

# **Somerset's Strategy for Early Years 2016 to 2019**

**February 2016**

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## Somerset Strategy for Early Years 2016 to 2019

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This document summarises the collective views of the Somerset Early Years Writing Team in their co-construction of a Strategy for Early Years for implementation in Somerset during the 2015-2016 Academic Year. The writing team comprised of Early Years providers, childminders, primary school headteachers and staff, and Early Help managers. This strategy draws on a number of key Somerset documents, national research and Ofsted documentation.

Please see 'Somerset's Strategy for Achieving Excellence for All', for the broad education picture, including performance data and our ambitious trajectory for improvement.

## 1. National Context

Securing a successful start for our youngest children, and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is crucial. 'Gaps in achievement between the poorest children and their better off counterparts are well established by the age of five.' (Unseen children 2013). We know that high quality early education and childcare impacts greatly on outcomes for children in later life.

Research tells us that children who thrive in their early years achieve more success at school. As adults they are likely to have higher employment and earnings, better health and lower levels of welfare dependence and crime rates than those who don't have these early opportunities.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the name used by the government and professionals to describe the time in a child's life between birth and five years old. The government views a good start in the early years as critical to children's development and eventual success in life; and sufficient, high quality, affordable childcare, as essential to supporting parents with employment and employment related activity. In Somerset children are able to start school in the September after their fourth birthday.

These twin aims are seen as inseparable in how services are developed. The government's guidance for early years and childcare (called the EYFS Framework) sets out what local authorities 'must' and 'should' do, to deliver their range of duties under the Childcare Act. These are summarised as:

- **Childcare sufficiency** - (ensuring there are enough childcare places)
- **Early Years outcomes** – (requiring joint working (led by the local authority) across Job Centre Plus, Health and Early Help services to ensure all children have made expected progress by the age of 5).
- **Information to parents** (and Early Years providers) - ensuring parents know about their entitlements to free child care places, and how to choose high quality provision.

### Early Years Entitlement

- The Childcare Act 2006 introduced an entitlement for 15 hours a week of funded childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds in England, of which Somerset was chosen as a Pathfinder Local Authority in 2008. The entitlement was extended to disadvantaged 2 year olds in 2013, and Somerset operates a stretched offer for the entitlements which equates to 570 hours per year of funded childcare for eligible families.
- In 2017, the entitlement for funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds will be extended to 30 hours in total for eligible families who are working for 16 hours or more per week.

## **2. Local Context and Performance**

### **a) Quality of Provision**

Somerset's Early Years childcare and education is delivered by a wide range of providers; of which, 99% are independent of the local authority (classed as the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector) 0-5. The Early Years Foundation Stage covers children until the end of Reception year in schools. Wrap around child care is also provided by a number of PVI providers including schools.

Of the 212 primary schools, 134 have childcare on their school site. There are also seven secondary schools that have pre-schools on their sites; one private, one governor run and five voluntary run.

Ofsted inspects all Early Years providers, and at the end of August 2015, 82% of Somerset's providers had been judged as 'good' or 'outstanding', a year on year improvement, but less than the regional and national average of 87%. This is an improvement of 21% since 2013.

Our Children's Centres are managed in the five district areas, and subject to Area Ofsted Inspections. We have 24 individual children's centres (subject to their own Ofsted inspections) and 17 de-registered centres (only inspected within an Area inspection). The most recent inspections of two Children's Centre area groups (Taunton and South Somerset), took place in September and October 2014, and both areas were judged inadequate. The other three areas have not yet been inspected. The individual Ofsted profile of the 12 registered Children's Centres in these areas, (Mendip, Sedgemoor and West Somerset) at their most recent inspection was: 7 rated 'Satisfactory or Requires improvement'; 4 rated 'Good' and one has not yet been inspected. Our Children and Young People's plan sets out our intention to 'review and re-establish the role of children's centres services within an integrated early help and public health nursing offer and the future use of children's centre buildings in the communities of Somerset'.

### **b) Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**

Somerset reflects the national trend in year on year improvement in the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD), at the end of the EYFS, with 66.6% of children achieving a GLD in 2015, a 5.2% improvement from 2014.

But the gap between those in receipt of free school meals and their peers remains at 20% and Somerset with just 46% of these children achieving a GLD at the end of EYFS, one of the lowest percentages in the country.

### **c) Take up of Early Years Places**

- Over the last year, Somerset has almost doubled the number of two year olds taking up funded early education places - from 640 in 2014 to 1220 in 2015.
- 97% of three and four year olds in Somerset take up some free education, in line with regional and national averages.

### **d) Related Policy and Strategies**

A series of related policy developments need also to be considered:

- Somerset's Children and young People's plan 2016 - 2019
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy
- The direct commissioning of health visiting services by the local authority (and requirement for health visitors to make families aware of their entitlements).
- Changes to tax credits and the introduction of universal credit
- The introduction of the national minimum living wage
- Tax free childcare
- A minimum hourly rate of funding for providers
- Changes to Job Centre Plus role and relationship to the LA
- The role of LAs in setting business rates
- Changes to qualifications and workforce for example apprenticeships

The strategy also recognises the links in strategies and the impact Early Years can have on a range of other service areas, as well as ensuring streamlined services and efficiencies:

- Social care - (reduction in Child Protection cases, that 80% of serious case reviews are with under-fives and 75% of those with under twos)
- Troubled families – with a 98% percentage of the entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds many of these are the same client groups
- Getset services– inspected on take up of entitlements as well as EYFS. They have a key role in multiagency working and the take up of funding for two year olds and narrowing the gap for the most disadvantaged

- Early Help and the early identification of those children and families who may need further support
- Health visiting and promotion services: Somerset Health Visitors have been working in conjunction with early years providers across Somerset, to ensure that every child aged 2- 2.5 years is offered an integrated developmental review, using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ3) prescribed nationally. Each quarter approximately 1300 children are eligible for this review. On current performance (Q2) 79% of children and parents are taking up this offer, we are working towards 95% coverage by Q4.
- Regeneration – workforce development, growth of sustainable businesses, the sector as a growing business sector it's self
- Capital assets and the possibilities for extending childcare to meet the 30 hours agenda.

### 3. Our Aspiration for Early Years

Somerset's aspiration for early years is based upon the aims and principles found within the EYFS framework. We want to ensure:

- Quality and consistency in all early years settings, so that every child in Somerset has access to high quality Early Years provision and makes good progress, ensuring no child gets left behind.
- A secure foundation through learning and development opportunities, which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child, and are assessed and reviewed regularly.
- Partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers.
- Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.
- The voice and needs of children, young people and their parents and carers are central, with their needs being consistently identified early and effectively met.

We want to ensure that all those working with young children are guided by the EYFS Framework principles, that:

- Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured;
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships;

- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers;
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

At the heart of this strategy is the right of every child to have a happy childhood in which they can relax, play, thrive and grow up to achieve their potential. Investing in the Early Years is crucial to this aim, *and* makes sound economic sense.

We therefore aspire to ensure that the best interests of the child will be given top priority when making decisions and taking actions that affect children.

Our aspirations and these principles are upheld by our new Children and Young People's Plan:

- Children and Young People have a voice and are listened to
- Outcomes are improved for all children and young people
- Services are person centred
- The impact of inequalities is reduced
- We work together to coproduce services, align our resources, and jointly commission

#### **4. Our Ambition – What we want to improve**

We want to narrow the gaps between the lowest attaining 20% of children and their peers. In particular, we want to improve outcomes for boys and for children who live in low income households. To do this Somerset must find ways to ensure:

- More effective multiagency partnerships which enable cohesive support to be targeted where it is most needed
- Greater collaboration, understanding and information sharing which will impact on improving outcomes for all children.
- The removal of existing barriers to better ensure timely identification of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, giving children the best chance of having their needs meet.
- Strong working relationships with training providers to ensure high quality Early Years practitioners who will enhance the workforce.
- A professional and well supported early year's workforce who are able to explain how their work makes a difference to children.
- Greater recognition of the different types of settings and range of skills within the Early Years sector.
- Early Years settings and schools work closely with parents to ensure that parents have a greater understanding of how they can support their child's learning

- A strong focus upon language and communication

Working more collaboratively across the Early Years sector, will enable Somerset to achieve the best possible outcomes for children by providing:

- A secure foundation for children which helps them to develop as a lifelong learner, well equipped to achieve their full potential
- Learning experiences which recognise and foster the characteristics of effective learning and enthuse, engage and motivate children to learn
- Engagement with all parents and carers - particularly those who are hard to reach – and other agencies.
- Equality of opportunity which recognises and values the individuality of the unique child
- A consistently high quality range of providers with a shared understanding of what is meant by 'a great education' for all learners.

We want Somerset to have good quality well qualified staff.

- Early years specialists across the globe agree that the key to providing high quality childcare and early education is well-trained and qualified professionals. A number of studies have found quality to be closely associated with qualifications, leading many experts to agree that the key to high quality is upskilling the workforce. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study found a close relationship between higher staff qualifications and higher quality provision.
- According to Ofsted, nurseries with three-quarters or more of staff qualified to Level 3 or above are significantly more likely to achieve better inspection results than those with less qualified staff. Graduate leadership in particular has been associated with narrowing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children. In this new, more professional era of childcare and early education, access to the affordable, flexible CPD that childcare professionals want is essential.

To do this Somerset must find ways to ensure we:

- promote understanding of how young children develop (theory) and of how to apply this knowledge (practice)
- include practical opportunities to link theory and practice within a supportive environment
- develop staff capacity to reflect on and adapt their practice
- develop staff leadership and management skills
- encourage a coaching and mentoring workplace environment.
- prepare them for working with health services and with children's social care.

## 5. Our Key Priorities

**Priority 1:** To further develop collaborative partnerships and provide the highest quality support and opportunities for all children and families.

### What we need to do:

- Promote, facilitate and support more effective joined up working between early education and childcare providers, (schools, the LA, health and all other relevant agencies and professionals to make better use of our resources and provide 'wrap around' support for children and families.
- Ensure all stakeholders to have greater understanding of each other's role and strengthen the relationships between education, health and social care.
- Ensure all parties have a shared understanding of Early Help and their role and responsibilities within that.
- Ensure all stakeholders share our ambition in order to identify and jointly support localised priorities
- Streamline systems, documentation and practices so that they are current, consistent and accessible to all providers of 0 -5 services.
- Ensure more effective sharing of data and information, so that all schools and settings know their locality well
- Ensure all children arrive in Reception classes with their needs identified
- Improve collaboration between Early Years providers to share expertise and ensure high quality teaching, learning and development in all settings.
- Key targets from this strategy should be reported to and monitored by the Children's Trust and departments/organisations within it, as well as the LA in its specific duties and remit

**Priority 2:** Ensure communication and information is relevant, clear and accessible to parents, carers and providers.

### What we need to do:

- Invest in excellent IT systems to improve efficiency
- Remove existing barriers to improve information sharing and communication with and between providers and partners
- Ensure information is easy to locate on Somerset websites There is not one Somerset website
- Ensure information is accessible to enable schools and settings to take responsibility for their own improvement
- Strengthen accountability of multi-agency teams in relation to their information being accessible and relevant

- Provide parents with the knowledge, skills and confidence to enable the kind of relationships and experiences that children need to learn and develop by disseminating best practice of effective parent partnerships

**Priority 3:** Identify and recognise the number of transition points a child has in their first 5 years and develop timely, multi-agency strategies to support positive transitions and continuity across the 0-5 age range.

**What we need to do:**

- Identify a county-wide, shared understanding of expectations for all pupils at the start of the Reception year, to avoid children starting school without the range of skills they need.
- Facilitate cross sector continual professional training and development that ensures a greater understanding of transition and the impact on the child's emotional well being
- Facilitate targeted support for vulnerable groups at points of transition
- The early years sector must commit to reducing the communication barriers that hinder children's transitions
- Create opportunities for better links between schools and settings to ensure a shared and secure understanding of accurate assessment and avoid lost time through unreliable assessments
- Ensure parents/carers have clear, useful and appropriate information to support their child at points of transition
- Use moderation to identify common strengths and areas for development in children's starting points
- Set an expectation for stakeholders to share information before and after points of transition

**Priority 4.** Value and empower the family around the child and in particular respect parents/carers as central to children's development

**What we need to do:**

- Celebrate and support resilient and positive parenting
- Promote services from -9 months to 5 as a menu of support not a series of interventions (Childcare after age of 5?)
- Make better use of data to meet the needs of the child and family
- Agree and communicate a shared understanding of 'school readiness' so parents know how best to prepare their child for their next stage of learning

- Empower parents by providing sufficient choice of early years provision to ensure parents remain central in driving a high quality diverse sector that meets their individual needs, and those of their child's.
- Better engage parents in a confident, positive understanding of their child's learning, to ensure that they remain the lead for their individual child's needs.

### **Priority 5. Improvement in the quality of Teaching and Learning**

'A child's early experience of learning and development, especially during their first five years of life, is a critical springboard to their future success in education, work and life' (Unseen children 2013)

Teaching in the early years should not be taken to imply a 'top down' or formal way of working. It is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities: communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges.

It takes account of the equipment adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress. (School Inspection Handbook 2015)

#### **What we need to do:**

- Establish a shared understanding of 'school readiness' so that children are able to access the curriculum when they start school, enabling more children to attain a GLD at the end of EYFS
- A range of support, advice and challenge around appropriate teaching and learning is available to schools and settings
- Increase accuracy of on entry/exit assessments through rigorous internal and localised moderation
- Actively promote cross sector understanding of the view that best practice in learning and development is an essential part of high quality provision
- Identify, disseminate and share best practice
- Meet the needs of all pupils and accelerate the narrowing of gaps in achievement by putting in targeted support for children who may be vulnerable to poorer outcomes

- Resources should be targeted proportionately to schools and settings with higher levels of need
- Promote recognition that all stakeholders have a role to play in ensuring all children are thriving and ready to learn
- Ensure Y1 children not yet ready for National curriculum receive developmentally appropriate learning experiences
- Support families to understand the importance of the home learning environment
- Foster an ethos of aspiration (in settings and with parents / carers) so that a greater percentage of children reach exceeded levels and more children are ready for KS1.
- Children's progress will be rigorously tracked and monitored to ensure any underachievement is recognised and tackled.
- Performance management and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is linked to attainment to give every child the best chance of making excellent progress
- A work force that is rigorous and resilient in their approach to being aspirational for the children of Somerset.
- Ensure a range of high quality and inspirational training focused on how children learn, which enables a high quality workforce
- Ensure that environments are conducive to enabling the best possible learning experiences for all children

**Priority 6.** Secure high quality and resilient leadership and governance in every school and setting and strengthen workforce development through ongoing self-improvement

The importance of strong, effective leadership is well known. It is particularly relevant in early year's settings. Competent, committed, and adaptable leaders are vital for securing continuous quality improvement. Through leading by example, as well as guidance, it is the person in charge who sets the quality benchmark, tone and aspirations for early years teaching and learning.

**What we need to do:**

- Promote a learning culture in Somerset through opportunities for a wide range of high quality, multi-agency professional development, which includes sector led improvement and peer to peer support across the 0-5 age range
- Use relevant data and Ofsted information to focus workforce development needs, focussing on both improving outcomes for children and ensuring a sustainable, diverse high quality sector.
- Implement and lead a shared ambition to deliver the best sustainable outcomes for families and children in Somerset

- Enable schools, settings and other professional agencies to develop, recruit and retain excellent leaders within the workforce, and to ensure effective succession planning to sustain future capacity
- Improve the skills of leaders and managers and the workforce in settings in areas of high deprivation, where quality of provision tends to be less good
- Develop an effective leadership framework to support new and exciting middle leaders, which includes relevant training and CPD opportunities
- Establish a shared understanding of an effective leadership framework in order to utilise sector specific skills and expertise
- Support for leaders and managers of schools and settings who need to quickly move to a good or better judgement and identify and monitor those who are vulnerable to receiving a poor inspection outcome.
- Celebrate and support high quality providers and their leaders to drive sustained and continual improvement through collaboration
- Incisive evaluation ensures performance management, supervision and appraisal includes a focus on improving teaching and learning
- Leaders and managers undertake rigorous self-evaluation of their teaching and learning in all contexts, as well as the overall sustainability and future readiness of their provision.
- Leaders who value, promote and actively encourage staff to develop skills to the highest possible level
- Aspirational leaders make up the deficit and counter the effects of socio economic disadvantage
- Leaders who are able to early identify children with special needs and who can put in place robust and effective systems of support for children who have below age communication and language skills
- Leaders who are able to provide safe learning environments for children and who are aware of and able to implement guidelines on all aspects of safeguarding or concerns of a child protection nature
- Support leaders in moving to the increase to 30 hours of entitlement so that they have the skills and knowledge to implement quality practice

### **Priority 7.** The development of self-improving communities

Community engagement is increasingly seen as a source of resources in terms of sector led improvement and the development of networks/partnerships. In order to drive quality improvement all schools and settings need to be autonomous and responsible for their outcomes.

#### **What We Need to Do**

- Redesign the leadership framework to ensure that it is more effective in terms of workforce development, CPD and self-serve improvement.

- Commit to training that includes the most current and evidenced based research and initiatives, and to offer high quality formal qualifications from level 3 and upwards.
- Commit to a workforce that has excellent numeracy and literacy skills to support school readiness
- Commit to a workforce that is confident and committed to safeguarding children through high quality training and development
- Recognise and use examples of best practice to impact on high quality provision.
- Improve accountability measures of the impact of initiatives and projects both to avoid duplication and ensure scarce resources are used effectively to deliver improved outcomes.
- Raise awareness amongst all agencies of importance of Early identification of children with additional needs
- Raise awareness amongst all agencies of importance of Early help and that it is everyone's responsibility

## **6. The role of the LA in School and Early Years Improvement**

Central to the Somerset strategy for Improving Outcomes is the strong belief that Early Years settings and schools are, for the most part, self-improving and that they improve best where there is a will and drive from within, with secure procedures for self-evaluation that involves all stakeholders. There is also a clear recognition of the value and importance of system leadership in promoting settings and school improvement. Strong settings and schools, with good capacity, are taking an increasing role in developing system leaders and sharing good practice. These Early Years settings and schools embrace the concept of setting to setting (peer to peer) and school-to-school support and take on responsibility for improvement beyond their own organisations, through the NLEs and LLEs deployed through teaching schools and Early Years Teaching Centres and Leadership Programme.

It is recognised that clear lines of accountability need to be established in order to monitor and challenge school and early year's settings where outcomes for children are not being met or are not sufficiently robust.

A vast majority of families in Somerset access their early years' entitlements and services in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, including schools. This dictates a commissioning and market facilitation role by the Local Authority which is supported by the relationship with Ofsted regarding quality and its relationship with other stakeholder organisations.

Key targets from this strategy will be reported and partners held to account by the Children's Trust and departments/organisations within it, as well as the LA in its specific duties and remit.

Commissioning frameworks need to reflect strategic priorities for each service area, to enable delivery through performance and contract management, as well as support for front line staff (and managers) in changes to their role to deliver on this strategy for the next three years.

Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance for local authorities identifies a clear role for local authorities as champions of all children and families but with particular focus on the most disadvantaged.

Local authorities are encouraged to promote inclusion and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, including (but not necessarily exclusively):

- families considered to be hard to reach
- families where children are in receipt of free school meals
- children in care
- children in need
- children with SEND
- minority ethnic groups
- gender inequalities.

Early Years and Childcare providers have a duty to comply with the Prevent Duty and Safeguarding legislation and in order for them to undertake this role the LA will continue to ensure access for providers to relevant training and advice and will need to ensure that clear lines of accountability and monitoring are in place.

Give priority across all strategic aims to support early years providers to strengthen existing networks, support continuous improvement and ensure a sufficiency and sustainability of the sector.

Clear contracts will be in place with providers through the Code of Practice to detail the expectation upon providers within Somerset who are accessing entitlement funding.