



Developments in Early Years & the Challenges Ahead

We are at another exciting and challenging time for developing services for young children and their families.

- For the last year we have been working with providers in reception classes and pre-schools, to ensure that the Foundation Stage for children between 3 and 4 is now implemented in practice with the appropriately qualified staff, resources, planning and with an understanding of child development.
- The statutory assessment of children at the end of reception; part of the Foundation Stage profile for every child will be implemented for the first time this June.
- We have exceeded our targets for additional out of school places in holiday, breakfast and after schools provision although there is still more to do – now there are viability issues and access issues to overcome. 20 children with special needs are integrated in their provision.
- We have a very well qualified work force in our pre-schools over 83% with a level 3 or above. We offer a range of training opportunities and events of which we are justly proud.

- All three year olds will have a free early education place from this September and every child identified with special or additional needs is supported by a provisional assessment of need and an individual programme of development through the very successful MAT team in collaboration with Oak House and all our colleagues in health and social services. This includes a home based Portage Programme and support for 160 children. The new neighbourhood nursery programme is taking shape and the first new nursery will open this month. A collaborative effort with Sure Start, Little Squirrels will open its doors to children from two of our most disadvantaged wards very shortly, and there are 6 more projects to follow. Sure Start delivers an excellent programme and we are currently planning for the mainstreaming and roll out of, all of the Sure Start projects. This will be a real challenge and our proposals are being discussed with the Local Authority, health and Sure Start Board and families.
- What we want is more of the good things that Sure Start can offer for more families. This will happen through a very challenging programme of Childrens' Centres across the Island targeted at the wards of the most disadvantaged. These have to provide a full range of health, family support, information, family learning services, integrated/inclusive childcare and early learning opportunities for children and parents pre-birth – 8 years old and will in most cases be developed around existing provision. Whilst 1.1 million pounds over 2 years sounds a lot it isn't, and we need to build on the 2 early excellence centres at Barton and West Wight, our 6 neighbourhood nurseries and possibly the development of an additional centre in Newport West.
- The Governments expectation is that, integrated, joined up, one stop shops of all services for children and families will be developed through these Childrens' Centres. Not all services, will need to be located on the same site but all will need to be linked and developed together. Each cluster of schools will need to be linked and schools will themselves over time offer more services for families through the extended schools programme and a full service school. Many schools already provide a wide range of facilities.

- The Island has money for the development of extended schools and for a full service school – an all singing and dancing version, from next April, but the delivery plan, the audit, the consultation, the assessment of needs has to be done now with the plan written and submitted by end September.
- June is National Sure Start month – the merging together of Local Sure Start projects and the overall early years and child care agenda. We mustn't forget that one driving principle is getting families back to paid employment and training and the links bet. Job centres, careers development, recruitment campaign etc. are clear from the new guidance. There is a growing need for more information for parents and services for disadvantaged areas. Local authorities will take the lead in these developments – one step but quite a big one towards an integrated children, families and schools department, which makes complete sense to me.
- Added to these initiatives are, the long awarded green paper following Climbie, the Lamming report, the national assessment framework and a review of the OFSTED regulations for childminders and day care and our ongoing work for all families and early years providers around promoting quality provision. To this end we have submitted our QA scheme for a 11C accreditation. Early Years will be a beacon theme for the Council and the LEA inspection will include early years in September for the first time.
- The Early Years Partnership will continue to provide a framework for this agenda but it is clear that the Government believes that stronger leadership from LEA's and Health should be driving the agenda. What should the role of this partnership be and other fora i.e Children and Young People's Partnership Board and Partnership Planning Group?

Our challenges this year: -

- 0-2's work with children with disabilities new guidance is out now and will need to be implemented from June 2003.
- Birth to three matters – new guidance for providers, on curriculum development for very young children.
- Getting quality right in the play and learning environment in all settings.
- Childrens Centres – audit and plans
- Preventative strategy, working more closely with Childrens fund/connexions, Youth and Community etc.
- Extended schools, integrated and inclusive for all children and their families. The development of a full service school.
- Mainstreaming Sure Start
- Quality provision for all
- Links to other initiatives i.e family learning and support, play strategy, cultural and leisure services.

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