

## **EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 SEPTEMBER 2016**

### **OXFORDSHIRE EARLY YEARS BOARD ANNUAL REPORT**

#### **Report by the Chair of the Oxfordshire Early Years Board**

#### **THE CURRENT FOCUS FOR THE PARTNERSHIP**

1. The Early Years Board brings together international, national and local early years experts. Current work includes:
  - strategic leadership for early education in Oxfordshire (using data and intelligence to prioritise and influence) across schools, settings (day nurseries and pre-schools) and childminders;
  - systems leadership: supporting outstanding practitioners to lead quality improvement in early education in Oxfordshire, and developing sustainable local networks, or 'communities of practice';
  - narrowing the gap in Oxfordshire between outcomes for economically disadvantaged pupils and their peers at age five.

#### **THE PARTNERSHIP'S KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE LAST YEAR**

2. Key achievements include:
  - the engagement of key national figures in helping to shape early education in Oxfordshire: Kathy Sylva and Sandra Mathers (Oxford University), Chris Pascal and Tony Bertram (Centre for Research in Early Childhood), Neil Leitch (Chief Executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance), Jan Dubiel (National Director Early Excellence) and Beatrice Merrick (Chief Executive Early Education);
  - close joint working between Oxfordshire's Early Years Teaching Schools and the council's Early Years Team;
  - engagement with Oxfordshire's Professional Lead for Health Visiting, who now sits on the Board, enabling high level discussion on the effectiveness of integrated assessment of children at age two;
  - the election of the Chair of the Early Years Board (Sarah Steel, Managing Director Old Station Nurseries). Sarah has recently been listed in Nursery Management Today Magazine's 'Top 10 Most Influential' list for the Early Years sector in the UK in recognition of her work for the National Day Nurseries Association and within both Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire local authorities;
  - the development of a systems leadership approach to early education in Oxfordshire, with outstanding practitioners working with other schools and

settings to improve quality. A launch event was hosted on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015 attended by 100 delegates. There are currently two cohorts of learners on 'systems leadership' training, including leaders from schools, children's centres, settings and childminders. A three year evaluation has been commissioned from Kathy Sylva and Sandra Mathers at Oxford University, to capture impact and what works well;

- high level scrutiny of current early years assessment arrangements. This resulted in a decision to highly recommend that all schools in the county with a reception class continue to assess children's attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage (at age 5) in 2016/17 even though this assessment ceases to be a statutory requirement on schools in July 2016;
- the commissioning of phonological awareness training in the north, central and south of the county in response to data concerns and challenge by Ofsted.

### **THE AIMS OF THE PARTNERSHIP IN THE YEAR AHEAD**

3. The Early Years Board aims to:

- continue to offer national expertise to help to steer policy for early education in Oxfordshire;
- embed the systems leadership approach described above;
- address the large attainment gap in Oxfordshire between economically disadvantaged children and their peers, for example through the 'School Readiness Steering Group';
- advise on preparations for delivery of the 30 hours childcare offer in Oxfordshire.

### **THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE PARTNERSHIP AND HOW THESE WILL BE ADDRESSED GOING FORWARD**

4. Current challenges include:

- implementation of the 30 hours childcare offer in Oxfordshire from September 2017
- financial viability of providers in the private and voluntary sectors
- demands on outstanding professionals and reliance on their 'professional generosity' to support other providers in their improvement journey
- uncertainty around future funding through the Dedicated Schools Grant

5. The September Board meeting includes agenda items addressing these challenges.

**SARAH STEEL**  
**Chair of the Oxfordshire Early Years Board**

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