



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 3 SEPTEMBER 2019

EARLY YEARS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work taking place across the County to support children in their early years, including the department's work in the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service. The report summarises the progress made by the Service in delivering its statutory and non-statutory functions.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The legislation that governs the work of the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service is the Childcare Act 2016.
3. A report was presented to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Free Early Education Entitlement on 5 June 2017.

Background

4. The vision, set out in the Children and Families Department Plan, is that Leicestershire is the best place for children, young people and their families.
5. A key priority in the Children and Families Partnership Plan is that every child gets the best start in life and the department is committed to providing support to ensure that young children's health, development and learning are the best they can be. In Leicestershire it is the aim that young children are emotionally resilient and able to reach their potential when they start school. The Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service works directly with children and families, but also with early years providers and schools. The work seeks to ensure all children can thrive taking a targeted approach in deploying resources to ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children are prioritised.
6. In 2018, the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare service was restructured. The review of the service was necessary to ensure that going forward the service was fit for purpose and that there is sufficient high-quality childcare that meets the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Early Years Provision

7. The Local Authority has a duty to secure sufficient high-quality childcare provision which supports parents back into work or study (this includes out of school and holiday provision for 0-14 years (18 years SEND)).
8. The Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service delivers and commissions support to those providers that are judged to be less than good by Ofsted and provides advice and guidance to all providers in the county. Currently in Leicestershire 95% of all childcare providers have a rating from Ofsted of good or outstanding.
9. In Leicestershire the market is dominated by private, voluntary and independent providers. This means that the role of the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare service is critical in positively influencing and shaping the market providers and securing improved outcomes for pre-school children.
10. The service monitors the opening and closure of provision on a monthly basis to ensure the sector has sufficient childcare places. This alerts the service to any gaps in provision across the county. As part of the monitoring process, quality or sustainability is taken into account including type of provision and diversity. The table below indicates the last financial year's (31 March 2018 – 1 April 2019) opening and closing of provision in the county:-

	Open	Closed
Private Voluntary Independent	4	7
Full day care	2	4
Out of School	0	1

11. Full day care provision has been closed during this period due to inadequate judgements by Ofsted and quality issues, whereas private voluntary and independent pre-schools in rural areas have closed due to sustainability issues and low numbers of children attending the provision.
12. The introduction of the new Ofsted inspection framework could have an impact on the quality of provision as providers come to terms with the new framework. However, the service is providing free training in September for providers to attend and has been distributing regular newsletters to prepare them. If there is a dip in good or outstanding provision this could have an impact on those providers who are able to offer two-year-old provision. The improvement advisors are visiting all providers at least four times a year and it is hoped that this will help to support and maintain the quality of provision.

Free Early Education Entitlement

13. The Local Authority has a responsibility to administer and monitor the take up of the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for eligible two year old children. In Leicestershire 72% of eligible children are funded (this includes children who are out of county that are educated in Leicestershire provision) which is above the national average of 68%. 96% of two year olds in Leicestershire access good and outstanding provision. Take up of free early education available to all three and four year olds is at 98%. 93% access good and outstanding provision in Leicestershire; 25% outstanding and 68% good.
14. The Childcare Act 2016 introduced a new statutory requirement for the local authority. From September 2017 there had to be available an additional 15 hours per week of free childcare for eligible working parents of three and four year olds; this essentially doubled the universal entitlement. The 15 hour entitlement for the most disadvantaged two year olds remains in place. The new policy envisaged a significant, positive impact on families, helping to give children the best start in life, and making childcare more affordable for parents so that they can take up work or work additional hours.
15. In June 2019, 96.2% parents accessed the extended entitlement and validated codes, an increase from the previous term (90%). In addition to this, 24.3% of parents have chosen to take an additional five hours which represents a very slight increase on last year, and 43.6% of parents have chosen to take an additional 12.5-15 hours which is also an increase. 23% of two year olds who were in receipt of free childcare who turned three went on to take up 30 hours of childcare.

Early Years Funding

16. The Local Authority's allocated funding is provided through the Early Years Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The funding is based on the January census data completed by providers immediately preceding the financial year and adjusted by the census from the following year. Leicestershire is one of the 48 authorities receiving the lowest rate of funding per pupil for free early education entitlement.
17. The sector continues to face significant financial pressures, as pension contributions and minimum wages impact on the small businesses. The free early education entitlement has not been reviewed since 2017 and the introduction of the extended entitlement has made some providers unsustainable.

Early Years Workforce Development

18. Ensuring that the workforce remains highly qualified remains a key focus for the local authority. Currently 59% of two, three and four year olds are supported by graduate practitioners compared to 52% nationally. However, the introduction of the extended entitlement has made it more difficult for smaller providers to access training, due to backfilling staff and maintaining ratios. There is also a concern relating to the maintenance of a highly skilled workforce as staff move from the sector.

19. In response to this challenge, e-learning materials have been developed to enable providers to access materials in their own time or to support staff meetings. The service has developed a training plan to streamline and prioritise the training that practitioners should attend.
20. In 2017 the government released a report entitled 'Unlocking Talent Fulfilling Potential'. This focuses on the need to improve social mobility and for early years this is through reducing the word gap. The Service is involved with different initiatives to support children's language development. Using funding from Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership the service is working with Syston Teaching Education Partnership teaching school to deliver a language-based programme. Schools and their feeder preschools are working together to support school readiness. Leicestershire County Council has also been invited to be one of the 53 local authorities to receive training to support 15 providers with their language provision.
21. As part of the new training available the service is working closely with the Education Psychology service to offer an emotional literacy support assistant programme for the early years, due to be rolled out in October. In house training packages are being developed for providers to receive at their own setting and will be available from September.

School Readiness

22. As part of the department's partnership plan and priority of ensuring that young children get the best start in life, the service has been instrumental in developing a shared school readiness definition across a range of partners, including health education and social care. Leaflets have been developed for parents giving them practical ideas to get their child ready for school.
23. These were distributed through Leicestershire Partnership Trust in October 2018 to all parents whose children were due to start school in September 2019. Using the lessons learned, the service has contributed to the development of the 1001 critical days leaflets to be used with parents and partners to share key messages about the importance of talking, playing, cuddling, relaxing and responding with very young children.
24. A two-day conference was held for schools, pre-schools and childminders to attend where 140 practitioners learnt more about how to support children to be school ready. A school readiness web-based toolkit will be launched in September for schools, pre-schools and childminders.
25. A pathway of further support for young children between health, the Early years inclusion and childcare service, and children, family and well-being service is being developed for those children who have been identified at risk of delay at the two year development check.

Early Years SEND

26. This year there has been a significant rise in the number of referrals made to the Early years SEND advisors

Early Years SEND Referral Panel

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Referrals	296	321	379	536

27. This had led to a review of the process and a reallocation of caseload. The service has continued to reflect upon its offer and to work closely with children and family partnerships to ensure children's needs are being met prior to starting school.
28. To better respond to potential SEND issues the service has developed a graduated approach to build capacity in the sector. An early identification graduated approach booklet has been written and shared with providers, which has been welcomed to support their staff, use for training and also as a tool to share with parents.
29. A daily duty desk is available for advice and guidance for practitioners, and providers can access drop in surgeries where a range of professionals are able to give advice.
30. Inclusion funding is used to support children with additional and emerging needs to access their local provision. During the coming months the service will consult with providers about how to utilise future funding to support children. The service will work with finance and the communication service to ensure that the sector is well informed of the proposals.
31. In May, five inclusion practitioners were employed to support children of non-statutory school age who are at risk of exclusion. These practitioners support the child in their placement, modelling good practice for the school or setting. When a setting or school have a child that is at risk, a senior/team manager will discuss reasonable adjustments to determine if there is anything that can be done to support the child within the setting. The next level of support involves the inclusion practitioner working intensively with the setting and the child to model strategies. If breakdown of placement is still a concern, then there is the option of a dual or assessment place at Menphys specialist nursery, with the view to getting the child back into mainstream school with an Education Health and Care Plan or into specialist provision if appropriate.
32. During May to July the team supported 10 children in total in an intensive capacity within the school/setting that they are in. One of the children went from a 10-day fixed exclusion to be supported to increase his hours. By the end of the term, he was in for the entire school period avoiding any further exclusions.
33. Due to the significant increase in the number of children with SEND referred to the Early Years panel requesting specialist teaching support, and responding to feedback from headteachers, parents and providers, the early years autism

team will broaden its remit. This will allow the service to better support those children who have not yet got a diagnosis but have an identified need relating to social communication and sensory processing.

34. In November 2018 the service held its first SEND conference for 90 professionals which was well received. The conference in 2019 will support young children's social communication. 21 practitioners were trained to be level 4 Special Educational Needs co-ordinators for their provision and at least five have fed back that they would like to take their qualification further. Practitioners have reflected on their provision, ways of working with parents and the inclusive environment they provide. The service is looking to retrain a further cohort to support the sector and train the workforce. Targeted training for the downs syndrome pathway and social communication has also been delivered to support transition to school.

Outcomes

35. At the end of the Foundation stage, an assessment for all children completing their reception year is completed. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) summarises and describes children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The main purpose of the EYFS profile is to provide a reliable, valid and accurate assessment of individual children at the end of the EYFS.
36. EYFS profile data is used to:
- inform parents about their child's development against the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and the characteristics of their learning;
 - support a smooth transition to key stage 1 (KS1) by informing the professional dialogue between EYFS and KS1 teachers; and
 - help year 1 teachers plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet the needs of all children.
37. In addition, the EYFS profile provides an accurate national data set relating to levels of child development at the end of the EYFS. The DfE uses this to monitor changes in levels of children's development and their readiness for the next phase of their education both nationally and locally. Leicestershire's EYFSP continues to rise year on year. This year for the first time Leicestershire learners are above national average for children who receive a good level of development (GLD) by the time they leave the foundation stage. 72.1% received a good level of development against a provisional national average of 71.8%.
38. Those children who are in receipt of free school meals underachieve compared with their peers. 593 children have been identified in Leicestershire as being in receipt of the free school meal. 44.8% of these children gain a good level of development.
39. It is apparent that not all children who are entitled to free school meals and the pupil premium that it attracts are accessing their entitlement. This can be seen

by the numbers of children accessing similar entitlements in the early years. In Spring 2019 there were 1240 two-year olds claiming their free education entitlement and 737 three and four year olds accessing their early years pupil premium. This was an increase of 100 from the previous year due to a targeted piece of work to ensure all providers in disadvantaged areas were working with parents to claim for eligible children to support improved outcomes for children.

40. Therefore, in order to try and ensure an increased access to children entitled to free school meals and the pupil premium, the service continues to work with Leicestershire traded services to support parents with accessing a portal to increase the uptake of free school meals when their child starts school. The Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service will also work closely with the school education effectiveness partners to raise the profile with headteachers to ensure children starting school access their entitlement and schools use the funding accordingly on their youngest children.

Conclusions.

41. Children's outcomes, in their early years continue to improve by the end of the foundation stage (first year in school). Although children's attainment is measured at the end of the reception year, account is also taken of the pre-school experiences children have had.
42. Children continue to access high quality provision in Leicestershire as evidenced by the high percentage of good and outstanding providers.
43. Excellent local relationships combined with strong communication with the sector has helped to continue to deliver the extended entitlement in Leicestershire. Local providers have demonstrated considerable willingness and flexibility in responding to this significant challenge.
44. Leicestershire has a growing range of delivery models including opportunities for developing a blended offer for parents where they cannot access 30 hours in one provision.
45. Pro-active and tailored communications with key internal and external partners have successfully promoted the school readiness materials.
46. The service is in a better position to support the sector with early identification of children with emerging and additional needs and put in programmes of support for these children.

Background papers

Child Care Act 2016: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/enacted>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

47. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from this report.
Where service changes are made EHRI Assessments are undertaken.

Officers to Contact

Sue Wilson, Service Manager of Early Years Inclusion and Childcare
Telephone: 0116 3058337 Email: Suzanne.wilson@leics.gov.uk

Alison Bradley, Head of Service Education Quality and Improvement
Telephone: 0116 3058825 Email: Alison.bradley@leics.gov.uk