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Flying Start – Annex

Quality Childcare Guidance

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1. About this Guidance

Flying Start is the Welsh Government targeted Early Years programme for families with children under 4 years of age in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales.

The core elements of the programme are drawn from a range of options that have been shown to influence positive outcomes for children and their families. These include:

- Free quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds;
- An enhanced Health Visiting service;
- Access to Parenting Programmes; and
- Early Language Development

This guidance should be read in conjunction with Welsh Government guidance relating to Flying Start, including the Flying Start Strategic Guidance and other specific guidance relating to the programme's core elements. These can be found at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/parenting/help/flyingstart/?lang=en>

Audience

The guidance set out in this Annex is intended for those who have a responsibility for planning and managing childcare for children receiving Flying Start support.

1. Introduction

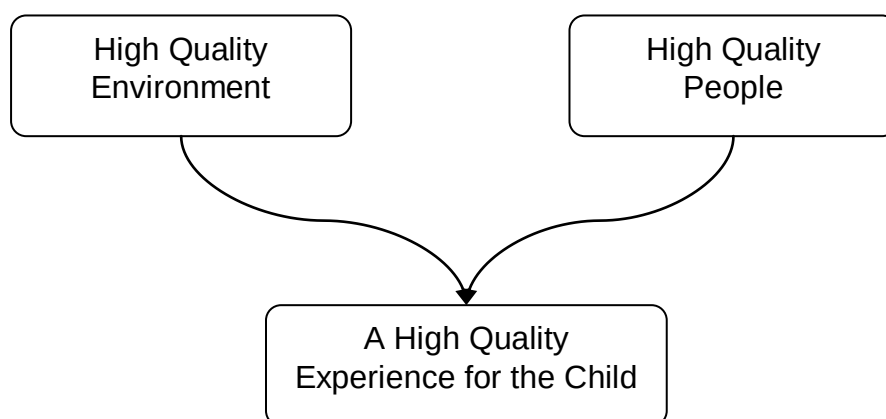
The provision of high quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds is integral to the Flying Start programme. Quality childcare contributes to the acquisition of skills such as socialisation and the ability to play and concentrate. These are crucial, not only to a child's subsequent ability to learn, but also to participate effectively in groups, whether in the classroom, the labour market or society.

Research suggests that quality early years care leads to improvements in children's development in later years, such as enhanced language skills; better educational performance in mathematics and reading; and a reduction in aggressive behaviour. Children who attend quality early years settings are more independent, concentrate on their play for longer and, on entry to school, are more co-operative and better prepared for the challenges they meet [Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) (2003); Schweinhart et al (1993), Love et al (2005)]. One of the findings of the EPPE study is that high quality pre-school care is linked to better intellectual attainment and improved social relationships. Research has also found that full-time attendance leads to no better gains for children than part-time attendance (Sylva et al, 2004).

A focus on high quality provision should therefore underpin all aspects of Flying Start childcare. Flying Start childcare should not only aim to be of the highest quality, but should strive to be the benchmark for quality childcare throughout Wales.

There are 3 key measures of quality in a successful Flying Start childcare setting:

- I. A high quality environment;
- II. High quality people; and
- III. A high quality experience for the child.



The combination of high quality people providing care in a high quality environment will lead to a high quality experience for the child. The experience will help provide the foundations on which all future development will be built.

Flying Start is based on the following expectations:

- a) Staff working with young children should be well trained and well qualified; have an understanding of how children develop and learn; and be sensitive and responsive to their needs and feelings.
- b) The role of the adult within the setting is to support and facilitate learning, rather than to direct it.
- c) Children need a caring, stimulating environment. The environment will be both indoors and outdoors; safe and secure, whilst being challenging; where children can be happy and feel valued as individuals.
- d) Children should learn through first-hand, play-based experiences and discovery, where experimentation and independence should be promoted.
- e) The learning programme for children under the age of three years should focus on their interests and needs; provide opportunities for them to develop their confidence and self esteem; and develop the early skills, knowledge and concepts appropriate to their stage of development.
- f) The opportunities provided should build on what children have experienced in the home and while attending early activity such as Parent and Toddlers groups or 'Ti a Fi'. There should be a clear link with early language development, play and the Foundation Phase.
- g) Robust assessment through observation of children's daily activities should be used to support children's progress and development.
- h) An assessment tool should be used to identify children with additional learning needs at an early stage and to inform the various professionals as required.
- i) Real partnerships must be developed between parents¹ and staff. Parents should be included in all discussions about their child and be guided in ways to support their child's development outside of the setting.
- j) Settings should develop close links with agencies that support children and their families. Information should be shared and the agencies' support or advice sought as necessary.
- k) A range of strategies must be in place to ensure smooth transition between different environments, particularly the transition from home to Flying Start, and then on to the Foundation Phase.

¹ For parents read parents or carers

I. A high quality environment

The standard of the physical environment has an impact on the quality of childcare provision. Accommodation and resources for Flying Start settings should be of the highest standard, to ensure the best learning environment for children, appropriate teaching spaces for staff and a place where parents feel comfortable and welcomed. Poor facilities can restrict children's experiences which could have an adverse effect on their physical and cognitive development.

Children require a safe and secure outdoor space which is interesting and easily accessible. The outdoors is an ideal area for active learning; encouraging appropriate risk taking; learning at first hand about the weather, nature and where large scale and messy activities are possible. Research suggests that the outdoor environment influences children's attitudes and behaviour. The level of care shown in the environment's management also gives powerful messages to both children and adults about the way they are valued by the setting. Several organisations provide information on providing stimulating play environments for children. These include, [Play Wales](#), [Ground Work Wales](#) and [Learning Through Landscapes](#) ..

Sufficient space, both indoors and outdoors, must be available to create large and small play areas where children can, for example, use both large and small construction materials. Areas are required for role play, experimenting and investigating, art and craft activities and for sharing books. Withdrawal areas should also be provided for individual children and for small groups. There should also be quiet areas where children can reflect and rest.

Appropriate space should be available to store work in progress or completed activities. Easy-access storage areas should also be provided, so as to encourage children to select materials and equipment which supports their development as autonomous learners.

Staff will also need quiet areas which allow them to work with parents or to have confidential discussions when necessary.

For the healthy development of children it is important to provide an environment in which good health is seen as a positive attribute, and in which healthy attitudes and behaviours are developed. Pre-school settings are being encouraged to work, with local support, towards the [Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme National Award Criteria](#). This takes a whole setting approach to a range of health issues and is assessed locally.

Children need time to settle into a new environment, to develop relationships with staff and peers and to adjust to new routines. Children need time to observe and to handle familiar materials that they can return to on a daily basis. Staff should support this 'settling in' stage and not overwhelm children with too many activities and resources.

It may be necessary to modify or adapt accommodation and resources to ensure that all children can access the provision, regardless of their need or disability.

Flying start childcare delivery models must meet locally identified needs. Local authorities have the flexibility and local discretion to decide what type of delivery to adopt. These may include:

- Mixed settings (Flying Start and non-Flying Start children)
- Flying Start only settings
- Maintained schools
- Mixed economy through voluntary/ community/ independent settings.

Local authorities need to follow their own procurement rules when formulating Service Level Agreements, which must be verified by their own legal services department (please refer to 'Third Party Relationships and Expenditure' in the Annex , Flying Start Financial Management).

All Flying Start settings must be registered with CSSIW and must meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Child care, revised in March 2012. It must be emphasised that Flying Start settings are expected to be of a higher quality than most childcare provision and should therefore be of a higher standard than the NMS.

II. High Quality People

Staff appointed to work in Flying Start childcare settings must be of the highest calibre in order to deliver high quality provision. Staff should be responsive, affectionate and readily available, whilst being committed to their work with children. To enhance children's development, staff should be well-trained. Staff development should ensure continuity, stability and also improve quality.

The EPPE (2003) study found that the higher the staff qualifications, particularly the leader/manager, the greater the progress made by the children.

Continuity of staff is also important. Children can show signs of increased aggression or social withdrawal when their carers are constantly changing. Children learning to communicate will often use idiosyncratic speech or gestures. A caregiver who is familiar with the child is likely to learn such idiosyncrasies and be able to respond, where as a new caregiver is more likely to fail to understand (Melhuish, 1991). It is therefore good practice for local authorities to introduce strategies that will enhance continuity of staffing within Flying Start.

When discussing practice, Selleck and Griffin (1996) suggest that working with and meeting the needs of the under-3s and their families is a rewarding yet demanding task which can be emotionally and physically draining. Staff need time to reflect on their practice and to share concerns with colleagues. Sensitive supervision, in-service training and the formation of networks can help to meet this need.

Staff working in Flying Start settings must have experience of working with young children and must have the qualifications outlined within the Care Council for Wales's List of Required Qualifications to work within the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Wales. Section 5 within the list specifically identifies the qualifications required to work within Flying Start. It sets out the current required qualifications, past qualifications which are accepted and suggested work-based

qualifications for career progression and continuing professional development (CPD). The list can be accessed at the following link:

<http://www.ccwales.org.uk/qualifications/>

Where staff do not have the required qualification, the Flying Start Plan must show how and by when staff will be trained to the required standard. This will need to be monitored by the Early Years Advisor/Advisory Teacher to ensure that progress is on schedule and qualifications are completed within the agreed timeframe.

The adult:child ratio at Flying Start settings is the same as other childcare settings. Full details of the minimum adult:child ratios can be found in the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child care - March 2012](#).

Over and above the minimum staffing ratios, additional trained and qualified staff should also be employed to provide cover to allow the leader/manager to perform additional duties, such as to meet regularly with parents, undertake home visits and to attend meetings. This cover should be for a minimum of three sessions per month.

Volunteers **cannot** be counted within the number of adults as part of the minimum adult:child ratio within a Flying Start setting.

All childcare staff must undertake at least five days' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training per year, as designated by the Early Years Advisor/Advisory Teacher. This training is in addition to any training requirements outlined in the NMS. Training should meet the needs of individual staff members and ensure that all staff have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding required for the job. The cost of backfilling during training should be factored into the setting's Flying Start budget.

The Flying Start CPD Framework will consolidate the Flying Start Early Years and childcare practitioners' existing skills and develops the specialist skills staff need to work in a Flying Start early years setting. The Framework describes and outlines the minimum arrangements for the continuing professional education and learning of Flying Start staff after initial qualification. The Framework consolidates and enhances the standard of Early Years practice and promotes professionalism.

The Care Council for Wales has also developed a toolkit that can be used to support Continuing Professional Development: [CPD toolkit for Social Care, Early Years and Child Care Managers and Workers](#).

III. A high quality experience for the child

Children will move directly into the Foundation Phase at the end of their period in Flying Start childcare. Flying Start childcare should therefore reflect a similar philosophy and pedagogy to the Foundation Phase, in order to provide a smooth transition. Flying Start staff need to build strong links with local Foundation Phase providers to ensure a smooth transition for each child. The curriculum and outcomes for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales in the Foundation Phase can be found on the Welsh Government website: [Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales](#) Staff, in partnership with parents, will support children's:

- personal and social development;
- emotional development;
- moral and spiritual development;
- cognitive development;
- physical development; and
- linguistic development and communication skills.

It must be remembered that children attending Flying Start settings will be at a very early stage in this process.

Flexible pedagogical frameworks that focus on process and developmental goals, rather than on subject outcomes, form the most appropriate learning programmes for this age group. Practitioners and parents should develop a variety of stimulating activities and experiences which will excite and interest children, whilst motivating their learning.

Through increased control of oracy (and later, literacy), children acquire ways to access knowledge and also the tools with which to think and learn (Riley, 1999). Children need language for developing thinking, and the more thinking they are doing the more their language will develop (Siraj-Blatchford, 2005). A high quality Flying Start childcare setting will allow children to develop and use their oracy skills. This will benefit the child's literacy and learning skills from three years old onwards, particularly through first-hand sensory experiences, for example, by reading, singing, using role-play and the outdoor environment to provide children with rich and practical first-hand learning experiences (Estyn, 2011).

It is important to remember that the early years of a child's life are important in their own right and not just as preparation for formal education and adulthood. Each child enters a setting as an individual with their own personal experiences in life and will be at their own unique stage of development. A child should not, therefore, be categorised by their age. Instead, what the child knows and can do should be the starting point for their learning.

This, alongside an assessment of a child's interests and needs should be the starting point for staff when planning experiences and activities. Health visitors should be involved in the process and the information they hold about the child's development should be fully utilised. Planning should be sufficiently flexible to

allow staff to adapt and re-structure plans as a result of on-going observation during their daily activities.

Sensitive and robust assessment of children entering Flying Start childcare provides an opportunity to identify additional support and interventions required to help meet individual needs. All Flying Start children must be assessed using a Welsh Government approved assessment tool, currently the Schedule of Growing Skills (SoGS).

SoGS provides a standardised tool for development screening and encourages consistency in assessing the development of the pre-school child. It provides a reliable snapshot of a child's development across nine key areas, including physical skills, cognitive development, speech and language, and social interaction. The tool enables the health visitor to assess, score and offer feedback in about 30 minutes. Its simple scoring system specifies whether a child needs further monitoring, or perhaps a referral to a specialist.

All Flying Start children must be assessed at the age of 2. The SoGS assessment will form the basis of an individual Child Development Plan. Flying Start health visitors will carry out these assessments and share the results with the childcare setting. Where a child is identified as having additional needs, a joint plan to address those needs will be put into place and will be taken forward either jointly or separately (depending on the need identified) by both the Health visitor and / or the childcare setting.

A second assessment of the child will be completed at age 3. The health visitor should either conduct or at least record this second assessment. The assessment will help the Flying Start setting to identify ongoing needs, inform the transition to the Foundation Phase and provide evidence of the child's progress. All staff within settings should be involved with the completion of the individual Child Development Plan and on-going assessment.

Parents should be kept fully informed about the outcomes of the SoGS assessments. It is important that parents are involved in the planning of activities for their children; that they are advised on how to support their child's learning within the home environment; are encouraged to involve additional professionals, where their child is identified as having additional learning needs; and are encouraged to share information when their child transfers to the Foundation Phase.

Play is crucial to the way children become self-aware and the way in which they learn the rules of social behaviour. Play is also fundamental to intellectual development. Play supports children in 'learning how to learn' and in acquiring high aspirations, a positive self image and a disposition to learning. Staff in Flying Start settings will, therefore, need to have a good understanding about the way children develop and learn and be able to facilitate learning through good quality, play-based activities.

3. Support for achieving high quality

The local authority must appoint an Early Years Advisor or Advisory Teacher. The Advisor/Teacher's main function will be to improve the quality of Flying Start childcare settings and to support Flying Start staff within their area.

The Advisor/Teacher must have an understanding of the different needs and stages of development of young children, particularly the differences between a 2 year old and a 3 year old child. The Advisor/Teacher will promote good practice among Flying Start staff so that the children are adequately prepared to enter the Foundation Stage.

The Advisor/Teacher must have experience of working in the sector, and be able to develop and deliver training to childcare professionals. The Advisor/Teacher will visit each Flying Start setting at least once a month to provide support and advice to the staff. The Advisor/Teacher will also agree a delivery plan with each Flying Start setting.

All Flying Start settings are expected to have a Quality Assurance system in place. Quality Assurance is a specific type of quality improvement which provides recognition that a setting has made real progress against a set of agreed standards and to an accredited level. This requires an independent review of the setting's quality by a trained professional, backed up by procedures to ensure consistency, equality and objectivity. Many childcare sector organisations have their own Quality Assurance scheme, and usually provide support in implementing the scheme.

It is recommended that each childcare setting is a member of one of the four main childcare umbrella organisations in Wales. These are the National Day Nurseries Association (Wales); Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WPPA); Mudiad Meithrin; and the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) (previously called the National Childminders' Association (NCMA) Wales). These organisations have a great deal of experience and offer benefits such as:

- Legal advice and support;
- A Quality Assurance Scheme;
- Up-to-date information on childcare issues;
- Advice on setting up and running a Welsh-medium childcare setting;
- Business support and provision of key business functions, such as payroll and invoicing;
- Staff training and CPD;
- Discounts on services such as insurance; and
- Publication of essential business documentation.

4. The number and length of sessions

Flying Start childcare will focus on improving the outcomes for young children in preparation for school and in the longer term. Children can access this provision from the beginning of the term following their second birthday to the end of the term in which they celebrate their third birthday.

The core Flying Start childcare offer is made available to parents of all eligible 2-3 year olds for 12 ½ hours per week, 39 weeks of the year. In addition, there should be a minimum of 15 sessions of flexible childcare and/or play provided for the child or family during the school holidays.

Sessions should be for 2 ½ hours per day, 5 days a week, in order that the child gets the maximum benefit from the programme. However, the Flying Start setting has some flexibility in how the 5 sessions are split across the week, where a parent/carer requests a different arrangement, such as when the parent/carer attends a training course or goes to work. Both the Flying Start setting and the family must agree on this arrangement.

A flexible approach to the number of sessions attended is often required to cater for parents' needs. For example, if a parent decides to bring the child for three sessions only, then this should be accommodated. However, providers should encourage parents to take up their full entitlement where possible.

The Flying Start plans should set out arrangements for managing childcare places with a view to maximising the take up of places, as well as ensuring value for money in terms of re-allocation. Further guidance on re-allocation can be found in Annex 9: Flying Start Performance Data Monitoring.

5. Equality, inclusion and additional learning needs

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that all children have the right to high quality care that lays firm foundations for the rest of their lives and maximises their innate ability. The convention emphasises the need to respect a child's identity alongside their family traditions by recognising their distinct culture and valuing the language of the home.

All children and their parents should be treated as equal. They must feel included regardless of race, gender, culture, religion, disability or lifestyle and be fully involved in the life and work of the setting. The early detection of additional learning needs is essential if appropriate support is to be provided, as preventative intervention is more effective than support provided later.

Every effort should be made to ensure that all parents with children of appropriate age within the area are offered, and encouraged to take advantage of, the Flying Start provision available for their children. This will support the early identification of needs and, where necessary, ensure that support can be provided as early as possible.

'The Early Years Transition and Special Educational Needs' (EYTSEN) study (Sammons et al, 2003) highlights the benefit of good quality early years provision for children who have, or are at risk of developing, additional learning needs. EYTSEN found that for cognitive outcomes, children with multiple disadvantages (in terms of child, family and home environment characteristics) were more likely to be identified as at risk of developing additional learning needs. The research suggests that high quality provision may help to reduce the incidence of additional needs (both cognitive and social/behavioural), especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of young children. The study also found that children who did not have English (or Welsh) as a first language were more likely to be at risk when they entered pre-school, but that they caught up when they were older, probably as their language ability improved. Children who tended to stay at home and did not attend early education were found to be particularly vulnerable. It was suggested that encouraging these children to attend provision such as Flying Start may help to improve their educational outcomes.

Decisions about the most appropriate intervention programmes for these children should be taken by an interagency panel of experts, set up by the local authority, to ensure that appropriate support is provided. Parents and Flying Start staff should be fully involved at all stages of this process.

In some instances it may be necessary to adapt the accommodation and provide specific resources and equipment to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, can access the Flying Start provision.

6. Welsh language provision

Childcare Sufficiency Assessments are carried out by local authorities to identify gaps in provision, including gaps in Welsh language childcare provision. Local authorities have a duty to ensure the provision of sufficient Welsh-medium childcare, including Flying Start childcare, where demand exists, as stipulated in the Childcare Act 2006.

Where possible, children in Flying Start areas must be given the option of attending a childcare setting which offers Welsh language provision. As part of the Flying Start Performance Data Monitoring, local authorities must record the number of children whose parents have specifically requested Welsh-medium childcare. The number of these requests which lead to an offer in their preferred language must also be recorded.

Each local authority is required to complete a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), which details how the local authority aims to achieve the Welsh Government's outcomes and targets outlined in the [Welsh Medium Education Strategy \(WMES\)](#). The local authority must consider their WESP targets when planning Flying Start childcare.

7. Involvement of parents

Staff need to develop close partnerships with parents and share information about their child in order for them to gain maximum benefits from the provision. Parental involvement in their child's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood (DCSF, 2008). Other agencies should also contribute and share relevant information that will enable all partners to cater for each child according to his/her needs.

The Evaluation of Flying Start (2011), which focused on families with babies aged 7-20 months, found that 5% of parents did not attend parenting groups as they were "too shy/unconfident" and 3% did not attend because they "wouldn't know anybody else there". This underlines the need for staff sensitivity, particularly when dealing with the most disadvantaged groups, such as teen parents, lone parents and workless households. Flying Start must ensure that these groups do not feel overwhelmed, so that the child receives the full benefit of the scheme.

The EPPE (2003) research found that the quality of the home learning environment has an impact on children's development. It was found that although there was a link between parents' social class and levels of education and children's outcomes, what parents do with their children is more important than who they are. The research found that where parents undertake activities such as reading to their children; teaching their children songs and rhymes; painting and drawing; playing with letters and numbers; and providing opportunities for them to play with peers, it helped promote their children's intellectual and social development. Staff in Flying Start settings should, therefore, be proactive in helping parents to support their children's development and learning at home.

Staff should be proactive in contacting families with children who are eligible to attend Flying Start childcare, to secure parents' support and children's attendance at the settings. Tenacity and initiative may be needed to engage some parents, especially from 'hard-to-reach' groups, so that their children receive their full allocation of childcare. Persistent shortfalls may be filled by flexible arrangements or outreach arrangements. Each local authority needs to have policies in place to encourage parents towards maximum take up, such as taster sessions before the entitlement period begins.

Parents must be included in discussions about their child and be guided in ways to support their child's development plan, as well as their wellbeing and development outside of the setting.

Parents of children who attend Flying Start settings need encouragement to become fully involved in their children's activities and in the assessment of their progress. Staff should welcome parents into the settings and show them that they are valued as the children's first educators and carers.

Ensuring that parents are aware of the aims of the setting and allowing them to see how practitioners relate to such young children can build parents' confidence and

could renew their interest in learning. Parents should also be encouraged to contribute as much as possible to the life and work of the setting.

Flying Start childcare should be signposted to eligible parents by the Flying Start health visitor at the appropriate time. Parents should be involved in the choice of the type of setting their child attends.

Settings should be within “pram pushing” distance of the children’s home, where possible. For practical purposes this is 10-15 minutes maximum.

8. Summary

Positive outcomes for the child are a fundamental principle of Flying Start. As this document has explained, extensive research shows that high quality childcare helps to deliver positive outcomes. The most important aspect of the free childcare offer for 2 to 3 year old children is that the childcare provided must be of the highest quality possible. A high quality childcare environment, coupled with high quality people, will provide a high quality experience for the child and a flying start in life.

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