

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee met on 15 September 2014.

Present: Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Stephen Shing (Vice-Chair), Peter Charlton, Michael Ensor, Roy Galley, Jim Sheppard (substituting for Claire Dowling), Alan Shuttleworth, Francis Whetstone, Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative), Simon Parr (Diocesan Representative) and Councillor Johanna Howell (District & Borough Council representative).

Also present: Councillor Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member for Children & Families).

1. Scrutiny Review of Early Years Attainment

1.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has completed its Scrutiny Review of Early Years Attainment. A copy of the Committee's full report has previously been circulated to all members and is available on request from Andy Cottell (Tel: 01273 481955).

1.2 Giving children a good start to their education is of key importance and poor levels of attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which covers children from birth to 5 years old, undermines progress and attainment in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

1.3 In 2012/13 despite 82% of children attending a setting rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, only 44% of East Sussex children were assessed as having a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) compared with a national average of 52%. (Provisional data for 2013/14 indicates that 65.6% of children are achieving a good level of development in the EYFS compared with a provisional national average of 60.4%).

1.4 The Review found children do best when they have a nurturing home, attend a quality pre-school provision with highly qualified staff (child minders, nurseries, playgroups etc.), followed by a high achieving primary school. A key component of good quality early education provision is having well managed transitions when children move through and into the early education system, and are supported by highly qualified early years staff.

1.5 The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee **recommends** to the County Council –

1.5.1. Children's Centres fulfil a number of roles. However, they should focus their work to improve children's early development and educational attainment by:

- a) Conducting outreach work in order to know all the families in their area and to identify their needs early (children's centres KPI 9 & 10).
- b) Co-ordinating work to support families to ensure school readiness and language development needs are being met (children's centres KPI 1 & 5).
- c) Making child development progress and language development checkers available to all parents/carers.
- d) Providing parenting courses for parents/carers and examine ways of involving parents/carers in their children's learning to improve home learning environments (children's centres KPI 4).
- e) Working with Health providers to review the child development advice and guidance given to parents/carers from pre- birth through to age 2 in the light of the withdrawal of free universal antenatal classes.

1.5.2 Following the withdrawal of early years teachers from Children's Centres, examine the feasibility and benefits of bringing Children's Centres and the Early Years Improvement Team under the same management to strengthen the early years education role of Children's Centres.

1.5.3 Children attending high quality early years provision have higher levels of attainment. It is important for parents and carers to have good information so they can access high quality early years provision and understand the benefits for their children. The Scrutiny Committee recommends that:

- a) Information for parents/carers on the quality of pre-school providers should be improved to make it easier for them to identify high quality provision in their area and those settings who are working with the Council to improve attainment.
- b) Information for parents/carers on the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) web site must be easier to find, be up to date and show the Ofsted rating for the setting together with the qualification level of the staff (e.g. an A-Z list of settings assessed as 'good' or 'outstanding' together with qualification levels of lead and support staff).
- c) The ESCC website should contain advice for parents/carers highlighting the benefits of choosing 'good' or 'outstanding' settings for children's education.

1.5.4 Attainment can be improved if pre-school early years providers work closely with primary schools and one another to improve transitions and school readiness, the quality of their assessment of children's progress, and their teaching practice. The Scrutiny Committee recommends that:

- a) The Early Years 'Village' and quality across the foundation stage (QUAFS) projects are extended to all primary schools by September 2016.
- b) Early years hubs are developed to promote good practice through clusters of providers and consideration be given to creating foundation stage leaders/area co-ordinators for early years settings (a strategy is currently being introduced by the Early Years Team).
- c) Pre-school providers should be included in primary school alliances to facilitate the spreading of best practice across all settings.
- d) ESCC should take opportunities to promote pre-school provision co-located with primary schools, which could be either private, voluntary or maintained provision.

1.5.5 Evidence suggests that attending good quality early years provision leads to higher levels of attainment. However, not all provision in East Sussex is 'good' or 'outstanding' and levels of attainment are below national averages. The Scrutiny Committee recommends that:

- a) ESCC continues to work with early years settings in the Ofsted categories of 'requires improvement/satisfactory' and 'inadequate', so that at least 85% of settings are in Ofsted categories of 'good' or 'outstanding' by September 2015 and at least 90% by September 2016 to ensure all parents/carers have access to a good quality setting in their area.
- b) The Early Years Improvement Team continue to develop programmes to tackle early years foundation stage (EYFS) profile weaknesses in literacy development, communication & language development and mathematics development.
- c) Primary schools consider including an early years specialist as part of the school leadership team, and governing bodies should appoint a governor with specific responsibility for the early years foundation stage (EYFS).
- d) ESCC should develop enhanced quality assurance measures and target those settings whose attainment results are not in line with their Ofsted rating.

1.5.6 Evidence highlights the role that highly qualified early years practitioners have in improving attainment. The Scrutiny Committee believe that ESCC should take action to improve the qualification levels and practice of early years leaders and staff in East Sussex. It recommends that:

- a) ESCC adopt a policy that all child minders and pre-school early years staff should hold or be working towards at least a Level 3 qualification by September 2016. Any prospective child minders should be required to obtain a Level 3 qualification.
- b) ESCC provide a list of preferred training providers for Level 3 early educator training courses and higher level training, to increase the number of early years staff and practitioners with higher level qualifications.
- c) The Early Years Improvement Team provide training for managers of early years settings in staff mentoring/supervision, appraisal and staff development to support the development of best practice within settings (i.e. Level 5 minimum qualification standards for lead practitioners).

1.5.7 It is recognised that the Council's financial position may not allow additional resources to be invested in early years education. However, some re-allocation of resources should be considered to improve early years attainment as evidence suggests this will also improve attainment at Key Stage 1 & 2. The Scrutiny Committee recommends that:

- a) ESCC review the allocation of funding for early years education through the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process, and by agreement with the Schools Forum, to provide a 2 year transitional programme of resources for early years provision in 2015/16 and 2016/17 to fund:
 - transformative measures to raise staff qualification levels in all settings;
 - training for early years educator level 3 qualifications;
 - delivery of more quality across the foundation stage and early years village projects and;
 - the establishment of peer to peer quality improvement networks so that all providers are included within a network of providers.
- b) The East Sussex early years funding formula is changed to encourage and enable pre-school providers to employ well qualified staff though the use of an enhanced lump sum supplement for high quality providers.
- c) Officers investigate the mechanism for calculating the per child amount in the early years funding that ESCC receives from central government, to ensure it reflects fairly the needs of children in the County.

[See also report of the Cabinet – 15 October 2014]

15 September 2014

KATHRYN FIELD
Chair

