

School Readiness Scrutiny Inquiry

How can school readiness be improved in Swansea?



The School Readiness Scrutiny Inquiry Panel
City and County of Swansea - Dinas a Sir Abertawe



March 2017

Why This Matters

Foreword by **Councillor Hazel Morris**



We found there to be a wealth of evidence that suggests investment in early years services, including children's school readiness, is hugely beneficial, not only to children and their families, but society as a whole. There is evidence that this investment can help to break the cycle of disadvantage in our communities by changing children's life chances.

We were interested to explore the many examples of good practice being shown that helps make children and parents school ready. This included for example a visit to St Helens Primary School and Flying Start where they are aspiring to be a school that is at the heart of the community, and the parents we spoke to said that they had achieved this aim. We also visited Stepping Stones and the Swansea Children Centre where they are working to develop children's physical and emotional school readiness and preparing children and their parents for the transition to school.

However, a key finding from our inquiry was that it is not only children and parents that need to become more school ready but schools themselves need to be more 'child ready'. We felt that there could be more robust challenge for schools on this aspect.

We also found gaps in service provision for families in Swansea. In particular, the coverage of multi-agency support via Flying Start is only available to one quarter of children and their families in Swansea. We recognised that this is based upon the areas identified as having most need but we know that there are children requiring this type of support across other parts of Swansea. All children would benefit from this type of provision, so we would like to see the excellent practice and the ethos found in Flying Start replicated in other areas.

We hope that Cabinet will find this report useful and that our recommendations go some way in helping to improve school readiness in Swansea.

The Panel met nine times over a four month period in order to complete this inquiry. I would like to thank the members of the Inquiry Panel who gave their time and commitment and all of those people who gave evidence and information to the Panel.

Contents

1.	Why we produced this report	1
1.1.1	Overview	1
1.1.2	Selecting the topic	1
1.1.3	Context of the inquiry and intended contribution	2
2.	Evidence collected	4
3.	Conclusions	4
3.1	Understand the cause and effect of the issues faced by children and their families in Swansea	4
3.2	Protect investment in early years services	7
3.3	Support those initiatives that are having a clear impact on children having the best start in life	8
3.4	Measure impact	13
3.5	Ensure that schools are child ready	15
3.6	Organisations must work closely together to address gaps identified in the delivery of early years services	16
3.7	Keep early years issues high on the agenda	18
3.8	Engage with parents, families and the wider community	18
3.9	Raise public awareness of school readiness and encourage use of key messages across Swansea	24
4.	Recommendations	25
5.	Acknowledgements	27
6	About the Inquiry	27

1 WHY WE PRODUCED THIS REPORT

Overview

1.1.1 This report focusses on the following question:

How can school readiness be improved in Swansea?

Selecting a topic

1.1.2 The inquiry into school readiness was proposed at the Annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference in May 2016 and was subsequently included in the scrutiny work programme by the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

1.1.3 This topic was chosen because:

There is considerable international evidence from a wide spectrum of leading academics and practitioners that investment in the early years will break the cycle of disadvantage by changing children's life chances. They are better able to make a positive contribution to society and at the same time reduce the need for very costly remedial services across the public sector.

'Action to reduce health inequalities must start before birth and be followed through the life of a child. Only then can the close links between early disadvantage and poor outcomes throughout life be broken'.

The Marmot Review Fair Society, Healthy Lives

The Panel agreed to investigate the following aspects:

1. **What is meant by improving children school readiness in practice?**
What is involved in developing children's school readiness including for example: self-care, literacy, language and socialisation.
2. **Cause and effect:** What is the effect of children's school readiness on their longer-term educational performance? What are the reasons for children not being ready for school? How do the council and its partners engage with parents/carers currently and what are we doing to improve this?
3. **Partners/professional relationships:** Who is involved in improving children's school readiness in Swansea and do they work together effectively to achieve this aim, particularly in relation to engaging parents?
4. **Working with families:** How does the council and its partners work with families to help improve children's school readiness?
5. **Impact:** What has been the impact of those initiatives that help develop school readiness with particular reference to parental engagement?
6. **Good Practice:** Look at guidance and examples of good practice in improving school readiness particularly parental engagement.

The Context of the inquiry

1.1.4 *Population*

There are approximately 13,200 0-4 year olds living in the City and County of Swansea which accounts for 5.5% of the overall population. An overview of recent trends over the ten-year period 2004-2014 reflects a growth of around 1,000 0-4 year olds (+7.8%), mainly attributable to an increasing number of births, particularly since the late 2000s. The number of live births in Swansea between January 2015 and December 2015 (inclusive) was 2,344. (1179 male and 1165 female).

1.1.5 *Services*

Funding for early years services is provided through a variety of sources including the Health Board, the Local Authority, the Welsh Government, generated income and grants. Services are provided on a multi-agency basis across the Local Authority, Health Board, Schools, Private Sector and 3rd Sector. Given the diversity of the sector it is very difficult to ascertain a clear and accurate picture of investment Swansea wide in early years provision across universal, targeted and specialist services.

1.1.6 *One Swansea Plan*

The purpose of this plan is to improve the wellbeing of people in Swansea by ensuring that professionals and the public work together. It was developed by Swansea Local Service Board which included the main public service agencies for the area and representatives of the voluntary and business sectors. The two key aspects relating to early years in this plan include:

A. Children Have a Good Start in Life

A good start in life for our children is the key to community wellbeing for all. The pre-school years are the time when the biggest difference can be made. If children have a good start in life they are likely to be healthier, likely to be better learners and less likely to experience deprivation. These factors lead in turn to a greater likelihood of a good job and of gaining a better standard of living. All of these factors mean that people are more able to look after the environment and contribute to safe and prosperous communities.

B. People Learn Successfully

Learning is critical for individual and community wellbeing. School age learning is of course our main focus but learning needs to be lifelong with generations supporting each other. Education helps to lift people out of poverty and protects those at risk of poverty and disadvantage. Skills increase employability and benefit the economy. Opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development need to be available in the workplace and in communities as well as in formal setting. Informal education and training has an important role to play.

1.1.7 *Corporate Plan – Corporate Priority 4*

There are a number of key areas which the Council are working to address relating to early years including:

- Children having the best start in life and being able to achieve in their early years enabling them to learn and thrive.

- Families are supported to live healthy lives

What needs improving?

- We need more accessible high quality services for all children aged between 0 – 7 years of age.
- We need to ensure all children are able to be ready for school and therefore able to play, communicate, move and problem solve.
- We need to ensure that children of all ages maximise their learning potential.

What are we going to do?

Implement Swansea's Early Years Strategy which is working with Health to ensure all children that live in Swansea are supported to develop and be the best they can be. This is going to be done by:

- Raising standards in child development within all childcare settings.
- Using the Swansea statement to raise awareness of child development.
- Running Flying Start Plus and our Early Years language pathway.

What Outcomes are we seeking to achieve?

- Children have a good start in life; 2 and 3 year old children in the Flying Start are helped to achieve their expected language, emotional, social and cognitive development.
- Children who are not disadvantaged by poverty when achieving and attaining standards and wellbeing in education.

Intended Contribution of Inquiry

- 1.1.8 As a Panel we believe that we can make a valuable contribution to this topic. We recognise that, while there are no easy answers, success will only come from a conversation that everyone is able to contribute to. It is in this spirit that our conclusions and recommendations are offered.
- 1.1.9 Specifically this report aims to contribute to this vital debate by:
- Offering proposals for improvement
 - Providing a councillor perspective
 - Drawing together some general principles addressing gaps in development of early years services
 - Pointing to good practice examples
 - Sharing the views of different people involved
- 1.1.10 We are happy to recognise the limitations of the inquiry. Given the complexity of the topic and the time that we had this report necessarily provides a broad view.
- 1.1.11 Finally, many of our conclusions are in line with the Council's current direction of travel and these are offered in order to provide reassurance. Others may be either additional or contrary to what has already been agreed. These are intended to offer challenge and to stimulate debate. Where we have made recommendations these are intended to help improve the service.

2 EVIDENCE COLLECTED

2.1.1 Evidence was collected between November 2016 and February 2017. The evidence gathering activities undertaken included:

- a. Visit to Stepping Stones Children's Centre, meeting with staff and parents
- b. Swansea Library Service
- c. Visit to Swansea Children's Centre meeting with staff and parents
- d. Meeting with Health Visitors
- e. Visit to St Helens Primary School Flying Start, meeting with staff and parents
- f. Meeting with representatives of the GP Partnership Project pilot
- g. Meeting with Headteacher from Trallwn Primary School
- h. Survey of Welsh Medium Primary Schools and day care settings
- i. Meeting with Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Healthy City and Performance & Early Intervention Strategic Manager
- j. Relevant policy, advisory and research documents
- k. University of Wales Trinity St David, Early Years Project

2.1.2 For full details of the evidence gathered including details of all the findings from each session please see the evidence pack for this inquiry. This can be downloaded at www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutinypublications

3 CONCLUSIONS

This report considers the findings from the scrutiny inquiry into school readiness. Each of these conclusions therefore is a suggestion about how the Council's Cabinet might approach this problem. Specific proposals are identified throughout and listed separately in the recommendations section that follows and are designed to answer the inquiry key question '*How can school readiness be improved in Swansea?*'

3.1 Understand the cause and effect of the issues faced by children and their families in Swansea

3.1.1 We found little consensus as to what constitutes being 'ready for school' across the sector and at what age relates to being school ready, is it at 5 or at 3 years of age? The panel recognise that child development does not necessarily line up with school starting age. Children starting school at 3 are much less ready than those at 5 years. Our inquiry therefore also led us to consider whether schools are 'child ready', which we will explain later in the report.

The term 'school ready' was considered vague by the Panel who agreed to define their inquiry to '*Children 0-5 years of age particularly relating to self-care, literacy, language and socialisation with particular reference to how we and our partners work with parents and care-givers to ensure children are ready for school.*'

- 3.1.2 The Panel heard that the Healthy City Board in Swansea, of which Swansea Council is part, have made a commitment to prioritising Early Years (-9 months to 5 years) and to improving school readiness. The approach and impetus has been in collaboration with the Institute of Health Equity (Marmot Review) under the Healthy City programme. They are working with partners in Swansea to accelerate progress in reducing health inequality by focussing on 'giving every child the best start'. Councillors were pleased to hear that this approach is rooted in the principle of a universal strategy and by targeting of services on a proportionate basis Swansea wide.
- 3.1.3 The Healthy City Board has pledged, as part of the School Readiness Strategy, to 'improve young children's development outcomes across the population with a clear focus on closing the gap in school readiness between advantaged and disadvantaged groups of young children' by ensuring that the four recommendations from the strategy are met by:
1. Increasing awareness of readiness (raise awareness of how families and communities can improve a child's school readiness through a statement of key messages)
 2. Assessing and signposting (early identification of developmental needs, increased accessibility to early years services, promotion of community around the child approach)
 3. Service Re-orientation and Development (expansion of the coverage of the early years pathway, greater co-ordinated level of resource)
 4. Data and Service Quality (Routine use of data collection and sharing to drive developmental milestones, quality of early years services through a motivated and highly skilled workforce.
- 3.1.4 The Panel did feel that many of the initiatives available in the defined target areas like Flying Start are excellent and are clearly making an impact in school readiness but that there are still children and families who need such services outside of those defined areas. The challenge in our communities is how we address that difference: are we only giving every child in Flying Start areas the best start in life? Councillors found from speaking to schools and parents that children are clearly more 'ready' for school after they have been to a Flying Start setting.
- 3.1.5 The Marmot Review Fair Society, Healthy Lives¹ highlights the issue of inequalities in early childhood development. The Panel supported the policy objectives and recommendations that are detailed in this report relating to early years in particular:
- Priority objectives*
1. Reduce inequalities in the early development of physical and emotional health, and cognitive, linguistic, and social skills.
 2. Ensure high quality maternity services, parenting programmes, childcare and early years education to meet need across the social gradient.
 3. Build resilience and well-being of young children across social gradient.

¹ [Marmot Review Fair Society, Healthy Lives](#)

Policy recommendations

1. Increase the proportion of overall expenditure allocated to early years and ensure that expenditure on early years development is focused progressively across the social gradient.
2. Support families to achieve progressive improvements in early child development, including:
 - Giving priority to pre- and post-natal interventions that reduce adverse outcomes of pregnancy and infancy
 - Providing paid parental leave in the first year of life with a minimum income for healthy living
 - Providing routine support to families through parenting programmes, Children's Centres and key workers, delivered to meet social need via outreach to families
 - Developing programmes for the transition to school.
3. Provide good quality early years education and childcare proportionately across the gradient. This provision should be:
 - Combined with outreach to increase the take-up by children from disadvantaged families
 - Provided on the basis of evaluated models and to meet quality standards.

- 3.1.6 Positive childhood experience and actions to reduce and negate negative influences in children's early years is considered central to breaking the cycle of disadvantage in communities. This in turn will improve children's life chances and reduce the need for expensive interventions in later years.

'Children who experience stressful and poor quality childhoods are more likely to adopt health-harming behaviours during adolescence which can themselves lead to mental health illness and diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes later in life. Adverse Childhood Experiences are not just a concern for health. Experiencing ACEs means individuals are more likely to perform poorly at school, more likely to be involved in crime and ultimately less likely to be a productive member of society.'

An increasing body of research identifies the long-term harms that can result from chronic stress on individuals during childhood. Such stress arise from the abuse and neglect of children but also from growing up in households where children are routinely exposed to issues such as domestic violence or individuals with alcohol and other substance use problems.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, Public Health Wales 2016²

The Public Health Wales 2016 report into Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population (Alcohol Use, Drug Use, Violence, Sexual Behaviour, Incarceration, Smoking and Poor Diet) was considered by the Panel and the conclusions from this document were seen as key in understanding what affects children's future life changes, thus enabling interventions to be put into place that can help address these ACEs or even stop them happening.

² [Public Health Wales, Report into Adverse Childhood Experiences in Welsh Adult Population](#)

The Panel agreed that positive early years experiences are vital to develop the necessary resilience and to mitigate adverse impacts and that consideration and integration of this research into policies across those services working with children and young adults was extremely important.

Some work has begun into breaking the ACE Cycle in Wales through national and local policies and programmes. A range of national policies and programmes are being progressed which aim to:

- Identify and intervene where children may already be victims of abuse, neglect or living in adverse childhood environments;
- Better equip parents and care-givers with the necessary skills to avoid ACEs arising within the home environment and encourage development of social and emotional well-being and resilience in the child;
- Ensure that indirect harms from for instance, domestic violence, substance misuse and other mental and behavioural problems in the family setting are identified, addressed and their impact on children minimised.

In Swansea these policies are being addressed through tackling poverty programmes like Flying Start, Families First and Communities First. These programmes are targeted to the most deprived communities in Swansea. The Panel felt that these services are doing excellent work but we must ensure that the momentum in these developments is continually progressed and maintained.

3.1.7 The Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 puts in place a Sustainable Development Principle which tells organisations how to go about meeting their duty under the Act. The Panel found that there are five key ways of working that apply to this and these must be the objective of, and built into, planning for early years services. These include:

1. Long-term - balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs. Objectives must look ahead to the long-term at least 10+ years and up to 25+ years into the future.
2. Prevention - when setting and taking steps to meet its well-being Objectives, acting to prevent problems from occurring or getting worse.
3. Integration - considering how its Well-being Objectives may impact upon each of the seven Well-being goals and on its other objectives
4. Collaboration - considering how it can work with other public bodies, or with other parts of the same organisations to meet the Well-being Objectives.
5. Involvement - involving people with an interest in achieving its Well-being Objectives and ensuring that those reflect the diversity of the area.

3.2 Protect investment in the early years services

3.2.1 The Panel explored the economic case for allocating scarce public resources, from pregnancy to age 2, including children being school ready. Transforming Young Lives across Wales, The Economic Argument for Investing in Early

Years, Bangor University³ talks about shifting the spending curve towards prevention and early years investment and how this shift in investment would result in the need to spend less in later life services.

'Health economics highlights the fact that decisions about resource use involve choices that are ultimately trade-offs in the use of public sector resources, trade-offs between different groups in society and trade-offs between different stages in the life course.'

'Through investment in Early Years, Wales will benefit in terms of the economy and improve social cohesion. Babies born today could have a greater opportunity to thrive than at present.'

- 3.2.2 The Panel recognise that we have started on the path of investment in prevention and early intervention in Swansea but the argument within this paper indicated developing things further over the longer term. This links to and can be supported by the recommendations outlined in the Wellbeing and Future Generation Act 2015⁴. The Act will expect local authorities and its partners to *'look to the long term as well as focusing on now take action to try and stop problems getting worse - or even stop them happening in the first place'*.

The Panel heard that Budgets for the sector are cross-agency and that currently there is no pooled budget in place to provide additionality to core services. Any increase in budget for Early Years within the authority or the Health Board will require a shift of resource from elsewhere as there are no additional resources available.

The findings of the inquiry indicate that should any dedicated Early Years funding including Flying Start be reduced or cut then at this will have a detrimental impact on our ability to deliver the Strategy and ultimately on improving outcomes for the youngest children in Swansea.

3.3 Support those initiatives that are having a clear impact on children having the best start in life

- 3.3.1 The Panel heard about the core aspects of the Early Years Strategy in Swansea and the impact it is making for young children and their families.
- 3.3.2 The first of these aspects is the Healthy Child Wales Programme which has the overarching aim of developing resilient families that are able to support their children to achieve the best possible health, social and educational outcomes. In Swansea the Healthy City Board is focussing on giving 'every child the best start' and is working to deliver this aim in conjunction with partners across the public and voluntary sector.

³ [Transforming Young Lives across Wales](#), The Economic Argument for Investing in Early Years, Bangor University

⁴ [Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015](#)

The premise of the focus on 'best start' is that experiences during ante natal and infant years of a child's life shape their future life chances. Positive early years experiences are vital to developing the necessary resilience and to mitigate against adverse impacts. The Panel however recognised that it is very difficult to quantify the direct impact as leading economists argue that the impact is longer term with the financial benefits across a wide range of sectors and organisations. The Panel heard that economists say that there would be a 4:1 return for every £1 spent in this area.

- 3.3.3 The Early Years Pathway is an important aspect that has the overall aim of developing the level of resilience within the family. The Panel heard that an assessment is made that determines which Health Visiting level the family will receive: universal, enhanced or intensive. The assessment is completed with the child and family. This programme is delivered in close collaboration with partners across the public and third sector and most importantly in partnership with families. The assessment consists of looking at the child's early years development and an analysis of the family and child's needs, then using this to signpost or refer/identify interventions to address the needs identified.

The Panel recognise that Health Visitors play a pivotal role in achieving the best possible start in life for children and their families. This is done by working with and supporting families during the crucial early years of a child's life.

The emerging evidence shows that investment in the early years of life has significant positive impact on a child's health, social and educational development and their long term outcomes. The health service has a fundamental role in supporting families so children are in a position to fully realise their potential. The delivery of the Healthy Child Wales Programme should make a significant contribution in ensuring this support is readily available.

The Welsh Government expects that every child and family will be offered the HCWP. The programme underpins the concept of progressive universalism and aims to identify a minimum set of key interventions to all families with pre-school children, irrespective of need. For some families there will be a need to increase intervention to facilitate more intensive support.

An overview of the Healthy Child Wales Programme NHS Wales

The Panel was particularly interested to hear about the assessments made in early years as part of the surveillance component of the Healthy Child Wales Programme. We are keen to see universal identification of resilience with more intensive support for those who require it. The Panel believe that this will, in time, show improved school readiness as one of the aspects of improving children's life chances.

3.3.4 **Flying Start**⁵ is a Welsh Government Initiative Early Years programme for families with children less than four years of age who live in some of the most deprived areas of Wales. Flying Start is targeted at defined geographical areas within each Local Authority where there are the highest concentrations of households in receipt of income benefit. Flying Start is offered universally within these areas.

Flying Start forms part of a targeted pathway where approximately 25% of 0-3 year olds are eligible. All children and their families are entitled to

- Funded childcare for 2-3 year olds for 2.5 hours a day
- Flying Start Health Visiting Programme
- Parenting support
- Early language development

Swansea has 19 Flying Start facilities based within Schools of which 1 is a dedicated welsh medium setting.

In addition there is 1 specialised pathway catering for children with additional needs at Stepping Stones (Action for Children) in Killay.

3.3.5 The legislative context is changing with regard to Additional Learning Needs. The (final) Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill was presented to the National Assembly for Wales on 12.12.2016. Unsure when royal assent will be given. The first draft Code of Practice was published in September 2015. The second draft is likely to be published in February 2017.

One of the key legislative changes will have significant implications for Early Years including Flying Start. This change relates to the change in age range where support for children with ALN must be given. The change in age relates to children and young people from the ages from 0-25 years. It is anticipated that the new code will provide much more in depth information.

In light of this it is suggested that it would be beneficial for the Early Years Services led by the Flying Start service in collaboration with the Additional Learning Needs Unit in Education to begin to prepare for these changes.

3.3.6 Integrated **Children's Centres** are based on the concept of providing an integrated service to secure good outcomes for children and their parents and thus ensure the best start in life. Each Centre provides: open access play, early years education, high quality childcare, community training, other vital family support services. Currently in Swansea we have one Children's Centre located in Penlan, with a second under construction located in Mayhill.

3.3.7 The Panel were pleased to see that Flying Start facilities now form part of schools which is good for not only relationship building with parents but for ease of transition from Flying Start into school. The Flying Start and school are able to mirror activities and behaviour which help prepare both the child and their parent/s for the demands and structure of school life.

⁵ Flying Start Wales Government: <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/flyingstart/?lang=en>

3.3.8 The Panel looked at what practically is done within Flying Start and Children's Centres that develops school readiness believing that this then can be shared and used in areas/setting where Flying Start does not operate. They found (not an exhaustive list):

- Structured childcare that mirrors early primary school and is operated as a professional day care setting.
- Access to Health Visitor and the Health Wales Programme
- Early language development, improving communication and socialisation
- Working closely with parents and providing assistance, advice and support
- Transition to school

3.3.9 The Panel found there to be a number of other initiatives that are or could potentially show promise in improving early years development and these are detailed below.

3.3.10 ***Penderi GP Partnership Project***,⁶ the purpose of this project is to ensure that key parenting messages are getting out to children and their families in order to effect positive change and to reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences. The Partnership includes:

- GP cluster, which included GPs, Practice Managers and the Parenting six GP practices within the Penderi Partnership Network
- post-natal services/Health Visitors
- early intervention team
- child and family clinics based within primary care settings

The main aim of this work is to provide support and skills training for parents with the purpose of promoting children's wellbeing by enhancing protective factors and reducing their exposure to risk. This is done by:

- supporting families to build upon skills and knowledge that allow parents to better meet the needs of their children
- Working with families in order to assess need in order to identify a family plan that will support the bespoke family learning
- Offering support, advice and guidance and interventions on a range of issues such as domestic violence, behaviour management
- Building protective factors and resilience within families

The Panel were supportive of this pilot which is showing early evidence that is very positive.

3.3.11 ***Education begins at Home Campaign run by Wales Government***⁷, the Campaign highlights that the home environment is the single biggest factor in educational attainment. By creating an environment that values education and

⁶ Penderi GP Partnership Network – [Cluster Action Plan](#)

⁷ [Education begins at Home Campaign](#) run by Wales Government

supports a child's learning, parents are giving their child a significant head start in life. Its strapline is *'Helping your child at home makes a difference to their performance in school.'*

The Education begins at home campaign on Facebook and Twitter is a place for parents and care givers to share ideas on how to help their child through education and play. Partners are encouraged to post useful links to activities and learning tools that can help children develop their learning skills. Information and links to a wide variety of education based topics is also available on the page.

- 3.3.12 **Attachment Theory** emphasises the importance of children making secure attachments with their main care-giver within their first three years. It suggests that, if these attachments fail to be made, this can have a lasting impact on the child, with the effects often re-emerging during adolescence. Within education, children and young people may tend to underachieve, are often punished for poor behaviour or are excluded. Attachment awareness is aimed at helping schools to recognise the issues involved, to support pupils with attachment difficulties, and thereby to improve attainment, behaviour and overall wellbeing for both pupils and staff. There are a number of risk factors, such as poverty, poor parental mental health, neglect, family bereavement, and frequent moves of home or school, but children from apparently non-vulnerable backgrounds may also suffer.
- 3.3.13 We recognise that there was a clear need for attachment awareness training and that this is huge piece of work but it was important all organisations working with children and young people partake. Councillors were pleased to see a programme of attachment training was being rolled out across Swansea.
- 3.3.14 **Assessing the quality of Early Years Settings** and the impact on children's outcomes through an evaluation tool is being completed by University of Wales Trinity St David's in Swansea. The Panel met with Professor Jane Walters who is leading this piece of work.

The Panel heard that research suggests that for settings to have a significant long term effect on outcomes they must be excellent and not just good. The research did tell us that there may be some gaps in assessing this by Estyn because even 'Green' Schools may not have good early years practices as this is not covered well by assessment. The Panel were pleased to hear that Estyn are looking at this. The focus of Estyn on wellbeing is welcomed although they are still working on what this means in practice. The Panel also heard that evidence suggests that early years practice works well in Swansea.

- 3.3.15 **Jig-so Project, a holistic model of delivery during the earliest years** - provision of holistic support for young and vulnerable first time parents, both mothers and fathers, Swansea wide via a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency team of midwives, Nursery nurses and parenting and early language development practitioners. It complements and works alongside universal core health services to engage parents into a pathway of support that aims to

better enable them to meet their baby and infant's needs and build the resilience factors needed to thrive as a family.

It is still early days as the project has only been fully up and running since May 2016. To date therefore the following has been identified as the main headlines:

- A new model of delivery ensuring integration across different organisations and professions with a focus on innovation
 - Effective early identification and intervention through the links with core midwifery and young babies not being accommodated by the Local Authority at birth due to the work starting pre-birth to build parental skills and resilience.
 - Above Welsh average breastfeeding rates for this group of young mothers. In 15/16 63% young mothers involved with the service were breastfeeding at delivery (national average 60%).
 - In a recent parental relationship group attended by 5 couples 100% of the mothers initiated breast feeding at delivery
 - 92% with improved family relationships
 - Of 34 pregnant mothers that reported they smoked during pregnancy, 15 reduced their smoking behaviour (44%), and 8 stopped completely (24%), meaning that 68% either reduced or stopped smoking during pregnancy
 - Out of 121 participant parents, 111 (92%) reported an improved ability to support their child's learning and development needs.
 - The same number reported that they felt that they could contribute to changes to their lifestyle and behaviours.
 - 102 (84%) reported an improvement in emotional/mental wellbeing
- Presentation at the annual BEVAN conference in Cardiff 2016 as a case study by parent, midwife and manager

3.3.15 The Panel heard that there is considerable momentum for prevention and investment in the Early Years on a multi-agency basis Swansea wide. We were pleased to hear about the early impact of this project and model of delivery has led to the development of a business case to extend the project to all vulnerable parents and not solely those under 25 years of age.

3.4 Measure Impact

3.4.1 Measuring impact is important in ensuring that we are supporting the right initiatives and making the argument for future financial support.

4.4.2 The Panel visited the Children's Centre in Penlan where they spoke to staff and parents about developing children's school readiness. They found the Children's Centre to be a welcoming and homely environment with staff who are well trained and enthusiastic about what they do. Panel members were impressed with the variety of activities that take place at the centre, having visited a mindfulness session with parents, the day care setting and speaking to parents and the Health Visitor.

ICCs have a range of positive impacts on the development of children

Children who attend the Integrated Children's Centres (ICCs) have enhanced social and cognitive skills. As a result of attending activities at the centres, children are more sociable and interact in a more appropriate way with peers and adults. Strong links with primary schools affiliated to the ICCs improve the extent to which children are prepared for schools. The positive discipline at the ICCs also supports children's transition from the Centres to school and improves their behaviour. (NFER 2010)⁸

3.4.3 The Panel heard that a new Family Centre in Mayhill was under construction and are supportive of this development believing that if it reflects the facilities and support provided by the Children's Centre in Penlan it will be of great benefit to Swansea.

3.4.4 The Panel found, from the evidence gathered, that children who have attended Flying Start settings are generally more prepared because they have experienced routines needed for school and parents feel more supported and prepared for that transition.

Flying Start only opened here in St Helens Primary School in 2014 but we are seeing a real difference in pupil's preparedness as they move into Primary School. Pupils are more sociable and resilient than many pupils who have not accessed Flying Start. Headteacher St Helen's Primary School

3.4.5 Nationally, the Welsh Government evaluate the impact of Flying Start on a regular basis with the last report detailing its effect on educational attainment which concluded that:

Despite the unknowns, it is possible to make the tentative conclusion that the attendance of children, who were potentially eligible to receive at least two years of Flying Start provisions, is better than those who lived in the same areas prior to the implementation of the programme. Their attendance is also improving at a more rapid pace than children living in non-Flying Start areas. It also appears that children who were potentially eligible for Flying Start provisions, who also have special educational needs, were more likely to be identified early than those in other areas and before the implementation of Flying Start. Similarly, the differences in attendance and attainment between children living in Flying Start areas and those in non-Flying Start areas appear to be diminishing.

Despite these positive results, the differences found over time can only be partially attributed to Flying Start. A wide range of changes and programmes have been introduced since the implementation of Flying Start, such as the Foundation Phase and the Pupil Deprivation Grant. In addition to this, there are a large number of unobserved factors which could influence educational outcomes, but which could not be included in this analysis. Therefore, with the currently available data, it is only possible to make these tentative conclusions on the impact of Flying Start, or each of the specific provisions, on children's educational outcomes.

**Wales Government Flying Start Evaluation: Educational Outcomes Feb 2017
Conclusions - Impact of Flying Start⁹**

3.4.6 The Panel understand that it takes a 'brave financial leap' to invest in the

⁸ National Foundation for Educational Research: [Evaluation of Integrated Children's Centres in Wales \(NFER 2010\)](#)

⁹ WG Flying Start Evaluation: Educational Outcomes: [Conclusions](#)

prevention and early intervention but it clearly forms part of an 'invest to save' agenda. The need to shift resources towards early intervention and prevention is going to be key to supporting children and their families in the future. It will not only have benefits to children and their families but to society as a whole.

- 3.4.7 The Panel concluded that Flying Start/Children's Centres in Swansea provide excellent facilities and support for children in their early years, with a clear aim of getting children school ready. Practice learnt through this way of working must be shared across the sector particularly in areas that are not supported by Flying Start. In an ideal world the Panel would like to see Flying Start offered right across Swansea but recognise the financial implications of this. The Panel were pleased to hear that Swansea plans to replicate the Flying Start approach on a proportionate basis according to need beyond the current geographical limitation and to invest in up-skilling the early years workforce and beyond in Swansea.

We therefore recommend Cabinet to:

- R1 Support those initiatives that are clearly improving school readiness and monitor the impact.
 - R2 Support the ethos and practice of Flying Start and use this as a basis for developing early years services outside of the designated areas (with the longer term aim of providing coverage across the City and County of Swansea)
 - R3 Ensure the Early Years Services led by the Flying Start service in collaboration with the Additional Learning Needs Unit in Education prepare for the changes in the Additional Learning Needs Reform legislation.
 - R4 Monitor, use and share the good practice that is emerging in this area.
-

3.5 Ensure that Schools are child ready

- 3.5.1 Schools being 'child ready' was a recurring theme throughout the inquiry. Some schools are working closely with parents and other settings like Flying Start and Stepping Stones as well as the wider community while others, it seems, do very little before a child starts with them.

We develop our knowledge of the children before they start at the Flying Start and the school through Health Visitor visits so that the schools is ready for its pupils and the pupils are ready for school.

St Helens Primary School and Flying Start

- 3.5.2 The research project carried out by University of Wales Trinity St David on the quality of early years settings in Swansea has been working with a number of schools in Swansea. Their main focus has been looking at whether settings are ready for children. They found that excellent settings will have some engagement with the community however they do not expect homes to be perfect settings. They said:

Good experiences and being valued in school settings gives children resilience for

other aspects of their lives. It is really important that schools value children from the start - schools fail if children feel they do not fit - if schools are too rigid in their responses to children some will become disenfranchised.

University of Wales Trinity St David's Early Years Project

- 3.5.3 The Panel heard that building on the Trallwn School Pilot, a survey of Primary schools is being developed to ascertain whether there are arrangements in place to engage with children and their families before they start school, what they do and whether they have future plans or aspirations to develop this area.
- 3.5.4 The Panel considered how schools could potentially make themselves more child ready, as there seems to be little consistency on this issue. The Panel questioned whether there needs to be clearer guidance for schools as to what constitutes being a 'child ready school'. The Panel felt that there needs to be more robust challenge on this aspect.
- 3.5.5 Some schools are using their pupil deprivation grant for this purpose. The Pupil Deprivation Grant provides schools and educational setting with additional funding to support children who are entitled to Free School Meals. Some of the ways that schools nationally have used their pupil deprivation grant for this purpose include:
- To employ staff to focus upon family engagement programmes
 - Training existing staff on significant meaningful relationships with families and the wider community
 - To facilitate whole school training on for example attachment
- 3.5.6 In Swansea, St Helen's Primary School and Flying Start have used some of their Pupil Deprivation Grant to employ a Family Engagement Leader within the school. Their role is to link with all families, especially new ones, get to know them, build up trust and an understanding and explain expectations of school. They act as an advocate for the family, can signpost to specialist external support services such as EYST, BAWSO, and offers pastoral support. They are also key in welcome meetings working alongside teachers to ensure the family understand what is expected from them and their child at school.
- 3.5.7 The Panel heard about the new Foundation Phase Profile and how this will help to develop a baseline when children start school. Initial data taken from the results for the first Foundation Phase Profile Baseline Assessment run during Autumn Term 2015 is now available. We recognise this is a new assessment and as such it will take some time before it settles down to become a reasonably robust assessment tool. Analysis has also been completed to show how outcomes vary between schools, and this shows that in some schools the assessments may not be robust at this stage. It is likely to take a few years for the results to be more reliable and consistent across all schools.

We therefore recommend Cabinet to:

R5 Work with schools to ensure that they are child ready and welcoming to

all of their pupils by:

- i. Developing guidance for what constitutes a 'child ready' school
 - ii. Encouraging schools and governing bodies to develop a community engagement strategy which clearly identifies how they will work with parents pre-school and in the early years. (Including Welsh Government toolkit more widely shared and contents more closely considered by schools).
 - iii. More vigorously challenge schools on their child readiness using minimum standards developed in R7
- R6 Encourage the use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant by schools and/or across clusters to help develop school readiness particularly when working with parents, families and communities.
- R7 Ensure that the recently introduced Foundation Phase Profile baseline has more consistency and robustness.
-

3.6 Organisations must work closely together to address the gaps identified in the delivery of early years services

- 3.6.1 No one service, working in isolation, will achieve the positive impact that organisations working together can achieve. The Panel heard for example that a key aspect of the success of the Healthy Child Wales Programme will be its partnership working with local authorities, communities, education and the third sector. We felt that identifying and addressing gaps in delivery in Early Years services is much better addressed when organisations work together.
- 3.6.2 The Panel found that there are some potential gaps in service provision.
- 3.6.3 Flying Start facilities are excellent but only support approximately one quarter of Swansea's geographical area. The Panel recognise that this is targeted at those areas identified as having the most need but did feel that there are children and families across the City and County that would fall into that category. The difference to school readiness that Flying Start makes to pupils was recognised by the Panel who felt that this would be of benefit to all children and their families in Swansea. The Panel recognise that funding will not allow this to be available to all but did believe that more could be done to develop innovative ways of using the Flying Start ethos, partnership working and other good practice in those areas outside of the defined areas.
- 3.6.4 The Panel heard that there is support to replicate a Flying Start approach beyond the current geographical areas and we heard that this is being progressed based upon a 'proportionate basis according to need'.
- 3.6.5 The new Welsh Government Free Childcare for 3 and 4 year olds policy will be a challenge to deliver but the Panel felt that this will be an opportunity to help build the right capacity in those areas not covered by Flying Start.
- 3.6.6 The Panel heard that there are plans to upskill the early years workforce across Swansea which again was an excellent opportunity to develop the right ethos and attitudes to school readiness.

- 3.6.7 The Panel were pleased to hear about the work taking place or proposed to address identified gaps in service delivery particularly relating to non-Flying Start areas including:
- A multi-agency and multi-disciplinary service between Early Intervention Services and Midwifery to identify and support parents and their babies/children, from -9 months and throughout the infant years. This is specifically for those that would benefit from support above the core Health generic services offer, in order to better enable them to meet their child's needs and build resilience within the family unit.
 - A new partnership with a GP Network for an exemplar project for 12 months to deliver parenting skills and interventions to young children and their parents referred by the GPs.
 - A speech and language proposal and an Early Years proposal under the Prevention Plan.

- 3.6.8 The Panel found that not all schools and day care settings provide effective transition to school processes. The Panel were particularly interested in the work carried out in Flying Start facilities, Stepping Stones and some schools in the transition period to school.

The transition is much easier when pupils go from the Flying Start setting to the School as we are located at the same place and managed through the school. Running up to the transition children are taken across to the school and activities and expectations are mirrored for both child and parents. Parents say that the transition is smooth and straightforward with very little disruption for the child.

Headteacher, St Helens Primary School and Flying Start

Transition can be difficult for children and parents of pupils with disabilities with new environment and people. We do our best to work with the school the child is transitioning to. Some schools are excellent at this, visiting Stepping Stones meeting with child and parents/carers to discuss the child and their needs. Others schools we have little contact with through transition. It would be good if more schools accessed Stepping Stones for transition tips.

Stepping Stones Children's Centre Manager

- 3.6.9 It was found that working with children and their parents in this key transition stage would make the move to school much smoother for the child, the parents and the school. Getting to know the child and family, sharing information and developing a transition plan seem to be the key to success. The Panel would like to see more consistency across schools and day care setting in this key transition period with a minimum standard in relation to transition in early years services developed.
- 3.6.10 We saw Speech and Language development as a key issue and a recurring theme throughout the inquiry. We found that access to, assistance and support outside of Flying Start areas was much less than within Flying Start areas. The Panel recognise the importance of speech and language in a child's development and the ability to interact and socialise with peers, in learning at school and how it impacts on future life chances. We were pleased to hear that Early Years speech and language development are priorities within the Prevention Strategy and as such business cases are being

- made for increasing funding to enhance this aspect.
- 3.6.11 In Trallwn Primary School speech and language training is provided to all staff to ensure understanding. It was felt that development was particularly accelerated when early communication needs are identified before the child starts school and shared through the transition period.

We therefore recommend Cabinet to:

- R8 Develop minimum standards for transition to school for both schools and day care settings.
-

3.7 Keep early years issues high on the agenda

- 3.7.1 The Panel believes Early Years need to continue to be high on the agenda and a priority across all partners' business plans. The opportunity to address this issue through the multi-agency Public Services Board (PSB) is supported by the Panel. This year it is one of the Board's identified priorities but it finishes as a defined priority in May 2017. The Panel however heard that there is a call from some of the members of the PSB for it to be kept as priority beyond this current year. Panel members agreed and will include this as a recommendation to Cabinet.

We therefore recommend Cabinet to:

- R9 Support the 'Best Start Swansea Initiative' as a Public Service Board priority for the coming 12 months.
-

3.8 Engage with parents, families and the wider community

- 3.8.1 The Panel found that parental engagement can have a positive impact on a child's learning and that is why it is so important to engage with and include parents in their child's education.

*Parents have an important stake in the education of their children and play a significant part in supporting their children's learning. Effective parental involvement sets aspirations and shapes the child's self-concept as a learner. **Estyn***

- 3.8.2 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found in their research, looking at poverty and low educational achievement in Wales¹⁰, that parental (family involvement) in their children's education has a causal influence on children's school readiness and subsequent attainment compared with other interventions it reviewed. They suggest, however, that providing parents with better information and access to appropriate support and advice appears to have the greatest effect. This enables them to conclude that interventions that simply raise parents' aspirations for their children to succeed are likely to be unsuccessful, whereas those which 'enable and encourage parents actively to

¹⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Poverty and Low Educational Achievement in Wales: Student, Family and Community Interventions](#)

engage with their child's learning and the education system more generally' are usually successful. The report concludes that Interventions focused on parental involvement, extra-curricular activities and mentoring should be prioritised within the Flying Start, Families First and Communities First programmes.

Where there is particularly effective parental involvement, the single most important driver is the enthusiasm of the Headteacher. When a school plans and implements positive policies to involve parents, this can have a significant impact on improving pupils' wellbeing, particularly in relation to behaviour and school attendance. Estyn

3.8.3 Panel members found there to be a number of reasons behind some parents' lack of engagement which can become barriers to them being involved in their child's education. Schools, the council and its partners need to identify these families and look at ways of overcoming or mitigating them in order to get meaningful engagement. Some of these barriers include:

- Parents perceiving schools as presenting obstacles, e.g. lack of encouragement, not informing parents of what they can do, and having too little scope for fitting around busy working and family lives.
- Costs, time and transportation, language (for some parents for whom English is not a first language), low levels of literacy and numeracy, and a lack of confidence.
- Understanding their world...especially families that have a chaotic life, negative personal experience and/or have low expectations or value in education.
- Parental attitudes "Not my job." Some parents feel that active involvement and assistance is the responsibility of the school and the teachers to educate their children
- Attitudes of some teachers - There is also variation within schools in terms of the attitudes of different teachers; some are welcoming and encouraging of involvement where others may be less so.
- Specific barriers faced by some families, for example, asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers and refugees find themselves in situations of poverty, and may suffer discrimination or stigmatisation. As newcomers they face language barriers. They lack knowledge on how local systems operate and very often they do not know where to go to access information

3.8.4 During the Panel's inquiry they found that some of the activity that currently takes place to engage and involve parents in early years development is excellent.

3.8.5 Health Visitors working in communities see families on a regular basis running up to a child starting school. The Panel saw this as a very important part of the jigsaw of support that parents receive to prepare their child for school. The Panel heard about the Family Resilience and Assessment Tool that Health Visitors complete with the parents to help to identify the level of resilience within the family which in turn assesses the amount of support the family need. The Panel felt that although in its early stages, it was a good example of how services can work closely with parents to get the best

outcomes for their children.

- 3.8.6 The Penderi General Practitioners Partnership and the Primary Care Early Years Project is working closely with parents and families with the aim of providing a person centred approach to support and skill training for parents to improve their family resilience. They work in partnership with families to assess need and develop a family plan that will support family learning and is bespoke and tailored to the needs of that family. We heard that it is in its early stages where 37 families have received or are receiving a service and of those, 35 have children under 5 years.

The Panel met with some of those people involved in the partnership and were keen to hear about this multi-agency funded work designed to reduce or mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experience so that children can have a better start in life. They agreed with the assessment made at the meeting that there is a lot of great potential in this way of working, that early results are promising, and that it was important to collect evidence of how it was working and to assess its impact over time.

- 3.8.7 Flying Start/Children's Centres providers have parental inclusion and involvement built into every part of their work with children, from working with pregnant women, young mothers and dads through to the transition to school as children leave the early years setting.



Visit to Children's Centre in Penlan

The Panel visited two settings and were very impressed with their inclusivity, finding that they work hard at reaching and involving parents not only in relation to the child's development but around the parents' own wellbeing. The Panel found that both the Children's Centre in Penlan and St Helen's Primary Flying Start show excellent practice in making children and their families school ready, in particular with harder to reach and vulnerable families.

- 3.3.8 The Headteacher at St Helen's Primary School said that one of the main aims of the school is to be 'at the heart of the community' and the parents we

spoke to said that *it is excellent and they are doing that now.*

Parental involvement in the schools visited ranges from a school being described as the 'hub' of the community where parents, including those from disadvantaged groups, feel very welcome in the school and await the next project with enthusiasm to a school where parents are rarely involved beyond a few formal events. Estyn

We met with a group of 15 parents whose children attend St Helens Primary School Flying Start and heard a number of important messages including:

- Both children and parents feel they are more ready for school when their child is/has attended Flying Start
- The inclusivity of the School and Flying Start is central to its success
- The importance of the big focus on bringing community together and actively encouraging that through their work with parent/families
- Being able to access a number of different services and support from one location, for example the Health Visitor to baby massage
- Both parents and staff expressed how proud they are of the school

3.8.9 The Panel found Trallwn Primary School to be working intensively with the local community, including and involving it in the work of the school. This has improved school readiness of pupils who may (or may not) end up going to the school. At a meeting with the Headteacher we discussed this good practice and the importance of addressing not only parents' skills but the norms in the community, that by knowing families before they come into school they are much better prepared to support and teach children. We heard about the universal approach to pre-school engagement and the specialist targeted support and about how partnership working with Health Visitors and speech and language specialists was also very important.

The school uses the Wales Government Family and Community Engagement Toolkit¹¹ which supports engagement with parents but heard that this toolkit was little known or used by schools generally. The use of this toolkit could be more widely considered for use by schools along with the practice learnt by Trallwn in relation to engaging the community more widely. Trallwn Primary School is not part of a designated Flying Start area and the Panel felt that this approach could go some of the way in helping to address the gap in parental engagement in non-Flying Start areas.

Engaging families in their children's learning is a powerful way of raising standards and well-being in schools. It is also essential for narrowing the attainment gap between learners from richer and poorer backgrounds.

This toolkit will help schools develop their approach to family and community engagement. The focus is on engagement that will improve learning outcomes, and on engaging with families of children who are underperforming, from deprived backgrounds or who get less support for their learning at home.

The toolkit is structured around 5 themes:

¹¹ [Family and community engagement toolkit for schools. Wales government](#)

1. *Practical support to school leaders to help them embed family and community engagement in the ethos of the school*
2. *How to build the school's capacity for engagement.*
3. *How to overcome barriers to engagement, including families that interact with the school less frequently or have needs that are harder to accommodate.*
4. *Ideas and examples of how schools can engage with families as serious and practical partners in children's learning.*
5. *Information on helping families find additional support and how to plan more effective transitions with a focus on what is important for the learner and their family.*

Wales Government Family and Community Engagement Toolkit

- 3.8.10 The Panel heard about the work Swansea Library Service does to reach out into the Community, in working with children and their families and ultimately how this helps with children's school readiness.

Library and library activities are free, therefore allowing children and families from all backgrounds to use it. Each library has a designated children's area with a selection of resources and there are no overdue fees on children's books. They run reading and writing groups, baby rhyme-time and many other activities where parents and children can engage. They also work with schools to encourage children and families to join and use the facilities.

Bookstart is another useful tool which is administered by the Library Service in partnership with health. In addition to the Bookstart pack a Bookshine pack for hearing impaired children and Booktouch for visually impaired children are used. Dual language packs are also given out to those families whose first language is not English.

The Panel recognised the ability to easily access libraries and the work that libraries do within our communities. They were interested to hear that people find the environment and atmosphere in libraries a safe and non-judgemental one and people who may not engage with other services able to engage with libraries. The Panel emphasised the importance of libraries as community hubs where people come for many reasons other than to borrow books e.g. use computers, borrow music simply to read the newspaper and be amongst other people.

- 3.8.11 The Panel visited the Action for Children Stepping Stones facility which provides support and early years services for children with disabilities. They provide a specialist Flying Start style pathway working closely with parents and carers in supporting their needs.

The Panel had a one to one discussion with a parent at the facility who had found the Stepping Stones engagement and support for her as a parent to be invaluable. She said that Stepping Stones *has been a lifesaver and has helped us deal with the many issues I have experienced when having a child with Autism, helping us to move forward and my son is now due to start Primary School shortly.* Although she explained that this was not without its problems she found the transition to Primary School particularly difficult because only one of the four schools she visited was either suitable physically or welcoming to her and her children. The Panel were concerned

to hear this and feel that many schools still need to be better prepared and more welcoming for all pupils.

- 3.8.12 It is clear that there are many examples of good practice in parent and community engagement in Swansea let alone further afield but what has become evident is the need particularly for more engagement of schools with parents and their communities in order to prepare their children for school. Some schools are working much more closely with parents and families particularly those with a Flying Start Setting but very few do extensive work in the local communities like Trallwn Primary School. The Panel felt that there is scope for much more parental and community engagement especially in those areas that do not have Flying Start. The Panel felt that more cluster working in relation to this aspect could be developed.
- 3.8.13 The Panel were concerned that there does not seem to be any clear strategy for how schools involve parents and whether there is any formal monitoring of the extent of parental involvement. They felt that parental engagement requires an active partnership with parents and this needs to be pro-actively developed. The Panel questioned whether schools should have their own community engagement strategies based upon the requirements of their communities.
- 3.8.14 The Panel emphasised the importance of those working with children and families to engage them in partnership. Parents must feel part of the child's development not feeling that things are being done 'to' or 'for' them but 'with them'.
- 3.8.15 It was felt that the good practice evident in our Flying Start settings around parental engagement should be shared more widely and considered by schools in Swansea, particularly in their work with vulnerable and harder to reach parents/families.
- 3.8.16 The use of ICT can also be a useful tool to improved parental engagement, by providing a convenient means for parents to access up-to-date information about their child's learning and provide more information for parents.

3.9 Raise public awareness of school readiness and encourage use of key messages across Swansea

- 3.9.1 The importance of school readiness is clear but the Panel feels that it is necessary to highlight the importance of raising awareness of this issue and using key messages to educate the population as a whole.
- 3.9.2 One of the Healthy City Partnership key initiatives is called Best Start Swansea which includes a key messages campaign that relates specifically early years with the purpose of raising awareness and changing attitudes that predominate in some communities.

Using this organisations are asked to take an active role through:

- The use of the publicity materials, promoting twitter and Facebook and website pages
- actively seeking opportunities to up-skill their workforces
- Identifying key contacts to lead on the campaign within their Organisations
- To link/facilitate events under the Best Start banner



3.9.3 Panel members would like to see Best Start Swansea continue as a priority for the Public Services Board in the coming year because these key messages, from their viewpoint, still need to reach communities.

The Panel felt that the key messages found in the Welsh Adverse Child Experiences (ACE) Study must to be shared and understood across schools and the early years sector. The impact of ACEs on children’s future life chances is clear, with actions to prevent or to mitigate those being central to improving those children’s chances of a successful and fulfilling life.

This latest report shows how experiencing abuse and other problems in childhood is linked with increased levels of chronic disease in adulthood and much greater use of health care. What happens to us as children can make our bodies develop differently, leaving them more vulnerable to conditions like Type 2 diabetes and heart disease in later life. Emphasising the importance of a healthy start for all aspects of a child’s life, Professor Bellis continues: “Finding solutions to the harms children suffer and the problems adults face because of their childhood experiences needs a new life course approach to health.

“This cannot be achieved by the NHS alone. That is why we are working with our key partners, including the Welsh Government, police, local authorities, charitable and voluntary sector organisations, to develop a joined-up approach to prevent ACEs and support adults whose health is suffering because of childhood trauma,”

he concludes.

Welsh Adverse Childhood Experience Study (Nov 2016)

3.9.4 The Panel wanted to highlight the UNCRC guiding principles¹² and ensure that these key messages resonate in our communities and guide our public services in Swansea.

- Article 2 - Non-discrimination (All rights apply to all children without exception. It is the State's obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination and to take positive action to promote their rights)
- Article 3 - Best interests of the child (All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests)
- Article 6 - Survival and development (Every child has the inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development)
- Article 12 - The child's opinion (The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child)

3.9.5 Councillors considered the Welsh Government Initiative called 'Ready to Learn'¹³ which was launched last year, that aims to raise awareness and advise parents on how to give your child the best start at school. It details some of the things that parents can do to prepare their child for school emphasising the importance of education beginning at home.

It includes for example: visiting the school with your child before they start to meet the reception teacher and borrow storybooks from your local library such as 'your first day at school', reading to your child and encouraging them to recognise their name. There is a Facebook page and associated materials that parents can use with their children to improve their school readiness.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Support those initiatives that are clearly improving school readiness and monitor the impact.

4.2 Support the ethos and practice of Flying Start and use this as a basis for developing early years services outside of the designated areas (with the longer term aim of providing coverage across the City and County of Swansea)

4.3 Ensure the Early Years Services led by the Flying Start Service in collaboration with the Additional Learning Needs Unit in Education prepare for the changes in the Additional Learning Needs Reform

¹² <http://www.childrenswales.org.uk/uncrc-principles.aspx>

¹³ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/education-begins-at-home/?lang=en>

legislation.

- 4.4 Monitor, use and share the good practice that is emerging in this area.**
- 4.5 Work with schools to ensure that they are child ready and welcoming to all of their pupils by:**
 - a) Developing guidance for what constitutes a ‘child ready’ school.**
 - b) Encourage schools and governing bodies to develop a community engagement strategy which clearly identifies how they will work with parents pre-school and in the early years. (Including Welsh Government toolkit being more widely shared and contents more closely considered by schools).**
 - c) More vigorously challenging schools on their child readiness using minimum standards developed in 4.8.**
- 4.6 Encourage the use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant by schools and/or across clusters to help develop school readiness particularly when working with parents, families and communities.**
- 4.7 Ensure that the recently introduced Foundation Phase Profile baseline has more consistency and robustness.**
- 4.8 Develop minimum standards in relation to transition to school for both schools and day care settings.**
- 4.9 Support the ‘Best Start Swansea Initiative’ as a Public Service Board priority for the coming 12 months.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel would like to record its thanks to the following people who came and gave evidence to us:

- Staff and parents at Stepping Stones, Action for Children in Killay.
- Staff and parents at the Children's Centre in Penlan.
- Staff and parents at St Helens Flying Start
- Headteacher at Trallwn Primary
- Swansea Library Service
- Health Visitors in Flying Start settings
- Penderi GP Partnership Project
- Quality of Early Years Setting Project, University of Wales Trinity St David's
- Prevention and Early Intervention Strategic Manager
- Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Healthy City
- The Welsh Medium Schools and early years settings that responded to our Survey

ABOUT THE INQUIRY PANEL

The **School Readiness Scrutiny Inquiry Panel** is a team of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. Their role is to examine a strategic issue of concern and to make recommendations about how policies and services can be improved.

Members of the Panel

Councillors

Hazel Morris (Convener)

Wendy Fitzgerald

Fiona Gordon

Jan Curtice

Paulette Smith

David Anderson Thomas (Co-opted Parent Governor Representative)

The inquiry was supported by Michelle Roberts from the Council's Scrutiny Unit.

For further information contact:

Michelle Roberts, Scrutiny Officer

City and County of Swansea

☎ 01792 637256