

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 8 November 2021.

**PRESENT:** Councillors D McCabe (Chair), L Mason (Vice-Chair), A Hellaoui, T Mawston, M Nugent, M Saunders and G Wilson

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** G Brown, J Brownsell and N Mount

**OFFICERS:** R Brown, S Butcher, C Cannon, T Dunn, D Johnson, J Kitchen, G Moore and K Smith

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors D Jones and P Storey

21/27 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item/Nature of Interest
Councillor A Hellaoui	Non-Pecuniary	Items 4 and 5, member of three governing bodies

21/28 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 4 OCTOBER 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel held on 4 October 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

21/29 **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) - FURTHER EVIDENCE**

A number of officers and representatives from early years settings were in attendance to provide the scrutiny panel with:

- an overview of how early years providers work with the Local Authority to identify and support children with SEN or disabilities and promote equality of opportunity for children in their care

The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that the SEND Code of Practice 0-25 stated that early years providers were required to have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities. Those arrangements needed to include a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN. The benefits of early identification were widely recognised - identifying need at the earliest point, and then making effective provision, improved long-term outcomes for children. It was highlighted that further information on the benefits of early identification was detailed in the submitted report.

It was highlighted that local authorities were required to ensure that there was sufficient expertise and experience amongst local early years providers to support children with SEN. Local authorities often made use of local area SEN Coordinators to provide advice and guidance to early years providers, on the development of inclusive early learning environments. The submitted report included information on the work that had been undertaken to develop provision for children with SEND. An outreach model had been developed, which involved the Early Years and Primary Support Service (EYPSS) visiting early years settings to develop the skills and knowledge of staff members, ensuring more children were able to access mainstream provision. As a result of that work, there had been a significant increase in the number of children with SEND accessing mainstream provision and a reduction in those needing to access the local area's specialist provision at the Cleveland Unit, which had been previously based at James Cook University Hospital and was now based at Hemlington Initiative Centre. The re-location had occurred as a result of the pandemic.

Members were informed that, across Middlesbrough, there were 38 Private, Voluntary & Independent (PVI) settings and 42 school nurseries. There were also 21 full-time equivalent places across 5 specialist assessment nurseries. Those included two special schools, two mainstream schools with resource bases and the Cleveland Unit, which was a Child Development Centre and had been judged by Ofsted as Outstanding 5 times in a row.

The Early Years and Primary Inclusion Lead advised that the EYPSS worked with children from birth until 11 years old. The service was delivered by the Local Authority, however, a multi-agency approach had been adopted. Most importantly, the child and their family were involved/consulted, in addition to health colleagues (e.g. health visitors, speech and language therapists, consultant pediatricians and GPs etc.) and early years settings/schools. The aim of the service was to identify needs at the earliest opportunity, provide early assessment, deliver interventions to promote the best outcomes for each child and their family, support inclusion in a mainstream setting of parents' choice (where possible) and identify the most appropriate setting if an alternative was necessary.

All the work of the EYPSS was based around the model - Assess, Plan, Do, Review. Initially, parents/carers/families were consulted to identify the needs of the child and determine the support that was required. Prior to the child attending an educational setting, work was undertaken to upskill parents/carers to enable them support learning and development.

Initially, an assessment was undertaken of the child's needs, following that parents/carers and the child were invited to multi-disciplinary family groups. Those groups provided assessment, information, advice and guidance to support and upskill parents/carers. The group took a Portage approach, which was a model of support for children and families that could be adapted and used effectively both in the home and in early years settings. The purpose of the approach was to build on identified strengths to support needs. The approach also placed great importance on support for parents and carers. It was highlighted that if parents felt unable to attend a group session, the approach was adapted and home visits were undertaken.

Once parents/carers had identified their preferred early years setting, the EYPSS worked in partnership with parents/carers, the early years setting and other professionals to ensure a smooth transition into and out of the nursery provision.

In terms of the pathway, the main professionals that were involved with the EYPSS were health professionals, health visitors and early years settings. It was commented that referrals to Portage could be made for children prior to them attending an early years setting, by any professional or practitioner working with a pre-school child who had significant concern about their learning or development.

In some instances, an early years setting would make the referral. It was commented that a referral from a setting could be a result of a child moving into the area at a later stage in their lives or their needs may not present at an early age, e.g. children with communication difficulties or on the autistic spectrum.

Once a referral had been received, a multi-disciplinary assessment would be undertaken, with key professionals involved with the child. Once the assessment had been undertaken, children and their families would become involved in intervention groups, based on the Portage model. The child was then provided with support to transition to the early years setting. Once the child was attending a setting, ongoing support and monitoring was provided. The EYPSS provided settings with training, teaching strategies, loans of specialist equipment and resources, additional funding etc. The support offered was continuously revisited and reviewed with parents/carers and the setting.

Members were advised that professionals from three early years settings were in attendance to provide case studies in respect of early years partnership working in Middlesbrough.

The SEND Coordinator at **Green Lane Primary Academy** advised that the school was a large primary school, which had 688 pupils on roll. Approximately 6.5% of pupils were registered as having SEND. However, it was highlighted that since 2016, only one child transitioning from nursery to reception had been transferred from the school to specialist provision.

There were currently 61 children attending the school's nursery and, since the beginning of the academic year, a number of children had been identified as having SEN. It was added that, through discussion with parents, those children had been entered onto the SEND Register.

To support children, nursery staff had:

- completed training on manual handling and peg feeding;
- worked alongside physiotherapists and occupational therapists; and
- gained advice on feeding from a dietician;

It was also added that the EYPSS had been an invaluable resource. The EYPSS had provided opportunities for the child to progress and enjoy the setting and had also provided staff members with confidence to care for the child and deliver effective support.

Members were advised that the partnerships formed during the early years provide a solid foundation for future years. The school worked tirelessly to support its children and it was committed to working with key individuals and professionals, such as families, the EYPSS, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, health visitors etc.

In terms of future plans, the SEND Coordinator continually reviewed and developed SEND provision within the school. The SEND Coordinator continued to attend training provided by the Local Authority's SEND Team and held staff meetings and twilight training with a focus on SEND.

It was also added that the effect of the pandemic and the extended lockdowns had brought to light the limited interactions of children, which had impacted on learning and development.

**Case Study** - Prior to the child starting nursery in 2019, the child had been involved in a joint education and therapy group. Due to the needs of the child, a multi-disciplinary team had been formed which ultimately allowed for the school to ensure the necessary provision was in place. The parent had conveyed a wish for their child to remain in a mainstream school. It was highlighted that initially, school staff had expressed some apprehension about the severity of the child's needs.

The setting facilitated visits for the child and the parent. To enable advanced planning, in February 2019 a multi-disciplinary team meeting was held. At the meeting, staff training needs were identified, which enabled staff members to start accessing training. Visits to the setting were also completed with the EYPSS, a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist.

The EYPSS had enabled the school to access Inclusion Development Funding and that funding was utilised to employ an additional member of staff to assist with meeting the needs of the child and to conduct specialist interventions. That member of staff was instrumental in enabling the child to access mainstream provision. Regular multi-disciplinary team meetings were held to review the impact of the support and to monitor progress.

Following agreement with the child's parent, a planning meeting had been held and the child was referred for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment. It was confirmed that the referral for an assessment did not result in an EHCP as the parent had requested for the mainstream placement to continue. In addition, the child's needs were being met without a plan.

When the child moved from nursery to reception, the school had been successful in securing High Needs Funding. It was commented that the EYPSS, a physiotherapist and occupational therapist had visited the reception class to support staff members and ensure that specialist equipment and resources were accessible.

In terms of what worked well, the following areas were highlighted:

- the needs of the child had been identified in a timely manner, at the earliest of stages;
- agencies worked together to plan a smooth transition into nursery and multi-disciplinary team meetings and physical visits to the setting took place;
- multi-disciplinary team meetings meant that the child's needs could be discussed and planned for holistically, with shared ownership;
- the positive partnership working with the EYPSS, physiotherapist, occupational

- therapist, dietician and speech and language therapist;
- training and modelling of strategies built the confidence of staff members; and
- using Inclusion Development Funding to employ an additional member of staff to assist with meeting the needs of the child and to conduct specialist interventions.

It was commented that inclusion had enabled Green Lane Primary Academy to fulfil a parent's request of mainstream provision. It was also added that the quality and level of inclusion would never have been possible without the collaborative working and determination of the key professionals involved with the child.

In summary, identifying the child's needs at the earliest point and then making effective provision had ensured that the child was:

- settled and happy in school;
- making good progress;
- mixing with peers; and
- learning to communicate his needs.

The SEND Coordinator for **Caldicotes Primary Academy** advised that the school had 270 children on roll. The school had a large early years setting, with a 2 year old provision and a nursery setting. There were 55 children within the early years setting and 10 of those children had been identified as having speech and language needs and were currently on the SEND Register. The main areas of need, in the setting, were speech and language needs.

Within the setting, training was provided and staff members had individualised development plans. Developing individualised plans empowered staff members to deliver effective provision for children. The support provided by the EYPSS in delivering training was commended. Recent training had been delivered in respect of supporting children with communication difficulties/delay, sensory processing and positive handling.

In terms of partnerships, the school had developed positive working relationships with families, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and the EYPSS. It was commented that the school was currently looking to refer two children, in its early years setting, to the EYPSS.

In respect of the future plans, the school planned to further strengthen relationships with outside agencies and access more specific training to enable staff to support more children with a range of SEND needs.

**Case study** - The child had previously joined a different school nursery and as soon as the child started to attend Caldicotes Primary Academy, staff members immediately contacted the EYPSS. At first the child was finding it difficult to access the setting and staff members had admitted that they required additional training to deliver effective support for the child. The training and the specialist/professional advice received by staff members, from the EYPSS, had been vital in enabling staff members to support the child's progress and outcomes.

It was commented that, alongside the support received from the EYPSS, Inclusion Development Funding had been secured. The funding enabled the school to employ an additional member of staff to help meet the child's needs and deliver specialist interventions. The additional member of staff enabled the child to access the setting and access learning.

To further support the child, an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment had been undertaken. As a result of that assessment, the child received an EHCP, which identified appropriate support required in school. It was also commented that following visits from speech and language therapists to the setting, the child now had a diagnosis of autism.

With support of the EYPSS, transition visits to reception had taken place. It was commented that the child remained supported in mainstream provision, with additional funding. The importance of upskilling staff members was highlighted.

In terms of what worked well, the SEND Coordinator explained that:

- the setting had experienced early years staff;
- effective partnership working was in place with social care, speech and language therapists and the EYPSS; and
- Inclusion Development Funding enabled an additional member of staff to deliver

effective interventions and strategies to support the child.

In respect of the impact of partnership working:

- the child was settled, making excellent progress and was able to communicate choices/preferences and join in group times with peers;
- the child was now able to benefit from lessons that were once inaccessible;
- the child's SEND needs did not define her or her educational journey;
- the family was supported at home; and
- working with EYPSS had strengthened practice and provided staff members with valuable skills that enabled them to care and support other children with SEND.

It was commented that enabling the child to communicate choices and preferences had been a great achievement, given that the child communicated non-verbally.

The SEND Coordinator for **Rosedene Easterside** advised that the nursery was a PVI setting. There were currently 98 children on roll. 10 of those children had been placed on the SEND Register, 8 were known to EYPSS and there had also been two recent referrals. All 10 children had been presenting with communication delay and some were on the autism pathway.

In terms of SEND training, the EYPSS had delivered training and modelling of strategies. Staff members had accessed distance learning courses on autism and communication training from speech and language therapists. It was also added that in-house training had been delivered by the setting's SEND Lead.

The nursery cared for children from the age of 6 months old and was very much focused on early intervention. Effective partnerships had been developed with the EYPSS, speech and language therapists, health visitors and social workers.

It was commented that, in terms of future plans, the nursery would continue to prioritise SEND training for new staff across its 10 settings. The importance of helping staff members to have an understanding that some children present differently and working to identify delays/difficulties quickly, following the pandemic, was highlighted. Supporting parents throughout their journey, as well as children, was also identified as a priority.

**Case study** - the child joined the nursery in January 2021. Once the child started at the setting, it became apparent that the health visitor two-year-old progress check had been delayed due to the pandemic. Therefore, the child's needs had not been identified prior to him starting at the nursery. Initial assessments undertaken by the nursery staff had identified communication delays, as the child was non-verbal, and difficulties with learning and development. The child was also struggling to attend the nursery for a full session, due to his lack of social interaction. The nursery worked with his parent, to make the appropriate adjustments and monitor his progress. In March 2021, as the required progress had not been made, the EYPSS and a speech and language therapist were consulted.

In April 2021, an initial assessment of the child was undertaken by the EYPSS at the setting. The EYPSS also shared strategies with staff members. In June 2021, Inclusion Development Funding was secured, which enabled the nursery to employ an additional member of staff to help the whole team meet the child's needs and deliver specialist interventions. The child's parent had also applied for, and now received, Disability Living Allowance for the child. It was commented that referral had been made for an autism assessment and the child had been referred to a consultant paediatrician.

The parent had previously expressed a wish for the child to remain in mainstream provision for as long as possible. The nursery and EYPSS were working collectively to produce an EHCP to identify the type of provision that would best support his needs when he started in reception. There was an ongoing daily review of impact and progress. In addition, support was provided to the parents when considering the next steps.

In terms of what worked well, the SEND Coordinator advised that:

- the setting had already established a good relationship with the family, as siblings of the child had attended the nursery;
- the needs of the child had been identified early, enabling the setting to access support quickly from various services, including the EYPSS and speech and language

- therapists, the GP and pediatrician;
- the funding had provided extra support in nursery; and
- training the whole team had upskilled staff members.

It was commented that, throughout the pandemic, parents had commended the work of the EYPSS and the support it provided.

The impact of the partnership work had ensured that:

- the child had been referred and signposted to the appropriate professionals and agencies for assessment and support, including EHCP assessment and autism assessment;
- the parent received ongoing support and had been supported to consider at an early point, the most appropriate support and provision for child in the future; and
- the child was settled and happy in the setting, attendance had improved and he was making progress, babbling and repeating some words.

The Early Years and Primary Inclusion Lead commented that the impact of the pandemic had been severe for early years settings, given the delay in children receiving specialist assessments. Therefore, the need for effective partnership working to identify needs at the earliest of stages was paramount.

A Member raised a query in respect of the fast-track referral, the Early Years and Primary Inclusion Lead commented that when a child had been known to the EYPSS previously, the fast-track referral merely provided consent for the EYPSS to visit and work with the setting. The fast-track referral ensured support from the EYPSS could be delivered quickly.

A Member raised a query about the Inclusion Development Funding. In response, the Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that:

- the Local Authority had access to High Needs Funding and Inclusion Development Funding and there was clear guidance on how that funding should be utilised;
- the Local Authority produced reports for the Schools Management Forum, involving early years settings, schools and post-16 settings, which provided a detailed account of how the funding had been used;
- moderation panels scrutinised the allocation of funding;
- the Local Authority had meetings with the DfE to ensure that the funding was being allocated in line with published guidance;
- the Local Authority completed annual returns to explain how funding had been allocated to provide specialist support based on the needs of children; and
- nationally, work was being undertaken to ensure there was sufficient High Needs Funding and to address deficits in local areas.

A Member raised a query in respect of the impact of the pandemic. In response, the Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that, in terms of health, there had been a significant increase in children being referred for speech and language support. In respect of health assessments, the Early Years and Primary Inclusion Lead advised that some delays had been experienced as key health professionals involved in assessments had been required to undertake work to respond to the pandemic. However, those delays were now being addressed. The EYPSS had encountered a short period whereby face-to-face assessments with children were not permitted, however, that did not impact on children accessing the right support as during that period remote support was provided. It was added that multi-disciplinary meetings were now held, in advance of a child receiving a diagnosis, to ensure that specialist provision could be arranged.

In response to a Member's query regarding childminders, the Early Years and Primary Inclusion Lead advised that the EYPSS was available to all early years settings, including PVI settings. It was commented that generally, given the limited number of children they care for, childminders tended to access advice, guidance and training from the EYPSS rather than funding. It was confirmed that no childminders had previously requested funding from the EYPSS.

**AGREED**

**That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the**

**scrutiny panel's investigation.**

21/30

**EDUCATION AND COVID-19 RECOVERY**

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that a letter had been send out to schools at beginning of term, advising that a 'business as usual but with caution' approach could be taken. It was added that schools were advised to continue to promote hygienic practices and observe of social distancing where possible.

The Head of Achievement advised that the 12-15 vaccination roll-out was underway, however, there had been delays encountered. The timescale of November had lapsed, therefore, January 2022 had been identified for full rollout. Only 11% of 12-15 year olds had been vaccinated in Middlesbrough and public health was working tirelessly to address that. Alongside the school roll-out, the NHS was encouraging families to approach their GPs for vaccinations. All secondary schools had been fully briefed and were engaged with the vaccination roll-out, however, only 2 schools had been able to take part in the programme so far, due to national delays.

**NOTED**

21/31

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - AN UPDATE**

The Chair advised that at the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, held on 20 October 2021, the Board had considered:

- the Executive Forward Work Programme;
- an update from the Executive Member for Regeneration;
- an update from the Chief Executive;
- updates from the Scrutiny Chairs;
- the final report of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel on Cultural Events in Middlesbrough;
- the Revenue and Capital Budget - Projected Outturn Position as at Quarter One 2021/2022;
- the Strategic Plan 2021-2024 - Progress at Quarter One 2021/2022; and
- scrutiny chairs' training.

**NOTED**