

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS' FORUM 6th October 2022

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

EARLY YEAR WORKING GROUP UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update Wirral's School Forum on recent Early Years performance and service updates.

2.0 Take up of Universal 2, 3 + 4 early years free entitlements & 30 hours extended (EYFE).

2.1 The take up of early years free funding entitlements remains slightly below pre pandemic percentage's, which in the main were above 90%.

2.2 There has been an increase in the number of 2 YO's taking up a free funded placement, from 82.82% to 87% in summer term. A robust engagement strategy to improve take up continues to operate through Wirral's Children Centres, gaining an understanding of barriers to take up. However, Wirral's percentage remains higher than the newly published National average of 72%.

2.3 We continue to receive anecdotal feedback that some settings are offering less 2YO places and opting to maximise their 3 & 4 year offer due to the lower ratio requirements, because of staffing issues. A workforce development post has been created and currently in recruitment process. This post will further understand and support the workforce and retention issues across the sector.

2.4 The take up of 3–4-year-olds combined remains at 87% which is slightly below the new national average of 92%. Again, this is being closely monitored with a specific focus on the Wallasey area which has the lowest take up, around 85% than that of Birkenhead and South & West Wirral.

Having previously identified a reduction in this funding figure we have investigated and discovered a discrepancy in the population figures used internally compared to the one the DfE use. Their population figure is supplied by ONS, and using this we would register a funding rate of 95%

2.5 The majority (97%) of settings providing places for 2, 3 + 4-year funding entitlements are judged "Good" or better by Ofsted. However, during the past 6 months there have been a number judged as "requires improvement" and "inadequate", which has resulted in funding being suspended, until quality judgements improve at next inspection.

3.0 Childcare Sufficiency

3.1 Childcare Provider Statistics

	Mar-22	Jun-22
Academies	3	3
Childminders	152	147
Day Nurseries	66	65
Extended Care	32	30
Independent Schools	3	3
Maintained Nursery Schools	3	3
Pre-Schools	30	30
Schools	55	55
Special Schools	2	2
Total	346	338

3.2 Some settings are capping the number of children they can take or closing rooms temporarily due to staffing issues for a number of reasons for example staff sickness, staff leaving, issues recruiting new staff or agency staff.

3.3 Still appears to be sufficient places available across the Borough, although not necessarily to meet requests of parents for specific days/sessions.

3.4 Whilst we are seeing several childminder resignations, new childminders are still coming through on a regular basis, quite a few recently through childminder agencies.

4.0 Workforce Development Working Group

4.1 The group has considered options and is now moving forward with a workplace programme alongside sessions focused on promoting childcare courses.

4.2 An 'Early Education and Careers page has been created to provide information to people interested in a career in the sector, <https://wirraleyquality.co.uk/careers/>.

4.3 A 30 second radio advert has been produced and is live on Gov.uk radio.

4.4 Working with Council comms manager to discuss a comms campaign possibly shared with care sector.

4.5 Student placements have been arranged for Prenton High School, Ridgeway High School, and Co-op Academy Bebington. Talks have taken place at Oldershaw

School and Ridgeway High, and a further talk is scheduled to take place at Prenton High later this month.

4.6 A recruitment event was held at the Floral Pavilion with attendance from a variety of providers, Wirral Met College, JM Training and Involve Northwest, along with a presentation from a Quality Officer about working in the sector. Attendance was good and lots of networking took place between providers and attendees. It is hoped that we can hold further events in the near future.

5.0 Quality, Training and Practice Improvement

5.1 The Effective Practice Quality Mark training package devised for this past year has been received well, this will now run as an annual quality mark. The training package covers key areas, pertinent to the current early years' climate and provider's needs, including: Child development, Key person, SALT and Curriculum (in total there have been 18 courses within the quality mark)

5.2 This year **94** providers gained the quality mark at some level Bronze, silver or gold, equating to **460** individual practitioners. (The EPQM has also generated an income of £2300 to date.)

5.3 A wide breadth of training has been delivered this year by the team, (including the EPQM above) as well as liaising with partners to diversify the offer. *Designated Safeguarding Lead* (including suitable training for childminders and refresher courses)

5.4 The Managers Network has been a new implementation to support networking in the sector, sharing practice and creating a collaborative approach. Feedback has been hugely positive and engagement levels very good.

5.5 The Early Years Online Platform has seen engagement grow greatly, with **683** practitioners now registered. There is now **19** eLearning modules available ranging from conference recordings, knowledge refreshers and instructional videos. This has helped to greatly diversify our training offer and fits into a more blended offer post-Covid.

5.6 The platform has been a hugely valuable asset, allowing us to create training, manage bookings and invoicing independently. Creating a centralised support point for all providers has also been massively beneficial.

5.7 Currently there are **97%** of providers judged good or above by Ofsted. Within this, 3 settings are 'requires improvement' and 3 'inadequate'. All of these settings are being supported by a Quality Improvement Officer utilising the support framework.

5.8 Engagement (*this year to date, from Apr '22*)

Attendance at training- 196 providers (some providers attending multiple courses)

Targeted support visits- 34

Pre-registration visits- 5

Good or above visits- 31

5.9 Four settings committed to the expert and mentor pilot programme (Apr-July 2022), two successfully completed the programme with action plans submitted to the DFE.

5.10 In August 22' several settings were put forward for the first phase of the project and four have been offered a place on the programme for the Autumn term 22'. An area lead, experts & mentors have been allocated to the settings. A meeting has been arranged for the Expert & mentor team to liaise with the Quality team to coordinate and compliment support for the settings during the term.

5.11 The Sally Tonge project is planned to begin in Jan 2023, with funding committed. The aim of the project is to explore storytelling/rhyme as a means of enhancing the development of children's communication and language. To offer practical ways to enrich language environments for young children. To upskill practitioners and give them the confidence and skills to engage the children in creating stories and music together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School Forum is recommended to note the report.

Simone White

Director of Children, Families and Education