

Select Committee on Lifelong Learning – 18 January 2006

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report on the Quality of Foundation Stage Education within Dudley Borough

Purpose of Report

1. To bring to the attention of the Committee the quality of education provided by schools, private, voluntary and independent settings for children 3-6 years within the Borough. This stage of education is called the Foundation Stage.

Background

2. The Foundation Stage is for children from 3 years of age to the end of reception class in primary school. This phase of education is recognised as a distinct stage of learning, when children learn best through an active play based curriculum which builds on their individual needs and interests. All children aged 3 and 4 years are entitled to Government-funded early education places in a variety of settings.
3. Currently, in Dudley, the Foundation Stage Curriculum is delivered in:
 - 1 Nursery School/Children's Centre
 - 91 Private and Voluntary Pre-schools and Nurseries (some of which are located on school sites)
 - 40 Maintained Nursery Classes
and by
 - 4 Childminders who are registered to deliver Nursery Education

Children may then transfer to one of the reception classes within the 82 Primary Schools and 5 Special Schools within the Borough to complete their Foundation Stage education. Dudley Borough has a September and a January intake into reception classes.

4. The curriculum for these young children is based on Department for Education and Skills Foundations Stage Curriculum Guidance which outlines six broad areas of learning;

- I. Personal, Social and Emotional Education
- II. Communication, Language and Literacy
- III. Mathematical Development
- IV. Knowledge and Understanding of the World
- V. Physical Development
- VI. Creative Development

These areas link to the National Curriculum subjects when a child moves into the next stage of education Key Stage 1. See Appendix 1

5. The Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance contains Early Learning Goals which set out what most children are expected to achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage.
6. During the Foundation Stage, observations are continuously made which assess and track learning and achievement and inform planning. The Foundation Stage Profile is the national assessment tool and is completed by the end of the Reception Year. It is used to record each child's achievements against the Early Learning Goals and covers all 6 areas of learning. This method of assessment is still developing and data collected from this process is in its experimental stage and requires further moderation. Formal tests are not carried out. The judgements on the Foundation Stage Profile are moderated by the Directorate's Assessment Team, which is supporting the development of accurate moderated data relating to the Foundation Stage. Some statistics are returned to schools at the end of the year. There will be a report to Committee on the Foundation Stage Data in March 2006.
7. Foundation Stage education is supported and monitored by the Directorate of Children's Services and inspected by Ofsted.

The Directorate provides support to the Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector by:

- an allocated Development Officer to ensure Daycare standards are met
- an allocated Early Years Adviser to ensure that education standards are met
- an allocated Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
- access to support for qualifications
- a Newsletter

And for both the maintained and non-maintained sectors:

- access to free or subsidised training

- facilitation of networks

For the maintained sector support and monitoring is provided by:

- School Development Advisers termly visits
- School Improvement Policy banding arrangements

This support is outlined in EDP Priority 1 and the Sure Start Plan.

8. Early Years Advisers and Development Officers support the Private, Voluntary and Independent Settings termly and as required. It is intended that a banding system similar to that used with schools, will be developed for the Private and Voluntary Sector in order to ensure that support is channelled to settings which are most in need.
9. The Quality Assurance Scheme, Growing Together, is used to raise the quality of education in the Foundation Stage. At present, 19 settings have received awards. Thirteen settings have gained the Bronze Award, 5 settings have gained the Silver Award and 1 setting has gained the Gold Award. There are 32 settings working towards the award.
10. The Directorate is also responsible for ensuring that there is sufficient provision to meet parental preferences and need. The Early Years and Childcare Team ensure that provision is appropriately situated across the Borough and advise settings on further development of both provision and practice.
11. Direct responsibility for the private and voluntary sector settings lies with the organisations themselves together with Ofsted. However, it is a requirement for organisations receiving Nursery Education Grant that certain quality standards are met. This is ensured by the involvement of the Early Years and Childcare Team based on the Code of Practice for nursery education funding. Responsibility for maintained Foundation Stage education within schools falls within the responsibility of governing bodies and the Directorate.
12. Ofsted inspects the quality of education in two ways. Education that is provided within school based nursery provision and reception classes is inspected under the Ofsted Inspection Framework for Primary Schools, known as Section 5 inspections. A new inspection framework came into operation in September 2005 and the first half terms reports have already been reported to the Committee. The Foundation Stage judgement gradings have been extracted and included in Appendix 2. The judgements can be 1 outstanding, 2 good, 3 satisfactory or 4 inadequate. The current outcomes show that of the

nine primary schools inspected the outcomes for Foundation Stage were two outstanding and seven good.

13. In the previous 6 years all schools had received an Ofsted inspection that had graded the quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage. The outcomes of these inspections showed that 14 were very good, 47 were good, 20 were satisfactory and 1 was unsatisfactory. The details are provided in Appendix 3.
14. Early education that is provided in the private and voluntary settings is also inspected by Ofsted. These inspections are carried out under a different set of regulations and a new inspection framework came into force in April 2005 with a further revision of the framework in October 2005, known as Section 122 inspections. Two settings in Dudley were inspected under this framework in the Autumn. No published reports have been received.
15. Inspections before October 2005 had also been carried out by Ofsted but under different regulations. The overall judgements have been provided as a baseline for future reference. See Appendix 4. The quality of teaching had been judged as very good in 28 settings, good in 1, generally good in 26 and there were 6 with significant weakness.
16. Under this inspection framework settings with significant weaknesses are not monitored by HMI. The Early Years and Childcare Team have ensured, through the setting review group, that all actions and recommendations identified by Ofsted have been addressed.
17. These inspections have not been reported to the Committee previously but will be reported biannually in the future.
18. Currently there are 91 settings, three have recently been registered and have not been included in Appendix 4. The new inspection framework makes overall judgements on Education and Care in addition to outcomes against Every Child Matters.

Proposal

19. That the Committee receives the report and uses the information provided as a base line for scrutinising Foundation Stage education standards in future reports

Finance

20. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The work for the School Effectiveness Division is financed from the Directorate's base

budget and Sure Start General Grant and Central Government nursery education funding. Ofsted inspections are financed by Central Government either under contract to independent team or by HMI.

Law

21. Ofsted inspections of schools are governed by Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. Ofsted inspections of Private and Voluntary Settings are governed by Section 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Equality Impact

22. The report highlights the work carried out to support the education of children between the age of 3 and 6 years. The curriculum that is provided for these children has a positive impact on promoting equality.

Recommendation

23. That the proposals set out above be approved.



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List of Background Papers

School Ofsted Inspection reports
Setting Ofsted Inspection reports
Ofsted Framework – September 2005
Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance