

The Impact of Early Years Inclusion Funding for 2, 3 & 4-year-olds



Executive Summary

Introduction

The Childcare Strategy Service and the Specialist Early Years Support Team at City of York Council have worked collaboratively to carry out this small scale research report.

The aim of the research was to investigate the impact of Early Years Inclusion Funding (EYIF) for 2, 3 and 4-year-olds. The fund was introduced in July 2011 to support preschool children with a high level of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or disabilities in early years settings where they did not have a Statement of SEN.

To inform the research both quantitative and qualitative information was collected from early years/school settings receiving EYIF together with feedback comments from parents, early years Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and narratives from case studies.

Key Findings

During the 18 months the Early Years Inclusion Funding has been operating, 78 children attending 43 early years settings have received additional support through the EYIF, with the majority funded over several terms. The key findings of the study are listed below under the headings of outcomes/benefits for the child, the early years setting and for the local authority.

Benefits to the Child

- Earlier identification of children's SEN and referral to support services for early intervention and advice to early years settings and parents.
- Children are able to stay in their own/locality early years setting with additional adult support rather than having to travel to an enhanced resourced nursery near the centre of York.
- Evidence from review reports, evaluated Individual Education Plans (IEPs) of targets achieved, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Baseline and Progress reports and EYFS Trackers, and reports from supporting professionals have provided information on progress made by the children.

- Parents, SENCO ratings and individual comments on the evaluation questionnaires were especially positive on the impact for children/progress made.
- Assessments of children's SEN were completed systematically and over time while they were attending preschool resulting in improvements for many of the children. It also enabled primary schools to be alerted in advance to children's SEN prior to their school entry, facilitating their planning and resource-allocation and enabling continued support for the children. It also enabled evidence for statutory assessment to be collected for 15 children to enable their assessment and Statement of SEN to be completed prior to school entry - either to a primary or special school.
- The additional adult support has meant that the programmes/interventions recommended by support service professionals have been implemented to record the child's response to programmes, their rate of learning over time and to identify the child's characteristics of learning. Recommendations can be made about what works best to maximise the child's learning.
- Several therapists and other support service professionals have commented on how the EYIF has enabled settings to implement their advice/programmes more effectively than early years practitioners in settings .

Benefits for the Early Years Settings

- Enables the early years setting to focus more time on the child with SEN without taking the time away from other children in the setting.
- Enables them to work more closely with parents and support service professionals and attend multi-agency planning and review meetings.
- Increased the skills of the practitioners by working closely with support services to find techniques that improve the child's rate of progress. There has also been a reported increase in practitioners' confidence when they see how they have been able to make a difference to the child.
- All settings are fully inclusive, which may not have been possible previously where 1:1 adult support was required for the safety of the child / other children in the setting but financial implications prohibited this.

Benefits for the Local Authority

- Children's needs can be identified earlier and so help given earlier.
- More effective use of support services time when their advice is acted upon / implemented and the child makes more progress.
- Reduces the pressure on places at York's only enhanced resourced nursery and enables children to stay at a setting in their own locality.
- More children can be supported than would be possible through a Statement of SEN and more cost-effectively.
- Identifies training and workforce development needs which can then be met primarily by support service practitioners.
- Many of the children receiving EYIF can now have a My Support Plan written collaboratively with parents, early years practitioners and support service professionals as part of the revised SEN legislation and Code of Practice. This could then be converted to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by the Special Needs Assessment Panel (SENAP) if appropriate.

Conclusions

During the period the funding has been applied 78 children have been supported in 43-different early years/school settings which is significantly more than the children supported through a Statement of SEN in mainstream early years settings during the last ten years. The EYIF has enabled all pre-school children to access additional funding for SEN support regardless of the early years setting they attended. Previously this funding had not been available to early years settings in the private and voluntary sectors.

It is clear that the funding has made a difference to 2, 3 and 4-year-olds. As children have to have high/complex SEN and/or disabilities to access the funding, its success should not be measured only in terms of the child's rate of progress or the removal of their SEN, but by whether it enables all children to attend their local early years/schools setting with their peers and be fully included safely and without detriment to other children.

A key benefit has also been to reduce the pressure on places at York's only enhanced resourced place (ERP) nursery, St Paul's Nursery, which

is only able to offer six full time equivalent ERP places at any one time. The EYIF has resulted in more children being supported in their own locality.

Although it is less clear if the EYIF has reduced or increased the number of Statutory Assessments of SEN being requested at preschool it does suggest that this has been deferred until children are nearing school entry. Certainly the 78 children supported through the EYIF during the last two years would not all have been supported through a Statement of SEN.

The funding also represents clear value for money as relatively small amounts of funding have made a difference.

Recommendations

- The research report clearly demonstrates the benefits and impact of the funding on these young children. There is a strong need for this funding to continue so that pre-school children (2-5 years) eligible for an early education place who have complex needs receive the same additional SEN support that children attending school receive.
- The funding formula for allocation of EYIF also needs to be integrated into York's Banding/Stages of Intervention, support and funding which presently outline the stages relating to the school age population.
- Further research should be commissioned to compare cost/benefits between this approach, where the funding is completely ring fenced to the individual child, and the existing and proposed model for schools where there is greater flexibility by the school over exact use of the funding.
- To ensure that there is increased inter-agency collaboration and support for parents of children receiving EYIF, the implementation of the SEN Pathway including the writing of a My Support Plan for each child in receipt of EYIF should help to address this to some extent. There also needs to be increased collaborative working with Children's Centres for those children who are in receipt of the EYIF but do not have regular support service intervention.

I would like to acknowledge the staff who made a significant contribution to this research and for their commitment and enthusiasm during the process.

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