

BRIEFING NOTE

Agenda
Item No. 5

TO: Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 16 December 2010

RE: Early Years in the Maintained Sector

Purpose

For this Scrutiny panel members have particularly asked for the contract report to concentrate on advice, guidance, support and challenge for schools, governors and other partners.

The achieve this the focus of this report is as follows:

1. To provide members with information about the numbers of young children accessing their free entitlement within the maintained sector
2. To provide members with information relating to the support and challenge provided to this sector by Walsall Children's Services Serco

1. Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage was introduced in 2008 and is the statutory framework within which all early years learning, development and welfare requirements are set. It sets the standards for all practitioners working with children from birth to five and covers four overarching principals which structure the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- the unique child
- positive relationships
- enabling environments
- learning and development

All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to access up to 15hours per week in an early years setting from the term after their 3rd birthday, although attendance is not compulsory.

In Walsall 6,704 eligible children take this entitlement through the maintained sector. This represents around 85% of all 3 and 4 year olds in Walsall.

There are 127 schools, made up of 8 Nursery schools and 119 infant and primary schools with a nursery class, where Early Years Foundation Stage learning is provided. Of these providers 75% are graded by Ofsted as delivering good or better early years provision.

The key areas of learning for children on which they are assessed are as follows:

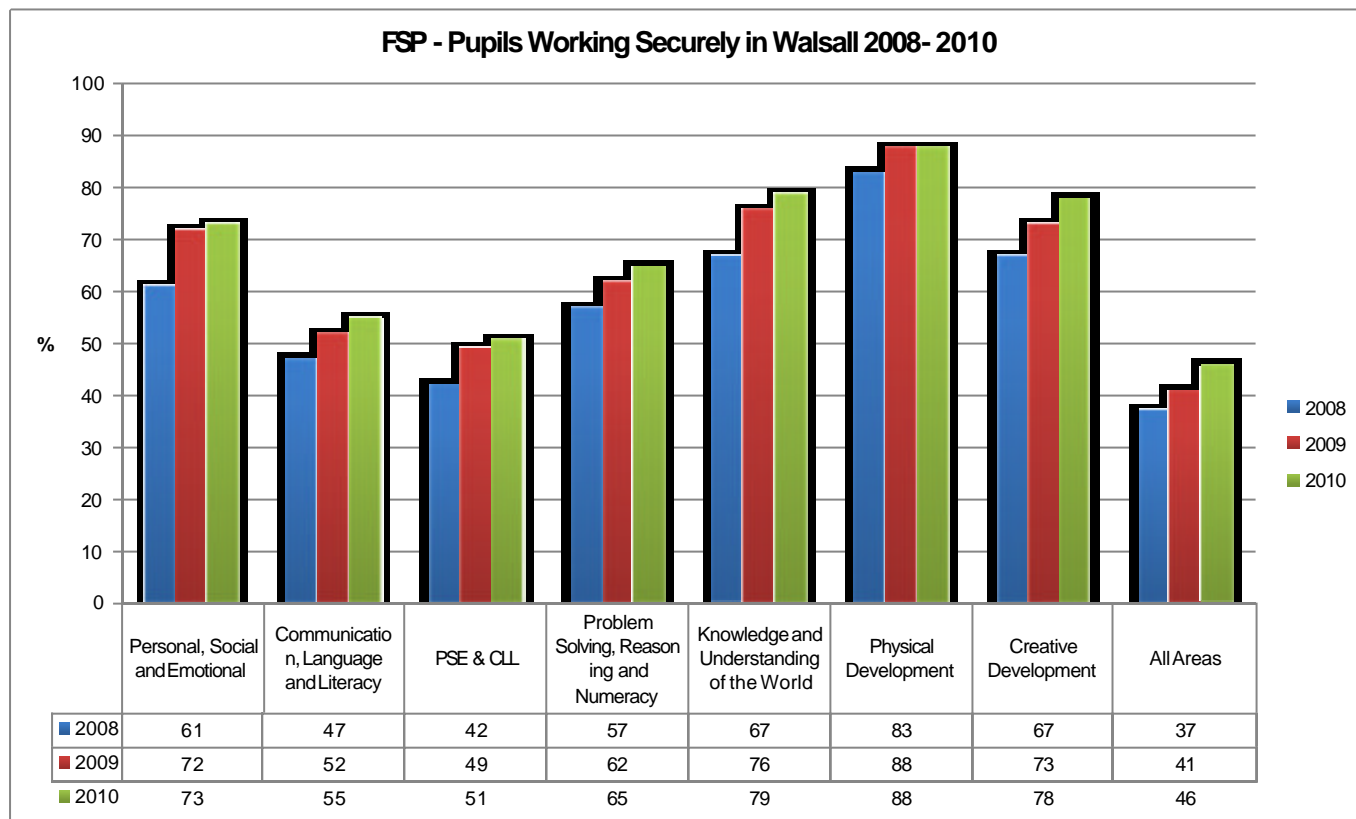
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSE)
- Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL)
- Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy (PSRN)
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World (KUW)
- Physical Development (PD)
- Creative Development (CD)

The Early Years Foundation Stage is currently being reviewed. Early indications are that there is likely to be little fundamental change, however, following the outcomes of the Serious Case Review

in Plymouth into Nursery Z there is a possibility that the welfare requirements may be strengthened.

2. Walsall Outcomes

There has been a 3 year upward trend in pupils working securely within the early learning goals across all areas.



The key indicator nationally is the percentage of pupils achieving 78 points at Foundation Stage Profile. The 3 year trend for Walsall shows a 9% improvement in the number of children reaching this milestone at the end of Foundation Stage.

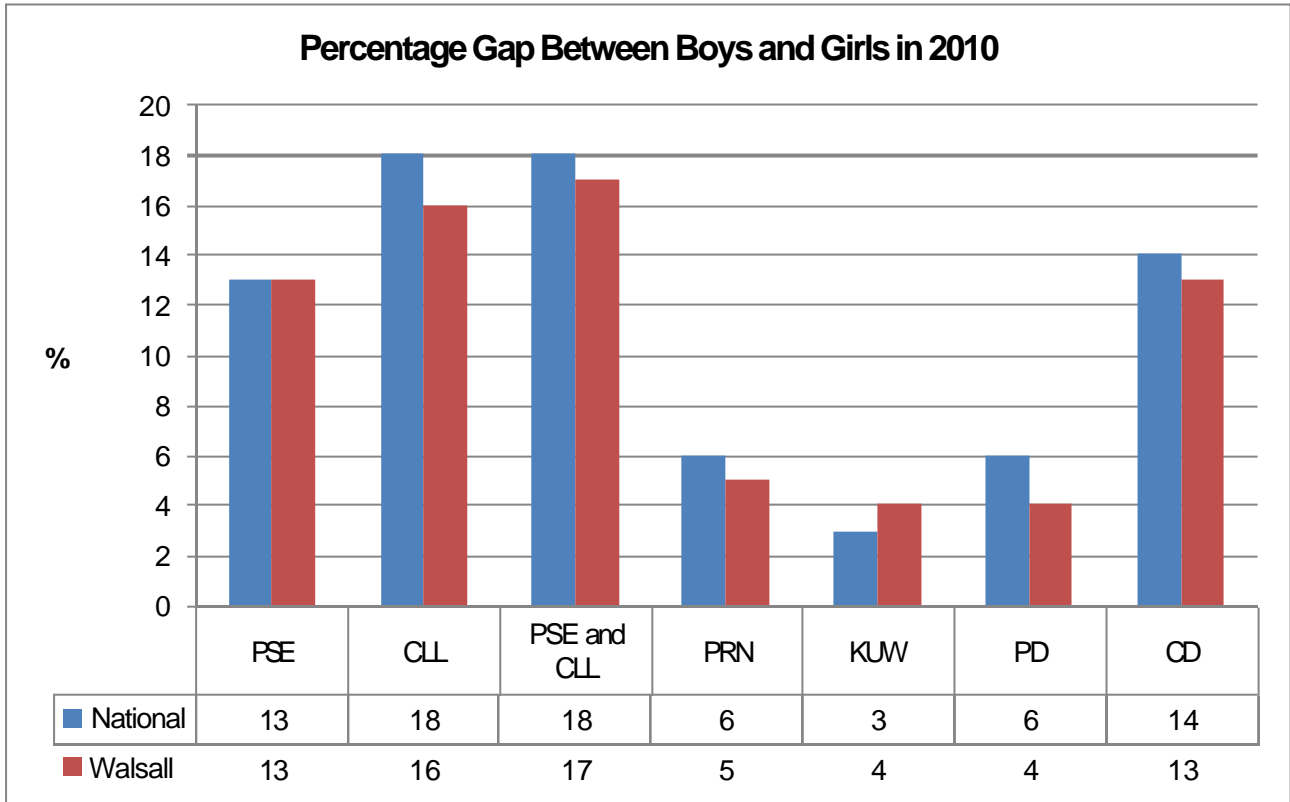
Walsall exceeded the target agreed with National Strategies by 1% in the previous year. Despite this very positive upward trend, nationally Walsall remains in the lowest quartile for pupils achieving 78 points; however, our progress in narrowing the gap places us in the upper quartile for performance.

Attainment in Walsall falls below the national average for pupils studying reading at Foundation Stage Profile where a 7% gap still exists. However the gap between the performance in Walsall and nationally has reduced by 3% since 2008.

In respect of writing Walsall is below the national average by 3%

3. Gender Gap

Girls continue to outperform boys; this follows the national trend. However, over the last two years boys in Walsall have shown exceptional improvement in all 7 areas and the gap between boys and girls in Walsall is narrowing unlike the national picture where there has been no significant change in the gap between boys and girls.



The biggest improvement for boys in 2010 were in knowledge and understanding of the world (+5%) and creative development (+6%)

Performance for girls dropped by 2% in physical development in 2010

Longitudinal research shows that children who receive good or better early years input will perform better in all areas of learning as they progress through school phases. In Walsall we see this continued improvement at Foundation Stage translated into improvements at Key Stage 1 where there have been improvements in reading, writing, English and mathematics.

4. Supporting Improvement to Early Years Practice

4.1 High Quality Teaching and Learning.

Early Years Consultants and Improvement Officers head up teams of Children's Centre Teachers, ASTs and EYSEN Advisors to create the team around the Children's Area Partnerships.

Each school receives at least one contact per term .This could be a visit, training session, moderation exercise or coordinators meetings. Emphasis lies with those schools that are within the Ofsted frame, and those causing concern

Practitioners continue to work within the EYFS framework; approaches for delivery are supported by the statutory guidance and by National Strategy programmes such as ECAT (Every Child A Talker) and Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD). We are at present working with a discreet group of schools and settings to develop hubs of excellence in Early Literacy.

Schools in Darlaston CAP are working with Home Learning programmes and with Creative curricula approaches which includes Partnership work with Bilston Play craft centre. Skills and expertise gleaned from this training will be cascaded universally through Network and Cluster meetings.

Training programmes offer practitioners a wide range of continuing professional development, including opportunities and information around alternative curricula approaches which are also delivered thorough our Early Years Practitioner network.

Of particular interest has been our Forest School based at Leighswood, which has under pinned our approach to outdoor learning encouraging schools to use their outdoor environment to engage and motivate children.

4.2 Support for School Leadership, Guidance and Advice

Training for School Improvement Partners and Children's School Improvement Advisors on the requirements of EYFS has ensured that colleagues have more confidence when challenging Heads and Senior Leaders. Training on data analysis of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for Head teachers, School Improvement Partners, School Improvement Advisors and Children's Centre Managers has allowed leaders to understand the relevance and importance of children's' starting points and put strategies in place to improve provision to narrow the gap.

In order to support the monitoring of the Early Years Foundation Stage a new proforma with prompts for good practice is now in use in most schools. The input to Head teachers from the Quality Improvement Manager and the Regional Advisor on identifying good practice by utilising these prompts has given more credence to the specialist skills of the EYFS practitioner.

Governors across the LA have had the opportunity to attend training on Early Years Foundation Stage.

The role of the Early Years Foundation Stage consultant has been developed and both Consultants and Improvement Officers have become more confident in the support and challenge element when visiting schools, the regular contact enabling staff to identify further areas for development, thus allowing intervention to be proactive.

5. Next Steps

The improvement in narrowing the gap, the consistently positive trend and the overall improvement in the quality of early year's provision in Walsall has resulted in Walsall being asked to participate in a DfE short life project to identify successful strategies for improving provision in disadvantaged areas.

The improvement in narrowing the gap significant and important as it improves the outcomes for our most disadvantaged children compared with the rest of their peers; however, the considerable levels of disadvantage in Walsall means that the starting point for many of our 3yr olds is such that they are not school ready, or necessarily well supported by home in early learning. This means that our progress going forward in ensuring that all children achieve the 78points is likely to be slower.

The assessment procedure has become embedded in practice, and skilled moderator's means that points awarded are a genuine reflection of a child's learning.

Over in the preceding 12 months, just over half of all authorities made less progress than in the first year of the Early Years Foundation Stage reflecting the contextual and demographic data unique to each authority.

Over the next 12 months the Early Years Consultants and Improvement Officers will continue to work with all providers to deliver the Making A Big Difference Plan ~ a framework document which outlines the way in which the key activities required to embed the Early Years Foundation Stage will be taken forward across Walsall, contributing to a continued narrowing of the gap and supporting further developments in learning environments and with parents to improve outcomes for children.

The key activities required are:

- develop a data report which will identify areas where learning needs further development
- continue to develop the monitoring of children's progress by practitioners, enabling them to analyse data, identify and support vulnerable groups
- engage and involve parents in developing strategies to further narrow the gap and improve outcomes
- ensure the alignment of all programmes to continue to narrow the gap and improve outcomes
- develop a buddying scheme which will enable outstanding providers to support those not yet delivering at that standard to develop their practice
- develop centres of excellence in early literacy
- continue to enhance leadership through support and challenge to secure continuous improvement

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