

Storal acquires Children 1st

Storal and Children 1st are delighted to announce Storal's acquisition of the Children 1st group. Founded in 1988 by Margaret Mason OBE, Children 1st is one of the highest quality nursery groups in the sector, operating 24 nurseries and a leading training centre in The Midlands and South Yorkshire. Margaret has been one of the leading lights in Early Years education for more than three decades – earning an OBE for her commitment to raising standards in early-years education. She will continue her work with children through her Charity, The Margaret Mason Children 1st Trust, which supports children and families in her local community.

Speaking about her decision to sell to Storal, Margaret said, "I can't imagine it in better hands. It's been my focus for so many years and I'm delighted that it will continue to flourish under Storal's management. I'm so proud of the amazing and experienced team who have built Children 1st alongside me for so long, and I'm confident that Sarah is the right person to lead them and the business into the future, with her experience and long-term commitment to delivering quality provision and team wellbeing. I also know from our discussions that Storal shares our core values, and has the backing and resources to move what we've built at Children 1st forward."

Of the acquisition, which will see 23 of the Children 1st nurseries join Storal, Sarah Mackenzie, Chief Executive of Storal, said, "I've been following Children 1st for many years. Throughout my career, I've looked to Children 1st as one of the great pioneers of high-quality early-years education. I have enormous admiration for everything Margaret has built and believe she has created an everlasting legacy – both at Children 1st and in the wider sector. After 36 years, she is now handing the reins to us, and this isn't a responsibility we take lightly. We want to create more milestones in their Magic Story and continue her pioneering work in the sector, supporting and fighting for the teams of educators around the UK who deliver such vital work, and the families, children and communities we serve."

Graphite Capital, a leading UK mid-market private equity firm and investor in Storal since 2023, has thrown its full support behind this acquisition. Tony Saade, Graphite partner, said, "We are excited to bring together two leading education providers in the early-years space. Storal and Children 1st share a firm ethos of positively impacting children development and attainment in life, which we commit to protect and nurture. The combination of Storal and Children 1st creates a unique early-years group in the UK, with the welfare of children, educators and parents at the heart of every decision. This is a transformational moment for Storal, and Sarah and the team continue to have our full support to make this journey a success."

With the addition of Children 1st's nurseries, Storal's enlarged group will become one of the largest, and highest rated, quality nursery groups, offering over 5000 places across 53 nurseries. While growing in size, the Storal team remain committed to supporting their individual team members across the country, and to empowering them to deliver a service that feels authentic to the communities, families and children they serve.

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