

Agenda item 4

Reducing Inequalities – Improving Self-Regulation and Academic Resilience in Early Years

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of the report is to establish centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant funding for a dedicated person to implement the involvement and well-being Leuvern scales. This post will work with an identified group of settings and schools where Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data has highlighted a wide gender and free school meal gap than that of Cheshire West and Chester.

Recommendations

2. The Schools Forum is asked to approve an increase to the centrally retained budget for the Early Years Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant to appoint a 0.5 FTE Grade 11 Early Years Consultant for four years to implement the Leuvern scales.

Background

3. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile gap between children eligible for free school meals and non-free school meals closed in Cheshire West and Chester in 2017 by 8.6 per cent. However, there are still pockets of settings and schools with gaps of more than 30 per cent between free school meal children and the rest of the cohort.
4. Cheshire West and Chester Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 2017 data:

Gender:

- Personal, social and emotional development; Increase in gap between boys and girls from 10.4 per cent 2016 to 11.3 per cent 2017.
- Communication and language; Increase in the gap between boys and girls from 10.5 per cent 2016, to 11.4 per cent 2017.
- The percentage of children eligible for free school meals who attained at least expected level in communication and language decreased by one per cent in 2017.

The Leuvern Scales

5. The Leuvern scales were developed by a team based at the Research centre for Experiential Education (Leuvern University, Belgium). They are based on a conceptual framework that was developed over decades of innovative work with settings and schools. Two indicators of quality are central to this approach: well-being and involvement. Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to secure mental health. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development.
6. The Leuvern scales are designed to help settings and schools to get aware of their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to creating the best possible conditions for children to develop. The process of reflection and action is seen as the responsibility of the whole team.
7. There are three steps in the self-evaluation process:

Step One: Assessment of the actual levels of well-being and involvement through observation.

Step Two: Analysis of the observations and explanation of levels observed.

Step Three: Selection and implementation of actions to improve quality.

Proposal

8. To appoint a 0.5 FTE Grade 11 Early Years Consultant for four years to implement the Leuvern scales with an identified group of settings and schools through training, observation, and collation of data to measure the impact.
9. The dedicated Early Years Consultant will implement the Leuvern scales, track the impact from two year funded children through to end of reception year, and ensure empowerment, and training of settings and schools involved.
10. As a result of implementing this programme, there will be an improvement of early identification, self-regulation and academic resilience of children nought to five, and an increase in practitioner knowledge and understanding of the importance of well-being as a contributing factor to closing the gap, and ensuring strong foundations on which future success is built.

Outcomes

11. This investment will impact on improving and closing the inequality gap in the following ways:
- Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential states that: ‘Children with strong foundations start school in a position to progress, but too many children fall behind early’.
‘A good early years education is the cornerstone of improving social mobility...these key years are the opportunity to make sure that all children develop the strong cognitive, social and emotional foundations on which future success is built.’
‘Our best quality settings are proof that prevention is better than cure, putting children from all backgrounds on the right track from the very beginning and enabling them to begin school in a position to thrive.’
‘On average, 40 per cent of the overall gap between disadvantaged 16 year olds and their peers has already emerged by the age of five’.
 - It will also take account of findings in the Department for Education funded project ‘High Achieving White Working Class’.
 - The investment will improve early identification, self-regulation and academic resilience of children nought to five and increase practitioner knowledge and understanding of the importance of well-being as a contributing factor to closing the gap, ensuring strong foundations on which future success is built.
 - Investment in a dedicated person to implement the involvement and well-being Leuvern scales will improve future performance in personal, social and emotional development which will lead to an increase of children attaining a good level of development at the end of reception and developing strong cognitive, social and emotional foundations on which to build future success in education and beyond.
 - Investment in identified settings and schools will lead to empowerment of staff to lead and mentor future work in this area. This will therefore become a self-sustainable initiative.

Funding

12. It is proposed that this fixed term post be funded from an increase to the Early Years Block centrally retained budget and the level of funding requested is shown in the table below.

Revenue Investment Requested	Financial Year (£000)					
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	Total
Total Investment	16	30	30	30	15	121

13. The centrally retained budget for 2018-2019 was agreed by Schools Forum in February 2018 at £776k and is fully committed. However, the agreed budget was based on the indicative funding allocation announced in December 2017 which did not include an updated allocation to reflect the take up of the 30 hours extended entitlement. The Local Authority is expecting an increase to the indicative allocation to be confirmed in July and this is estimated at £1.7 million. Within this amount there would be headroom above the agreed Early Years Single Funding Formula to allow for an increased element of central spend. Under the National Funding formula early years central spend is subject to a cap of five per cent of the total three and four year old funding allocation. The current approved budget for central spend represents 2.8 per cent of the total allocation and is within the permitted limit.

Next steps

14. Subject to Schools Forum approval, to establish Local Authority approval for the appointment of one Grade 11 Early Years Consultant, 0.5 FTE for four years to implement the initiative and to advertise the post.