

HEALTHY EARLY YEARS SETTINGS: A SCOPING STUDY

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Briefing Paper on the Diversity in Early Years Provision

Numbering approximately 94,300 settings¹ and offering over one million places nationally, early education and childcare provision has grown significantly in recent years. This briefing paper considers the diversity within this provision. It is produced for the Healthy Early Years Study, which is funded by the Department of Health, to help inform decisions about extending the Healthy Schools Programme approach to early years settings.

The paper focuses on childcare and early education provision for children aged from birth to five years: maintained and private nursery schools, Sure Start local programmes, children's centres, day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, and childminders. Nursery and reception classes are not included because they are part of the school system and should be covered by the Healthy Schools Programme. An overview of the relevant issues and of the distinguishing features of each type of setting is provided.

1. Early Education and Childcare

Historically, early education and childcare were regarded quite separately in terms of policy (e.g. childcare in DH; early education in DfES), regulation, and the training and working conditions of the workforce (e.g. teachers providing early education; nursery nurses and childminders providing childcare). With the acknowledgement that care and education cannot be separated², and with research showing the benefits of integrated provision, recent governments have moved towards increasing integration and reducing the anomalies. However, the legacy of the split system and the move towards greater integration in part explain the current diversity and the major changes taking place within the sector.

2. Organisation of Early Years Services within Local Authorities

Until the late 1990s it was common to find childcare services located in local authority Social Services Departments and early education services located in Education Departments, reflecting the split system referred to above. With the move

¹ Quarterly Childcare Statistics December, 2005 (published 27 January 2006, Ofsted). Includes childminders, but not out-of-school provision, maintained nursery schools or Sure Start Local Programmes.

² Eg. DfES (1998) Meeting the Childcare Challenge, London: The Stationery Office.

of responsibility for childcare services nationally, from the DH to the DfES, many local authorities moved their childcare services into Education. More recently, policies and legislation such as the Ten-Year Childcare Strategy, the Every Child Matters Programme and the 2004 Children Act have led to further local authority reorganisation of children's services aimed at a greater integration of services. Thus, for example, all services for children may be brought into one Department often referred to as the Children and Young People's Directorate or Service.

Responsibility for early years provision usually resides with the Early Years and Childcare Service³ though its Departmental location currently varies between authorities. The local authority usually employs early years development or support workers and there may be a quality assurance or quality improvement manager. Every local authority has a Children's Information Service (CIS), which provides information on childcare and related services free to the public. The CIS has a database of all registered childcare provision within the authority. A local authority's website or its early years and childcare service can provide further information.

3. Government Funded Early (Nursery) Education

All three and four year-olds are entitled to free part-time early education amounting to 12.5 hours a week for 38 weeks a year. Early education can be provided in nursery classes, nursery schools, children's centres, day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, or with childminders who are part of an approved childminder network. Although more than half of funded places are in the maintained (state) sector around a third are in the private and voluntary/community sector.⁴ During 2007, the government will be piloting the extension of free provision to two year-olds in disadvantaged areas in 15 selected local authorities.

4. Regulation and Curriculum Frameworks

All early years settings are regulated by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Currently, childcare and early education are regulated differently, with separate requirements for each. Providers offering childcare for children from birth to eight, such as day nurseries, childminders and pre-school playgroups, are registered and inspected by Ofsted at least once every three years. These providers must meet the National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding. Providers offering government funded early education are also inspected by Ofsted and must follow the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. Where providers offer both childcare and funded early education an integrated inspection involving both regimes takes place. The new Childcare Bill⁵ will rationalise these separate frameworks and from September 2008 all early years settings will be required to deliver and be inspected against the Early Years Foundation Stage (see below).

³ Names for the service vary – e.g. Early Education and Childcare or Early Years Development and Childcare Service.

⁴ Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England: September 2005*. London: DfES.

⁵ Currently at committee stage in the House of Lords.

4.1 National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding

Ofsted has divided childcare settings into five categories: childminding; full day care (e.g. day nurseries, children's centres); sessional day care (e.g. pre-school playgroups); out-of-school day care; and crèche day care⁶. There are 14 national standards for each category, covering a number of areas including health and safety, food and drink, child protection, special needs, and working in partnership with parents and carers. Each standard, regarded as a minimum, describes a particular quality outcome and is accompanied by a set of supporting criteria providing information about how to achieve the outcome. The national standards are the same across the five childcare categories, but the supporting criteria change to reflect the nature of the setting. For more information see:

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/ensuringquality/standardsregulation/>

4.2 Foundation Stage Curriculum

The Foundation Stage is the first part of the National Curriculum, focusing on children aged three to the end of their reception year in primary school. Each of the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage contain a number of Early Learning Goals setting out what most children are expected to achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage and including stepping stones that help to show a child's progress towards the goals. The six areas of learning are: 1. Personal, social and emotional development; 2. Communication, language and literacy; 3. Mathematical development; 4. Knowledge and understanding of the world; 5. Physical development; 6. Creative development. For more information, see:

www.surestart.gov.uk/ensuringquality/foundationstage/.

4.3 Birth to Three Matters

The DfES Sure Start Unit has produced non-statutory guidance for childcare providers on supporting the development and meeting the needs of children from birth to three. Birth to Three Matters focuses on: child development; effective practice; examples of play activities to promote play/ learning; guidance on planning/ resourcing; and meeting diverse needs. It is organised around four themes: 1. A strong child; 2. A skilful communicator; 3. A competent learner; 4. A healthy child. For more information, see:

www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/childcareworkers/birthtothreematters/

4.4 Early Years Foundation Stage

A new quality framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is currently under development and will become statutory in September 2008⁷. This new framework brings together Birth to Three Matters, the Foundation Stage and the National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding into one coherent

⁶ Categories are defined by the number of hours of care and its location e.g. full day care is for a continuous period of 4 hours in non-domestic premises and sessional day care is less than a continuous period of 4 hours in non-domestic premises. Crèches offer occasional care for children, but need to be registered if running for more than 2 hours a day.

⁷ The Early Years Foundation Stage: Consultation on a Single Quality Framework for Services to Children from Birth to Five (DfES 2006). Consultation closes 28 July 2006.

framework for children's development from birth to the end of the reception year. The EYFS will define the standards against which all early years provision required to register with Ofsted will be inspected including both maintained and non-maintained settings and childminders. As with the current separate frameworks, standards concerned with health and emotional well-being will be included in the new EYFS framework. For more information, see:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1393>

5. Quality Assurance Schemes

Quality assurance (QA) systems have been used across many fields, including the early years sector, to improve quality. In addition to their Ofsted inspection, many early years settings are also accredited through a QA scheme. QA schemes will only accredit settings if they meet certain standards and are committed to keeping those standards by monitoring their work. These schemes support practitioners through mentoring and advice, and help them to think about the way in which they work and how they can improve the services they offer. Most QA schemes have been developed either by national organisations representing early years providers, such as the National Childminding Association or the National Day Nurseries Association, or by local authorities. The Investors in Children Scheme, a DfES initiative⁸, endorses quality assurance schemes for early years, play and out-of-school settings and there are approximately 49 QA schemes endorsed:

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/guidance/investorsinchildren/endorsedqaschemes/>

6. Diversity in Early Years Settings

In addition to the different regulatory systems, early years settings vary along a number of other dimensions including the premises, the workforce, opening hours, ages of children who attend, and the service offered. Some of these areas are considered more broadly, before looking at the key characteristics of each type of setting in the thumb-nail sketches that follow.

6.1 Key Features

Premises: Not all settings are purpose-built. Playgroups and non-maintained nurseries are often located in premises designed for another purpose such as village halls and scout huts where toys and equipment have to be cleared away at the end of the session. Childminders work in their own homes, though as with all other settings, the home environment has to meet the national standards for health and safety.

Workforce: The childcare workforce for pre-school aged children comprises of nursery nurses working in day nurseries, children's centres and nursery schools, playgroup workers and childminders. This workforce is mainly female and younger on average than the workforce as a whole, with nursery nurses being younger than other childcare workers.

⁸ Following consultation in 2005, the future of IiC is under review, with the possibility of the early years sector taking over the running of the scheme.

Working conditions: Employers range from small organisations, which predominate in the private sector, to larger organisations such as nursery chains and local authorities. Most childminders are self-employed. Working conditions vary between types of provision and between the different sectors. Compared with other childcare workers, playgroup workers are less likely to work full-time reflecting the part-time opening hours of this form of provision. Childcare workers are relatively poorly paid (an average hourly rate of approximately £6 in 2003, which includes nannies and au pairs but not teachers)⁹. There are significant differences between the private and public sector with the latter offering on average higher rates of pay and better working conditions in terms of pension, sick leave and holiday entitlement.

Qualifications: A variety of qualifications apply to the early years sector, which are assigned different levels ranging from level 2, broadly equivalent to the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) to level 6, equivalent to a higher education degree. Generally, those working in the state sector have higher levels of qualification compared with those working in the private (for profit) and voluntary/community (non-profit) sectors. Whereas all teachers in the state sector must be qualified to degree level (level 6), the statutory qualification requirements for other early years workers varies depending on the provision. For example, in settings offering full-time childcare managers must hold a level 3 qualification appropriate for the care or development of children and at least 50% of the remaining staff must have a level 2 qualification. There is no requirement for childminders to have an accredited qualification and they are the least qualified group among early years workers, with 26% having a level 3 qualification compared with 39% of playgroup workers and 46% of nursery nurses¹⁰.

The Government has recognised the need to reform the early years workforce, particularly improving skills and qualification levels. A new role defined by a set of national standards covering work with children from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is under development. Those who meet these standards will be awarded Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), equivalent to qualified teacher status. It is proposed that in due course only workers with EYPS should lead the delivery of the new Foundation Stage. For more information, see: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/projects/earlyyears.htm.

6.2 Types of Settings: Facts and Figures

Maintained Nursery Schools

Sector:	LEA (part of the state education system).
Scope:	470 (Jan 2004) with on average 83 children per school.
Hours:	Usually school hours (9am to 3.30pm) during term-time offering half-day sessions (morning or afternoon for 2.5 hours).
Age group:	3-5, though can take children aged 2.
Service:	Early education.
Staffing:	A statutory requirement for a qualified teacher and qualified nursery nurse assistant for every 13 children.

⁹ DfES (2005) The children's workforce in England: a review of the evidence. DfES: London.

¹⁰ Based on data from 2001-2003 Labour Force Survey (Simon, A. and Owen, C. Who are today's care workers? In J. Boddy, C. Cameron and P. Moss (2006) Care Work Present and Future. Routledge: London.

Regulated: Inspected by Ofsted and must follow curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage.

Nursery Schools

Sector: Private (parents pay fees) or voluntary/community sector (not for profit) organisations, though majority in private sector.

Scope: No separate figures.

Hours: Usually open school hours (9am to 3.30pm) during term time for full or half-day sessions.

Age group: 3-5 though some will take children from 2 years of age.

Service: Early education.

Staffing: Usually employ a qualified teacher, but not a statutory requirement.

Regulated: Inspected by Ofsted and must follow curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage if offering government funded early education.

Sure Start Local Programmes

Sector: Sure Start local programmes are delivered by local partnerships (e.g. LAs, NHS, voluntary sector organisations) with strong parental and community involvement.

Scope: Approximately 524 local programmes reaching up to 400,000 children under four living in disadvantaged areas which will become Sure Start Children's Centres (see information on children's centres below).

Age-group: Many programmes are focused on the early years, but the childcare remit covers children from conception to age 14 (16 for those with special educational needs or disabilities).

Service: Sure Start local programmes work with parents and carers to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities by increasing the availability of childcare for all children; improving children's health, education and emotional development; and supporting parents in their role and in developing employment aspirations. Programmes vary, are tailored to local need, and have had a high degree of autonomy in determining the services they provide.

Staffing: Staff with health, early years and/or family support experience.

Regulated: Registered and inspected by Ofsted if offering childcare and/or funded early education. Must meet national standards for childcare and curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage if offering funded early education.

Children's Centres

Sector: LAs have strategic responsibility for delivery, building on existing provision (e.g. Sure Start Local Programmes, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres). Although predominately provided by the public sector, LAs are encouraged to involve private and voluntary sector organisations in delivery.

Scope: 840 centres (3,500 by 2010 – one for each community serving on average about 800 children under five through on-site and outreach services).

Hours: Childcare for five days a week for 10 hours a day for 48 weeks a year.

Age-group: From birth to 5.

Service: Integrated service offering childcare, early education, health and family support – acting as a hub for other services such as training for parents, benefits advice, childcare for older children and toy libraries.

Staffing: Staff from education, health, family support and childcare backgrounds. All children receiving care and early learning will have their activities planned and substantially led by a qualified teacher.

Regulated: Registered and inspected by Ofsted and must meet national standards for childcare element and Foundation Stage requirements for early education.

Day Nurseries

Sector: Can be community or work-place based and run by LAs¹¹ and voluntary, not for profit, organisations or privately owned and run usually for profit either by individuals or chains (e.g. Asquith, Nord Anglia, Bupa, Busy Bees).

Scope: 12,900 offering 553,100 places (Ofsted full day care category, December 2005¹²). Majority are in the private (for profit) sector.

Hours: Usually open full-time (8am to 6pm) 50 weeks of the year though may offer part-time places.

Age-group: Varies from 0-5 to 2-5. May provide out-of-school service for school-aged children.

Service: Childcare and may provide funded early education.

Staffing: 50% of staff must hold a relevant childcare qualifications such as NVQ Childcare Level 2 or equivalent. All supervisors are required to have an NVQ Childcare Level 3 or equivalent. Adult child ratios are: 1:3 for 0-2 years; 1:4 for 2-3 years and 1:8 for 3-5 years¹³.

Regulated: Registered and inspected by Ofsted and must meet National Daycare and Childminding Standards for Under 8s. Must meet requirements of Foundation Stage Curriculum as assessed by Ofsted if offering funded early education.

National: National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

Pre-School Playgroups

Sector: Organised by community or voluntary groups on a not-for-profit basis, often with help from parents.

Scope: 9,900 offering 241,100 places (Ofsted sessional category, December, 2005).

Hours: Most open for sessions of about 2 to 3 hours during term-time, but some have longer hours and offer full-time placements. Groups of between 10-20, but not more than 26.

Age-group: Usually 3-5 though some do offer places for 2 year-olds.

¹¹ There are few LA day nurseries and they are usually for children at risk or in need.

¹² As not all providers inform Ofsted that they have ceased operating, the number of registered providers and places is likely to be higher than actual numbers.

¹³ Consultation is under way on a new ratios model. Where a member of staff is present with an appropriate level 6 qualification (e.g. a qualified teacher), or with Early Years Professional Status, together with a member of staff with a level 3 qualification, providers will be able to apply the same ratio as that operating in maintained nursery classes and schools (1:13). This will end the current divergence at age three between provision in the maintained and non-maintained sectors (The Early Years Foundation Stage Consultation. DfES 2006).

Service:	For young children to learn and play in small groups. Those with longer opening hours may offer childcare for working parents. Some will provide government funded early education.
Staffing:	Mix of paid staff and volunteers – usually parents of children attending. One adult for every eight children and at least half of the adults must be qualified. Same ratios as for day nurseries apply.
Regulated:	Registered and inspected by Ofsted and must meet national standards for childcare and follow curriculum guidance for Foundation Stage if offering funded early education.
National:	Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA)

Childminders

Sector:	Self-employed usually working in their own home.
Scope:	71,500 with 321,200 places (Ofsted, December, 2005).
Hours:	Full-time and part-time places. Times vary, usually 8am to 6pm.
Age-group:	From birth to 8+, school-aged children before and after school and during school holidays depending on parents' needs.
Service:	Childcare and if a member of an approved network can provide government funded early education.
Staffing:	Can care for up to six children under the age of eight, including their own – but only three aged under five. All must complete a basic training course recognised by their LA including child protection and first aid.
Regulated:	Registered with Ofsted and must meet National Daycare and Childminding Standards for Under 8s. Childminders caring only for children aged over 8 do not need to be registered. Those eligible to provide funded early education must meet the requirements of the Foundation Stage curriculum as assessed by Ofsted.
National:	National Childminding Association (NCMA)

7. Health Promotion by Early Years Organisations and Sure Start

7.1 Pre-school Learning Alliance

The Pre-school Learning Alliance has developed a scheme, *Feeding Young Imaginations* in partnership with the British Nutrition Foundation. The scheme aims to ensure that settings and parents are provided with guidance for providing healthy meals for children under five. The scheme will develop guidelines for food provision in pre-school settings that recognise the needs of different age groups and cultures, practical food and nutrition advice and support for pre-school staff and parents and raise awareness of the importance of a healthy start in life. For more information, see: <http://www.pre-school.org.uk/iacontent.php/en/9.phtml>

7.2 National Childminding Association

The National Childminding Association and the British Heart Foundation have joined forces for National Childminding Week 2006 (17-24 June). The Week - entitled *Food, Fitness and Fun* - will raise awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle for children from an early age. Guides will be produced on exercise activities and

healthy eating as well as community activities that childminders can organise for children and their families. For more information, see: <http://www.ncma.org.uk/>

7.3 National Day Nurseries Association

The National Day Nurseries Association is supporting the *Stop The Rot Campaign* by calling on nurseries to help prevent tooth decay in children. NDNA has published materials on healthy eating and oral health:

http://www.ndna.org.uk/document_tree/ViewADocument.asp?ID=65&CatID=35

7.4 Sure Start, Extended Schools and Childcare Group (DfES)

Guidance has been issued that Sure Start Children's Centres must work in partnership with health agencies to improve physical and mental health outcomes for young children and their families and reduce health inequalities. They should work with services to:

- Support parents so that they are confident in helping their children develop physically and mentally;
- Reduce obesity in children by encouraging active play and healthy eating;
- Reduce smoking in pregnancy and smoking around young children;
- Improve mental health and the well-being of young children and
- Reduce accidents and injuries among young children.

Centres should also contribute to the local Child Health Promotion Programme, which is a framework to ensure the promotion of children's health and well-being by sharing information with health professionals and offering premises that families can use.

Local authorities are also required to consider how children's centres can support and promote the Healthy Schools Programme. For example, by co-locating centres with maintained nurseries that have achieved healthy schools status.

For more information about Sure Start, see:

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/about/thesurestartprogramme2/>