

Senior Leadership Team Report

REPORT TITLE	Early Years Specialist Assessment provision proposal
DATE OF MEETING	3 rd February 2022
REPORT AUTHOR:	Sarah Hylton
REASON FOR BRINGING TO SLT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To advise SLT of the current position regarding early education/childcare for children with complex needs• To seek approval to pilot an EY specialist assessment provision
RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Approximately 150K for 12-month pilot DSG funding agreed in principle	
RECOMMENDATION FOR SLT DECISION: That we commission the provision of an Early Years Assessment centre for a 12-month period to support up to 50 children.	
TIMESCALE: Pilot to run from September 2022 – July 2023	

Early Years Targeted/Specialist Assessment and Support proposal

Background

In 2014, (when I took up the post of EY SEN Service Manager) each year approximately 50-60 children, aged 2-5yrs without a statutory plan, were allocated a nursery placement in the county's special schools. At that time, decisions to allocate special school nursery placements were made by a panel chaired by an Education lead; the key criteria were that the child had a formal diagnosis or disability. Over the following 2 years we worked hard with the EY sector to promote and support inclusion, introducing non statutory inclusion funding and the provision of advice, guidance and support for EY settings to enable safe and positive experiences of inclusion in mainstream settings. By 2016 the number of children allocated a special school nursery placement (without a statutory plan) had reduced to approx. 10-15 per year. All of these children remained in the special school once they reached statutory school age and remain there now.

For the past 3 years, due to the increase in demand for special school places, commissioned places are available for children with an EHCP only. This is reflected in the commissioning briefs for each school. EY children, without a statutory plan, are able to access a special school provision only if the school have space to accommodate the child, in addition to the commissioned places, and with additional funding.

Due to the high demand for specialist places and the additional support and funding available to mainstream EY settings, almost all children have been able to access their EY education entitlement in a local setting. However, for some children with complex needs this has not been a positive experience and has merely enabled the child to access a setting. As a consequence, developmental progress has been compounded by an environment that is not conducive to the child's needs and/or by a lack of expertise and specialist knowledge of the setting staff. This issue has been highlighted over the past 2 years when EY children in mainstream settings have had very limited access to specialist assessment and advice from the Advisory Teaching Service or Educational Psychology Service.

Our ethos is that:

- All children in Gloucestershire are able to access their EY entitlement in a high-quality setting that is suitable to meet their needs and is able to support every child's development and to assess and plan for the next stage of their education
- Most children aged 0-5 years in Gloucestershire have EY provision, support services and resources available to enable them to learn, develop, thrive and achieve good outcomes in their mainstream setting
- Most children with additional needs/SEND are able to access their entitlement of EY funded provision in a mainstream setting. Early Years Inclusion Funding is available to support children with emerging SEN where additional resource is required. Non statutory high needs

funding is available for children with more complex needs that are likely to require a longer period of support.

- High needs funding is available to support non statutory plans for children aged 0-4 years to avoid the need for a statutory plan (EHCP) altogether or to delay the need for a statutory plan (EHCP) until the child's pre-school year.
- Children in mainstream settings have access to a range of practitioners to undertake assessments and to support their learning needs within the setting and at home if necessary, and dependent on access to Advisory Teaching Service and Education Psychology Service.
- Children receive the support, assessment and intervention that they need as early as possible and in the right environment to provide the best opportunity to address holistic needs and to plan for the next stage of their education/life. Where there are concerns that a child is not making the expected developmental progress, a holistic approach is taken to identify the child's and family's strengths and difficulties. This informs the development and implementation of a holistic plan of support to meet needs across all areas of the child's life.

Context and challenges

- Over the past few years the number of EHCP requests for young children has increased steadily. So far in 2021 (11 months), 186 EHCPs have been issued for children aged 5 and under, of which 36 have been allocated a place at a special school and 25 are awaiting placement. In 2020 a total of 182 EHCPs were issued for children aged 5 and under.
- Last year a number of children deferred school entry, and remained in EY provision, solely because special school was agreed and named on the EHCP but no places were available. These were a mixture of parental requests for special school and children for whom assessment identified a need.
- Special School Head Teachers have consistently reported over the past few years that many of the young children allocated a place with them are likely to have not needed specialist provision had there been a specialist assessment and intervention at an earlier stage with a planned and supported transition back to mainstream EY/school provision. None of these children have moved back to mainstream school or had EHCP resource reduced over the following years.
- The majority of special school places for EY children are allocated following a request from parents, who either have no confidence in mainstream settings or have been advised by the setting/school that mainstream is not suitable.
- Some children have complex needs that mean they are unable to access their EY entitlement and/or a multi-agency assessment in a mainstream setting. This may be due to significant behaviour challenges, sensory difficulties and/or high anxieties.
- Some children are able to access a mainstream setting that meets their social needs, but require a multi-agency assessment in a targeted setting to understand their developmental/ learning needs.

- Whilst good multi-agency planning has successfully enabled some children with complex health needs to safely access a mainstream provision, some children's health needs have prevented them from accessing a mainstream setting due to the complexity of their condition and the lack of confidence/capacity within mainstream settings to support these needs.

Proposed enhanced offer for EY children with SEND:

- EY Service continue to provide a range of training and support to EY settings across the county to build confidence, skills and knowledge to enable them to meet the needs of children with SEND and to prepare them for their next stage of education. (see attached EY Service tiered offer and OAP guidance)
- EY Service promotes a holistic approach to assessment and planning for the needs of young children and their families. This includes considering parent/family support needs, and health/environmental/housing issues that impact on development and well-being
- EY SEN Inclusion Funding is available to support children in mainstream settings when they have emerging needs. This provides short term support for a period of approximately 8–16 weeks where it is anticipated that early and holistic interventions will achieve desired outcomes and reduce/negate need for further additional support.
- EY Service contributes to a multi-agency discussion for all children with complex needs, to agree and plan assessment and intervention and to consider both NSF and requests for EHCN assessment
- Children aged 2-3 years with complex, long term needs are supported via non-statutory high needs funding for a period of up to one year to reduce/avoid requests for EHC assessments. This could be a pilot group to explore funding the Graduated Pathway before children become statutory school age with a view to reducing the need for statutory plans.
 - (a) Children with the most complex needs have access to longer term funding when they need it.
 - (b) Children with the most complex needs make good progress in their EY setting in line with their abilities
 - (c) Reduction in the number of requests for EHC assessments for children aged 2-3 years' old
 - (d) Minimise the number of requests from parents for special school places for children in EY settings
 - (e) Ensure special school placements are available for the children who need them most
- A targeted provision is developed to provide multi agency assessment and intervention for children who cannot access this in a mainstream setting. This will enable practitioners to understand the child's needs, to consider how best to support and respond to these needs and to plan an enhanced transition to their next setting.

Criteria for this provision:

- Lack of clarity/understanding regarding needs and how to meet them
- Disconnect between what is presented/reported at home and in setting
- Child is unable to access EY entitlement despite interventions in place
- Child's progress is less than expected, despite multi-agency input and interventions

Provision to be included:

- Multi-agency assessment
- Targeted provision placement to enable child to access EY entitlement (*or additional hours if this will enable parent to access work/training?*)
- Training/mentoring/coaching for staff in receiving setting prior to transition
- Enhanced transition to next setting
- Telephone support for staff in receiving setting for at least one term after child transitions
- Outreach support to mainstream settings
- Submission of EHCN assessment if necessary

At present, we are looking to pilot one assessment provision and, if this works, we will be asking for this provision to be included in the development of the family hubs and for the EY DSG contribution to the commissioned C&FC element to be used for assessment provisions in each locality.

- Special school places are available for children whose complex, long term needs require a specialist early years/school setting, as determined by a range of assessments and interventions. For most children this will be allocated as a school placement through an EHCP, or in exceptional circumstances, a non-statutory placement pending the issue of an EHCP.

Intended Outcomes

- Improved working relationships with parents to build confidence and to support transition from assessment provision to setting/school resulting in fewer parental requests for special school for children aged under 5 years
- Improved outcomes and comprehensive, holistic support plans for children aged under 5 years with complex needs.
- Increased understanding of individual needs as a result of assessment provision to enable multi-agency assessment and HN funding being available at a non-statutory level.
- Reduction in the number of parental requests for EHNCA and specialist placements for children aged under 5 years.
- Overall reduction in the number of EHCPs, using non statutory funding to support transition to primary school

Associated costs

1. Children aged 2-3 years with complex, long term needs are supported via non-statutory high needs funding for a period of up to one year to reduce/avoid requests for EHC assessments

Current budget of £130K per year. This is usually spent entirely to support children with emerging and complex SEND/health needs. Proposal is for additional £50K to support 2-3 yr. olds with complex needs via a non-statutory plan rather than moving straight to EHCNA.

2. A targeted provision facility is developed to provide multi agency assessment and intervention for children who cannot access this in a mainstream setting. This will enable practitioners to understand the child's needs, to consider how best to support and respond to these needs and to plan an enhanced transition to their next setting.

Propose that this is commissioned to an external agency/organisation. The cost would be approximately £150K to provide places for up to 50 children in a 12-month period. This is based on the Dingley's Promise EY Assessment Provisions. (Dingley's promise run 3 similar assessment provisions in the south east of England and are currently in discussion with several LAs in the South West. They have also been commissioned by DfE to support LAs to develop action plans to improve the experience of Transitions from EY to Primary school) They would be happy to work with us to pilot a similar model in Gloucestershire, however given the potential cost of the provision this would need to be commissioned through the full procurement process.

Sarah Hylton

Head of Early Years

December 2021