

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Education Officer****Education Services Committee: 28 September 2022**

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:

(a) deliver the statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of high quality early learning and childcare.

3. Background**Framework for High Quality ELC**

- 3.1** The ELC Quality Improvement Framework is designed to support improvement at our ELC provision. The framework provides self-evaluation tools which support ELC to measure progress and plan improvement. Specific self-evaluation tools have been provided to critically reflect on practice and to specifically evaluate the 1140 hours curriculum offer.
- 3.2** Outcomes for our children and families evidenced through their progress in literacy and numeracy are improving. The skills, knowledge and confidence of most practitioners and leaders at our ELCs has also improved through our programme of professional learning. This was evidenced through our ELC Improvement Framework; verified by external scrutiny from the Care Inspectorate. Intensive support is provided for staff at some ELC to deliver high quality ELC; 1140 hours and understanding of the increased expectations of the policy. Support and training to deliver the extended children's day, curriculum, planning and assessment is being provided.
- 3.3** HM Inspectors of Education will resume their routine programme of inspections following the pause in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The quality framework and indicators within *How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare?* will continue to be used as the focus for their inspections.
- 3.4** The Care Inspectorate have used their new quality framework in their inspections for day care of children, childminding and school-aged childcare services. The framework focuses on children's wellbeing and sets out the elements that will help answer key questions about the impact care and learning is making to outcomes for children. The framework is a self-

evaluation tool to help settings self-evaluate their own performance in delivering high quality care and learning for children.

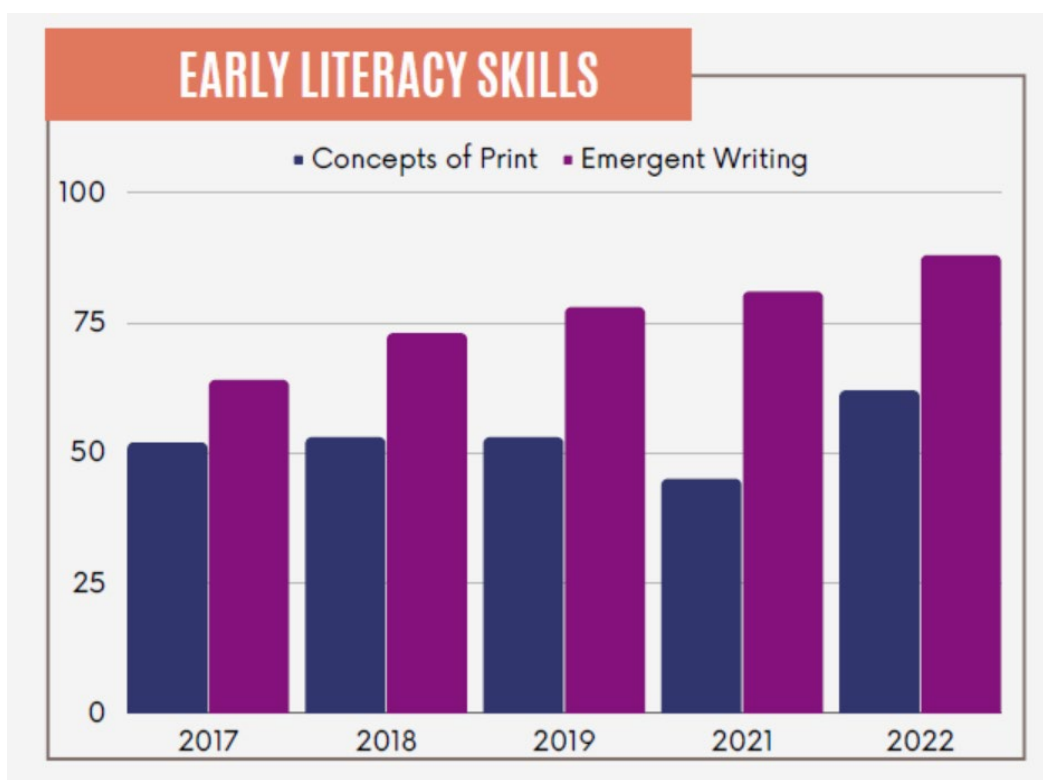
- 3.5** A national consultation on options to improve and streamline the inspection of ELC has been launched. This consultation as a result of Professor Muir's recommendations for education reform in Scotland recommended that there should be a shared inspection framework for ELC; a single inspection framework which would remove unnecessary burdens and duplication by the inspecting bodies.
- 3.6** Of our 40 ELC settings (includes 11 partner providers), 10 ELC were inspected by the Care Inspectorate between August 2021 and August 2022; evaluative grades awarded were good and above. The work to ensure that ELCs below good, achieved good and above, can be attributed to expansion models and the new structures of leadership in place. Of the 10 inspected services: 3 were newly opened ELC managed by a head teacher, 3 ELC were re inspected, who were below good at their last inspection, now managed by head teachers, three partner providers were also re inspected and there was one pilot of a new inspection model. There is evidence of strong improvement and quality of provision at the 10 ELC in the sample of inspections last session. Published reports provide detailed evidence and answer key questions: *How good is our care, play and learning? How good is our setting? How good is our leadership? and How good is our staff team?*
- 3.7** Care inspections provided the following evaluations:
- *How good is our care, play and learning?* 3 settings were rated good and 7 rated very good
 - *How good is our setting?* 5 settings were rated good and 5 at very good
 - *How good is our leadership?* 2 settings were rated good and 8 at very good
 - *How good is our staff team?* 3 settings rated good and 7 at very good
- 3.8** Early Years officers continue to work closely with the Care Inspectorate to support ELC improvement; to develop skills, knowledge and expertise of our ELC leadership teams to self-evaluate and plan for improvement.

4. Children's Progress

- 4.1** Children are achieving very well in literacy and numeracy. Attainment progress data shows that children achieved ambitious benchmarks last session. The early level literacy and numeracy baseline assessment is benchmarked across the authority to highlight performance levels. It is too early to say that the increased hours of early learning and childcare is a contributory factor for the improvement in children's progress. However, our ambition through our models of ELC and increased hours is to improve outcomes for children and to narrow the poverty related attainment gap which we are on target to do.
- 4.2** Attainment progress over time, with the percentage of children achieving benchmarks in literacy and numeracy has improved year on year. Literacy progress measures in all areas increased in 2022 compared to 2021.

Although emergent writing data shows a small increase, this was the first time that this measure had increased and represents 88% of our children achieving. The focus on writing through play in our ELC literacy environments has helped to improve this area of children's skill. The biggest increase of 17% was Concepts of Print for 2022 compared to 2021 which also shows an increase over the time of our data collection, this represents 62% of our children. Concepts of print is the main benchmark used to measure children's progress in literacy skills. Children's daily exposure to high quality communication and literacy environments and programmes to develop their literacy skills such as Word Aware is what can make the difference to their attainment. Overall children have improved knowledge of books, vocabulary, writing (early mark making), how words work, ability to hear and produce rhyming words recognise letters and sounds and to recite the alphabet. These are the early literacy skills necessary before formal reading and writing begins at P.1. Although All literacy areas increased in 2022 compared to 2021, it is too early to say if the overall improvement is related to 1140 hours. See Table 1, for literacy attainment in emergent writing and concepts of print at our ELCs (there was no data for 2020).

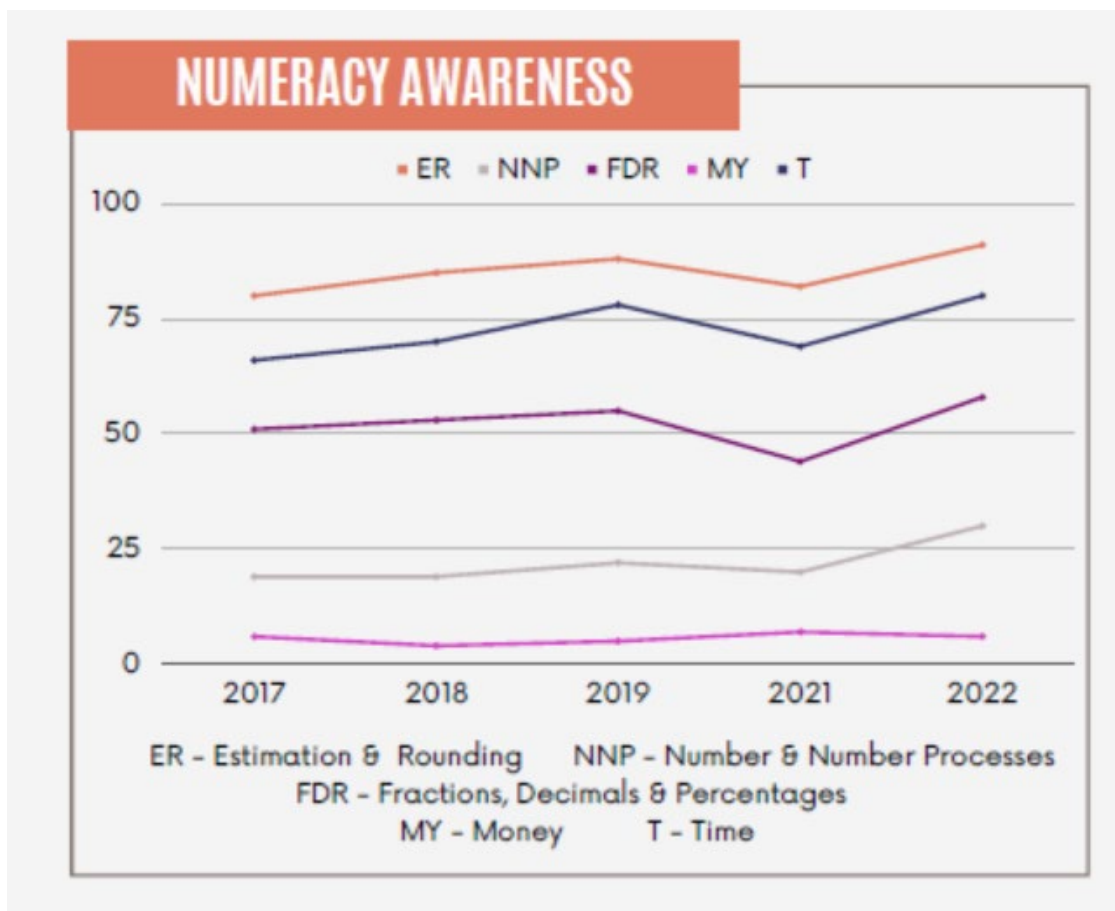
Table 1:



All numeracy areas increased in 2022 compared to 2021, except for Money which declined by 1% in 2022 compared to 2021. Money is a difficult concept for children under five years which requires well developed skills in number and number processing. In number and number processes 32% of our children achieved a very high benchmark score of 19. Children must achieve a score of between 19 - 22 to achieve the benchmark in number and number processes. This benchmark was set deliberately high to show progress across early level for number and processing skills. 63% of our children achieved a score of between 5 - 18 in number and number processes

which is a wide range but shows that children are progressing well in this skill area. The biggest increase of 19% was Properties of 2D shapes and 3D objects for 2022 compared to 2021. Also, Angle, symmetry and transformation increased, 14 % for 2022 compared to 2021. The increase in those two measures may be attributed to our Froebel focus on Block Play which can be seen at all of our ELCs. See Table 2, for numeracy attainment for the last five years at our ELCs, there was no data for 2020).

Table 2:



5. Developing the Early Childhood Curriculum

5.1 The increased hours of attendance at ELC has brought challenges as well as opportunities to provide high quality education for our youngest children. The 600 hours model of ELC provided approximately 3 hour ELC sessions, morning and afternoon, for two different cohorts of 10 children. With the new model our ELC teams provide 1140 hours, approximately 6 hours of ELC for one cohort of 8 children. The longer hours of attendance, with less children requires much more thought and attention to detail to provide curriculum delivery indoors and outdoors, a lunch service which promotes independence, periods of rest, planning and assessment and an environment for learning which responds to children’s stage of learning and development. Built into this model is increased time for staff to develop their practice through collegiate time. This session collegiate plans will be monitored to ensure that the time available is used to prepare and plan for children, provide professional learning, plan and assess and, for team meetings

5.2 Evidence from improvement visits has highlighted that support is required at a small number of ELC to provide the quality that we expect. The key elements for high quality provision which we will continue to support and develop are leadership, curriculum, environments for learning and developing practitioners' skills and knowledge. A working group has been set up to develop curriculum models and rationale for the early childhood curriculum. This group of ELC practitioners will review and evaluate their curriculum, make necessary changes and share good practice. This group's work aligns with the ELC professional learning programme. ELC practitioners will also be encouraged to attend the professional learning and continuous professional learning modules available from the Scottish Government Improvement Service which complements the learning programme we have developed for ELC to:

- Support the development and progression of children's early language and literacy;
- Build confidence in identifying and responding to additional support needs;
- Track and monitor children's progress, and develop
- Curriculum rationale.

5.3 Professional learning and specific groups set up to deliver the high quality expected of 1140 hours are linked to our Delivery Plan. An Action Plan has been developed to track and monitor progress of specific areas which require improvement and support. Opportunities for professional learning continue, linked to the national practice guidance Realising the Ambition. Specific collaborative groups set up to develop 0-3 years practice, communication and literacy, One-ery, and outdoor learning will continue to meet. In addition a group has been set up to support the development of the early childhood curriculum for 1140 hours. The impact on the skills of practitioners who do attend professional learning and support groups is positive. We encourage all early years practitioners to attend training, we schedule training and group meetings after the ELC day which ensures that all staff can attend within their core hours of work. The central early years team also provide training to individual ELC teams where need has been identified. Training attendance records show that attendance is good for most ELC teams. Good practice is evident where practitioners are given lead or champion roles to develop specific areas of the curriculum. This aspect of ELC quality was also commented positively at all recent inspections.

5.4 The One-ery model of early level learning, curriculum delivery based on play pedagogy and nurturing approaches at P.1 and ELC has been successfully delivered and piloted in our campus schools and ELC this session. Progress of early level children at the campus schools is measured through their literacy and numeracy attainment. Children's progress is significantly better than years prior to the pandemic.

5.5 An increased number of settings have plans to implement the One-ery model this session. Our professional learning programme and forums will support education practitioners and leaders as we continue to develop and refine the One-ery model of learning approach.

6. People Implications

- 6.1 As previously reported a high quality, diverse and well-qualified professional Workforce is key to delivering the expansion and the quality of ELC.
- 6.2 Support is provided for ELC staff teams and leaders identified to support delivery of the high quality ELC and increased expectations of 1140 hours model of curriculum

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 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

- 7.2 The outdoor expansion projects at various locations will be completed in the next few months. Projects planned for Linnvale ELCC, St. Mary's Alexandria, and Christie Park Primary School are at various stages of implementation see details below. Budget has been allocated for projects within existing budgeted resources.

- Linnvale ELCC - planning in place, building warrant and start date required
- St Mary's ELCC Alexandria – planning in place, building warrant and start date required
- Christie Park Primary School – plans have been drawn up.

8. Risk Analysis

8.1 The Key Risks:

- The quality of 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.
- Any further delay for the Linnvale ELCC project, which does not comply with registration requirements, will result in evaluative grading below good.
- The Christie Park project is required for August 2023 which if delayed will impact our capacity to deliver the number of ELC placements required for deferred entry policy.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

9.1 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 to Committee on the expansion.

10. Consultation

10.1 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.

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

11. Strategic Assessment

11.1 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 2017-2022.

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Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All

