

Select Committee on Children's Services – 19 June 2008

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Early Years Foundation Stage

Purpose of Report

1. To bring to the attention of the Committee the changes that are taking place with regards to Early Years Foundation Stage Education and Dudley's current position.

Background

2. The Foundation Stage has become significantly more high profile since the launch of Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance in 2000. In September 2008, the new Early Years Foundation Stage is to become statutory. A main provision in the Childcare Act 2006 is to ensure that all children up to five years will have high quality early learning and care and better access to services to give them the best start in life.
3. This will be achieved through the Early Years Outcome Duty. This includes:
 - a Children's Centre in every community;
 - the Local Authority (LA) working with partner organisations to improve the Every Child Matters outcomes for all children up to five and reduce inequalities between them;
 - Parents' entitlement to free integrated care and learning for 3-4 year olds increasing from 12 ½ hours per week to 15 and become more flexible as to when they may be taken.

LAs must also ensure access to a wide range of childcare provision which will enable parents to have a greater choice and flexibility in order to balance home/work through the Childcare Sufficiency Duty whereby LA's facilitate the childcare market.

4. Sitting with all this is a new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a

statutory framework for providers which brings together the Birth to Three Framework, the Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance and elements of the Day Care National Standards (Welfare Requirements). This new framework is from birth to the end of the Foundation Stage (end of reception) and promotes an integrated and consistent, principled, play based approach, to care and education.

5. A renewed Ofsted Inspection Framework is currently being developed and piloted and will reflect the new Early Years Foundation Stage. It is intended to present one inspection framework for all provision whether maintained or not.
6. The Children's Plan (2007) goals for 2020 with a Foundation Stage focus include enhancing children and young people's well-being, particularly at key transition points in their lives, and that every child is ready for success in school, with at least 90% developing well across all areas of the Foundation Stage Profile by the age of 5 years.
7. The EYFS September 2008
The EYFS consists of "The Statutory Framework" which sets out all the legal requirements of the EYFS (Learning and Development requirements, Welfare requirements, ratios and assessment arrangements etc.) and "The Practice Guidance" which covers some key aspects of meeting the requirements in the statutory framework (Play, flexible provision, safeguarding, transitions etc.)
8. There are six Areas of Learning:
 - Personal, Social, Emotional Development,
 - Communication Language and Literacy,
 - Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy,
 - Knowledge and Understanding of the World,
 - Physical Development
 - Creative Development.

All six areas of learning remain of equal importance.

Each area of learning and development is organised in broad developmental phases with age ranges that overlap. This emphasises that each child's progress is individual to them and that different children develop at different rates. A child does not suddenly move from one phase to another, and they do not make progress in all areas at the same time. However, there are some important "steps" for each child to take along their own developmental pathway.

9. Effective practice means being aware of these and supporting the child in

achieving them. It must be appreciated that not all children will have reached all Early Learning Goals by the time they are five or the end of reception class. Key Stage 1 practitioners will therefore need to be aware of how to use the EYFS and the FS Profile data to plan appropriate learning experiences for those children.

10. The actual curriculum of the new EYFS has few changes, however, the welfare requirements which include Food Handling Certificate, Paediatric First Aid and certain adult/child ratios and staff qualifications may present more of a challenge for the maintained sector. The Early Years Advisory Service is supporting this as it will be a requirement for Ofsted Inspections and schools have not had to comply with these Welfare Requirements before.

11. LA Early Years Outcome Duty

The LA is challenged by the DCSF with improving outcomes of Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) data by:

Increasing the percentage of pupils achieving 6+ scale points in all strands of Personal, Social, Emotional Development (PSED) and Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) combined and 78 points across the FSP. LAs also have to work towards narrowing the gap in terms of FSP results between the average of the lowest 20% and the median.

12. In Dudley the FSP results 2007 showed a decline in the number of children achieving 6+ in PSED and CLLD combined. However, targeted actions and the impact of council services did result in the narrowing of the gap.
13. Underpinning evidence from a range of rigorous evaluations does not necessarily support the DCSF headline data for Foundation Stage in Dudley. The evidence consists of Ofsted judgements, Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Audits (ECERS), Dudley Criteria for Developing Quality (self-reflection tool) and Professional judgements. This evidence supports the fact that progress has been made but has not yet impacted on % improvement for individual children. However, the percentage of Dudley PVI providers judged good or better by Ofsted is significantly above national average and is continuing to improve. For example: sessional care – 28% above national averages and day care 21% above. The number of childminders with an outstanding grade is currently almost three times the national figure. Also, 14% of PVI settings in Dudley currently hold an outstanding Ofsted grade. In Dudley of all primary schools inspected in 2007/8, none were identified as having key issues in Foundation Stage.

14. National Strategies monitoring and evaluation of LA Foundation Stage (RAG assessments to May 2008) rated Dudley outstanding overall with the capacity to improve. Service impact in general across Dudley is judged to be good.

The National Assessment Agency Moderation visit, summer 2007, concluded that moderation procedures in Dudley were good, and that the systems employed were effective.

15. In September 2006, the advice from the National Assessment Agency (NAA) was that 80% of observations and assessments of children's learning in Foundation Stage needed to be undertaken when a child is engaged in self chosen (child initiated) activity. The LA has highlighted to schools the importance of quality assuring Foundation Stage Profile data and is implementing a rigorous and aligned programme to ensure that all FSP data submitted is an accurate reflection of children's attainment. LA training has focussed upon developing practitioner's confidence in making judgements whilst observing Child Initiated activities.

16. Actions and Impact

The following processes are used in Dudley LA to measure the development of setting quality and the impact of targeted support in preparation for the implementation of the EYFS.

17. Early Childhood Environmental Ratings

ECERS was the research tool used to underpin the Effective Pre-school Provision (EPPE) Research which today informs the government initiatives and development of the Early Years Agenda.

In Dudley 52 members from various teams across the LA, (Early Years Advisory Team, Child Development Officers, Early Years Specialist Services, National Primary Strategy Consultants, Assessment, Birth to Three Advisers etc) have been trained to conduct ECERS audits which measure quality within the provision. The audit takes place again after 6 months or 1 year in order to gauge impact of interventions following action planning after feedback. Although it is early days and only a small number of settings have as yet accessed an audit, data shows that there has been a 29% improvement in the quality scales achieved of those settings involved.

18. The number of settings considered by Early Years Advisers/Development Officers to be outstanding has doubled. Over the past year approx 35% of settings have improved in quality of provision. Visits and support from Early Years advisers and other agencies is in inverse proportion to success.

19. Training Programme

A comprehensive training programme tailored to practitioner's needs is planned annually. In order to ensure schools access training and network opportunities to support liaison and transition with PVI, half-termly township meetings have been introduced from Sept 2007. Between September 2007 and Easter 2008, 1213 practitioners have attended these meetings. Areas discussed at these meetings include Steady Beat (Phonics), Record Keeping, Transitions, Booktime.

To prepare settings for the implementation of EYFS, two half-day intensive training sessions were organised for all FS practitioners. 98% of settings and 60% Of Childminders were represented at these sessions with more planned for Summer Term 2008.

20. Newly Qualified Teachers in the Foundation Stage

A network to support the development of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) working in the Foundation Stage was set up in September 2007. This network is in addition to the compulsory NQT induction year and supports the development of good practice related to practical issues in Foundation Stage. (Phonics, Child Initiated work, planning, observation and assessment, managing the outdoor classroom etc) The network has attracted interest from Newman College and the annual programme is being accredited as a Masters Module. The DCSF has indicated that all teachers will be required to study for a Masters at some time in the future, this puts Dudley in a strong position.

21. Personal, Social, Emotional Development

It is widely recognised that a child's personal, social and emotional development is crucial to future academic achievement and success. Research indicates that children who achieve well in the PSED area of the FSP are more likely to make good progress across all other areas of learning and that this trend also continues into KS1. PSED Matters underpins social, emotional aspects of learning. To date 35 schools have attended the extended course which supports issues arising from Single Point of Entry (September 2008), summer born boys and key worker issues. More schools are awaiting future sessions.

22. Communication, Language and Literacy

In 2007/08 all training and support for CLL was mapped. In response to Rose Review, a teaching of Phonics Conference was planned and practitioners from both physically visually impaired and maintained sector attended. This was followed by a conference to launch Letters and Sounds. YR/Y1 Networks were established and supported, a number looked at Literacy with a few undertaking an aspect of Numeracy. From Easter 2008 Dudley is part of the National CLL Programme. 11 targeted schools have been selected. The coaching and mentoring will take place

with their YR/Y1 and their related pre-schools and Nurseries.

23. Parents as Partners in Early Learning

This initiative was targeted at Foundation Stage provision with poor FSP outcomes and low engagement of parents. A PEEP Network (Peers Early Education Project) was set up across Dudley. Managing a PEEP group can lead to accreditation either towards a Foundation Degree or Masters Module. PEEP Groups have now been established as induction programmes. The PEEP Network is now firmly established and is continuing to develop. An Early Years Adviser acts as PEEP Mentor. Mapping of provision with quality judgement involving views of parents was undertaken and a toolkit for practitioners from all agencies to support working with parents has been developed. Forest School philosophy was explored as a way of engaging parents who would not usually access services or wish to be involved in their child's early learning. Unfortunately the project was only funded for one year. The early indications show positive impact. However, we await FSP results 2008.

24. Young Child's Voice Project

Our work in this field is nationally recognised. 123 staff (teachers, TA and Heads from Conte Verde Settings) both maintained and non-maintained have been trained in listening to young children and the undertaking of action research. Recently 2 Special Schools have become involved in the project. Dudley is a lead LA working with National Children's Bureau exploring ways to ensure that very young children have a voice. When the completed action research case studies are disseminated nationally, the work will support other LA's to comply with the 2004 Children Act.

25. Conte Verde

A strong principled group of lead practitioners continuing to build on the Reggio Emilia visit in 2005. Developing systems and skills to document children's learning, looking at processes (Learning Journey's) not just finished product.

26. Multi- Agency Links

Through effective alignment, teams are working together to improve outcomes for children and to close the gap. The work with Primary National Strategy and Assessment teams is highly effective and closely aligned. Libraries frequently work with the Early Years Team on projects such as Parents as Partners in Early Learning and Booktime. The Booktime Project resulted in over 50% of Dudley Schools requesting to work directly with Libraries. During summer 2007, Children taking part in The Big Wild Read, doubled to 2352.

27. Children's Centres

Strategic Lead for Children's Centres appointed May 2008. Children's Centres designated ahead of time.

Finance

28. The funding for the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage is available within school budgets, the council's base budget and the SSEYCG grant.

Law

29. The legislation for these development sits within the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Equality Impact

30. A national review has taken place as well as a national consultation regarding the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and Guidance. The work in Dudley will be across all racial groups, disabled young people and both genders. The report outlines the improvements that will be made to outcomes for young peoples.

Recommendation

31. It is recommended that the Committee note the report and support the development of this work.



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