

EARLY YEARS REVIEW

Report of the Children's Services and Education
Scrutiny Sub-committee

March 2010



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1. Introduction and background

1.1 The children's services and education scrutiny sub-committee decided in September 2009 to do a review of early years. The review principally looks at the delivery of the free early education offer and the impact of a new funding regime, the Single Funding Formula (SFF), on this provision. The review also addresses take up of the early education offer, how the early education offer fits in with wider subsidised day care provision and lastly considers how this could be best targeted.

1.2 Members of the sub-committee chose this as a review topic for a number of reasons including:

- Concern about the possible negative impact of the Single Funding Formula on the economic sustainability of settings and therefore their ability to deliver the early education offer;
- Anecdotal stories of a lack of provision in East Dulwich;
- A plethora of evidence that good early education can positively impact on children's emotional, social and cognitive development;
- Concern with take-up of free early education places by families and whether the provision of nursery care meets the needs of children and families;
- Concern that more disadvantaged and vulnerable families were not accessing the Free Early Education offer.

2. Key evidence considered

2.1 Key evidence we considered included:

- Review of documents produced by officers at the request of sub-committee members;
- Review of existing local authority documents;
- Five settings were visited: Ivydale Nursery School; 1st Place Children's centre; Robert Browning Nursery School; Kintore Way Nursery School (based in a children's centre) and Puddleducks (private nursery). *[Reports for visits are separately written up and available];*
- One to one interviews with two parents. *[Reports for visits are separately written up and available];*
- Consultation with parents through attending the Parent Participation Forum. *[Report attached as appendix].*

2.2 The Parent Participation Forum (PPF) builds on the work of local forums and partnerships where parents play an active part in decision-making and consultation, to create a Southwark-wide early years forum for parents. The forum is developed and supported to feed into and contribute to the planning and development of services for children, young people and families. The forum particularly relates to and responds to the priorities and targets originally set by the 0 – 6 sub partnership, and Children's Centres Development programme. The group meets monthly. Membership currently runs at 45 parent members, of whom 90% are bi-lingual.

Background

3. Free Early Education Offer (FEE)

- 3.1 The FEE is the government funded early years provision that every child should be able to access. All three and four year olds are currently entitled to 12.5 hours of free early education for 38 weeks of the year. This applies until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday). The early education can take place in nurseries, play-groups, pre-schools or with qualified child-minders.
- 3.2 All settings receiving government funding to provide free early education to three to five year olds must:
- be included in the local authority directory of providers;
 - help children progress towards the 'early learning goals' set out in the early years foundation stage;
 - be inspected regularly by Ofsted.
- 3.3 This means that a child should get a good quality early years education, regardless of which type of setting they attend.
- 3.4 The early years foundation stage emphasises learning through play to develop cognitive skills and children's confidence, emotional and social well being (ref.1).

4. Single Funding Formula (SFF)

- 4.1 The single funding formula affects the delivery of the free early education offer in a number of ways. Originally the SFF was scheduled to be fully implemented by September 2010; however in January 2010 the government decided to delay its implementation for most local authorities and Southwark will be delaying full implementation by a year.
- 4.2 The guidance requires local authorities to plan for four interrelated changes:
- Introduction of funding based on children's 'participation' rather than 'places';
 - Development of a single formula covering all settings;
 - Extension of the free entitlement from 12.5 hours to 15 hours per week term time only;
 - Ensure, as far as possible, that parents have flexibility in using the services.
- 4.3 All non-maintained school settings are already funded on the basis of participation so this change is less likely to adversely impact on these settings. However nursery schools and children's centers are more likely to experience a negative impact as they are currently funded by 'places'. Buffer funding is planned to help alleviate some of the consequences.

4.4 Following discussions with all sectors working in early years Southwark has concluded that the following factors should be taken into account when developing a formula:

- Basic hourly rate;
- Social deprivation supplement;
- Staff qualification supplement.

4.5 The following delivery patterns that form the Core Offer (FEE) have come from the findings of the pathfinder local authorities. These authorities have found these patterns to be popular with parents and deliverable by providers within the national limits designed to protect child development:

3 hours a day over 5 days of the week
 5 hours a day over 3 days of the week

4.6 Currently the department for children, schools and families is consulting on two additional models:

6 hours + 6 hours + 3 hours over three days of the week
 9 hours + 3 hours + 3 hours over three days of the week

Delivery of any model should not go ahead without assessment of parental demand and local provider capacity to deliver

5. **Types of pre- school education and day care settings**

Pre-school playgroups	Generally take children aged 3-5. Most offer half-day sessions, not all are open all week. Usually non-profit making and run by volunteers. Many parents involved.
Day nurseries	Take children under 5 for whole working day. Run by local authority, voluntary sector, private companies, employers or individuals.
Child-minders	Child-minders look after children under 5 and older children out of school hours. Usually in child-minder's own home. Local authority determines number of children
Private nursery	Take children aged 2-5. Offer full or half day sessions, sometimes including school age children.
Children's Centres	Provide a range of activities for children and families including daycare and nursery provision
State nursery schools	Take children aged 3-4 during school terms and normally offer 5 half day sessions a week.
State primary schools	Take children aged 3-4. Open during term time and offer five half-day sessions a week.
Reception classes	Take children aged 4-5. Some children start off with half day sessions and build to full time.

6. **Focus of the review**

6.1 The review decided to focus on policy development around four areas:

- Delivering the flexible offer;
- Developing a policy around part time and full time places;
- The impact of the SFF on admissions;
- Increasing the uptake of the FEE by disadvantaged, stressed and vulnerable groups.

Context and summary of views

7. **Central government**

7.1 The government childcare strategy has two main aims;

- Promotion of high quality childcare and provision of the early years offer in order to affect positive child development;
- Providing childcare so parents can work in order to combat poverty and deprivation.

8. **Local authorities**

8.1 Southwark Council has a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare of good quality that is flexibly delivered to meet the needs of children and families. Local authorities produce a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment every three years. Southwark did this in February 2008 and this was supplemented by further work in December 2008.

9. **Children**

9.1 Research shows that children from the age of three benefit from good quality early years provision. To obtain these benefits it is essential that the provision is delivered to a high standard. High quality early years education impacts positively on children's cognitive, emotional and social development and the impact is particularly measurable on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. High quality care is associated with well trained and educated staff. It can be delivered in a number of settings; what matters most is the development of nurturing relationships and a stimulating environment that promotes learning.

9.2 There is some research showing some moderate adverse affects to children's emotional and social development when children spend too long in centre based day care (ref 2)

10. **Parents, families and carers**

10.1 The sub-committee considered three main sources of information; Southwark Childcare Sufficient Assessment and Gap Analysis which interviewed parents; two telephone interviews and attendance at the Parent Participation Forum.

10.2 The main concerns for parents are:

- Increasing flexibility
- Reducing the number of providers an individual family has to use
- Assistance with transitions and admission
- Affordability
- More availability of nursery provision
- More provision for disabled children
- Provision located closer to home

10.3 Other issues are:

- Use of informal childcare is high; family members are the most popular choice
- Inflexibility of employers is one of the biggest barriers
- A significant number of parents do not want to use childcare
- Satisfaction with childcare is generally quite high; as choice goes up satisfaction increases

11. **Settings**

11.1 Summary of how the settings responded to the issues the review is focusing on:

Name/Type of setting	Impact of SFF	Current offer	Admission criteria	Actives to reach disadvantaged families
Ivydale State Nursery School	Neutral	Morning or afternoon FEE	Criteria for places is given to Looked after children Children with special needs Children with a sibling at the school; Nearest maintained Nursery Class or Nursery School.	Home visits

Name/Type of setting	Impact of SFF	Current offer	Admission criteria	Actives to reach disadvantaged families
1 st Place Children's Centre with charity status	Positive	Full time or part time places incorporating the core FEE with wrap around care	<p>A List</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Looked after children - Children with disabilities - Parent and child live in the catchment area - Sibling attending 1st Place <p>B List</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teenage parents in education - Children from lone parent - Training or studying - Starting or returning to work - Using working Tax Credit - Working in the Aylesbury Area 	Outreach Range of family activities
Kintore Way Nursery School in state maintained Children's Centre	Negative	Full time or part time places incorporating the core FEE with wrap around care	<p>Priority for places is given to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Looked after children - Children with special needs - Siblings - Nearest nursery - Balanced mix of ages <p>Criteria for full time nursery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vulnerable families - Children with special needs <p>Extended wrap around care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vulnerable families (safeguarding) - Parent/carer working or studying 	Outreach and range of family activities
Robert Browning State primary schools	Slightly Negative	Moring or afternoon FEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Looked after children - Siblings - Catchment area - Children with special needs – if appropriate funding can be accessed 	Word of mouth and toddler group planed
Puddleduck Private Nursery offering FEE	Slightly Positive	Full time or part time places incorporating the core FEE with wrap around care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are able to match children to places - length of time on the waiting list - referrals from Social Services - siblings and family 	Outreach via Children's Centre

Findings

Responding to flexible offer

12. Settings: present and planned offer

12.1 Present offer:

Nursery schools

The two maintained Nursery Schools we visited offered part time only places term time only; either morning or afternoon for 2.5 hours.

Morning	LUNCH	Afternoon
9.15am – 11.45am		1.15pm- 3.15pm

Children's centres

Children's Centres (Kintore Way Nursery and 1st Place) offered part time for 2 or 3 days a week or full time 5 days a week using these options:

Kintore Way

Wrap around breakfast club	Nursery school	Wrap around after school care
8.15 am – 9.15am	9.15am – 3.15pm	3.15pm - 5.45pm

1st Place

Wrap around	Nursery school	Wrap around
8am – 9am	9am – 5pm	5pm – 6pm

Private nursery

The private nursery offers full time and part-time places

Puddleducks

Full and part time : 8am - 6pm

Proposed response to the flexible offer

- 12.2 The two maintained nursery schools visited offered part time only places term time only; either morning or afternoon for 2.5 hours and they will increase this to 3 hours. One would like to offer full-time place but needs consent from the local authority to do this. The other nursery is considering the possibility of offering part time places over 2 or 3 days but this would need capital investment to provide lunches.

Morning	LUNCH	Afternoon
9.15am – 11.45am	Provided	1.15pm - 3.15pm

13. Economic issues

- 13.1 Settings that offered part-time places tended to offer Monday/Tuesday or Thursday/Friday with Wednesday as an optional day or they juggled places according to need. They also offered some variation in hours. This seemed complex but manageable. The private nursery said parents purchasing additional hours was key to remaining economically viable and offering the FEE.
- 13.2 Teacher led early years education is more expensive to provide than wrap around care so some providers adapt their staffing to suit.

14. Impact of change on provision

- 14.1 Two nurseries expressed concerns that expanding nursery and day care provision might put pressure on the more traditional morning or afternoon term time provision.
- 14.2 They thought these slots were beneficial to the children as they were not so tired and that it allowed more children to access a pre-school place and smooth the transition to reception class in primary schools. A number of settings were concerned that some parents preferred this pattern but might get squeezed out if settings moved to a longer day pattern.

15. Parents

- 15.1 Parents that the sub-committee gathered views from wanted more flexible provision that fitted in with their work or family life. The prevailing view was that slots of 2.5 hours were too short and a comment was made that this hardly left time to take the bus home and then return again. Parents seemed to prefer the longer slots. 5 hours, 6 hours & 9 hours were mentioned as preferred options.
- 15.2 Some parents were using a number of providers for different siblings in different locations and finding the travelling stressful for their children.
- 15.3 They welcomed the child-minder option to expand provision and offer flexibility.
- 15.4 Providers thought that some parents may well want the more traditional morning or afternoon offer and this may suit children well; particularly morning provision. More consultation work would need to be done to see if other parents wanted this pattern. The parents we spoke to all preferred the longer pattern.

Recommendations:

1. Provision of the FEE in longer days of 5 or 6 hours may meet most parents' needs better. The maintained sector may need capital investment to provide additional space for providing lunch etc; permission from the council to vary hours and assistance with changes to staffing.
2. Provision of nursery education alongside wrap around care means that parents can combine their FEE and then purchase additional care in order to work or study. It may be worth considering this as an option for maintained sectors.
3. Investment in the child-minder option to deliver FEE will expand provision, offer flexibility and be welcomed by parents.

16. Developing a policy around part time and full time places

- 16.1 Settings have different status (voluntary, private, maintained) and benefit from different levels of state support. All the settings we looked at benefit from some state support because they have agreed to deliver the FEE. The level of state support varies across settings; some settings such as private nurseries only get help with their capital programs and through network and learning opportunities. Others settings such as children's centres get more intensive state support and this directly subsidise the fees they charge to parents for additional hours of care they offer families over and above the Free Early Education offer.
- 16.2 These places are often desirable because the fees are more affordable than in those in the private sector.
- 16.3 This is a summary of the priorities used by all the different settings visited to set their criteria for admission:

All prioritise	Most prioritise	Some prioritise
Looked after children Siblings at the nursery	Children with special needs/disabilities Parent and child live in the catchment area or nearest nursery	Teenage parents in education Lone parents Using working tax credit Working locally Balanced mix of ages Parents working or studying Starting or returning to work Training or studying Vulnerable parents Safeguarding

- 16.4 Responding to looked after children and families in crisis. Settings said they wanted to be able to respond to families in crisis; whether or not this was a formal policy, as well as the needs of looked after children. Nurseries said that they needed to leave some spare capacity and this had an economic cost.
- 16.5 Although most settings prioritise children with special needs or disabilities some settings had particular expertise in this area; 40 % of Kintore Way children have special needs. Other settings found the slow assessment process a barrier.
- 16.6 Occasionally children with high level special needs will have a statement in place on entry. More typically, this is not the case and the process of assessment is initiated after admission. Such children (those on the autistic spectrum for example) often require high levels of support which goes well beyond that which is funded through the Early Years Action Plus.
- 16.7 A statement is sometimes issued in the child's final term in nursery provision and the attached funding is only provided from the date of issue. The nursery setting has had to provide statement level support from admission but is only reimbursed for a small part of that time.
- 16.8 Inclusive settings which welcome children with special needs are therefore financially disadvantaged every time they make provision before the issue of a statement even though the place could not be sustained without it.

17. **Parents**

- 17.1 When parents were asked who should get priority for part time and fulltime day care places (which may incorporate the FEE depending on age) they said:
- Everybody should get access; early education is important for all children.
 - Low income families should get priority. They particularly picked out working families with a low disposable income and emphasized that the assessment of income should not be rigidly applied and not exclude those who were ineligible for income support.

Recommendations:

4. Ensure settings can maintain spare capacity to respond to families in crisis and looked after children.
5. Backdate support funding for children with special needs to the start of their time in nursery, for children who later receive a more extensive statement.
6. Prioritise part time and full time daycare places for parents with a low disposable income who are working or studying.

18.

The impact of the SFF on admissions

18.1 There were two main potential adverse impacts noted:

- Nursery schools had concerns that the counting of 'participation' happened early in the term so impacted on gradual transitions. They would like parents to be able to reserve a place even if they fully took it up later in the term.
- There are particular difficulties for nursery schools in children's centres where they also provide day care. The present set-up makes a smooth transition very economically difficult and this is anticipated to get worse by the move to a single point of entry to primary schools in September, as recommended in the Rose report.

Recommendations:

7. Give urgent consideration to providing adequate transition funding for children moving from daycare to nursery school in relevant Southwark Children's Centres so that affected children who are not '3 enough' still receive adequate funding to sustain a place.
8. Allow parents to be able to send a child to nursery gradually even if they don't fully 'participate' until later in the term.

19. Increasing the uptake of the FEE by disadvantaged; stressed and vulnerable groups

- 19.1 According to Southwark's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, 87% of parents use the FEE offer but this includes schools and this may be lower for children aged 3. The Day Care Trust concluded that nationally disadvantaged children are less likely to take up childcare. In 2004 only 31% of the lowest income families accessed formal childcare versus 52% of the highest income families.
- 19.2 The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and the Gap analysis both suggested that the evidence indicated that the needs of disabled children and their families were not being met effectively. The report recommended that further information be gathered to more accurately understand the barriers faced by this group.
- 19.3 One of the providers the sub-committee visited had teenage parents from the 'Care to Learn' scheme, however a number of providers said that they did not have a high uptake from this group and they were not using services. One provider did indicate a specialised group meeting in Chumleigh Gardens of young parents. The Gap analysis did not gather data on this group specifically.
- 19.4 Parents want more help with admissions and transitions; both into early years and into primary school. They want more communication from nursery schools about places once they have applied. Two parents commented that they made applications and heard nothing back for many months and then

one received a call the week before term started and the other on the day the nursery place became available. They valued the home visits and wanted more providers to offer one to one slots prior to their child joining the nursery. A comment was made that discussing their child's needs was difficult to do in a classroom in a 15 minute slot. They wanted more support for transition to primary school. There were concerns about the single point of entry plans for primary schools.

- 19.5 Children's centres employ outreach workers and Puddleducks works in partnership with the local outreach worker to reach out to parents.
- 19.6 The Parent Champions Project produced by the Day Care Trust promoted peer to peer networks to reach the most disadvantage groups through the use of word of mouth. This increased the uptake of the formal childcare. (ref 3)
- 19.7 The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment demonstrated that in 2008 63% of providers had an average of 3 vacancies. Only Dulwich had a demonstrable need for more provision; however parents living in Bermondsey and Borough & Bankside were most likely to have concerns over provision. There appears to be a gap between what is on offer and parents' perception of choice.

Recommendations:

- 9. Consider if extra work needs to be done to gather the views of parents of disabled parents to understand more about the needs of this group.
- 10. Consider children's centres acting as hubs to promote good practice around meeting the needs of disabled children.
- 11. Consider linking up outreach workers from children's centres to work with other local providers to reach out to disadvantaged parents to promote take up of early education (FEE).
- 12. Consider using the Day Care Trust Parent Champion Project toolkit; particularly to reach target groups such as families with a disabled child, teenage parents, BME groups etc to promote take up of early education (FEE).
- 13. Concentrate on giving more family support around admission and transitions particularly through more regular, sustained and sensitive communication including home visits where appropriate.

20. Summary of recommendations

Recommendations:

1. Provision of the Free Early Education offer (FEE) in longer days of 5 or 6 hours may meet most parents' needs better. The maintained sector may need capital investment to provide additional space for providing lunch etc; permission from the Council to vary hours and assistance with changes to staffing.
2. Provision of nursery education alongside wrap around care means that parents can combine their FEE and then purchase additional care in order to work or study. It may be worth considering this as an option for maintained sectors.
3. Investment in the child-minder option to deliver FEE will expand provision, offer flexibility and be welcomed by parents
4. Ensure settings can maintain spare capacity to respond to families in crisis and looked after children.
5. Backdate support funding for children with special needs to the start of their time in nursery for children who later receive a more extensive statement.
6. Prioritise daycare places for parents with a low disposable income who are working or studying.
7. Give urgent consideration to providing adequate transition funding for children moving from daycare to nursery school in relevant Southwark Children's Centres so that affected children who are not '3 enough' still receive adequate funding to sustain a place.
8. Allow parents to be able to send a child to nursery gradually even if they don't fully 'participate' until later in the term.
9. Consider if extra work needs to be done to gather the views of parents of disabled parents to understand more about the needs of this group.
10. Consider children's centres acting as hubs to promote good practice around meeting the needs of disabled children.
11. Consider linking up outreach workers from children's centres to work with other local providers to reach out to disadvantaged parents to promote take up of early education (FEE).
12. Consider using the Day Care Trust Parent Champion Project toolkit; particularly to reach target groups such as families with a disabled child, teenage parents, BME groups etc to promote take up of early education (FEE).
13. Concentrate on giving more family support around admission and transitions particularly through more regular, sustained and sensitive communication including home visits where appropriate.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Members who participated in this review:

Councillors:

Councillor Barrie Hargrove (Chair)
Councillor Nick Vineall (Vice-chair)
Councillor Eliza Mann
Councillor Jonathan Mitchell
Councillor Sandra Rhule
Councillor Veronica Ward

Education representatives:

Reverend Nicholas Elder
Jane Hole
Colin McKenzie Elliot
Sharon Donno

SOURCES

Research and information

- 1 Early year's foundation stage
<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/83972>
- 2 Centre for excellence for early childhood development. Bulletin; March 2004
<http://www.excellence-jeunesenfants.ca/documents/BulletinVol3No1March04ANG.pdf>
- 3 Parent Champions Project, day care trust, August 2007–March 2008
Project Highlights
<http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/parent-champions.html>
- 4 Making a Big Difference case study 11: Working with reception classes in Southwark
<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/180275>

Local authority documents

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment February 2008
Gap analysis December 2008.
<http://lbsth-dtr01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=144&MId=3005&Ver=4>

Evidence

Consultation with Parent Participation Forum (PPF)
<http://lbsth-dtr01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=144&MId=3005&Ver=4>

Summaries from telephone interviews with local parents about Early Years arrangements

<http://lbsth-dtr01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=144&MId=3004&Ver=4>

Early Years Site Visits

- Visit 1: 1st Place
Visit 2: Ivydale Nursery
Visit 3: Kintore Way Nursery School
Visit 4: Robert Browning Nursery School
Visit 5: Puddleduck Nursery

<http://lbsth-dtr01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=144&MId=3004&Ver=4>
<http://lbsth-dtr01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=144&MId=3005&Ver=4>