



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

Date: 26th August 2009

Subject: Response to the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) Inquiry into Education Standards - Entering the Education System

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the recent Scrutiny review on Education Standards - Entering the Education System we have seen some significant changes in communication strategies and joining up of processes and services in early years. This response identifies some of the changes that have been made and areas of progress for the future.

2.0 Purpose of this Report

2.1 This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent Children's Services Scrutiny Board inquiry into the Education Standards - Entering the Education System and details how the Director proposes to respond to these recommendations. The report asks the Board to approve the proposed response.

3.0 Background Information

3.1 At the start of the 2008/09 municipal year, Children's Services Scrutiny Board agreed to carry out an inquiry into Education Standards, with a focus on Entering the Education System. This followed on from previous work which was undertaken in 2007/08 into the support available for young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). One of the conclusions drawn was that many of these young people can be identified at a very early stage. It was therefore decided to explore the support on offer to those vulnerable to underachievement when they first enter the education system.

3.2 The report makes nine recommendations for action. The Director of Children's Services has accepted these recommendations and actions are underway or planned to address them. The Director has also acknowledged the importance of learning from the issues that inquiry has raised. The actions proposed by the Scrutiny Board will support this and will be monitored by the board as part of its regular recommendation monitoring activity.

4.0 Main Issues

4.1 Each of the Scrutiny Board's six recommendations are listed along with a response from the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds as appropriate:

4.2 Recommendation One:

That the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds continue to develop and implement ways of promoting parity of esteem between different settings, in particular by developing more effective means of communication, not just from Early Years providers to schools, but vice versa. Also, that joint training for staff from both areas is extended to ensure that everyone working in the sector has a good shared understanding of child development. That progress in these areas is reported back to the Children's Services Scrutiny Board within three months.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

The Early Years Service and Education Leeds have already identified this as key area of development and part of the early years outcome Duty Action Plan. Building on the joint appointment of an Early Years Advisor between the Early Years Service and Education Leeds has improved joint communication strategies across all early years providers; this includes a termly newsletter for all providers and joint EYFS leadership, management forums for teachers and school Foundation Stage co-ordinations beginning in September 2009 and a continuing professional development programme free at the point of delivery for all providers with an emphasis on joint training sessions where this is appropriate.

4.3 Recommendation Two:

That the Director of Children's Services reports back to us within 3 months on the steps being taken to ensure that:

- a) all Children's Centres in the city are committed to serving the whole community in which they are located*
- b) the children experience as seamless a transition as possible, regardless of which school they move on to*
- c) assistance is offered to those Centres, or schools, which are having difficulty in establishing these ties, and*
- d) all Children's Centres are encouraged to form stronger ties with their Extended Services cluster where this is not already happening.*

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

- a) All Children's Centres have clear information about the number of children under 5 in their reach area (between 600 and 1,200) and report on the delivery of services to those families through quarterly meetings with Heads of Children's Centres Services.
- b) We have developed guidance to ensure children experience seamless transition for their Children's Centre this will be a focus for training at the newly established EYFS leadership and management forums from Sept.
- c) The Quality Improvement Teams across the two services are being revised in light of this report and the requirements of the Early Years Outcomes Duty to ensure a clear referral route for advice and support.
- d) Heads of Children's Centres Services are ensuring that Children's centre managers attend extended services clusters meetings, both contributing to and leading developments.

4.4 Recommendation Three:

That the Director of Children's Services takes steps to ensure that greater targeted support is offered to both childminders and private nurseries, in implementing, and making best use of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Also, that a system is established to enable close monitoring of provision across all settings in order to identify those which may be in need of assistance. That progress in both these areas is reported back to the Children's Services Scrutiny Board within three months.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

The Early Years Services has commissioned the National Childminding Association (for childminders) and 4 Children (for private nurseries) to challenge and support quality improvement and improve outcomes for children. The Local Authority will implement a nationally supported quality improvement setting programme from January 2010 in partnership with the commissioned services. This will ensure effective categorisation of settings in order to identify need and consequent support from the Local Authority. This will be monitored by National Strategies (DCSF).

4.5 Recommendation Four:

That the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds report back to us within three months on the steps being taken to promote the EYFS Transition Record as widely as possible, and to encourage as many settings as possible to make use of it.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

The EYFS Transition Record has been created by a range of settings including day care and childminders. The record has been piloted and is due to be widely distributed from September 2009.

4.6 Recommendation Five:

That the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds ensure that every effort is made to avoid stigmatising those children who are identified as being in need of additional support during the EYFS, and that any support offered takes account of the need to involve parents as much as possible in order to maximise the benefits for the child's development. That progress in these areas is reported back to the Children's Services Scrutiny Board within three months.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

The 49 Children's Centres (59 by April 2010) are offering universal services to all families across the reach area including nursery education and child care, family support, health and JC+ advice and further advice and support. A new database is being populated to monitor data on a monthly basis in terms of take up of services – identifying the area they live, ethnic background, gender, in receipt of benefit, disability. This information will enable targeting of services for those families experiencing difficulty or exclusion. The Early Years Service has commissioned Intensive Family Support services to be available in SOAs in the lowest 30% areas of deprivation. A new team of 61 Family Outreach Workers spend time in the community working with all families and giving additional support to families facing difficulties. Information about their levels of contact will be available by September 2009.

The aim Objective 5: of the Early Years Outcome Duty is to develop and promote partnership working with parents. There is wide evidence that schools and Children's Centres are working with parents to engage them in their child's early learning. For example Early Years Consultants work with family outreach workers to support parental involvement in their children's learning, All Children's Centres offer Movement Play activities with children in the centre and also work with parents to develop skills and knowledge around child development and early play and learning skills. All parents have an opportunity to comment about their child's progress on profiles and the Transition Form which then is shared with the receiving setting.

4.7 Recommendation Six:

That the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds report back to us within three months on the steps being taken to ensure that 'joined-up' working becomes a fact of life for all providers working within the Early Years Foundation Stage, including the voluntary sector, and that the existing strategic commitment to partnership working between education, Early Years, Health and Social Care, along with current examples of good practice, are used as a basis from which to roll out these improvements across the city.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

The recent Children's Centre review identified that all Children's Centres are working with health visitors, speech and language therapists and job centre+ to offer services for families. Many centres are evidencing good levels of additional family support services with good attendance and a growing range of opportunities developed in partnership with parents. A number of good practice examples of working with Children's Social Care have developed recently e.g. the secondment of two Children's Centre managers to ensure services to support children on the edge of care, a qualified social worker as part of the integrated team at Hawksworth Wood Children's Centre.

The voluntary sector are included in consultation, service development and services are commissioned for example LEAP supporting settings with asylum seekers and refugee families, PSLA- providing "One Point of Contact" for families with children with disabilities.

4.7 Recommendation 7:

That the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds report back to us within three months on how the support on offer to those groups of children identified as being at high risk of underachievement, such as Black and Minority Ethnic children and those with Special Educational Needs, is being made as seamless as possible, particularly during the transition period.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

Through the work of Objective 2 in the EYOD the Local Authority has recognised the need to use data in a way that supports service planning and early identification. For example information collated from Children's Centres and schools identifies Gypsy Roma and Traveller children who may require specialist support in centre and at home. An Early Years Consultant (Early Years Service) is now working closely with the newly appointed EAL early years consultant (Education Leeds). An action plan has been drawn up which will ensure training and support is offered where needed.

4.8 Recommendation 8:

Also, that the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Education Leeds carry out a review of the funding for children with Special Educational Needs within Early Years, within the next three months, with a particular focus on ensuring that children are offered the same level of high quality support, regardless of the type of setting which they attend.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

A review is being undertaken around funding for young children with disabilities across all sectors to ensure inclusion and access- this will report to the Sure Start partnership in September 2009. There is a planned programme for all Children's Centres to undertake Early Support training by April next year- this is a national programme to facilitate parental engagement as central to all planning for their disabled child.

4.9 Recommendation 9:

That the Directors of Children's Services and Education Leeds develop a means of coordinating and moderating different services and their associated governance arrangements to ensure that there is a consistently high standard of service across all providers. That the option of making use of the Area Management Boards to achieve this be considered. That a report on progress is brought to the Children's Services Scrutiny board within the next 3 months.

The Director of Children's Services agrees with this recommendation.

The recent review of Children's Centres identified that 59% (29) of centres have an established Advisory Board attended by a range of partners from the area and including parents as active decision makers in the development of services. All centres (49) are expected to have Advisory Boards in place by January 2010. Centres will be advised to approach the Area Management Boards for involvement and support of their governance arrangements.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Board are requested to approve the proposed responses to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services).

Background Papers

There are no specific background papers relating to this report.