

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION
EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update Wirral's School Forum of discussions at the recent subgroup, Early Years working group, dated 8th January 2021, inclusive of service updates.

2.0 Central Staffing updates.

2.1 All vacant Early Years core staffing posts in the central staffing costs have now been filled during the autumn term, which brings both the functionalities of the business team and SEND officers to full capacity, which is welcomed during such pressured times of additional operations due to COVID19.

3.0. Universal 2, 3 + 4 early years free entitlements & 30 hours extended (EYFE).

3.1 The disruption to early educational entitlements during the Summer term 2020, due to Covid19 issues, resulted in fluctuations of take up. However, since the commencement of the autumn term there have been positive signs of recovery across the 2, 3+4-year-old offer. Although, the recovery of the take up of extended offer has struggled as parents either continued to work from home and are not taking additional childcare hours or remain on a "furloughed" arrangement.

- **2-year-old take-up - Wirral actual 73.40% - National 69%**
Increase of 4.40% (69%) from Autumn Term 2020

- **3/4-year-old Universal take-up – Wirral actual 89.20% - National 91%**
Increase of 5.2% (84%) from Autumn Term 2020

- **3/4-year-old Extended take-up (30 hour funding) – actual 70% - National 90 % (Summer 19)**
Reduction of 25.46% (95.46%) from Autumn Term 2020

3.2 30-hour funding – discretionary funding was applied to families who had missed the 31st August deadline date to renew their 30-hour funding code. 25 discretionary starts were authorised, these children were added to providers headcount submission so many were covered by the providers being paid on Autumn 19 headcount to sustain take up.

3.3 Continued methods of engagement and improved take up with parents, supported with Public Health messaging of safe practice and environments are communicated with providers through cluster meetings, attended by Public Health.

4.0 EYFE Funding Allocation Arrangements.

4.1 During the Autumn term the Department for Education (DfE) informed Local Authorities (LA's) that Early Years Providers and Schools would be paid as if COVID-19 had not happened and the autumn 20 headcount was compared to autumn 19 headcount for each provider. Early Years Providers and schools were then paid on whichever funding amount was higher. This saw several providers and schools paid on Autumn 19, detail below.

Paid on Autumn 19 - 109

Paid on Autumn 20 - 103

When asked providers with lower numbers for Autumn 20 cited parents on furlough or made redundant or working from home and felt able to manage childcare to explain the dip in numbers. To increase numbers providers had completed virtual tours, Facebook marketing, requested online reviews from current parents etc.

When asked providers with higher numbers for Autumn 20 stated they had not done anything differently, a couple of providers had increased their marketing, 1 had a nearby setting close and some felt word of mouth by parents were the reason.

4.2. For the Spring Term, at this point in time, guidance still states that funding will be based on children attending a setting on headcount day as below;

- Children who are advised to shield during this lockdown can still be claimed for on headcount as long as the child / family are supported with educational activities- this could be weekly conversations on what activities parents could complete with their child.
- Parents who decide to keep their children at home during the lockdown should not be claimed for on headcount. Procedures following the lockdown are being devised for children who did not attend during lockdown.
- Please be aware that early years providers other than schools that close or reduce attendance may receive less funding as spring term payments at present will be based on actual headcount submission.
- Children in receipt of inclusive practice funding will only receive funding if they are attending early years providers or schools.

4.3. Following the announcements by Central Government on 4th January 2021, with regarding a new national lockdown and despite early years settings being open for all children, the return to "normal" processes of applying the Spring term funding has raised further sustainability concerns by the sector. Presently the DfE have consulted with several LA's and are considering the feedback, with an expectation of further guidance on this situation to come through imminently.

5.0. Early Years SEND Updates

The Early Years SEND Team now has 3.7 Portage Workers who continue to support families by phone, Teams, or home visits where necessary following review of Risk Assessments (January 21). They continue to support emotional and mental health of the parents (very large part due to COVID) as well as helping the parents to break down activities into small achievable steps. They respond to parents request for next steps ideas and they send out electronically or by doorstep drops new activities. They continue with the Sensory time virtually with the Children Centres and they support the Rainbows groups. They liaise with parents, SEND Officers and settings/schools when children transition into a placement. The numbers of requests for involvement are increasing.

The Early Years SEND Officers are now up to 3.5 Officers with 2 new officers starting in November 2020 and January 2021. They are currently holding planning meetings with every setting virtually to gain an insight to each child referred the team; supporting assessments of emerging need, identifying strategies to enhance learning and development and consolidate information where a EHCP maybe required.

Since the start of Autumn term and with the return of larger groups of children settings inform, since the first lockdown in March, more children have returned/started needing additional time to identify who may/may not have SEND needs – at this point it is still unclear if it is going to be short or long term yet.

Subsequently there have been 3 Inclusive Practice Funding panels since September intake, with 93 children being supported to access their early years education entitlements.

Furthermore, given the demand in this area the SEND team are providing a robust professional development training programme to upskill and enable practitioners to deliver an effective graduated response to need;

Training and support being offered -

- New to the role of SENCo
- How to apply for an EHCP
- ICAN due by end of March
- Autism Education Trust – Making Sense of Autism and Good Autism Practice this term.
- EY SEND cluster meetings.
- EY Accredited SENCo Award on hold until September
- EY SEND Review has started but will be better/easier when lockdown is over.

Feedback from settings is their needing a greater understanding of practical ideas for language development in the settings (not just doing a WELLCOMM screening).

The aim is to work closer with the 0-19 Speech therapy service.

6.0. Workforce Development – Wirral’s Training Platform.

The LA’s Early Years training programme has continued this year, with delivering online since March. Engagement has been sporadic, and we have responded to the sector by reducing costs and delivering at a variety of times (including evening) to ensure accessibility for all. Currently the Quality Improvement & Training team are in the final stages of building a webpage ‘**Wirral EY Quality**’ which will provide a single point of reference for all things Early Years. The hope is that providers will use this to access daily updates (both local and national), resources and management materials, e-learning modules, SEND information etc. This will also provide a training platform for providers and a payment portal.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Forum to note the report.

Paul Boyce
Director of Children, Families and Education