



Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group



Health and Wellbeing Board

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1. Summary

The Department for Education has set an ambitious goal to halve by 2028, the number of children leaving reception year without the appropriate level of communication and language skills they require. The Department for Education is therefore working with Local Authorities (LAs) to improve early (language) outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged children across the country.

The measure that is underpinning the ambition is the proportion of children achieving the expected level or above for both the 'communication and language' and 'literacy' early learning goals of the early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP).

Currently Shropshire LA is achieving 71.5% on this measure (ranked joint 92/152). The best performing of our 11 closest statistical neighbours achieved 75.3% on this measure (Shropshire therefore ranked joint 8/11).

It is anticipated that in order to meet the target set, 86% of children nationally would need to achieve the expected level in both communication & language and literacy. Currently no local authority is achieving this. Further key metrics and contextual data is available in the Early Years Outcomes Dashboard, which was published on 6 June <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2017-to-2018>

There are a number of initiatives already underway in Shropshire to help us to achieve this ambition.

2. Recommendations

For the Health and Well-Being Board to receive and note the content of the report and support the work being carried out to improve communication and language.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB This will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental consequences and other Consultation)

There are no Human Rights, Environmental Consequences, Community or Equality issues identified with the provision of these updates.

4. Financial Implications

A significant amount of work that is being undertaken is being funded using the Early Years block of schools grant, which is only available limited period of time due to the restrictions placed by DfE on how this funding can be used.

5. Background

5.1 Current picture

There are a number of initiatives taking place across the County within both early year's education and health to improve communication and literacy. The overall quality of early year's provision in Shropshire remains above national average as judged by Ofsted. Take up of the free early year's entitlements for 2, 3- and 4-year olds are in line or above both regional and national averages. However, the overall level of development of early year's children, in particular those from more disadvantaged backgrounds continues to be an area of focus.

- 24U 570 hours of free childcare over 12 months for those children whose families meet the qualifying criteria for Free School Meals (FSM)
- Universal 3 and 4-year-old offer- 570 hours over 12 months for all children from the term after their 3rd birthday until the child start full time education.
- Extended 3 and 4-year-old offer of an additional 570 hours per year for those children whose families where both parents are working and earning in excess £115 per week.

Unlike many local authorities the majority of early years provision in Shropshire is delivered by private and voluntary nurseries, childminders and pre-schools with only around 35% of provision delivered by academies and local authority maintained schools.

Shropshire Council area are one of the lowest funded local authorities in terms of the amount of early years block funding received per child and in addition receives one of the lowest amounts for public health per head of population.

We are also aware that the family environment has changed over the last decade with an increase in IT, screen time and more families where both parents are working resulting in limited amounts of time spent talking, reading and interacting as a family group.

5.2 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The Early Years Foundation Stage sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to age five. All schools and Ofsted registered Early Years providers must follow the EYFS including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes. The quality of delivery of the framework is measured by Ofsted as part of their regular and on-going inspection programme. The attainment of individual children is measured in each of the key developmental areas at the end of each child's reception year by their class teacher.

In 2018, 69.9% of Shropshire children achieved a good level of development against a national average of 71.5%. However, of those children identified as being eligible for free school meals in Shropshire in the same year only 47.9% achieved a good level of development compared to 56.6% nationally.

First release date for 2019 is more encouraging with 72.5% of children achieving a good level of development against 71.7% nationally and 54.4% of FSM children achieving a good level of development against 56.1% nationally.

Additional funding is available through the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) to support learning and development where concerns have been identified. However, due to the small cohorts of children the overall amount that providers can generate through EYPP is often not sufficient to cover the costs of the required interventions.

5.3 Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Progress Check at Two

All children are offered a 2-year review as part of the mandated contacts within the Public Health Nursing service. In 2018-19, 71% of children undertook this. The ASQ is a parent led questionnaire that helps to assess the development of children in 5 domains. These include; communication, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem solving, and personal social skills. Where children are identified as not meeting expected milestones in any of these domains, further appropriate support is given to families. Where a child is in an early years setting this information is shared with them to further support the child. Although the 2-year review is a universal offer and is optional for parents, they are encouraged to take up this contact and the importance of the review highlighted. Where a child / family have been identified as vulnerable, a more targeted approach is taken to ensure that families take up this review. In addition to the 2-year review, a universal contact is offered at 12 months. However, currently the uptake of this is lower, and further work is being undertaken in the service to encourage parents to take up this contact to enable early identification and intervention for emerging concerns. Where additional needs are identified, this assessment can be used as evidence for applying for the EYPP. The sharing of this information has improved partnership working between health and early years. Early Years settings have access to the Public Health Nursing Team, who they can contact for support and advice.

Early Years' practitioners also undertake a review of each child's progress, when the child is aged between two and three - the progress check at two. This review summarises the child's progress and development in the three Prime Areas of learning and development (Communication and Language, Personal Social and Emotional Development and Physical Development) as identified in the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (2017). The progress check at two identifies the child's strengths and any areas where the child's progress is less than expected. It also describes the activities and strategies the provider intends to adopt to address any issues or concerns. Practitioners will also discuss with the child's parents / carers, how this summary of development can be used to support their child's learning at home. Referencing the 'All About Me @ 2' pathway (see appendix 1), practitioners and Public Health Nurses can share, with parental consent, any information gathered from the progress check at two and the 2-year health review, to focus support on any areas of concern, to further improve the child's early years outcomes.

5.4 Communication and Language Training and assessment

The Institute for Health Visiting in conjunction with Public Health England, have undertaken a programme of work to upskill health visitors in recognising and supporting early communication and language concerns. Two Health Visitors in Shropshire have now been trained in a train the trainer model and the training will be being rolled out to staff teams within the Public Health Nursing service from October 2019. The training will be co-facilitated by speech and language professionals.

The Early Years Consultant has also undertaken training to enable training of early years providers to utilise the Stoke Speak Out assessment tool to identify communication and languages difficulties and the effective of interventions through on-going monitoring of children.

5.5 Speech and Language

The local authority will deliver and have commissioned a wide range of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) which will be rolled to the early year's workforce during the academic year 2019/20. The purpose of this is to improve the overall level of communication between practitioners and children, raising awareness of the importance of regular communication on one to one/two basis and supporting less experienced practitioners to become more confident in storytelling in all of its forms.

It is acknowledged that nationally there is a shortage of qualified speech and language therapist and as a result further training programmes are being developed. However due to the current limited capacity of these professionals they are no longer able to deliver early interventions therefore the necessity for training programmes to be developed for early years practitioners.

5.6 School Readiness Task and Finish Group

Following a publication from Public Health England and local anecdotal evidence, a multi-agency task and finish group was set up to map services and identify gaps in relation to improving school readiness. An action plan has been worked through and a leaflet produced to provide parents with information on how to support their child's development. The leaflet will be available electronically on various platforms but funding for any printing costs need to identified. A web page has also been developed to support the key messages within the leaflet offering parents signposting to activities and sources of information.

The 2 year review data collected now also provides information on the percentage of children who have had an Ages and Stages Questionnaire completed and meet the required developmental milestones in each of the identified domains; communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving and personal-social skills. This may enable us to identify any areas of need going forward.

The task and finish group along with other groups put together a bid for the Early Outcomes project which also includes a maturity matrix. Although we were unsuccessful with the bid, we will continue to work through the maturity matrix and local action plan to develop the work further. There is also the option to request a peer review as part of this work.

5.7 Parenting Courses

Evidence has shown that communication and language can be improved with effective attachment. Attachment starts in pregnancy. Parents are therefore encouraged to undertake an antenatal parenting course either within a group or on-line. The parenting programme looks at baby brain development along with how parents and the wider family can influence this by interacting with their baby in the womb and then in person. Further parenting programmes are available online in the postnatal period, as well as face to face groups for parents/carers with older children.

CPD for early years practitioners also includes focused speech and language parenting skills for them to support the development of the home learning environment.

5.8 Libraries

Shropshire has 21 libraries all of which run regular Rhyme and Story time sessions to parents/carers and young children. These have an emphasis on encouraging early language and communication and literacy as well as recognising the benefit of attending these sessions on maternal mental health (<https://sharedintelligence.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/rhyme-times-and-mmh-2018-final4.pdf>)

Shropshire Libraries are developing “Let’s Get Ready” Book Bags aimed at 2 years – 4 years olds to encourage conversation between the child and parent/carer around the next stage of a child’s life. The bags will be able to be borrowed like any other library item and will be launched in National Libraries Week in October 2019. The bags are funded by the Early Years team.

Shropshire Libraries delivers Bookstart, the national book-gifting programme, in partnership with the Public Health Nursing Service, the Family Nurse Partnership, Early Years settings and Registrars. These valuable local partnerships will enable Shropshire Libraries to deliver over £362,747 worth of impactful resources to pre-school children over the next 3 years. Every year, approximately 2850 Bookstart Baby Packs and 2340 Bookstart Treasure Packs are gifted. In addition, children that have English as an additional language, will be offered a dual language book in each of their Bookstart packs and a range of targeted resources are gifted to children who are deaf, blind, partially sighted or have additional needs which impact on the development of their fine motor skills.

All Shropshire Libraries offer ‘Bear’s Reading Adventure’, a free sticker storybook for families with children aged up to five. Children collect a sticker every time they visit the library and put them in the special sticker book to take home – it is the perfect reason to visit the library more often. In addition, Shropshire Libraries offer the Mini Challenge over the summer holidays, which lets pre-schoolers take part in the annual

Summer Reading Challenge alongside older children. Children collect a sticker every time they visit the library over the summer. Once they have collected six stickers, children will be rewarded with a certificate. Taking part in such schemes boosts a child's language skills and helps to develop a love of stories, books and libraries.

Across the County, libraries are making themselves more accessible to parents and young children by providing storytelling sessions and other family orientated activities.

5.9 Intergenerational projects

We have begun to work with two primary schools, one in Craven Arms and one in Church Stretton who from September will deliver one half day early year's session per week from the local supported living centre within their community. This will be an opportunity for the very young and old to mix in a semi-structured environment. The children will carry out a range of usual activities with the involvement of adults living within the centres. This will help to improve the social interaction and therefore develop the communication and language of the children and the older people who attend.

5.10 Next Steps

In 2019/20, we are delivering a year's programme of "Making Language Matter" and will evaluate its effectiveness. As part of the development of this programme strong links have been made between early years, library service, multi-cultural development Telford & Wrekin team, Connexus and the museum service.

Training will be continued to roll out across different disciplines and regular evaluation of progress will take place through close consultation with early year's practitioners and providers.

Data collected through both EYFS and ASQ at the 2-year review will continue to be monitored.

We need to maintain the focus on communication and language within the early years from both a practitioner and a whole family perspective.

We will also continue to raise awareness through different vehicles to ensure that the focus on communication and language is maintained by all.

6. Additional Information

Key documents

Early Years Outcome Dashboard <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2017-to-2018>

Hungry Little Minds DfE <https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>

Ofsted Unknown Children destined for disadvantage?

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541394/Unknown children destined for disadvantage.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541394/Unknown_children_destined_for_disadvantage.pdf)

PH E school readiness report <http://startwellbirmingham.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SchoolReadinessInTheWestMidlands.pdf>

7. Conclusions

We are seeing an overall improvement in communication, language and literacy although further work is still required to narrow the gap for our most disadvantaged children as well as ensuring that they achieve overall school readiness.

A number of initiatives are underway with further developments due during the next academic year. These will be evaluated to ensure effectiveness.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Ed Potter – Children’s Services Rob Gittins - Deputy Portfolio Holder - Public Health
Local Member
Appendices 1. All About Me @2 Pathway

