

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: 6th July 2021
Report for: Information
Report of: Karen Samples, Director of Education

Report Title

School Readiness Update

Summary

This report provides an update on school readiness, including the impact of Covid and strategies in place to support school readiness.

Recommendation(s)

That the contents of the report are noted.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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1. Early years sector

Trafford has a strong early education and childcare market with a good mix of early years providers across all neighbourhoods offering parents and carers a range of options to suit their needs. There are 304 registered early education settings, comprising 211 childminders and 93 early years group settings. In addition to this, 57 schools have nursery classes and two of these offer 2 year old provision. There are nursery assessment places available in three of the primary special schools.

Quality of early years provision is high with 98% childminders graded Good or Outstanding compared to 96% nationally and 98% of group settings graded at Good or Outstanding which is compared to 97% nationally.

2. Early years strategic plan ambitions

Trafford has a well-established 0-5 Board with representation from all key partners. The 0-5 strategic plan has 7 ambitions:

1. **1001 Critical days**
To promote good parent infant relationships and early child development
2. **Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**
Needs and strengths are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity
3. **Integrated working and family support**
Working together to achieve better outcomes and be safe
4. **Speech, language and communication**
Children communicate well
5. **Social and emotional wellbeing**
Children have healthy relationships

6. Being healthy

Children achieve their best possible physical health

7. Early education

High quality early education for all

The priorities linked to these ambitions were refreshed for June 2020 – December 2021 to reflect the Covid recovery planning, ensuring that work is maintained at pace and outcome focused.

3. School readiness data

Key performance data for school readiness is from within the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) at the end of a child's reception year in school. This is not available at scale due to the cancellation of the EYFSP centralised data collection for both 2020 and 2021. This is further compounded by the Early Years Reforms which come into effect September 2021 meaning that comparable data will not be available moving forward.

The assessment tool used by Health Visitors to assess child development at mandated points as outlined in the Healthy Child Programme is the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. This information is also not available at scale not just due to pressures of Covid but also due to the challenges of Information Governance. However ASQ data from 2018 demonstrated that 12% of children in receipt of their 2 year mandated review were not meeting age related expectations.

In the absence of current performance data an approach has been taken to revisit 2019 EYFSP data to address pre-covid challenges on the assumption that inevitably any issues will have been further compounded.

Key headlines from 2019 include:

- The majority of children achieved a good level of development (GLD) at 75% which is above the national average.
- Partington and the North locality were below both the national and Trafford average in terms of children achieving a good level of development.
- Children in these localities were below the national average in the three prime areas of learning: communication and language, social and emotional development and physical development.
- Particular cohorts of children were also not achieving both the national and Trafford average namely:
 - Black and mixed heritage children
 - Boys in both Partington and in some areas of the North were also not achieving a GLD.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Consultant is working with Headteachers and EYFS Leads across Trafford to work collaboratively to gather, where readily available, key tracking data despite this not being a statutory requirement. This will be invaluable in gaining evidence at scale of the impact of a disrupted early education experience. Of particular concern is Reception children who are due to move in to Year 1.

The most recent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for children and young people in Trafford age 0-19 highlighted the following for the 0-5 age range:

- One in 5 children aged 5 is overweight or obese (one in 4 nationally)
- One in 5 children has tooth decay by age 5 (one in 4 nationally)
- Children age 0-5 in the 20% most deprived small areas were 2.5 times more likely to require Social Care Support than the Trafford average (March 2018)

- 24% of children assessed as being a Child in Need were in the 0-5 age range. 'Abuse and neglect' was the primary need followed by 'Family in acute stress' and 'family dysfunction'. (March 2018)
- 18% of looked after children were in the 0-5 age range. (March 2018)

4. Impact of Covid and key themes

a) Sufficiency and parental confidence

Take up of early education was high with 3 and 4 year take up at just under 100% placing Trafford 7th nationally in the year 2019/2020. Take up of the universal and extended offer remains broadly constant, but the number of places funded across the sector has decreased, linked to a declining birth rate which follows the national trend. This will continue to be closely monitored when the full information becomes available for the academic year 2020/2021 and into 2021/22.

Take up of the 2 year education places has decreased slightly to 88% in the Spring Term 2021 however this is still significantly higher than the national average with Trafford currently placed 1st compared to our statistical neighbours and 3rd nationally out of 151 other local authorities. Two year take up appears to be the lowest in one small area of the North in Clifford ward. Further exploration of this is required to fully understand the data and potential barriers.

There are no known sufficiency issues resulting in children being unable to access an early education place.

Parental confidence has steadily increased over time. This is reflected in take up figures and data collated and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) with over 6,000 children attending early education settings weekly.

Narrowing the gap has been a particular focus. The attendance of those children with a social worker has been tracked weekly since the start of the pandemic. Any absences are accounted for and notified to Social Workers.

b) Speech, language and communication (SLC)

Increased screen time, family pressures and an absence of high quality adult child interaction for some children have resulted in a widening word gap. This is not specific to Trafford and is recognised as a national priority, particularly as SLC difficulties are now recognised a child wellbeing indicator.

In the absence of data, the Early Years Service has worked with early education providers – both schools and those providers in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector - to assess speech, language and communication which is a key predictor of school readiness, as well as outcomes in later life. In October 2020 near the start of the academic year the results of WellComm screens (SLC assessment tool) were collated in Partington and demonstrated the impact of lockdown and the pandemic:

PVI sector - Initial WellComm screens conducted with 44 children:

- 91% were not at age related expectations scoring either a Red or Amber on the evidence based WellComm screen. Of these 73% were on Red.

School Nurseries - Initial WellComm screens conducted with 20 children:

- 50% of children not at age related expectations.

School Reception - Initial WellComm screens conducted with 44 children:

- 61% not at age related expectations.

However, the success of the WellComm intervention can be evidenced from rescreen data from 31 children in the same locality where there was a 42% reduction in red scores.

c) Social and emotional wellbeing

The wellbeing of families has been significantly affected due the myriad of pressures experienced due to Covid whether this be economic, family breakdown, increased anxiety and stress. There is inevitably a broad spectrum of need emerging ranging from:

- Challenges with self-regulation
- Increased dysfluency (stammering) – linked to increased anxiety
- Impact of domestic violence
- Loss due to family breakdown or bereavement
- Increased anxiety in the home environment
- Stress and pressure due to economic factors such as job loss, poverty

Both Health Visitors and Intensive Family Support have reported increased complexity of issues within families with enhanced support required.

d) Physical development

Early Years Teachers have reported an impact on children's fine motor skills and writing due to increased screen time and a decrease in outdoor play. Increased obesity levels and tooth decay highlight the need for healthier lifestyles.

e) Safeguarding

National data demonstrates that there has been a rise in traumatic head injuries to babies and poisoning in the home. Between 2016 and 2019, 60 children under 5 from Trafford were admitted to hospital due to accidental poisoning and 95 admitted to hospital from poisoning from medication.

f) Attainment

Reception children are of particular concern due to the fact that they have missed out on key early education experiences in both nursery and reception.

The attainment of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children is a key focus:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) – significant progress was made to improve outcomes for children with SEND that was reflected in 2019 performance data. The concern is that some of these improvements will have been adversely impacted. Strategies have been implemented to mitigate this as much as possible.
- Children with a Social Worker – a concerted effort has been made to ensure children have continued to regularly attend early education provision. Whilst this was affected during the initial lockdown period this steadily increased and has continued to remain consistently high. This has been important not only in terms of attainment but also safeguarding.
- Economic disadvantage and particular cohorts of children – as outlined by the EYFSP data and the 0-19 JSNA, school readiness for children in the North locality and Partington are of concern. Boys in both areas and those children who are Black or mixed heritage have lower attainment than their wider Trafford peers.

5. Strategies in place to support school readiness

Wide scale speech, language and communication approach in early education settings including schools with WellComm, the Big Book of Ideas intervention, Nuffield Early Language Intervention delivered. WellComm training and packs are to be distributed to Childminders in Partington and the North to ensure equity for all children regardless of the type of early education provision they attend. Targeted intervention 'Talking Together' in development with Early Help Team to support parents to boost their children speech, language and communication.

Bridging the gap approach for Reception to Year 1 – Trafford Early Years Foundation Stage Consultant has supported and promoted a range of Greater Manchester School Readiness Webinars aimed at Headteachers, Senior Leaders and EYFS/Year 1 Leads. High numbers of Trafford schools involved with 71 participants attending from our locality.

Transition Guide developed and shared with all EYFS Leads and PVI providers covering speech, language and communication, social emotional development and SEND to ensure transition, particularly to school, is as positive as possible - even if this is virtual.

Launch of a Feel Good Early Years Project to support social and emotional development along with the co-production of a social and emotional development pathway for children aged 0-5. Work on Early Years Trafford Team Together will commence in September 2021 with place based holistic family support in Partington/North.

Comprehensive workforce programme for SEND has been delivered remotely during lockdown periods with 34 SENCOs now trained at Level 3. A level 2 qualification is to be extended to Childminders to raise SEND knowledge and expertise across the sector.

High quality SEND support for early years children and their families delivered by Trafford Early Development Service (TEDS) and Special Educational Needs Advisory Service (SENAS) with additional nursery assessment places resourced. This was highlighted as a strength in the recent SEND Peer Review.

On-going attendance tracking of children with a Social Worker to ensure the most vulnerable are attending high quality early education provision.

The ICON (Infant crying is normal, Comforting methods can help, Its ok to walk away, Never, ever shake a baby) programme is being rolled out across Trafford as a multi-agency approach. Likewise, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) 'Take Action Today, Put Them Away Campaign' is underway to reduce household poisoning.

EYFS Reform briefing and a programme of support are already underway for all in the early years sector including Headteachers, EYFS Leads, EY Teachers, Practitioners, Teaching Assistants and Childminders. In addition child development training is to be offered widely which underpins the rationale for reforms.

Exploration of an 18 month assessment model in order to identify needs at the earliest opportunity is occurring with commissioners and key partners. This is based on evidence that 80% of brain development has happened by age 3. The 18 month assessment provides the opportunity to intervene much earlier. The model represents significant system change that would require resourcing/service realignment, introduction of interventions and a workforce approach.