

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET: 8 JUNE 2016

EMBEDDING EARLY LEVEL PRACTICE

Report by the Depute Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer Economy and Skills

PURPOSE

- 1 The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet on the progress of embedding and improving early level practice at St Andrew's Primary School during academic year 2015/16 and to seek agreement that this programme is continued in academic years 2016/17 and 2017/18 in St Andrews Primary School and introduced in Netherthird Primary School in academic years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

BACKGROUND

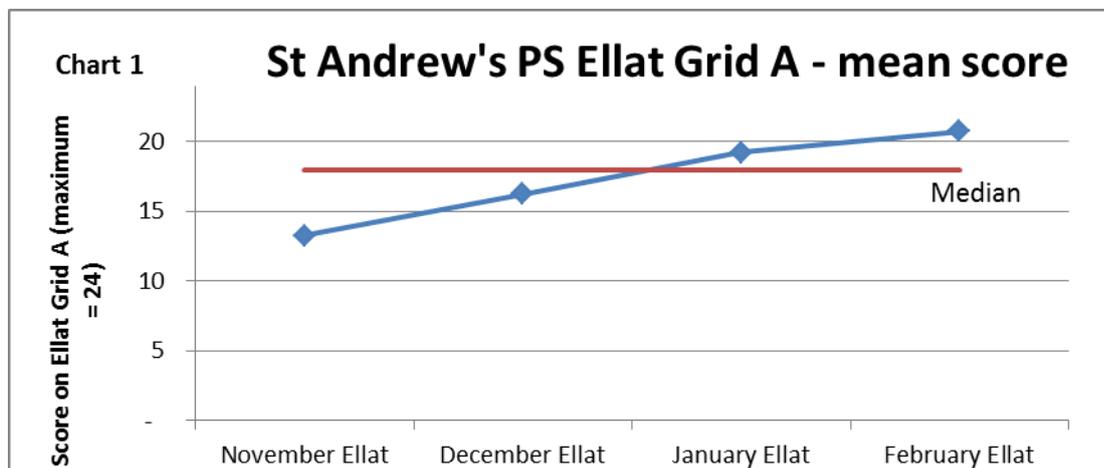
- 2 The Curriculum for Excellence describes national expectations for learning and progression which are set out as curricular levels. The early level covers children from three to six years including those in primary one (or later for some children).
- 3 In 2007, the Scottish Government published the support document *Building the Curriculum 2 – active learning in the early years*. The document clearly states that “developmentally appropriate practice is most conducive to effective learning” and that “approaches to fostering learning need to be flexible to take account the needs of the child and will change as children develop”.
- 4 The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004) was the first major European longitudinal study of a sample of young children's development between the ages of 3 and 7 years. This research was continued into the early years of primary and highlighted that the highest quality and attainment for children happened when early years practitioners worked closely with teachers.
- 5 This move to active learning pedagogy is challenging and requires a shift in thinking about the processes that support learning and the different roles adults have. In addition, the environment plays an important role in curriculum delivery – it can support an active pedagogy and help qualified practitioners deliver learning to meet the individual needs of any class.
- 6 Early learning and childcare practitioners have knowledge of children's development across the curriculum. They are skilled in providing experiences which challenge and motivate young children. Within a primary 1 setting, they can work in partnership with the primary one teachers to plan, implement and evaluate learning experiences across the curriculum.
- 7 By providing a highly skilled practitioner, there are opportunities for all staff to work with families to develop stronger home-school links and to develop innovative ways to engage parents/carers, particularly those with children identified as being at risk of not achieving their developmental milestones and learning outcomes. Staff will also be able to work with outside agencies and partners to provide opportunities for parents/carers to share their child's learning both in school and in the wider community.

CURRENT POSITION

- 8** St Andrews primary school was part of Embedding Early Level Practice (EELP), a project which involves early learning and childcare practitioners and teachers working closely together to support early level learning cross the early childhood centre and primary 1.
- 9** With the support of the Head Teacher, further consideration was given to EELP and the move to develop an innovative primary 1 environment which uses evidence based research on young children's learning to shape the methodology used within the setting.
- 10** During the current academic year, St Andrew's Primary School has moved to a more active learning environment. The area identified to test this practice has been set up to allow team teaching across the day with each child having a base class and identified teacher.
- 11** Inter-disciplinary learning has ensured that children have been afforded the opportunity to consolidate and extend their learning within a purposeful context. Pedagogical support has also been brought in from Strathclyde University to provide in-service training for staff.
- 12** Improvements in attainment have been identified by undertaking regular use of the Early Level Literacy Assessment Tool (ELLAT) with a small group of 17 children who had been identified early on in the school year as being at risk. These children have received three sessions each week with the early learning and childcare practitioner to support their progress and the improvements are set out below.
- 13** Additional benefits have been seen in terms of anecdotal evidence from teachers of increased confidence, readiness to learn, and enthusiasm. These improvements have helped with the children's integration into the larger class as they are more able to participate after having received the additional input. Moreover, the wider class has also benefited, as this has freed up teacher time when the small group interventions are in progress.
- 14** There is a large body of evidence demonstrating the positive impact on attainment and wellbeing outcomes by increasing parental engagement in their child's education. Parents of the children receiving additional support have had opportunities to visit the school and see the changed environment in primary one. Although some parents were initially sceptical about the changes implemented, they have seen the progress their children have made as a result of the input by the early learning and childcare practitioner and use of the space to support active learning.

REVIEW OF DATA AT ST ANDREW'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

- 15** St Andrew's has used the improvement science methodology from the Early Years Collaborative to ensure there was robust planning in place, outcomes were measured, and to undertake the work in a logical and sustained way.
- 16** A group of 17 children were identified as 'at risk' as their score was 18 or less on Grid A of the ELLAT in November 2015. This group was tracked over the following months with monthly documentation of ELLAT scores. All of the children in the small group improved, with 14 out of the 17 scoring above 18 on the ELLAT by February 2016. The mean score of the primary one class, excluding the small group of 17 children, was 22.8 in November 2015 compared to the small group score of 13.2. The mean score of the small group had increased to 20.8 by February 2016, an increase of 57%. The results are shown in Chart 1 below.



- 17 The impact of the small group support was reflected most in the improvements made by the children in the lowest quartile at baseline. The average score of this group increased from 9 to 17.5 compared to the top quartile where the average increase was from 17 to 23.5 (note there is a ceiling effect as the maximum score is 24). The data appears to support the benefit of having an early learning and childcare practitioner in the primary one class providing regular targeted work and who has knowledge of children's development across the curriculum and who is skilled in providing experiences which challenge and motivate young children.

NEXT STEPS

- 18 It is proposed to continue to test this approach over the next 2 years to build on the existing evidence.

The small group of children from primary one will continue to be tracked in primary two to identify whether gains made are sustained.

The learning from this model of practice over the last academic year will support continuous improvement in practice and will focus on engaging parents and involving them in the process at an earlier stage.

The proposal is to spread the learning, this model of practice and early years methodology to a second primary school i.e Netherthird primary school in Cumnock for 2 academic years starting in August 2016.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 19 Lifelong learning is a central theme in the Economy and Skills Delivery Plan 2015-2018. The proposal supports the progress towards raising educational attainment and achievement for all children.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 20 Nil

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 21 It is proposed that the early learning and childcare practitioner seconded to St Andrew's Primary School continues in this project for a further two years to support early level practice and an additional early learning and childcare practitioner is seconded to Netherthird Primary School for two years commencing in 2016-2017.

The recruitment of an early learning and childcare practitioner for the new session in August 2016 with PVG check completed and carried out successfully.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

22 No negative impact

FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

23 The cost to support this model of practice for 2 schools is £58,000 per year i.e. £116,000 for 2 years.	2016/2017	2017/2018
	£	£
Early Learning and Childcare Practitioner (Grade7) x 2	55,000	55,000
Two days in-service provided by Strathclyde University	3,000	3,000
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	58,000	58,000

Funding would be available from earmarked balances brought forward arising from an underspend in 2015/16.

RECOMMENDATIONS

24 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) Agree the proposals to continue the programme of embedding and improving early level practice at St Andrew's Primary School during academic years 2016/17 and 2017/18 and to introduce the programme to Netherthird Primary School in academic years 2016/17 and 2017/18.
- (ii) Otherwise note the contents of the report.

Alex McPhee

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27.05.2016

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004)
2. Building the Curriculum 2 – active learning in the early years (Education Scotland, 2007)
3. Early Level Literacy Assessment Tool (East Ayrshire Council)

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