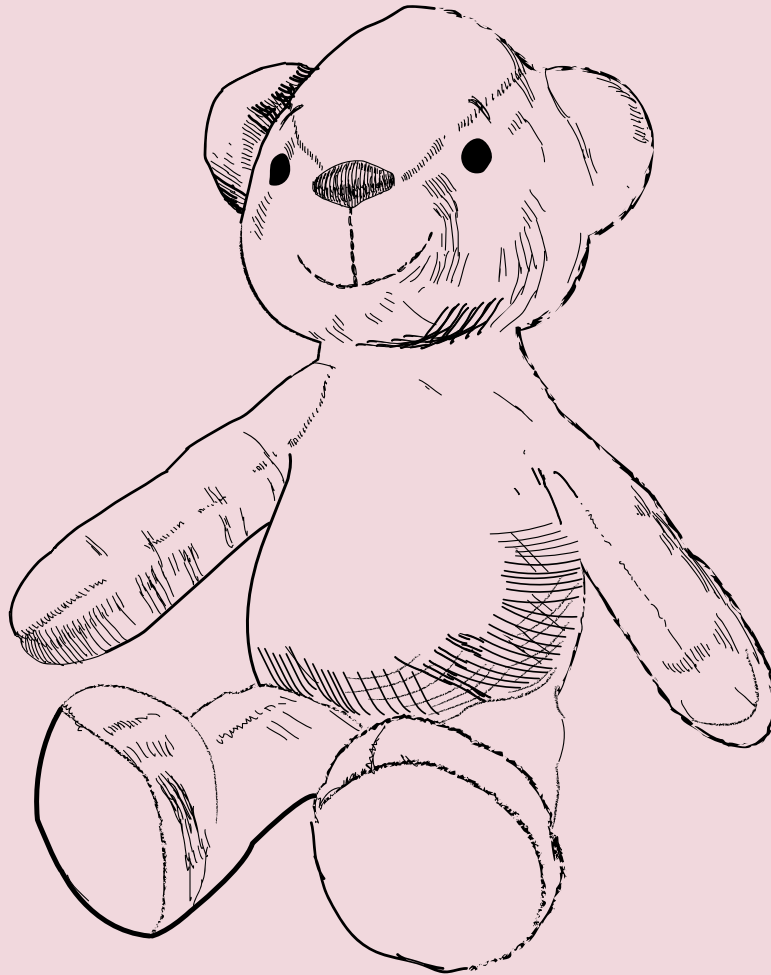


Early education and childcare resource pack



Helping children and young people to fulfil their potential is a key ambition of all councils, but our children's services are under increasing pressure.

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Foreword

A child's earliest years are their foundation; if we give them a great start, they have a much better chance of fulfilling their potential as they grow up. As councils, we have a big role to play here across a wide range of services, from housing and health to family support and education. This resource pack looks at the ways that we deliver our responsibilities around early education and childcare, which are incredibly important when it comes to giving our youngest residents a head start.

We know that children who are behind when they start school are unlikely to ever catch up to their peers – and that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to achieve expected levels of development. We also know that high quality childcare can support children's development and increase academic skills, helping children who start off at a lower level to catch up before they start school. Securing enough high-quality childcare for the children in our area, then, is something we need to invest our time and energy into, to make sure children can get the places they need.

This decade has seen big changes in terms of childcare and early education for children and families. Every three- and four-year-old is now entitled to 15 hours of free childcare every week of the school year; many will be eligible for 30 hours. Disadvantaged two-year-olds can also access the 15 hours. In addition, we have a new early years funding formula, which has had different impacts in different areas of the country. Councils have done an incredible job of bringing together early years partners to make these changes work locally, and despite the difficulties of squeezed funding, reduced resources and increased workloads, are finding ways to meet the needs of pre-school children.

Councils are seeing increasing demand for support for children with special educational needs and disabilities in the early years, as they are at all stages of the school system. This is particularly challenging in the context of the 30 hours policy and pressures on the high needs budget, and we are keen to hear from councils who are finding effective ways to meet this challenge so that all children can access the childcare they need.

Councils' statutory abilities to intervene on quality in childcare settings are extremely limited, yet we know that around the country, they are facilitating highly effective networks and training opportunities to improve standards wherever possible. This resource pack includes some examples of the work councils are carrying out, demonstrating their vital convening role and their work as place-shapers and drivers of change.

The Government has recognised the role of early education in improving social mobility, dedicating one of the four ambitions in its social mobility action plan to closing the 'word gap' in the early years. The Local Government Association (LGA) will be working closely with government to support the delivery of this ambition, including through the implementation of an early years peer review programme. If you are interested in your council taking part, visit www.local.gov.uk/early-years-social-mobility-peer-review-programme to find out how.

The more prepared children are to start school, the more they're able to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way. We owe every child the chance to have a really bright future, and an outstanding early years offer is a key piece of that puzzle.

Councillor Anntoinette Bramble

Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board

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Early years childcare and education: an introduction

What are 'early childhood services'?

Section 2 of the Childcare Act 2006 identifies early childhood services as early years provision in addition to broader services such as social care and health services.

The Act places a duty on councils to improve the wellbeing of young children in their area and reduce inequalities with regard to:

- physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution made by them to society
- social and economic wellbeing.

This resource pack will focus on childcare and education for children up to the age of five. More information on early childhood services can be found in other LGA publications, including those on children's services and public health.

What are councils' responsibilities around early education and childcare?

The council must secure 'early childhood services' for the benefit of parents, prospective parents and young children, taking 'reasonable steps' to involve parents, early years providers and other relevant people in those arrangements. They must also consider the quantity and quality of services,

and where in the area they are provided, and consider the views of young children where possible.¹

Councils must also make sure that there is enough childcare available for every eligible two, three and four-year-old to access their free 15 or 30 hours per week² (see next section). They should also work to identify parents in the area who might not take advantage of early childhood services that could benefit them and their children, and encourage them to take these up.³

There is a duty on councils to provide advice, information and assistance about childcare in their area, including for disabled children, and to make sure this is provided in a way that is best for those who need it.⁴ This is usually provided through their family information service, plus local websites.

Councils must also provide information, advice and training for childcare providers in their area, imposing reasonable charges for this if they wish.⁵

With regard to the early years foundation stage (see 'legislation and practice'), local authorities have a statutory responsibility to set up and carry out moderation arrangements⁶ to:

- secure the consistency and accuracy of judgements made by different practitioners

1 Childcare Act 2006, s2

2 Childcare Act 2006, s7 and Childcare Act 2016, s1

3 Childcare Act 2006, s3

4 Childcare Act 2006, s12

5 Childcare act 2006, s13

6 The Early Years Foundation Stage (Learning and Development Requirements) Order 2007

- reassure practitioners that their judgements are accurate, valid and consistent with national standards
- assure moderators that an acceptable level of accuracy and validity has been achieved for assessments recorded and reported by the settings for which they have responsibility.

What early education and childcare are children entitled to?

There is a variety of entitlements and support for childcare available, with specific support for working families and disadvantaged families. Childcare calculators at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk help parents to understand the best choices for them.

All three- to four-year-olds in England can get 570 hours of free early education or childcare per year from the term after their third birthday. This is usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year, or traditional school term-time.

Support for working families

Children of parents (including foster parents) who are working and each earning at least £120 a week, but no more than £100,000 a year, are eligible for an additional 15 hours free childcare on top of the universal offer.

Tax-free childcare supports working parents earning up to £100,000 per year (per parent). For every £8 paid by parents to a registered childcare provider via an online account, the Government will provide a £2 top-up, up to a maximum of £2,000 per year. The scheme is available for children up to the age of 11, or up to 17 if they are disabled. Parents can use tax-free childcare alongside the 15 or 30 hour offers, but not at the same time as childcare vouchers, universal credit or tax credits.

Childcare voucher schemes closed to new applicants on 6 April 2018, but those who joined before that date can remain on the scheme while they remain with the same employer and the scheme continues to be

offered by that employer. The scheme allows parents to take up to £55 a week of their wages as childcare vouchers, which they don't pay tax or National Insurance on.

Support for disadvantaged families

Two-year-olds can get 15 hours free early education and childcare if their parents receive certain benefits, including income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Universal Credit. They can also get this if they're looked after by a local council, have a current statement of special education needs (SEN) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, receive Disability Living Allowance or have left care under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order.

Parents in receipt of Universal Credit can claim back up to 85 per cent of their childcare costs, up to £646 for one child or £1108 for two or more children per month. For parents still claiming Working Tax Credit (ie where they have not yet moved onto Universal Credit), up to 70 per cent of childcare costs can be claimed back.

Where do children access early education and childcare?

Tax-free childcare, the early years entitlements and childcare vouchers can only be used at registered childcare providers, which include:

Maintained sector provision: nursery schools and nursery classes

Maintained sector provision is either schools for children aged two to five (maintained nursery schools) or nurseries attached to primary schools (nursery classes); both are maintained by the council. They generally offer early childhood education and care during school hours. Maintained nursery schools and nursery classes have greater

statutory obligations on them than other provision, including the requirement to employ a qualified school teacher, and designating a qualified teacher as a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Maintained nursery schools also have to have a headteacher, and so are generally more expensive to run than other provision, but these obligations aim to ensure high-quality provision, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Private, voluntary and independent nurseries (PVI)

These can be run by private companies, community groups, individuals or employers, and they must be registered with the Ofsted Early Years register.

Registered childminders

Childminders registered with Ofsted can choose to offer the 15 and 30 hour entitlements. They often provide more flexible arrangements than nurseries can, including evening and weekends.

How do parents access these entitlements?

- Applications for the universal 15 hours for three and four-year-olds are through the nursery or childminder, who will submit a claim to the local authority on the parents' behalf.
- Applications for 30 hours free childcare are via an online form; parents are then sent a code which should be provided to the nursery as proof of eligibility.
- Applications for 15 free hours for two-year-olds are via a form from the local authority.

How is early education and childcare funded?

Councils are funded for early year's provision through the early years block in the dedicated schools grant (DSG). This is allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) using the early years national funding formula (EYNFF),

which takes into account the number of eligible children in an area, the number on free school meals, and the number for whom English is an additional language. The formula also includes an area cost adjustment multiplier to reflect variations in local costs. This uses the General Labour Market measure to indicate staff costs and nursery rates cost adjustment (NRCA) to indicate cost of premises.

Councils must use a locally-determined, transparent formula – the early years single funding formula (EYSFF) – to allocate the early years block to providers. Providers and the Schools Forum should be consulted on the local formula, and councils must pass through at least 95 per cent of the early years block to providers. The rest can be retained for central costs, such as support for providers.

The formula for entitlements for three and four-year-olds should consist of a universal base rate for all providers (by 2019/20), with additional supplements based on local needs or policy objectives. The formula must include a supplement to account for deprivation, and councils can also include them for issues related to rurality or sparsity, flexibility, quality and English as an additional language.

In contrast, funding for the two-year-old offer includes no compulsory supplements, and councils are encouraged to offer a flat hourly rate for all providers.

Following the introduction of the EYNFF, supplementary funding has been provided for maintained nursery schools up to 2019/20 in acknowledgement of their additional legislative responsibilities. Government is reviewing funding options for future years.

What provision is available for disadvantaged children or those with special educational needs and disability?

Early years pupil premium

Additional funding is provided to local authorities through the early years pupil premium (EYPP) to support disadvantaged pupils aged three and four, including looked-after children and those whose parents

receive certain benefits. The EYPP remains distinct from the early years national funding formula and is a separate funding stream within the DSG.

Early years providers are responsible for identifying eligible children. In particular, providers should speak to the parents of children who took up the early education entitlement for two-year-olds, as most of these children will attract EYPP when they turn three. Councils can check eligibility for the EYPP through a DfE online eligibility checking system.

SEN inclusion fund

All councils are required to establish an inclusion fund in their local funding systems for three and four-year olds with SEN taking up childcare entitlements. This should be targeted at children with lower level or emerging SEN, to support providers working with these children. Children with more complex needs and those in receipt of an education, health and care (EHC) plan continue to be eligible to receive funding via the high needs block of the DSG.

In order to establish an SEN inclusion fund, local authorities will combine the amount from either one or both of their early years block and high needs block of the DSG. Local authorities must consult with early years providers to set the value of their local SEN inclusion fund.

Councils must consult with early years providers, parents and SEN specialists on how the SEN inclusion fund will be allocated, as part of the preparation and review of their 'Local Offer'.

SEN inclusion fund top-up grants are payable to providers and count towards the 95 per cent pass through rate. Specialist SEN services paid for centrally from the SEN inclusion fund, however, do not count towards the pass through rate.

Disability access fund

Children aged three and four in free early education are eligible for the disability access fund (DAF) if they receive Child disability Living Allowance. The one-off payment of £615 per year is for providers to make reasonable adjustments to their setting and/or helping with building capacity. This is funded by central government.

Legislation and practice

Education Act 2002

Section 78 of the Act applies to maintained nursery schools and funded nursery education, and specifies that the curriculum must be a balanced and broadly based curriculum which:

- promotes the spiritual, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society
- prepares the pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

Childcare Act 2006

This is the key piece of legislation with regard to childcare and early years provision.

The Act places a duty on local authorities to improve the wellbeing of young children in their area, and reduce inequalities in relation to issues including physical and mental health and wellbeing, education, and social and economic wellbeing.

Councils are also expected to make sure that there is sufficient provision of children's centres to meet the need of local parents, prospective parents and young children, as far as is reasonably practicable. The Act states that children's centres are places, or groups of places, where early childhood services are provided or advice is given on accessing those services.

The duty to ensure enough childcare, where possible, for working parents is set out by the Act, along with the requirement to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on childcare and

other services that may be of benefit to them or their children.

Councils must also secure information, advice and training for childcare providers, for which they can impose 'reasonable' charges.

Children and Families Act 2014

The Children and Families Act 2014 made provisions around the support available to children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. This includes joint commissioning arrangements between councils and the NHS, the introduction of education, health and care plans and the publication of a local offer.

Childcare Act 2016

This Act was the legislative basis for the 30 hours free childcare for three and four-year-old children of working parents.

Early years foundation stage

The early years foundation stage (EYFS) was established under the Childcare Act 2006 and sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five years old.

All schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers must follow the EYFS, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes.

The areas of learning are:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development
- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design.

Children are assessed in the classroom, rather than being tested. Assessment is against early learning goals, which outline the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the academic year in which they turn five.

Councils have a statutory responsibility to set up and carry out moderation of these assessments.

Results of the EYFS are published by the DfE each year: www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-early-years-foundation-stage-profile

These results are at both local and national level, and outline the proportion of children achieving the expected level of development and a good level of development, including by pupil characteristics such as SEND, ethnicity and free school meal eligibility.

Key lines of enquiry for all councillors

Do we have sufficient early years provision in our area?

Councils should produce regular sufficiency assessments to identify whether enough early years provision is available to meet the needs of children and families in their area. Assessments should consider the demand for places versus the supply, for children of different ages and needs, including SEND. Consider also whether spaces are available at atypical hours – many families may need care outside of standard office hours.

Assessments should also look at whether people are able to access their early years entitlements. How many children are eligible for the two-year-old offer, the universal three and four-year-old offer and 30 hours? How many providers are offering funded places?

Assessments will also need to look forward, considering potential changes in both the local population and the provider market. Are market or funding conditions having an impact on providers? Is there a risk to provision going forward?

If there is insufficient provision, what work is being undertaken to improve this? For example, is business advice available to help providers set up or expand? Mixed models of provision can be a helpful way to deliver the 30 hours entitlement, for example using part of the entitlement with a nursery and the other part with a childminder to cover atypical hours. Do providers need support to offer spaces to children with SEND?

Coram Family and Childcare has a number of toolkits available to support local areas in improving sufficiency, including a sufficiency assessment tool and guidance on mixed models of provision:

www.familyandchildcaretrust.org

Is the childcare in our area of a high quality?

There is evidence that while high quality childcare can support children's development and increase academic skills, low quality childcare produces either no benefit or even negative effects.⁷ The quality of provision locally, therefore, is at least as important as the quantity.

This is reflected in funding guidelines, which state that councils should only fund providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, or 'requires improvement' where there isn't enough accessible good and outstanding provision to meet demand. Funding should be withdrawn from any provider rated 'inadequate' as soon as is reasonably practicable and when spaces have been found elsewhere for children attending that setting. Councils can place requirements on providers rated less than good in order for them to receive funding, to ensure that they improve as per the Ofsted inspector report, for example insisting that staff members attend training.

⁷ Sutton Trust (2014) 'Sound Foundations' <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/1sound-foundations-jan2014-3-1.pdf>

The vast majority of early years provision is assessed by Ofsted as being 'good' or 'outstanding'; find out whether this is the case in your area, and if there is provision that is less than good, what support is being given to help improve this? Is lower quality provision concentrated in particular areas?

Speak with your local providers to find out about the quality of staff. The presence of well-qualified staff improves the quality of a setting⁸, however there are concerns nationally about the quality of the workforce, with qualification levels on a downward trend.⁹ Is this something your providers are experiencing? If so, can you work with local education providers to improve access to, and take up of, courses? Can you support the continuing professional development of early years staff, for example by commissioning training that local providers can purchase? The DfE published its Early Years Workforce Strategy in 2017 which gives an overview of national work being undertaken to improve the quality of the workforce.

Is there a good take up of early education entitlements in your area?

The DfE publishes annual statistics on the take up of early education, entitled 'Education provision: children under five years of age'¹⁰. In 2017, 92 per cent of three-year-olds, and 95 per cent of four-year-olds, accessed the entitlement. Tables are available broken down by local authority, so that you can compare your area to your statistical neighbours.

8 Nuffield Foundation (2014) 'Quality and Inequality: Do three- and four-year-olds in deprived areas experience lower quality early years provision?' https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Quality_inequality_childcare_mathers_29_05_14.pdf

9 Education Policy Institute (2018) 'The Early Years Workforce: A Fragmented Picture' https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/early-years-workforce_analysis/

10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-childcare-and-early-years>

Find out how parents are informed about the entitlements, including work with partners and marketing campaigns, and how those strategies are evaluated and adapted as necessary.

What proportion of eligible two-year-olds in your area take up the entitlement, and is this improving?

Fifteen hours of free childcare are offered to disadvantaged two-year-olds, for example those whose parents are on certain benefits, those in care or those with SEND, to improve their school readiness and social mobility. However, take up of this offer is lower than for three and four-year-olds, with a national take up rate of 72 per cent in January 2018.¹¹

If take up of the two-year-old offer in your area is low, what are the reasons for this? What work is being undertaken to identify eligible families early and work with them to improve take up? Are partners engaged in this, for example health partners?

An unintended consequence of recent changes to early years funding has been, in some areas, a reduction in places for eligible two-year-olds. Has this pattern been seen in your area?

Are any particular groups of children less likely to be in early education?

Find out whether the children accessing early education in your area reflect the population. For example, are children with SEND, English as an additional language or those from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to attend?

11 Department for Education (2018) 'Education Provision: children under five years of age', 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2018>

Does your council have a good understanding of the reasons for variations, and how these compare to statistical neighbours? Is there action that can be taken to improve take up where this isn't as high as you might expect?

Is early years provision impacting on social mobility?

Analysis by the Education Policy Institute shows that by the time young people take their GCSEs at age 16, those from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 18.4 months behind their peers. Forty per cent of this gap emerges before the age of five.¹² Further research shows that pre-school has almost as much impact on educational attainment at age 11 as primary school.¹³ It is therefore vital to encourage children from more disadvantaged backgrounds to attend high quality early years provision wherever possible to help narrow the disadvantage gap before children start school.

EYFS results show the proportion of children eligible for free school meals achieving at least the expected standard in the early learning goals, alongside the proportion of all children achieving this, broken down by local authority.

Nationally, 54 per cent of children known to be eligible for free school meals achieve at least the expected standard, compared to 71 per cent of all other children. What is the gap for your area? Is this improving?

Research shows that PVI settings in deprived areas are more likely to be of poor quality than those in more advantaged areas, offering disadvantaged children a poorer

standard of childcare and early education.¹⁴ Is this the case in your area? What is being done to improve quality in those areas?

Is there a clear strategy to improve speech and language for children in early years settings?

Children who are behind in language development when they start school are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English by the age of 11, and 11 times less likely to reach this standard in Maths.¹⁵ For this reason, the Government has highlighted 'closing the word gap in the early years' as a key ambition in its Social Mobility Strategy.

Does your council have a good understanding of the speech, language and communication needs of children in your area? How is this captured, and how is this information used to inform provision by both the council and local health services?

Are there clear pathways to refer children for speech and language support? And are these effectively communicated to parents, providers and partners?

It is also helpful to understand how both providers and parents are supported to help children with their speech and language. Is training arranged for early years practitioners to improve their skills in supporting children to learn? And can parents access information to understand the importance of early language skills and support home learning?

12 Education Policy Institute (2018) 'Structural Elements of Quality Early Years Provision: a review of the evidence' https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early-years-structural-quality-review_EPI.pdf

13 Ibid

14 Nuffield Foundation (2014) 'Quality and Inequality: Do three- and four-year-olds in deprived areas experience lower quality early years provision?' https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Quality_inequality_childcare_mathers_29_05_14.pdf

15 Department for Education (2017) 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A Plan for Improving Social Mobility Through Education' https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667690/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf

What support is available for parents and prospective parents to understand the early education and childcare available to them?

Councils are required to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents, and this is usually done through their family information service.

Recent changes to government childcare policies, in particular the introduction of the 30 hours scheme, have resulted in significant additional work for council early years teams. Have your teams experienced this, and how has it impacted upon other work streams? Are families still able to access the support they need?

How do different early years services in your area work together to support families? Do health visitors speak to families about childcare and early education? Can they help to identify families who might benefit from the two-year-old offer, or who might need information on the SEND offer to encourage them to take up their entitlements?

How do parents and children influence service provision?

How do you know whether the provision in your area is meeting the needs of families? What methods are in place to capture this information?

Find out how practitioners in your area listen to the children in their settings. This is important not only to make sure that their interests and perspectives are taken into account, but to support their development and help them to build confidence and critical thinking. Both can be indicators of quality provision.

Parents are a good source of feedback on provision, but they may need support to know what 'good' looks like in a setting. Is this information available to them? And is it clear how they should raise any concerns?

What support is available for providers, and does the council have a good relationship with them?

Developing and maintaining positive relationships with early years providers will help the council to keep an eye on both sufficiency and quality of provision, and ensure that the support being offered to providers reflects their needs to deliver better outcomes for children.

Is there a clear offer of support in place for providers, and is this developed in consultation with them? Does this cover mandatory training such as first aid, continuous professional development, and business support?

How does the council facilitate networks of providers to support sector-led improvement, professional development and sharing good practice? These are valuable ways to encourage a culture of continuous improvement and to build and maintain skilled, engaged workforce.

Do our looked-after children attend early education provision?

Looked-after children are entitled to 15 hours of early education between the ages of two and four; those in foster care are also entitled to the 30 hours offer if their foster parents meet the eligibility criteria.

Do all of your looked-after children access their entitlement, are they in good quality provision and are they getting any additional support they need? As corporate parents, councillors have a responsibility to ensure

that looked-after children are getting the best start that they can, and this includes making sure they can take advantage of good early education.

Key resources and further reading

Department for Education ‘Early Education and Childcare: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities’

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2>

Sutton Trust (2014) ‘Sound Foundations’

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/1sound-foundations-jan2014-3-1.pdf>

The Sutton Trust (2017) ‘Closing Gaps Early: The Role of Early Years Policy in Promoting Social Mobility in England’

https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Closing-Gaps-Early_FINAL.pdf

Department for Education (2017) ‘Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A Plan for Improving Social Mobility through Education’

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667690/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf

Case studies

Stoke-on-Trent

In response to a high number of children in the city starting nursery with delayed language development, Stoke-on-Trent City Council introduced Stoke Speaks Out, a programme to support children to improve their communication skills and get them ready to thrive at school.

As part of the Stoke Speaks Out initiative, the council has recently commissioned the development of an Early Communication Screen (ECS) which identifies early language delay and measures children's progress over time. This allows practitioners to provide support to individual children at the right time with appropriate, targeted interventions.

The ECS was written by speech and language therapists from the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust (SSOTP), commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, who also provide training and ongoing support for early years practitioners so that they can not only administer the screen, but interpret the results. The screen takes only five to 10 minutes per child, and practitioners have reported improved recognition of language delays and increased skill in selecting the appropriate interventions.

In the first year of the ECS programme (2016), the ECS baselines revealed that only 35 per cent of children were on track with language development. 10 months later, following screening and interventions, this had risen significantly to 54 per cent.

All private nurseries and schools in the city have been trained to use the ECS and they submit the data twice per year, providing valuable information on over 8000 children each year to allow the council to make sure its offer is effective and responding to need. Embedding the screen in practice in all nurseries, and training practitioners in all settings in intervention packages, ensures its ongoing sustainability.

Key learning

Speech, language and communication is a national issue for children. Having a reliable measure consistently used has proved powerful for evidencing change and planning future services.

Issues cannot be addressed by one service alone – commissioning a multi-agency team is an effective way to achieve greater outcomes.

For more information, contact debbie.jacobs@stoke.gov.uk

Dorset

In Dorset parents, carers and practitioners are working together to develop a shared language to help children help themselves.

The Incredible Beginnings™ programme adopted by Dorset County Council aims to develop a capable, confident and consistent early years approach that understands how children can be helped to self-regulate. It has already had a positive impact; a random sample revealed 100 per cent of children showed reduced hyperactivity and there was a 95 per cent drop in conduct problems.

Parents and carers taking part in pre-school parenting programmes felt that there was a disconnect between what they were being advised to do at home, and what was happening in early years settings. Incredible Beginnings™ provides practitioners with the training and pedagogy to then work with parents and others in their setting to implement shared strategies. Where techniques are reinforced by both providers and parents, clear, consistent messages are sent. Results suggest this approach leads to more happy, stable children.

Over 2,300 children are already benefiting from the programme. A random selection of children from across cohorts showed that:

- all children showed a reduction in hyperactivity
- there was a 95 per cent reduction in conduct problems
- 60 per cent of children showed reduced emotional problems
- 11 children deemed to have significant problems prior to the programme were not considered to have these at the end.

Dorset County Council commissioned and subsidised the project, with the early years sector making a contribution. The programme has the potential to reach more children than a parenting programme could, meaning the whole community is involved.

Feedback of the programme has been encouraging:

“I’ve found all the techniques really helpful. My daughter can now calm herself immediately, which has stopped situations from escalating. Her behaviour has improved greatly.”

Parent

“All parts of the course have been of great benefit to me as a practitioner, SENCO and mother. It’s inspired me to improve my own practice within my setting and also inspire others.”

Practitioner

Incredible Beginnings™ builds a better understanding in practitioners of young children’s social, emotional and mental health, and increases the use of whole setting strategies in promoting positive behaviour. The successful implementation of the programme relied on using trusted providers and accredited facilitators. Its reputation and positive testimonies have attracted investment from public health partners and neighbouring authorities, and the council has been able to reduce its share of costs as providers have invested further. It was also shortlisted in the Children & Young People Now Awards 2018.

At the heart of the Incredible Beginnings™ programme is the social and emotional wellbeing of our children. With more children spending longer in early years settings as a result of the 30 hours of free childcare offer available to parents, a consistent approach such as Incredible Beginnings™ is paramount.

For more information, contact comms@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Bristol

To support children with their transition from nursery to school, to develop confident learners and to support families, Bristol City Council has embedded its children's centres firmly within the early education framework, with all 22 centres based on school sites. Children's Centre services are coordinated by four area hubs which are led and managed by maintained nursery schools in partnership with our Families in Focus team.

The strong link with education provides strong pedagogical leadership along with economies of scale in terms of leadership and management costs. It also means that the city's most marginalised families are more likely to consider early education for their children when they see this as part of a safe and welcoming children's centre offer. Almost 25,000 families with under-fives are registered with the children's centres. Eighty-two per cent of families participate in children's centre services, rising to 87 per cent in areas of greatest need. These figures have risen in recent years.

The children's centres play a key role in quality improvement across Bristol's early years sector. Each centre has a lead teacher who monitors the quality of provision in schools and settings in their reach area and reports back to the council, highlighting strengths and identifying any need for additional support, as part of a structured conversation.

Bristol's National Early Years Teaching School works in partnership with the Early Years service to recruit sector experts according to the city's priorities (for example early communication and language, early maths, family support and disability/SEN). These experts are funded from the quality improvement strand of the dedicated schools grant and deployed to improve practice in settings where this need is identified. This has had an impressive impact on the Ofsted ratings.

All the city's maintained early years' settings have now been judged 'good' or 'excellent' along with 96 per cent of private providers and 98.9 per cent of childminders – outcomes for childminders have improved by over 37ppts in just four years. All two year olds that take up their free early education offer are early years settings that have been judged good or outstanding.

Profile data and Ofsted data are used to evidence service impact. Outcomes are improving at the end of the early years foundation stage: 69 per cent of children achieved a good level of development in 2018, up 1.3 per cent this year. The gap between those in the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas and their peers has narrowed by five per cent in four years, to 13 per cent.

The Bristol Boys Achievement Project is seeking to improve educational outcomes for boys, specifically those from low-income households and some black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Early years teachers and practitioners are working with families and communities to explore strategies to support increased engagement and improved attainment. This has already helped to narrow the gender achievement gap which is 11 per cent.

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Rotherham

Rotherham Council has taken several dedicated, simple steps to help improve the use of early years pupil premium (EYPP) across their early years settings.

The council started in 2015/16 with two pilot projects to assess the impact of EYPP spend. These projects focussed on early language development and parental partnership, which could have an impact on all children rather than just those in receipt of EYPP. Settings were invited to take part in the project that best suited their needs, then intense packages of continuing professional development were delivered to staff over the course of the project, including support from specialists.

To ensure the success of the projects, along with the potential for ongoing benefits, expectations were made clear to participants from the start in terms of the commitment to attend training, disseminate learning in their own settings and deliver interventions. Participants were also required to deliver case studies and attend a celebration event at the end to share experiences and support ongoing learning.

Settings were encouraged to record EYPP spending, alongside information about the children in receipt of it, to monitor the ongoing impact of that spending and check that it was delivering the intended outcomes.

The case studies produced through the projects are now available to all settings through the Foundation Years website, while word-of-mouth recommendations about the projects have generated demand for additional training for practitioners. The learning from the projects was used to inform fact sheets that give settings ideas on how to effectively spend EYPP, including sheets with a specific focus, such as improving fine motor control. This is supporting settings to use EYPP funding in the right way for the children in their care, to best help them achieve better outcomes and have the necessary skills to be 'school ready'.

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