

Education and Skills Scrutiny Commission

March 25th 2019



Report of: Director, Education, Learning and Skills

Title: Schools Readiness – Early Years

Ward: All Wards

Officer Presenting Report: Sally Jaeckle

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Recommendation:

Members are recommended to support the development of a strategy working with key partners to address the priorities identified and improve outcomes for all children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly those facing the greatest challenges.

The significant issues in the report are:

The LGA Early Years Peer Challenge noted the quality and professionalism of early years services and a strong commitment to putting vulnerable children and families at the centre of the Early Years system. However outcomes for children eligible for Free School Meals at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are below the median nationally and opportunities were identified to build on current strengths to co-construct a coherent multi agency strategy to ensure that all children make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage and into Key Stage 1, particularly those children experiencing the greatest challenges.



1. Summary

Improving outcomes for all children in Communication, Language and Literacy at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is recognised by the DfE as the key to Social Mobility. Outcomes for Bristol children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage have been improving steadily over the last five years. In 2018 69% of children achieved a Good Level of Development in Communication, Language and Literacy, ranking Bristol 3rd out of the 8 core cities but below national (71%). However there are pronounced gaps in attainment for children eligible for free school meals and their peers.

This was therefore the focus of an LGA peer challenge to the Early Years' Service in January/February 2019. The quality and professionalism of provision was found to be good overall, including a strong commitment to putting vulnerable children and families at the centre of the Early Years system. There was also evidence of good engagement with partners and parents. There is now an opportunity to build on these strengths and co-construct a coherent and clarified multi-agency strategy to ensure that all children make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage and into Reception and Key Stage 1, particularly those children experiencing the greatest challenges.

2. Context:

2.1. Bristol:

Bristol is a rapidly growing and changing city. There has been a 30% increase in the number of children aged birth to four in the last decade and the population is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, reflecting the recent growth in Somali and Polish communities. Over this decade (2016-26), the population increase in Bristol is projected to be the fifth highest of all Local Authorities in England.

The 2018 School Census shows that almost 48% of nursery aged children now identify as 'Non-White' British and there are at least 187 countries of birth represented, 45 religions and 91 main languages spoken by people living in Bristol. 1 in 5 Bristol children under 16 are now living in low income families and 18% of children aged birth to four years are in households in receipt of out of work benefits compared to 16% nationally.

Bristol Children's Centres provide a universal offer of integrated early education, health and family support services, tailored to the needs of each community. 77% of children under four are currently registered with their local Children's Centre, rising to 83% in the 10% most disadvantaged SOA's.

Bristol's aspiration is to give every child and family a good start in life, particularly those facing the greatest challenges. Promoting inclusive practice is at the heart of the Early Years Strategy.

2.2. Focus of the Peer Challenge:

The focus of the peer challenge is on improving outcomes for all children in Communication, Language and Literacy at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, as this is recognised by the DfE as the key to Social Mobility.

2.3. Provocation for the Peer Review:

Bristol is recognised nationally and internationally for the quality of its Early Years Services, as evidenced by visits from interested partners including Denmark, the United States and other Local Authorities across the UK, but this is not reflected in outcomes for all children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. While outcomes are improving overall at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, attainment for children eligible for Free School Meals is below the national median. This therefore was the provocation and key line of enquiry for the LGA Peer Review.

2.4. EIF Maturity Matrix Analysis:

In preparation for the Early Years Peer Review, 22 stakeholders representing a range of agencies and partners, including health visitors, speech and language therapists, Early Years settings and schools, Children's Centres, the Families in Focus team and Feeding Bristol, were invited to complete a self-assessment matrix in December 2018; 17 complete responses were received. The analysis of responses by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) identified that "substantial progress" had been perceived in the following themes:

- Vision/ Strategy/Planning
- Leadership, voice and culture
- Quality
- Information for Families
- Workforce Development

And 'early progress' in:

- Community engagement
- Data collection/information sharing/evaluation

Key Lines of Enquiry:

We therefore wanted to test progress on the following systemic priorities that are emerging, to eventually eliminate gaps in attainment at age five and ensure that every child is ready for school:

- a) Create a coherent, single, city-wide narrative to improve outcomes for all children in Communication, Language and Literacy that promotes effective connectivity between agencies and local communities
- b) Strengthen community engagement and expertise to build local capacity, particularly in the development of the Home Learning Environment, and build future sustainability through local initiatives that are co-produced
- c) Develop a shared outcomes framework to assess how well we are doing against clear actions and work collaboratively to effect change

2.5. Outcomes for Communication, Language and Literacy:

69% of children in Bristol achieved a Good Level of Development in Communication, Language and Literacy at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2018. Although this is below the national average, Bristol is ranked 3rd out of the 8 core cities, behind Newcastle and Sheffield.

Although girls continue to achieve better outcomes than boys in all areas of learning, the gender gap for Communication, Language and Literacy is 3ppts narrower (ie better) than the national average. However, this is not consistent in all ethnic groups.

Other significant gaps include a 22ppt gap in achievement between the 872 children eligible for Free School Meals and their peers.

Gaps in learning and development begin to appear before the age of two and rarely narrow as children progress through Primary and Secondary school. There are therefore clear challenges to be addressed if we are to achieve our aspiration to give every child a good start to life and positive dispositions to learning, motivation and engagement.

A holistic multi-agency approach is needed to strengthen children's opportunities in the development of their Communication, Language and Literacy skills in both the Home Learning Environment and Early Years settings and schools, while addressing the broader impact of family poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences.

2.6. Quality and Take Up of Early Education and Childcare Provision:

Take up of the Free Early Education Entitlement for Two Year Olds:

There was an increase in the take up of the Early Education and Childcare offer for eligible two year olds from 50% in 2015 (58% national) to 68% in 2018 (72% national), and over that period the gap between Bristol and the national average narrowed by 4ppts. However there has been a decrease of 2% in take up between 2017 and 2018, so the Early Years Service is closely monitoring the situation. Early Years settings report nationally and locally that the extended free early education offer for three and four year olds (30 hours a week for eligible working families) is more cost-effective to deliver than the two year old offer, and this may explain our local situation. Children's Centres are actively promoting the take up of the two year old free entitlement, particularly in communities where families may not consider this a priority for cultural or other reasons.

Eligible two year olds are in early years provision that has been judged 100% good or better by Ofsted. We have developed local agreements to enable children of refugees and asylum seekers and children of Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller heritage fast track access to this provision. 91% of two year old children who have been identified by the DWP as having complex needs and allocated the Disability Living Allowance are taking up their offer of free early education. Settings offering provision to eligible two year olds with emerging SEND or more complex needs are able to access additional funding through the Early Years Inclusion Panel.

Take up of the Free Early Education Entitlement for Three and Four Year Olds:

93% of three and four year old children accessed the Free Early Education and Childcare Entitlement in 2018, which is 1ppt below the national average and ranks Bristol joint 3rd against the other core cities, alongside Liverpool and Manchester and below Leeds (97%) and Newcastle (95%).

Delivery of the extended 30 hours provision by providers has increased from 67% to 80% between September 2017 and January 2019, with 100% of Nursery Schools and Children's Centres offering 30 hours, and 94% of Private Nurseries. Take up by parents has been

much higher than expected. The DfE anticipated that 2,500 families would claim 30 hours but in the first term, 2,037 codes were used, rising to 3,368 codes by the end of the first year of the offer. Bristol's processes and paperwork were recognised by the DfE as a model of good practice for supporting Foster Parents in accessing 30 hours from Sept 2018.

Take up of the Free Early Education Entitlement continues to be a priority for the Early Years Service and will be closely monitored, alongside the take up of the new extended entitlement for eligible, working families.

2.7. OFSTED Early Years judgements:

Children are able to access their Free Entitlement across a range of high quality early years settings including:

- 150 Private, Voluntary and Independent settings
- 12 maintained nursery schools
- 41 maintained nursery classes
- 101 Reception Classes in Primary Schools
- 406 Childminders
- 4 area-based Children's Centre Hubs, providing integrated Early Education, Health and Family Support Services across 22 sites

The percentage of early years settings currently rated at least Good by Ofsted continues to improve across the early years sector, with the exception of early years provision in schools which declined by 5.6% this quarter:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| • Private Providers: | 95% |
| • Voluntary Providers: | 97% |
| • Maintained Providers: | 100% |
| • Childminders: | 99% |
| • Nursery Schools | 100 % |
| • Schools (Early Years) | 74% |

The transition from nursery to school will continue to be a priority for the Early Years Service to secure continuity for children and families throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and into Key Stage 1. The quality of provision in Reception Classes is an ongoing focus which will be supported through the recruitment, designation and deployment of additional expert Reception Teachers as Specialist Leaders of Education. The Early Years Service hosts termly meetings of an active Early Years Coordinators in Schools Network which is well attended and well received, with 100 teachers attending the most recent learning seminar which focused on Communication, Language and Literacy.

2.8. Bristol Children's Centres: provide a universal offer of integrated early education, health and family support services, tailored to each community and targeted to those in greatest need.

In 2018 Bristol Children's Centres were remodelled to save £1.5 million, following a significant reduction in Government funding to Local Authorities. Children's Centre services are now coordinated, managed and quality assured by four hubs, one in each of four areas

across the city, and delivered across the 22 sites to continue the community based offer. The four hubs are led by:

- Filton Avenue Nursery School and Children's Centre in North
- Knowle West Nursery School and Children's Centre in South
- Speedwell Nursery School and Children's Centre in East and
- St Pauls Nursery School and Children's Centre in Central.

Despite their challenging context, children's centres have continued to deliver a strong integrated offer of early education, health and family support across the city to give every child a good start in life. However, some key initiatives have had to be put on hold due to capacity issues and will be reframed in 2019, including the CAPI (Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment) Champions Programme and the Gypsy Roma Traveller Drop -In Centres.

Children's Centre Leaders receive a comprehensive data pack each year which provides demographic, health, Family Support and education information. This supports them in identifying priorities at a city-wide and community level.

Almost 25,000 children under four years of age are registered with a Bristol Children's Centre and the majority of these families regularly engage with Children's Centre services, including families of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller origin. Although the percentage has dropped slightly following the re-modelling of Children's Centres in 2018, this nevertheless equates to 77% of children overall, rising to 83% in the 10% most disadvantaged SOA's.

Children's Centre services include:

- Early Education and childcare
- Health and maternity Services
- Debt, benefits and money management support
- Adult learning and volunteering opportunities
- Employment support
- Universal, tailored and targeted Family Support programmes

The new model has enabled a strong partnership to develop between the Children's Centre Family Support Leaders and the Families in Focus Area Managers. Although it is still early days, this is already bringing greater strategic alignment and the opportunity to make better use of our combined resources and intelligence, paving the way for a shared outcomes framework.

Over 2,000 responses were received from families that use Children's Centre services in a 2018 survey which identified the important role of Children's Centres in improving well-being and mental health by combatting social isolation and loneliness, particularly in the early years of parenthood.

2.9. Bristol's infrastructure of System Leadership to support Quality Improvement:

Bristol's Early Years model of system leadership underpins the Early Years quality improvement strategy, and the positive impact can be demonstrated by a gradually improving trajectory of outcomes for children and the quality of Early Years provision as

evidenced above. Practising Early Years practitioners and teachers with proven expertise are designated as Specialist Leaders of Education in partnership with the National Early Years Teaching School, according to Bristol's early years strategic priorities. They are deployed to provide short-term targeted support to early years settings and schools where the need has been identified by Ofsted or local intelligence. The impact of this support is carefully monitored.

This support is funded through the National Early Years Funding Formula Quality Improvement Supplement (Dedicated Schools Grant) which promotes System Leadership, so there is no charge to settings. The continuation of the Quality Supplement was agreed by Schools Forum in January 2019 following a consultation with providers in which 91% of respondents agreed to maintaining the current position.

Bristol is committed to promoting a culture of informed self-evaluation and reflective practice across the sector, as evidenced by widespread participation in the longstanding Bristol Standard Quality Assurance Framework in Bristol and beyond:

<https://www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk/the-bristol-standard/>

The Early Years Partnership: this relatively new partnership provides a strategic forum for stakeholders from across the sector and key partners to enable an informed and consultative approach to the identification of priorities in the Early Years, monitoring of impact and a dynamic and solutions focussed response to challenges experienced by the sector.

The systems leadership model is embedding across the sector and provides a strong infrastructure on which the Early Years Service can build to progress the priorities emerging from the Early Years Maturity Matrix (above).

2.10. Health Partnerships:

- Joint commissioning of Speech and Language Therapy Services
Speech, Language and Communication Therapists work in Bristol Children's Centres to provide both preventative and clinical services in the local community, <https://www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk/health/speech-language-therapy/>
- **Partnership with Health Visitors**
There is a shared commitment to securing an aligned approach that brings together the Healthy Child Programme and the Early Years Foundation Stage, including the Together at Two Progress Check. This is a collaborative approach to the development and implementation of an integrated developmental assessment for two year olds, which encompasses Speech, Language and Communication skills.
Ref: Document 1.6: Together at Two Integrated Developmental Progress Check
Wherever possible, Health Visitors and therapists are being co-located on Children's Centre sites.

Breast Feeding Children's Centre Champions:

In 2017 (latest data available) 64% of new mothers were still breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks in Bristol, compared to 50% in England, this is a 4.7ppts increase over the previous three year period. However, again this is not consistent across the city and breastfeeding initiation and sustainability is a continuing challenge in some wards,

eg: Hartcliffe (23%), Knowle West and Lawrence Weston (31%).

We believe that this limited improvement is in part due to the coordination of the Peer Supporter Breast Feeding programme, now based at Knowle West Children's Centre and trained Breast Feeding Champions in our Children's Centres across the city. At the time of writing Bristol Health Visitors are being assessed for the re-accreditation of the UNICEF Baby Friendly initiative.

Parental information and support for breastfeeding continues to be a priority to give every child a good start in life, as this not only promotes children's future health but also helps to establish secure attachments and opportunities for early communication.

Bristol and South Gloucestershire Family Nurse Partnership:

Bristol and South Gloucestershire Family Nurse Partnership is now in its 5th year and continues to be recognised by the FNP National Unit for the skilled work that the team are continuing to deliver to vulnerable young parents across the area. The creation of a safe space and the time to work and support clients to make effective change is key to the success of this approach to practice, which is underpinned by a recognition of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

There is now an opportunity to formalise these partnerships and develop a single Early Years and Health strategy for the Earliest Years (The First Thousand Days) and linked data dashboard. This would aim to align service delivery and make the best use of resources and expertise, further strengthening Bristol's aspiration to give every child a good start in life. A single strategy would promote the early identification of children and families in need of additional interventions and prevent escalation of risk with the high financial and emotional cost that this brings

Other key partnerships include:

- Social Care and Families in Focus – including edge of care services
- The Hope Virtual School for Looked after Children
- Adult and Community Learning - to support parents/carers in accessing basic skills to support volunteering and employment opportunities
- Feeding Bristol and FareShare – a city wide initiative to combat food poverty
- Bristol Refugee Rights – support for children and families
- Bristol Association for Neighbourhood Day Care (BAND) – support for out of school clubs and holiday play schemes <http://bandltd.org.uk/>
- Rockabye (support for families experiencing low well-being following childbirth)

2.11. Continuing Professional Development for Early Years Providers:

A range of high quality continuing professional development opportunities can be accessed to promote early oracy, reading and writing skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage, developed in partnership with the Bristol Early Years Teaching School. However a recent provider consultation (December 2018), **highlighted the financial challenges that early years settings are facing across the sector, which is impacting on their ability to fund CPD activity for their staff**, including releasing them to attend off site courses.

The Boys Achievement action research project is now in its third year and continues to

work with Bristol University, schools, Early Years settings and the Bristol Men in Early Years Network to identify and disseminate best practice in narrowing the gap in achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The Early Years' service is also working with Reading City and the BCC Library Service to develop 'Cloakroom Libraries' in Children's Centres with parents/carers trained as peer champions to promote the importance of sharing books and reading with children in the earliest years.

New DfE funded Communication, Language and Literacy initiatives are in place to further strengthen the Early Years offer in 2019 including:

- A NASEN training programme that is enabling Bristol Early Years SENCO's in PVI settings to achieve the new Level 3 SENCO Award
- A targeted enhancement programme with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and ICAN 'Changing the Conversation about Language' which will focus on improving the Home Learning Environment (HLE) by promoting positive interactions between parents and their children. This will significantly add value to our current SLT programme.
- A targeted DfE funded Professional Development Programme to support early years practitioners working in settings with high numbers of children eligible for Free School Meals in strengthening their knowledge, skills and understanding of children's speech, language and communication development and identifying children at risk of delay or disability.

2.12. Peer Review Recommendations

The report of the peer review (2.2-2.4 above) has been received very recently and has yet to be embedded into the service narrative. Reviewers were impressed by the quality of service delivery, and saw examples of the range and quantity of projects, many resulting from successful bids which had brought additional funding into the city. They recognised the passion and commitment common to elected members and practitioners, putting vulnerable children and families at the heart of the system. In general they saw opportunities for clearer strategic alignment and sharper evaluation, with a series of recommendations of which some reflect issues identified in the service and others provide additional challenge.

- 1) **Create a simple story, co-constructed with partners, that describes the Early Years strategy and top priorities.** The current strategy is not consistently recognised and understood. The Council needs to co-construct with parents and other partners, a simple and commonly understood set of priorities that is shared widely across the city and that is aligned with the City Plan. Activities should then be aligned to these priorities and monitored to ensure the strategy is delivered.
- 2) **Produce a simple data dashboard underpinning the strategy.** The Council needs to provide evidence of outcomes across the city. Bringing together the data that is currently available in a variety of sources will enable more effective governance and help those engaged in Early Years activities to understand how their input and progress against the strategy is being monitored. This should be complemented by more in-depth data analysis of particular areas of challenge or interest.
- 3) **Present a visible, One Families, Children's and Learning team, working together with its wider city partners.** Currently, there is a tendency for professional

teams to work in silos. To ensure that provision is more integrated and efficient, people need to work collaboratively with a common purpose. To facilitate this the Council needs to reinforce the concept of one team working across the various departments and agencies.

- 4) **Collaborate with heads and wider education partners to create a robust education partnership, making the most of the best leaders across the system.** Build on the achievements obtained through the Teaching School. By taking a systematic approach, better practice is identified and shared across the whole education system, rather than compartmentalising within particular stages.
- 5) **Invest and focus on Reception, transition and primary education.** There is a mismatch in the perceived outcomes achieved when leaving pre-school and the assessment in Reception. There needs to be an alignment in the monitoring of individual children and quality improvement resources in Early Years and schools. This will ensure that children are being assessed in a consistent way and the reasons for the level of progress are understood and addressed. This could include a review of the Healthy Child Pathway, from antenatal to five and beyond, to ensure there is equity of access and facilitate measurement of impact on outcomes e.g. Healthy Child Programme Indicators, standards in schools, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
- 6) **Review the use and approach to nursery schools alongside national funding announcements.** There is a level of anxiety in the nursery school sector nationally relating to the outcomes of the spending review of nursery subsidies. There is an opportunity to bring together nursery head teachers and governing bodies to review how they could contribute to the strategic priorities and what might need to be done differently in a climate where there is likely to be less central funding. This should include how to maximise the use of resources.
- 7) **Undertake a systematic evaluation and alignment of services, projects and initiatives.** There was reported to be a high number of projects and initiatives. Given that there are limited resources available, each project should be assessed against their delivery of the strategic priorities (which should also be aligned with the City Plan) and the capacity for them to be sustained. Decisions should then be taken as to which go forward and which do not. This could include a pathway analysis of the offer to all different types of families based on need, with a redesign of the universal and targeted offer and options for traded services.
- 8) **Put in place a strategy for addressing low take-up of the two-year-old offer.** Given the work being undertaken and the facilities in place the two-year-old offer is not where it is expected to be. This needs further analysis and systems need to be put in place so that underperformance, and the underpinning issues, can be effectively acted on, using creative approaches as necessary. Staff should be aware of the actions they need to take to address any slowdown and be actively supported to ensure these are delivered.
- 9) **Actively pursue a city workforce strategy including Early Years and schools.** The Early Years workforce does not currently adequately reflect the make-up of the city. A strategy needs to be developed that ensures the right staff, with the right skills, are in the right place at the right time, with a major focus on appropriate representation of the city's demographic make-up. Any specific Early Years strategy will need to take account of the wider workforce and be aligned with the council wide approach.
- 10) **Create a city accommodation strategy that focuses on creative use of nursery and children's centre sites.** There is a range of accommodation and more needs to be done to ensure equity of provision. Where there is high quality inside and outside

space available there should be a review to consider how this can be maximised and offered more widely to support the integration agenda. Examples of increasing and broadening use could include; provision for ‘contact’, as a base for social workers and health visitors in supporting families and communities.

2.13. Conclusion:

A sound infrastructure is now in place to support the development of the themes outlined in this report. There are strengths to the service including:

- the systems leadership model of quality improvement
- a positive trajectory of Ofsted outcomes for Early Years providers, particularly childminders
- a history of collaborative working with Health Partners and joint commissioning of the Speech, Language and Communication Therapy Service
- a new area based model of integrated early education, childcare, Health and Family Support Children’s Centre Services

However, outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage remain inconsistent and the quality of Early Years provision in Primary Schools is a cause for concern. There is therefore an urgent need to recognise the emerging priorities identified in the maturity matrix and peer review to establish a comprehensive, multi-agency commitment to improving children’s communication, language and literacy from the earliest years as part of a holistic approach.

3. Policy

These recommendations link to the Early Years Strategic Plan, The Business Plan 2019/20 and the One City Plan

4. Consultation

a) Internal

not applicable at this stage

b) External

not applicable at this stage

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.

- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.

5b) The Early Years Service focus on vulnerable children and families is identified in the report

Appendices: n/a

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
Background Papers:

None