

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Education Officer

Education Services Committee: 21 June 2023

Subject: Early Learning and Childcare Progress Update**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report provides progress made to provide high quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee notes: progress to deliver the statutory entitlement of high quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

3. Background - Evaluation of ELC Provision**3.1 Quality of our ELC**

Outcomes for children continue to be very positive. This is evidenced through external evaluation by HMIE and the Care Inspectorate, WDC Quality Improvement Framework and data analysis of children's progress.

3.2 Aspect Review of ELC

This session our quality framework review focussed on curriculum rationale and design; leadership of pedagogy and play; curriculum learning and development pathways. The evidence gathered from learners, staff, parents, carers and senior leaders shows that outcomes for children are very good. Summary of our findings:

- Detailed and effective use of progress data to inform planning and interventions.
- High expectations for children's attainment and achievement.
- Collegiate approaches to develop curriculum rationale and vision.
- Effective parental involvement and engagement.
- Links to the local community to enhance curriculum offer.
- Well maintained and well looked after environments for learning, rich in resources, providing areas for play, and quieter spaces for children to experience a good pace of the day and times for rest.
- Support for health and wellbeing using exploration of feelings.
- Up Up and Away framework and associated professional learning was beginning to impact.
- Children's reflection on learning was very well supported to personalise the learning journey.
- Children were happy to share their learning using the journal approach.
- National guidance; Realising the Ambition was informing and improving practice.

- Curriculum for Excellence was evident in the principles of curriculum design.
- The One-ery model of early level learning was impacting learners' experiences; based on play pedagogy and nurturing approaches.

3.3 Parents Views

Parents were consulted at all visits through focus groups. Parents were asked set questions which provided rich feedback about children's learning, the quality of the ELC, their engagement in their child's learning and impact on family life. We found that most parents now expect 1140 hours and some are not aware of the 600 hour offer. Outcomes for children was the main benefit for parents who responded. See Appendix One for a sample of responses.

- 3.4** The West Partnership 1140 Hours Evaluation Study will report on children's outcomes, the experiences of those involved including staff and parents views. The results from all phases of this research will be analysed together to give us a holistic understanding of the impact of 1140 hours across the West Partnership. These findings may be published in various articles or reports to contribute to our understanding of how this policy has affected children's outcomes and possible next steps for the sector. Education Service Committee will be updated when the report is published.

3.5 Staff Views

Most staff said that they had been involved in the development of their curriculum rationale and ELC vision. They described their leadership roles to develop the curriculum, training and involvement in improvement priorities. Many staff reported that they were undergoing their BA qualification and a large proportion were already qualified to this level. The Froebel training and approaches were also impacting the curriculum offered to the children; large numbers of staff said they have benefitted from training in this methodology to develop children's skills for life. Some staff, at a very small number of ELC, said they need support to provide an appropriate curriculum for children with additional support needs. Transition across early level and planning collaboratively was commented on positively.

4. Developing ELC Provision

- 4.1** A consequence of the eligible 2 year old policy is earlier identification of children with additional support needs (ASN). Numbers of 3 and 4 year old children with ASN has also increased in the last few years. A working group of early years professionals was set up to scope out developments to service delivery which might better support the growing population of children with additional support needs (ASN) in our mainstream settings. In particular, children with autism (ASD), the need for specialist ELC provision and training and support for our ELC staff teams. We found that models of provision in other authorities were based on assessment of children, ASN panel referrals, and ASN service which was integrated within ELC mainstream provision and provision for children with complex learning needs.
- 4.2** Application to ELC has been revised which will allow parents to identify their child's ASN. This means that our ELC can provide earlier intervention and support for parents to meet the needs of specific children. We also identified

training and support required at our ELC. This is currently being addressed with a programme of learning and support underway. Education Services Committee will be updated when options for specialist provision within mainstream ELC are available for consideration. Any such provision must align with the overall ASN Strategy.

5. Deferred Entry

5.1 From August 2023 families can make the choice of deferring sending their children to school. Our Admissions' Policy has been updated to reflect this statutory change. We have capacity in all geographical areas to meet the demand which has increased over time from approximately 30 children to 118 children for school session 2023-24. This means that if a child is still aged 4 years on the day they would usually start primary 1, parents have the right to delay (or defer) their child's start at primary school. Under this new legislation a child can start school the following year, when they are 5 years old (six years in September). In the previous system, the youngest children, those with January or February birth dates, were automatically entitled to an additional year of funded ELC. Those with an August to December birthday could still defer their school start, but had to apply to the local authority to request funded early learning and childcare for that year. This no longer applies: we can advise but it is the parent who has the choice.

5.2 We are supporting our schools and ELC with the implications for the older age range of children in our P.1 and at ELC, through a programme of staff development and professional learning; continued development of play pedagogy at early level and professional collaboration. Further work will also be carried out to find out the profile of the children and families who choose to defer i.e. attendance, attainment outcomes, gender split, SIMD distribution, additional support needs and children at risk of not achieving.

6. Children's Progress

6.1 Assessment data gathered in March 2023 shows that children continue to progress well in literacy and numeracy outcome measures. Our ELC use individual Statistical Reports to analyse their children's attendance, gender, ASN and reasons for support, SIMD distribution and children at risk of not achieving. The report also has literacy and numeracy data action planning which is derived from the data. Our projected stretch aim for June 2023: is 67% of all children will achieve the benchmark in Concepts of Print which we are confident will be achieved.

7. Inspections

7.1 Our ELC continue to meet the criteria for the National Standard of good and above evaluations of their service. We are confident in our leadership, quality improvement framework, training and support contributing to sustaining good and above evaluations, high quality at ELC and positive outcomes for children and families. The inspection of our ELC by Education Scotland has resumed. Whitecrook ELC took part in a national thematic inspection focusing on curriculum design. The purpose of the national thematic inspection was to gather evidence on what is working well; aspects for development, any challenges in designing a curriculum and examples of highly effective practice or innovation. HM Inspectors will use the evidence gathered from the visits to

develop a national report on the approaches to curriculum design and its impact on improving outcomes for learners. Whitecrook ELC have been invited to provide a case study of their work which will be part of the national report.

7.2 Review of inspections

Following the publication of the Scottish Government's response to the consultation of the Inspection of Early Learning and Childcare and School Aged Childcare Services in Scotland, Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland are working together to progress the development of the shared inspection framework. This review will impact ELC, childminding and school aged child care. The shared inspection framework will replace existing frameworks, 'How Good Is Our Early learning and Childcare' and the Care Inspectorate's 'Quality Framework for day care of children, childminding and school aged childcare'. We are currently in the consultation stage, with expected recommendations to be made in December 2023. Implementation is expected as inspection methodology by the Care Inspectorate from April 2024, and Education Scotland from September 2024.

8. Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022 – 2026

8.1 Key aspects of the vision, priorities and outcomes of the Best Start Plan:

- Benefits of 1140 hours expansion - outcome measures
- Build a system of school age childcare
- A new offer for 1 and 2 year olds
- Sustainable, diverse, thriving sector and profession – Strategic Framework
- Fair funding and outcome frameworks
- Robust data
- Regulation of services and support for quality improvement

Funding for projects such as expansion for one and two year olds are not clear at this stage. A Pilot project is underway for School Age Childcare which will benefit most in need children and families in Glasgow. Committee will be updated as plans become available for Best Start and what it may mean for West Dunbartonshire children and families.

9. Expansion Projects

9.1 Outdoor project plans for Gartocharn and Brucehill ELCs are underway. The project for compliance and improvement at St. Mary's ELC Alexandria is complete with a new free flow entrance for children and much improved garden space provided. Linnvale ELC compliance project will recommence in August. Christie Park new ELC project is underway, scheduled opening of the new class planned for September. Some parents have opted to move their 4 year old child from neighbouring ELC when Christie Park opens. New children i.e. 3 year olds who are entitled from August have been given the option to start at another ELC until Christie Park opens.

10. People Implications

- 10.1** Support is provided for ELC staff teams and leaders identified to support delivery of the high quality ELC and the expectations of the statutory offer of 1140 hours for eligible 2 year olds and 3 and 4 year olds.
- 10.2** We have 48 career changers to date; 5 who have just completed their training and gained the ELCO qualification; and a further 9 who are undertaking the qualification at present. All career changers are women. We will continue to promote this career path and route to qualification in particular for men.

11. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 11.1** As reported previously to ensure that it is protected for investment in early learning and childcare, the multi-year funding package for expansion is allocated through a specific grant. There are no changes to the multi-year funding allocation to this authority; figures are cumulative. The multi-year allocations for West Dunbartonshire:

Financial Year	Revenue £m	Capital £m
2018/19	1.410	0.580
2019/20	5.268	2.380
2020/21	8.717	4.480
2021/22	9.723	5.880
2022/23	9.485	0.794

12. Sustainable Rate Setting

- 12.1** The 2022 ELC LA Funding & Support data report was published by Scottish Government during December. The published version of the report is available at:
[Summary of the Returns - Early learning and childcare providers - local authority funding and support: overview 2022 to 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-of-the-returns-to-early-learning-and-childcare-providers-local-authority-funding-and-support-overview-2022-to-2023/pages/summary-of-the-returns-to-early-learning-and-childcare-providers-local-authority-funding-and-support-overview-2022-to-2023.aspx)
- 12.2** Scottish Government and COSLA have reviewed the sustainable rate setting process in 2022-23. The aim of the review is to learn lessons from rate-setting during 2022 and to identify where the process can be improved further; and to ensure that the sustainable rates set reflect the costs of delivering funded ELC.
- 12.3** Our funded private providers have proposed an increase to the hourly rate. The providers state that they would absorb 12% of the average operating cost increases that they have experienced. Their proposal is based on payment of the real living wage, inflation and energy costs. This proposal is a 5% uplift for 3 and 4 year olds from August 2023. This represents a 0.28 pence increase, bringing the rate to £5.95 per hour. We continue to work within Government guidance to set the rate, budget available of which an ELC funding decision is awaited. We have not committed to % increase or agreed format for arriving at a new rate. Discussion will continue with providers.

13. Risk Analysis

13.1 The Key Risks:

- Maintaining high quality ELC at all funded providers to ensure that they meet the National Standard Criteria.
- Failure to deliver 1140 hours curriculum by confident, well-trained ELC staff teams.
- Evaluations of good for environment by Care Inspectorate are at risk if ELC building assets are not maintained.

14. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

14.1 An EIA for the Expansion Plan was undertaken previously. There was no requirement to undertake another EIA for the purposes of this report as it is providing an update for Committee.

15. Consultation

15.1 Regular consultation with stakeholders including parents and carers, ELC staff, Unions, Council partners in the project and partner ELC providers continues through the various WDC fora and regular meetings.

15.2 The service delivery model has been reviewed at Kilbowie ELC. The number of parents taking up the offer of the 50 week service has diminished over time with this session only 5 children attending in the afternoon, 50 weeks. The parents were consulted and have agreed to term time service from August 2023.

15.3 Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

16. Strategic Assessment

16.1 This report reflects the Council's aspiration to have a strong local economy, improved employment opportunities and efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents. These are strategic priorities for 2017-2023.

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Background Papers: none

Wards Affected:

All

