

Report to:	EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD
Date:	21 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	Tim Bowman – Director, Education (Tameside and Stockport)
Subject:	EARLY YEARS EDUCATION IMPROVEMENTS
Report Summary:	This report outlines the changes already made to the early years education teams to ensure a clear focus on leadership and support for schools and settings is developed and articulated. In addition the report details the proposed additional strategic and leadership capacity from our enhanced partnership with Stockport. The plan outlines the priority areas and activity over the last two years and going forward.
Recommendations:	It is recommended that the Board notes and supports the content of the report.
Corporate Plan:	The content of this report supports most aspects of the corporate plan by ensuring that schools and settings are able to provide high quality early years education for children and thus ensure that they have the best chances of starting well and living well in Tameside.
Policy Implications:	The report sets out the position in line with Council policies and the statutory framework.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>The proposed arrangements and restructure are estimated to be affordable within the existing financial envelope. Further detailed work needs to take place with Stockport in relation to the allocation of costs between both authorities and to ensure the costs reflect the activity appropriately for both parties.</p> <p>It is critical that the financial arrangements and any further changes to the shared service / structure are kept under close review due to the reducing budget envelope for early years as a result of reducing birth rates. Any further changes to the structure will need to be taken through the relevant governance processes.</p> <p>Funding is identified for the WellComm resources and governance will be followed to draw down this funding as it is currently in reserve. Making it REAL and the SEN Inclusion Fund are both funded from the Early Years DSG and again will be kept under close review due to the reducing budget envelope.</p>
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	<p>Work is ongoing with Stockport Council to explore the opportunities for working collaborative in order to drive up standards of services and educational attainment for the residents of Tameside.</p> <p>This work will include the necessary due diligence and options appraisals which will be presented to Cabinet for Members to decide on their preferred approach in relation to the future delivery of the education services.</p> <p>Pending the operational decisions by cabinet some interim changes to the services have been made as detailed in the main body of this report.</p> <p>The Board may wish to consider whether some clear criteria should be identified at this stage to assist analysing the benefits and</p>

anticipated improvements these posts have brought together with an agreed time line for reporting back the anticipated improvements.

Risk Management:

There are potential future budget pressures associated with the impact of the future reduction in birth rate on Early Years DSG which will be closely monitored.

Access to Information:

NON CONFIDENTIAL

This report does not contain information, which warrants its consideration in the absence of the Press or members of the public

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Jane Sowerby



Telephone:

 e-mail: jane.sowerby@tameside.gov.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The early years of a child's education are hugely important to establishing the foundations for future learning and success in life. We know that children who do not reach the nationally expected levels by the age of five years old are very unlikely to reach national expectations at 11 years old and at 16 years old. This impacts negatively on future earnings, mental health and physical health in adulthood. Children who are economically disadvantaged experience disproportionately poorer outcomes than more advantaged children and have been adversely affected by the pandemic more than their better off peers.
- 1.2 In the last set of national data (2019) Tameside was four percentage points below children nationally and it is clear that the impact of the pandemic on Tameside's five-year olds will be disproportionately greater than in other parts of the country. Tameside was already prioritising education outcomes for five year olds before the pandemic. This was through support to schools and settings with speech and language interventions and approaches such as WellComm (a speech and language toolkit for screening and intervention in the early years) and Nuffield Early Language Intervention (a programme for Five year olds which has been found to improve children's language and early literacy skills). However it is clear that more needs to be done. Investing in and supporting schools and settings in the early years will have a positive impact on the outcomes of older children and is the best way to prioritise support and investment if improved outcomes at all stages of education are to be achieved.
- 1.3 There is new evidence that in primary schools, younger year groups (Key Stage 1 pupils) have been the most significantly affected by the pandemic, with lower attainment than previous cohorts across all subjects (EEF, May 2022).

2. DEVELOPING AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 The challenge for Tameside is to maximise the impact of support on education outcomes whilst not increasing the financial envelope. Until November 2021, Tameside's Early Years Quality Team was positioned in the Early Years, Early Help and Neighbourhoods Service in Children's Services. As part of a strategy for more effective and efficient service delivery, the Early Help Service underwent a redesign (ECG, December 2021) and the Early Years Quality Team was moved to Education Improvement and Partnerships under review, in order to support the Council to have a greater impact on school outcomes in the early years by working more closely with schools and education colleagues and by exploring opportunities to achieve this by working in partnership with Stockport (Executive Cabinet, Shared Service Paper, February 2022).
- 2.2 The Education Improvement and Partnerships service sits in Children's Services and is focused on providing support and challenge to schools and early years settings across Tameside. Ensuring good school and childcare places and developing partnerships to support continuous quality improvement of the education offer. In line with Tameside's Schools Strategy, the focus of school improvement activity is through effective partnerships with successful schools and MATs and education providers both locally and nationally.
- 2.3 In March 2021, Executive Cabinet agreed to establish an 'enhanced partnership' with Stockport Council. This partnership was included to explore and bring forward proposals for a model of integrated service delivery between the two authorities. The partnership is focused on Education services. The agreement also established a single Director of Education working across both Local Authorities to lead this work.
- 2.4 This programme explores a model of education improvement and partnerships across both authorities which will increase leadership capacity and realise opportunities across the breadth of the teams' responsibilities. The purpose of this work is to build on existing strengths, sharing best practice wherever possible. We are clear that our teams must be able

to offer support to all schools and settings, regardless of their governance, and ensure that we continue to focus on high quality relationships and partnerships with school and setting leaders and managers. This strengthening of our offer will enable integrated knowledge and local experience to improve services to children and their families.

- 2.5 The ambition of these changes is to influence practice in settings and schools to support improved outcomes for children and to give children the best start in life possible. By achieving better at five years old, children will have greater life chances and have the potential to achieve better outcomes and earnings in later life. Historically, the team supports PVIs and childminders but not early years classes in schools, so it is important to develop the skills and capacity of the team to reach this sector and influence practice.
- 2.6 The service is working towards this ambition with the additional pressure of reducing birth rate across the authority and consequently there is a reducing budget (Early Years DSG). The restructure had to focus on increasing strategic leadership and the remit and impact of the Early Years Quality Team within a reduced financial envelope. The redesign therefore focused on maximising strategic and operational leadership in education early years with the development of the Improvement and Partnership roles and shared leadership roles across Stockport and Tameside.
- 2.7 Stockport and Tameside share the ambition to develop their strengths in early years practice. A shared leadership model provides the opportunity to draw from a larger pool of practitioners, utilising the skills and best practice across the two authorities and nurturing innovation that is created from collaborative working. This will encourage broader thinking, encourage the sharing of ideas and support a culture of mutual challenge which in turn should enable us collectively to develop more creative solutions to common problems.
- 2.8 The changes to the Early Years team were detailed in a paper to ECG in February 2022 with implementation from 1 April 2022. The new model includes three shared leaderships posts with Stockport and new posts for Early Years Officers with QTS (Qualified Teacher Status). The Primary Lead post has been deleted to create a shared Early Years and KS1 Lead post with Stockport. This is because the main needs across Tameside's primary school sector sit within Nursery to Year 1. It makes sense to refocus this post around this age phase therefore. There are two further shared leadership posts which have been created: a PVI and Childminder Leader which has been filled by a Tameside post holder and a Schools Early Years Leader which will be filled by a Stockport post holder.
- 2.9 Although the number of frontline staff has not reduced, a small number of vacant Early Years Quality Officer posts have been deleted to create QTS posts giving the team the capacity to provide more support to schools. This will provide the new team with the right balance of QTS expertise and experience over time to meet needs.
- 2.10 The shared leadership posts will be co-funded by each authority and take account of existing leadership posts. The early years officers will continue to serve their own authorities, with the Shared Leadership Team working across both authorities.
- 2.11 The team has already established new practices in the early years education space including: multi-agency working with the Early Years Educational psychologist; a new process for SEND Inclusion Funding for children in settings and school nursery classes; new processes around tracking vulnerable children so that they are not lost in the system; and developing early years transition between schools and settings.
- 2.12 One of the key priorities since November is developing the involvement and developing communication with the early years sector. We have established an Early Years Working Group, which makes recommendations to Schools' Forum and co-produces procedures and protocols.

3. DEVELOPING AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION STRATEGY

- 3.1 Once the shared strategic and leadership posts are in place, the next step for the early years is to articulate a clear early years education strategy focused on supporting settings and schools with SEND and addressing the communication and language needs of all children in the early years both of which have increased during the pandemic. A report to EAIB in the autumn will detail the strategy once it has been produced.
- 3.2 The need for focused language and communication support is ongoing. The priority is to embed the use of WellComm, a speech and language toolkit for screening and intervention in the early years, across schools and settings. Over the past four years all settings and 30 schools with the highest levels of socio-economic deprivation, have been provided with a WellComm pack each. Many settings and schools have made excellent use of this diagnostic tool and intervention but this has not been systematic. We will provide the remaining primary schools with WellComm packs and roll out fully, making clear the strategy for how schools and settings, health, and the local authority can use this data, and practice to ensure high quality language provision, early identification of difficulties, and early action to address difficulties.
- 3.3 In addition to WellComm, Tameside had previously supported schools to train staff and implement the evidence-based Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI). NELI is a programme for five year olds which has been found to improve children's language and early literacy skills. As part of the government's recovery support in 2021 all schools have been offered free training for NELI for implementation in Reception. In cohort one, 30 Tameside schools applied for this and in cohort two, there were 18 schools, this is on top of the 10 schools trained in 2019 by the local authority. The Early Years Quality Team will work with these schools to support them to implement this effective programme and to provide additional training should the government scheme no longer be available. Again we will work systematically with schools through the capacity provided by the new QTS posts in the early years team.
- 3.4 Making it REAL has continued to be a priority programme in the early years focused at 3 to 4 year olds. It has been difficult to keep the programme going during the restrictions imposed during the pandemic as this programme is relational and relies on families, children and practitioners being able to come together in groups and in the home to model language and play skills. Despite these difficulties Tameside has managed to keep supporting schools and setting to engage in and embed Making it REAL. We will continue to support settings and schools in the next academic year and the impact that this important programme is having. 11 schools and eight settings have been trained to date with recruitment drive currently for a further eight settings and five to eight schools.
- 3.5 A key part of the early years education strategy will be to influence strategy and practice around the teaching of phonics for PVI's and childminders, and schools.
- 3.6 In addition to interventions, the focus will also be on improving the skills of the early years workforce by promoting and supporting the new Early Years National Professional Qualification which is a government-funded national initiative. The early years training offer will also be updated and improved so that it meets the needs of all practitioners.
- 3.7 SEND is another key area for investment to ensure Tameside children have the best chance of getting ahead in life. The SEND Inclusion Fund (SENDIF) has been reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team and there has been full consultation with the sector. Access to the fund is focused on getting the right support to children at the right time. Funding is more easily accessed and the process is more transparent. The process is centred around cycles of plan-do-review to encourage best practice and use of the Early Years Matching Provision to Need document, which supports a graduated response, but with provision for exceptional circumstances included. The fund is now allocated at a half-termly multi-agency meeting

including the educational psychologist; children in receipt of funding are monitored and transition is supported by the Early Years Quality Team. Schools are now aware of the funding available for nursery classes and children with SEND Inclusion Funding will now keep their funding should they transition to a school nursery. In addition, more Early Years Officer time is allocated to SEND-focused activity and support.

- 3.8 The strategy aims to raise standards in the early years by providing strategic educational leadership and high quality support from a skilled team of practitioners. The strategy aims to ensure coherence across the early years education landscape and ensure improved outcomes for our five year olds and beyond.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Through redesigning the workforce supporting early years education, we have developed capacity and direction which focuses on children's outcomes and establishing strong early years strategic leadership across the Borough.
- 4.2 Schools have not always had the support that they have needed to improve outcomes in the early years, this increased support and strategic clarity will support schools and settings to improve practice across the Borough.
- 4.3 Practice and outcomes in the early years were already a priority for the authority prior to the pandemic and given the challenges of the impact of the pandemic and government targets stated in the School White Paper (March 2022), focus and investment in this area continue to be a priority.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As set out at the front of the report.