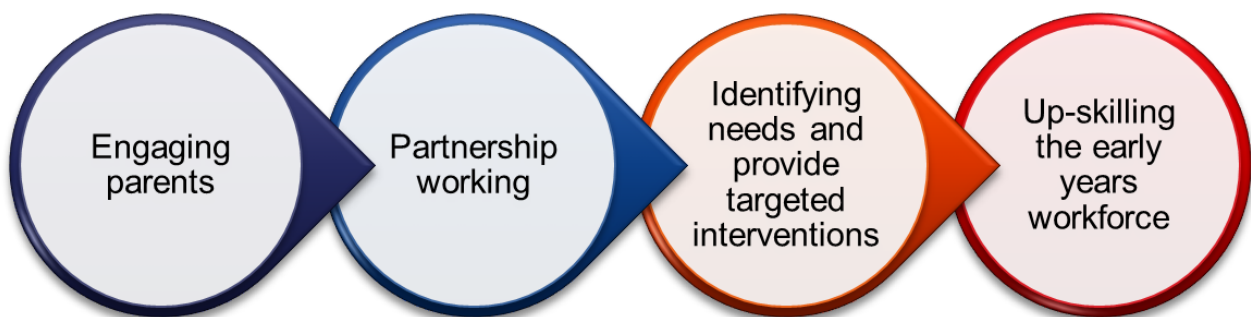
## NATIONAL CONTEXT

Significant changes to legislation have taken place since 2010, with a wave of new initiatives in the area of Early Years and SEND, including:

- 1) Equalities Act 2010
- 2) The Children and Families Act 2014
- 3) SEND Code of Practice 2015
- 4) Early Education Entitlement for 2 year olds
- 5) Improving Outcomes for Disabled Children
- 6) SEND Green Paper 2022

There is a focus on:

- ✓ Coordination and joint working between all services that support children and their families
- ✓ Involving children, young people and parents in decision-making
- ✓ Publishing details of how children with SEND are supported via the 'local offer'
- ✓ Education and Health Care Needs Assessment from Birth to 25
- ✓ Targeted early intervention, with a growing number of children with SEND attending Early Years settings from the age of two



Key features of effective interventions that improve outcomes for disabled children (*Narrowing the Gap in Outcomes for Vulnerable Children 2009*)

### Where does Portage fit within this national context?

Including Portage within the local authority's 'local offer' addresses many of these key national priorities (early intervention, improving outcomes for disabled children, multi-agency working and parents as partners).

Portage can play an important role in ensuring families who have eligible children with SEND take up their 2yr old nursery places and that settings are equipped with the skills to support these children.

### **PORTAGE WORKS!**

Portage services have been working in this country for more than 40 years. There have been many evaluations indicating the value families and professionals place on the input from these services. The effectiveness of Portage has also been recognised by more formal evaluation by OFSTED. The quality of teaching offered by Portage Services and the relationship established with parents receives consistently high ratings. The effectiveness of Portage services has also been acknowledged in legislation and guidance published by the Department for Education, such as the 2015 SEND Code of Practice.

The techniques and principles of Portage can be effectively applied within Early Years settings to better meet the needs of children with SEND. This has been demonstrated by the settings across the country that have gained the NPA Stamp of Approval.

---

**Portage is an effective form of early intervention and skilled Portage practitioners are ideally placed to support Early Years practitioners in their work with children with SEND.**

---