

## 6 Funded Early Education

### 6.1 Introduction

Children become entitled to fifteen hours of funded early education from the term after their third birthday until statutory school age. The funding is made available by the Department for Education and is administered by the Local Authority. Provision is delivered by the private, voluntary and maintained sectors. Parents can choose to take up the entitlement at daycare nurseries, preschools, schools with maintained nursery units or with accredited childminders. Providers must be registered with Ofsted and meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Specific information about funded early education for disabled children, for black and minority ethnic communities and in disadvantaged areas is available in sections seven, eight and nine of this assessment respectively.

### 6.2 Developments since 2008

There have been many developments in the availability and flexibility of funded early education since 2008 driven chiefly by changes in funding criteria from the DfE.

- Many preschools developed more flexibility in their early education services moving from offering five fixed daily sessions during term time to offering five sessions over fewer days.
- Additional hours were phased in, increasing the full entitlement from 12.5 hours a week over 38 weeks, to 15 hours a week over 38 weeks (or proportionately fewer weekly hours over more weeks of the year)
- Additional flexibility was introduced giving all settings that offer funded early education more choice about how the entitlement is offered (ie the length of sessions and the number of weeks over which it is delivered) and giving parents more choice about how it is accessed.
- Large scale planned housing developments slowed due to the recession though there is additional need for funded early education due to new development, for example in North Swindon.
- Swindon took part in a DfE pilot to administer funded early education sessions for targeted two year olds. 188 children benefited from this funding enabling them to access two year old sessions on recommendation from a relevant professional such as a health visitor. Two year old funding has been continued by the DfE following the success of the pilot nationally.

### 6.3 Early Education Funding and Starting School

Most infant and primary schools have well-established links with the pre-schools and nurseries in their community. However, where a child attends funded early education, even if it is a maintained nursery class, is not part of the admissions criteria for any Swindon

school. There is evidence that some parents wrongly believe this is the case which may influence their preferred choice of provision.

In Swindon there is a single school intake in September each year. This means that the majority of four year olds who are attending funded early education settings move up to a reception class in school. As four year olds will not have reached statutory school age at September entry (the beginning of term after the child's fifth birthday), parents may opt to defer entry to school until their child does reach statutory school age in which case funded early education entitlement can still be claimed in the private and voluntary sector. However, in practice, this choice is infrequently taken.

#### 6.4 Supply and Demand of Funded Early Education in Swindon

Swindon Sure Start Partnership at Swindon Borough Council actively promotes the availability of the funded early education entitlement aiming to ensure that there are sufficient places for all parents who wish to take up the offer in whole or in part.

The percentage of available early education places that are filled in Swindon (87% at its peak) demonstrates that there are sufficient early education places available in Swindon as a whole. However, there is significant variation in availability by area as evident both in Local Authority early education funding take up statistics and considerable feedback from parents who struggle to find early education places in their locality.

The percentage take up of funded early education fluctuates over the academic year. With four year olds moving on to reception in September under the single school intake, there is a surplus of funded early education places in the autumn term each year. With more children becoming eligible for funded early education in subsequent terms, places in the summer term in specific areas of Swindon become oversubscribed.

The percentage of children taking up the entitlement has declined slightly from 93.7% in 2008 to 89% in 2010. Percentage take up will continue to be monitored, however there are a number of other factors which have an impact on supply of and demand for funded early education:

- Approximately 30% of children do not take up the full entitlement either from parental choice or through limited availability of places
- Between 150 and 200 children per term split their funding entitlement between two settings either from parental choice or through limited availability of places
- Further investigation is needed to find out the extent to which parents use early education in a different area to the one in which they live, either through choice (for example if they want to use a workplace nursery), or through lack of availability nearer to home
- At the time of writing 52 children were being funded in Swindon who do not live in the Borough.

- Not all daycare provision offers standalone funded early education. A parent's only option in these settings is to use a combination of funded early education provision and childcare for which they must pay.

## 6.5 Parent Feedback and Comments

Parents who use funded early education were asked additional questions in the consultation to find out whether existing availability and flexibility meets their needs. 1032 parents responded to this part of the consultation.

Parent preferences for funded early education usage in Swindon	% response
I use the full entitlement	74
I do not use full entitlement	26
I do not use full entitlement because I do not want to	8
I do not use full entitlement because I want to use one provider	9
I do not use full entitlement because I didn't know I can use two providers	1
I do not use full entitlement because I didn't know about the entitlement	2
I do not use full entitlement (other reason)	4
I can find enough sessions	64
I cannot find enough sessions	10
I would prefer three sessions of five hours	31
I would prefer five sessions of three hours	41
I would prefer a different combination of hours	11
I would like to use a maximum of three hours a day	24
I would like to use a maximum of four hours a day	8
I would like to use a maximum of five hours a day	19
I would like to use a maximum of six hours a day	20
I would like to use a maximum of seven hours a day	4
I would like to use a maximum of eight hours a day	4
I would like to use a maximum of nine hours a day	2
I would like to use a maximum of ten hours a day	2

This shows that of the parents who do not use the full entitlement the main reasons are because they prefer not to or because they wish to use one provider only. There are some parents who are unable to find sufficient sessions. Most parents would prefer to use up to six hours of funded early education a day.

The majority of parent comments about funded early education are about lack of availability. There are fewer comments about the need for additional flexibility or a request for more funded hours. There are many positive comments about the quality of early education provision.

- Severe lack of preschool places in North Swindon. I do believe a preschool or nursery should be within walking distance.
- Some preschools over subscribed so not able to get many sessions as would like.

- Pre school places are not flexible enough. A 3 hour session from 8.30 - 11.30 5 days a week is not ideal for a working mum. Combining sessions would help a lot. Then working mums with other children could work school hours. Childminders are not willing to pick up and keep young children for just a few hours so the current system has made my childcare arrangements really difficult.
- We use both a childminder and preschool and are very happy.
- My son has settled really well into preschool. He has come on leaps and bounds with his speech. The staff are excellent with the children there.

## 6.6 Recommendations

- Make equipment grants available to new funded early education provision in areas where there is unmet demand
- Use section 106 funding and the Community Infrastructure Levy to support the provision of early education
- Target families in areas of low take up, especially in disadvantaged areas, to ensure parents are aware of the early education entitlement
- Investigate difficulties with supply of places and devise a strategy to improve the availability as appropriate