

Key

WIRRAL COUNCIL SCHOOLS FORUM REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SERVICES EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Wirral's School Forum with an overview of Early Years for children in Wirral. The overview will include the support that available at each stage, any imminent changes from government legislation and current data available. The report outlines the services available within Early Childhood Services and partners, it is acknowledged there is a much wider system of agencies and partners within Early Years.

2.0 Overview

2.1 Wirral's Early Years Strategy has now been launched to parents, carers and professionals. To support implementation of the Strategy a delivery group has been established with representatives from key stakeholders. The group are working on how children's and parent's voices can be included and how the system can regularly come to together to work on issues for Wirral's youngest children.

2.2 The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on Local Authorities to:

- To secure sufficient childcare for working parents (section 6).
- Secure early years provision free of charge (section 7).
- Limit the requirements local authorities can impose when they make arrangements to deliver early education places for two-, three- and four-year-olds (Section 9A).
- Provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents (Section 12).
- Provide information, advice and training to childcare providers (Section 13).

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21>

2.3 The early years workforce is currently facing many challenges. Recruitment of new staff is difficult due to the reduction of students completing early years qualifications. Experienced staff are leaving the sector due to retail now paying more with less responsibility. Children are displaying higher levels of need and it's often unclear if this is a delay in development due to covid pandemic, a SEND concern,

parenting issue or trauma based. The childcare sector feels the early years funding does not cover the cost of places and the rising cost of living is also impacting.

3.0 Antenatal Period

3.1 Expectant parents often receive their first contact with a professional at around 8 weeks gestation, this is their booking in appointment with their midwife. During Covid-19 this was completed over the telephone. As of April 2023, these appointments have moved back to 'in person' in the Children's Centres and other community venues. Not only does this allow for a more detailed discussion with the midwife and parents thus identifying any challenges the family may be facing earlier, it also offers an opportunity for expectant parents to access support services within their communities.

3.2 As an early years partnership, there are many services that expectant parents can access antenatally, they include specialist perinatal mental health support, smoking cessation, 'singing mamas' and 'Mamafit' classes. There is both 'universal' drop-in support in the form of Bumps to Babies groups, which enables parents to build a network of support in the antenatal period as well as being provided with information around healthy pregnancies and infant feeding support (for example).

3.3 Where parents are identified as needing more specialist support, with their consent the parent's challenges can be discussed at Wirral's Pre-birth Liaison meeting. Representation from across Midwifery, 0-19 services, Family Nurse Partnership, Integrated Front Door and Children's Social Care enables a multi-agency discussion identifying challenges and working together to provide the best support for the family, with the unborn at the heart of decision making.

3.4 Within Early Childhood Services (ECS) there is a specialist Pre-birth and infant team who provide intensive support to families who may have previously experienced separation or removal of previous children. The team can complete PAMS (Parent Assessment Manual) assessments which identifies challenges the parents may have and identifies both areas for support and the capacity to make these changes. Evidence based parenting support is offered intensively, as well as working closely with Children's Social Care with the aim to keep the family together and baby to receive the best start in life.

3.5 It is acknowledged that within the antenatal period and the newborn period, this can be a challenging time for relationships. Therefore, we have a skilled workforce who are able to support with parental conflict, and for those situations that escalate to domestic abuse incidents, ECS facilitates course such as Gateway programme and Caring Dads which provide insight into healthy relationships. Often following the

completion of these courses, parents have built up a strong network of support and go on to facilitate their own support groups for others.

4.0 Birth to 1 years

4.1 Through an information sharing agreement with the 0-19 team, ECS receive Birth notifications of children within Wirral. ECS teams visit each family with a 'Welcome to the World' pack, this introduces families to services in their community as well as simple activities that can be done in the home together to support their Child's Development.

4.2 Children's Centre groups focus on the prime areas of learning: Communication and Language, Physical Development and Personal Social and Emotional Development. The development of a strong attachment is key to both the mental health of parents and the emotional and development wellbeing of the baby. Groups such as 'Baby Massage' provide a unique opportunity to help develop this attachment. Language Development is a key challenge for Wirral's children, within the 1st year of life Children's Centres offer Baby Babble sessions, teams are trained by speech and language therapists to provide high quality session which enable parents and carers to interact with their children. Baby Yoga encouraged gross motor skills of both parents and babies, which helps support the development of fine motor skill and a first step in getting ready for school.

4.3 Welcome to the World is an evidence-based parenting course, delivered by the Prebirth and Infant team. It provides practical support for preparing for a baby such as infant feeding support, bathing a baby and preparing for labour and beyond.

4.4 Dolly Parton Imagination Library is a book gifting scheme which has been rolled out across 5 targeted wards of Wirral: Birkenhead and Tranmere, Rock Ferry, Bidston St James, Secombe and Leasowe. The aim of the scheme is to enable families to have access to high quality books, posted each month for free, which can often be expensive for families to purchase and therefore can be a barrier to reading together. Books will continue to be gifted until the child's 5th birthday. Early indications show that parents are reporting they are reading to their children more.

4.5 ECS aims and key performance indicators are part of the wider Early Help and Children's Services agenda, but also closely align with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Wirral and its aim to ensure that Children receive the Best Start in Life. Working with key agencies such as 0-19 service is integral to achieving this. An example of partnership working includes 0-19 service and ECS being jointly accredited as Baby Friendly with UNICEF to Level 3 standard, evidencing that environments and practice across the 2 services promote both infant feeding and responsive parenting.

4.6 Between 9-12 months a family will be invited to their child's first development review, this provides an opportunity to discuss their child's development with a health professional, discuss any concerns they may and access key development message such as the introduction of oral health messaging. If any needs are identified within this review, pathways into ECS as well as other specialist services exist which ensure that families are able to access the support they need.

4.7 From September 2024 15 hours of childcare will be extended to all children from the age of nine months living in a working household. This will potentially increase the number of families accessing work or increasing their hours. The Early years team are currently working on sufficiency to ensure enough provision is available for families.

4.8 All parents can access Tax Free Childcare (TFC), up to £2000 per year for each child to help with childcare costs. In 21/22 2880 families used TFC for 3640 children. Whilst this has been increasing year on year the data shows parents are not utilising this funding. The early years business team will be marketing this offer to encourage more families to make use of this funding.

5.0 1 year to 2 years

5.1 Speech and Language interventions such as Chatter Tots and WELLCOMM assessments are imperative within this age group, we are able to identify delay, implement a package of support, reassess and refer to specialist SALT services if there has been no progress and more specialist support is needed. In addition, each Children's Centre has a Sensory room which is accessible for all families, they can also be accessed by specialist support services such as physiotherapy, vision support and occupational therapy services- who also provide clinics in the Children's Centres.

5.2 Through the development of Wirral's speech and language pathway, the early years partnership co-produced an 18-month community speech and language check, this is quick and easy checklist for parents to utilise and think, know what to expect and when in relation to language development. It also provides information in relation to where families can access support with their child's development, both in person and online.

5.3 As children develop their independence skills this can often bring behaviour that is challenging. Evidence based parenting programmes such as the Nurturing Programme provide support to parents with boundaries and routines, reflecting on how a parent was parented and how this influences your own parenting styles.

5.4 Childminders can access a drop-in session, to support children's social interactions with their peers. Childminders are able to provide peer support to each other and reduce their isolation as well as gain advice and guidance from a quality Improvement officer.

5.5 Children with a delay in development or SEND aged 0-3 can access the portage service. The Portage team, work with parents in the home to break down skills into small achievable steps covering all areas of learning. 38 families are currently working with the portage team. As well as the support offered in the home, the portage team offer sessions of support in partnership with ECS in Children's Centres. Rainbows groups are offered in partnership with Wirral Autism Together, for families who may have identified some social communication challenges for their children. Signing for babies is delivered by Sundowns Charity, for children with Down Syndrome to learn communication skills via Makaton.

6.0 2 years to 3 years

6.1 In partnership with Kings College London the early years team are implementing a randomised control trial to support children's Good Level of Development. The project includes 7 partners coming together to support children attending 20 settings between July 23 till June 24. The results of this trial will inform future delivery plans to support children.

6.2 From April 2024, working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of childcare. The early years team are currently waiting for guidance from Department for Education (DfE) on how this will be delivered.

6.3 Currently eligible two-year-olds can receive 15 hours of childcare. DfE send notification of eligible children, children's centre staff visit families within the community to promote the entitlement. The current take-up of the offer is 78%, population 1158 903 taking up, however this is expected to rise for Summer term. Eligibility is dipping due to the raise in minimum wage, tax credits and the income threshold hasn't changed for over 5 years. Wirral's population figure will be 1002 for financial year 23/24.

6.4 From September 23 the staffing ratio for two-year-old children will change from 1:4 to 1:5. The sector currently feel adapting to this figure will impact on staff well-being and are planning to only use the increased ration in emergencies.

6.5 Between 2 and 2.5 years a further developmental check is completed by a health professional, again offering an opportunity to discuss a child's development and identify any challenges that may need support. As with the 9–12-month review, there is a referral pathway to a variety of specialist support services. In particular where a

child is identified as having speech and language needs, the child is referred to ECS for the completion of the WELLCOMM assessment.

6.6 The Early Years Quality Improvement team have a tier approach to supporting early years providers. A universal offer for all providers to access information, advice and guidance when needed. A targeted offer for pre-registration, pre-inspection support or specific identified support. The specialist offer is for providers who receive an inspection judgement less than good, support around safeguarding. Currently 97% of providers are judged to be good or better across early years provision.

7.0 3 years to 4 years

7.1 All children aged 3-and-4years-old are entitled to 15 hours of early years provision. Eligible working parents can receive an additional 15hours of early years provision to support employment. The current take-up for 3-year funding is 91%. This has maintained from last year.

7.2 To support children's learning Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is provided to top up the base rate by 62p per hour. This funding is used to support learning and development of eligible children. Currently 811 receive EYPP funding, unfortunately there is no population data however the system in place ensures 100% of eligible children receive this funding.

7.3 Children with lower level or emerging Special Education Needs are supported with additional funding to providers through the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF). Early years providers and schools are supporting a review of the funding for September 23 onwards. This academic year the fund has supported 169 children and predominant primary need is communication and interaction.

7.3 Disability Access Fund (DAF) is given to providers for children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. The £800 for a calendar year is used to ensure the child's access to provision and can be used to support reasonable adjustments or resources to ensure inclusion at the setting. Currently Wirral has 58 children in receipt of DAF.

7.4 Parents or providers can also submit a request for additional support through an Education and Health Care (EHC) Assessment potentially leading to a Plan. Currently Wirral has 99 children under 5 years of age with an EHC plan and 94 on the assessment pathway.

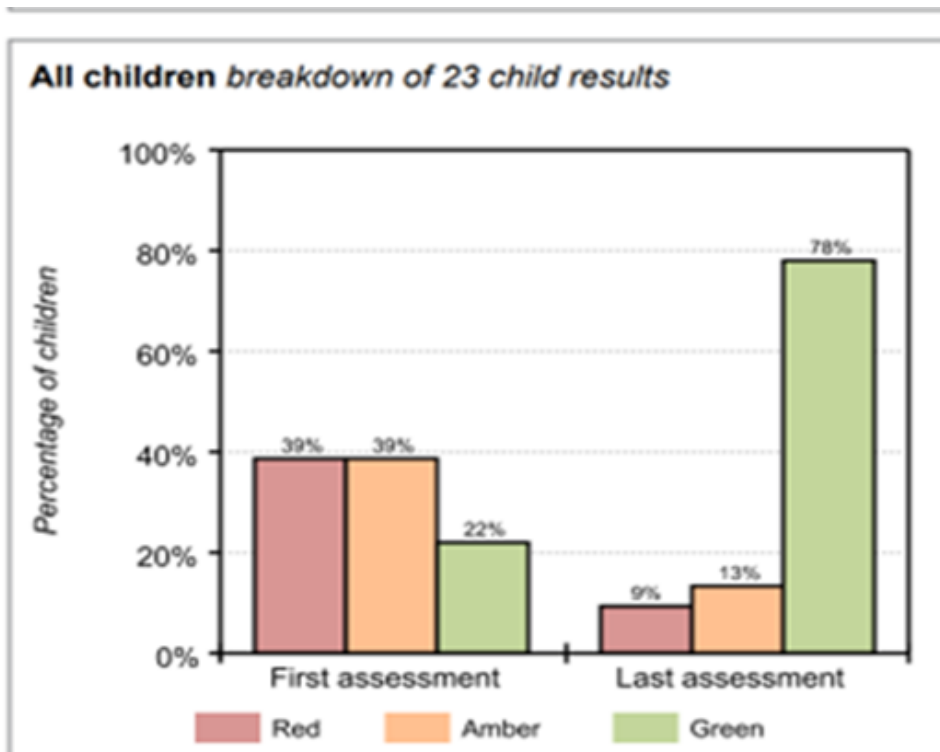
7.5 SEND officer support is available for all Early Years settings and two-year and Foundation 1 classes in schools. The SEND officers support quality first teaching and the graduated approach. As well as providing individual strategies to support children during their time in a setting and then supporting their transition to school.

7.6 The Effective Practice Quality Mark (EPQM) programme offered a set of training workshops to enable providers to achieve a bronze, silver or gold award based on the number of workshops they purchase. Currently 62 settings have signed up to the programme. Wirral's Early Years online platform hosts 20 e-learning courses and has 870 users.

7.7 The quality improvement team read all Wirral early years inspection reports identify trends and devise training to support these trends. For example, curriculum and co-regulation training has been developed to address an identified need. This is supported by training delivered by the SEND team who offer Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) accredited training at level 2 and 3. To date 65 have completed the level 3 training with a further 12 currently completing.

7.8 The early years team have just completed the universal transition programme. Collecting information from early years providers and compiling this into their destination school. This is to start the conversation during the summer term for children transitioning to Foundation 2 classes. 83% of setting submitted information, 11% points increase from last year. Communication and concentration identified as areas of concern across Wirral.

7.9 By using GLD data and in partnership with local schools ECS provide speech and language support in primary schools, by completing a WELLCOMM with identified children, providing a package of support and then rescreening to assess if the intervention has made an impact. Please see table below- from 1st assessment to second assessment.



8.0 4 years to 5 years

8.1 Wirral has seen an increase in the number of children requesting to defer their child starting school. Last year 53 children deferred their place, currently 23 have so far applied to defer their place. Admissions, SEND and Early Years are working together to ensure appropriate funding is in place for children deferring.

8.2 Tracking back of the Good Level of Development (GLD) is completed each year the data is available. The infographic is shared with the early years system to identify the activity that appears to support GLD. For instance, accessing Children's Centre provision, good attendance and taking up early year's entitlements are more likely to mean a child will achieve their GLD.

8.3 The government is providing funding to support the increase in wraparound care within schools. With an expectation that by September 2026 most schools will offer childcare before or after school.

8.4 From September 2025, working parents of children under the age of five will be entitled to 30 hours free childcare per week. Whilst many working parents will have always planned to have their children attend childcare this new offer may mean an increase in demand which could lead to a widening of the attainment gap.

8.5 The early years team also support various projects from My Happy Mind in partnership with public health to support mental health and well-being of children. The Professional Development Programme in partnership with Department for

Education (DfE), Education Development Trust to support teaching of early language, early mathematics and personal, social and emotional development. The expert and mentor programme in partnership with DfE to support settings priorities and needs. The Business support project in partnership with Hemsall's to support the sustainability of settings.

8.6 The workforce development group identified key work streams to support the sector with recruitment and retention issues. Work is being completed to support a commission to implement this plan over the next 12 to 18 months.

8.7 Early years providers are having to cap numbers due to the recruitment issues. Whilst we are still able to place children this is becoming more difficult, and parents are not able to get the days and times they want or need. The Business team are completing a sufficiency check over the next few months to identify areas of pressure to ward level. This will support the implementation of the proposed expansion of early years entitlement funding. The net loss of providers is reducing which is bucking a national trend now. Generally, it is childminders across South and West locality closing and opening.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 School Forum to note the report.

10.0 Appendices

10.1 Early Years Strategy - <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/EY2022>



Final EYFE
Agreement 23-24.pdf

10.2 Early Years Funding Agreement

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