

PROPOSAL TO LOWER THE AGE RANGE FOR THREE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Committee name	Children, Families and Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Claire Fry, Assistant Director, Child and Family Support Services
Papers with report	NIL
Ward	Colham and Cowley, Eastcote, South Ruislip, and Wood End.

HEADLINES

This report outlines the proposal and statutory public consultation to lower the school age at three community schools (Colham Manor Primary School, Field End Infants School and Minet Infant and Nursery School) to enable them to provide funded childcare places for 2-year-olds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the report; and**
- 2. Submit any comments to Cabinet, or delegate comments to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chair, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead**

Note: Cabinet will be making a decision on this matter at its meeting on 12 December 2024

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Early Years Childcare Entitlements for 2 year olds

1. Previously, early years childcare has been universally funded for all 3 and 4 year olds, for 15 hours a week, 38 weeks a year. This was subsequently extended to 30 hours funded childcare for children whose parents were working, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria for the additional hours.
2. Children aged 2 years, who may be disadvantaged, are also able to access 15 hours of funded early years childcare (38 weeks per year) from the term after their second birthday, if they meet any of the following criteria:
 - Parents are in receipt of an eligible benefit e.g. Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance;
 - Are looked after by a local authority;
 - Have an Education, Health and Care Plan;
 - Get Disability Living Allowance;
 - Have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order.

(Full eligibility criteria can be found at: [Help paying for childcare: Free education and childcare for 2-year-olds if you claim certain benefits - GOV.UK](#))

3. In April 2024, the Early Years Entitlements were expanded with the principal aim of supporting more parents to return to work. The new entitlement often referred to as the 'working parent' entitlement was introduced, providing 15 hours of funded childcare per week for 38 weeks per year, for 2-year-olds whose parents are working (subject to meeting the eligibility criteria), thereby increasing the number of 2-year-olds eligible for funded childcare.
4. This entitlement is set to rise from 15 to 30 hours of funded childcare for 2-year-old children with eligible working parents from September 2025. At the same time the 'working parent' entitlement for children aged 9-23 months will also be increased from 15 to 30 hours.

Sufficiency of Childcare

5. The Childcare Act 2006 places a legal duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare (so far as is reasonably practicable) for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment.
6. In Hillingdon, the childcare market is diverse; childcare is provided by childminders, group care providers such as day nurseries and playgroups and school based providers. The introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage, changes to the registration and inspection arrangements for childcare, and the expansion of the early years entitlements has seen the market change significantly over time. The number of sessional care providers, such as playgroups has significantly reduced, and in recent years there has also been a decline in the number of childminders. However, group care provision remains relatively stable, supporting sufficiency across the early years age ranges.
7. Estimates provided by the DfE indicated that the increase in the number of 2-year-olds eligible to receive funded childcare from April 2024, would mean that a further 955 children would be using funded childcare hours each term. In Hillingdon, the actual number of additional children using funded hours has been 1,059 in the summer term and 1,121 in the autumn term.
8. To date, the local childcare market has been able to provide sufficient places for children eligible for the 'working parents' entitlement, when considering the borough as whole. However, DfE projections anticipate a lack of childcare in some wards for children to access funded early years childcare, and it is anticipated that this may be exacerbated with the expansion in hours from September 2025.
9. It is also of note that the number of 'disadvantaged' 2-year-olds accessing funded childcare appears to have reduced. This may be due to families exercising parental choice, as early years childcare is non-statutory and they may prefer to keep their children at home or for them to be cared for by family members. Alternatively, it may be that some families are eligible for funded childcare under both schemes and are utilising the 'working parent' entitlement in anticipation of the increase in hours in the future.
10. Officers continue to closely monitor the uptake of places for 'disadvantaged' 2-year-olds to understand the impact of the new entitlements on the availability of childcare places for this cohort.
11. Schools are well placed to support families to access childcare; at least 2 schools already host private childcare providers on site, thus enabling families to readily access childcare. However, it may also be prudent for some schools to directly deliver childcare to a younger cohort of children, and the local authority is disposed to support this for 2-year-olds in areas where analysis of supply and demand shows this is needed.
12. It is important to remember that schools would be required to meet the differing requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage for a younger cohort. Of particular note are the higher adult-child ratios (1:5), staff qualifications and experience, the appropriateness of the environment (both indoors and outdoors) including provision for sleep and toileting, and a curriculum that meets the needs and responds to the interests of young children.

13. Where schools have expressed an interest in supporting younger children, they are being supported by the Early Years Quality Team to ensure that they understand and are able to meet the needs of 2 year olds and have the necessary space and business plans in place to do so well and in a sustainable way.
14. Officers have liaised with colleagues in the Education Improvement and Partnership service and Schools Finance to ensure that there are no current concerns that may mean the proposed change would have a negative impact on the school.
15. Officers have also liaised with colleagues in School Place Planning to ensure that is no identified adverse impact for school places for the existing cohorts, should the school use existing space to develop and extend their provision to support 2-year-olds.
16. It should also be noted that the process for academies differs from that for maintained schools. Academy Trusts are responsible for conducting their own consultation process and reporting the outcome; 2 schools in the north of the borough completed this process in the summer term and commenced taking 2 year olds with effect from September 2024.

PERFORMANCE DATA

17. In reviewing sufficiency in areas where schools have expressed an interest in taking 2 year olds, officers have considered supply and demand data from the DfE, HMRC data regarding the validation of eligibility codes for 'working parents' and DWP data regarding eligibility for 'disadvantaged' 2 year olds.

Colham Manor Primary School

18. There is a lack of childcare in Colham and Cowley Ward for both elements of the early years' entitlements for two-year-olds.
19. 54 two-year-olds in Colham and Cowley Ward are eligible for the disadvantaged two-year-old entitlement but only 27 children are accessing a place, suggesting that current childcare provision may not be sufficient to meet parental demand.
20. Data on the eligibility codes issued and validated in the area around Colham Manor Primary School, for the 'working parents' entitlement' suggests that there is unmet need for funded childcare places for working parents. Colham and Cowley Ward, is in the lower half of wards in the borough (16 out of 21) for the percentage of eligibility codes issued that have been validated. This suggests that parents who are eligible are struggling to find a funded childcare place.

Field End Infant School

21. In the area around Field End Infant School, there is unmet need for childcare places for two-year-olds.
22. 60 families in Eastcote and South Ruislip Wards are eligible for the entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds but only 22 children are accessing a place. This suggests that current childcare provision may not be sufficient to meet parental demand.
23. Data on the eligibility codes issued and validated for the 'working parents' entitlement in the area around Field End Infant School suggests that there is unmet need for funded childcare places for working parents. Eastcote and South Ruislip wards have the highest number of parents with an eligibility code for the working parents' entitlement for two-year-olds. However, Eastcote ward has one of the lowest percentages of eligibility codes that have been validated (17 out of 21). This suggests that parents who are eligible may be struggling to find a funded childcare place.

Minet Infant and Nursery School

24. In the area around Minet Infant and Nursery School, there is unmet need for childcare places for two-year-olds principally for the 'disadvantaged' entitlement.
25. 60 two-year-olds in Wood End Ward are eligible for the entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds but only 20 eligible children are accessing a place. This suggests that there may be a lack of sufficient childcare provision to meet parental demand.

RESIDENT BENEFIT AND CONSULTATION

26. Developing provision for 2-year-old children in schools will support the childcare market in the named wards where data suggests there is currently or likely to be insufficiency of places as a result of the expanded Early Years Entitlements. Creation of additional sessional care places will also support choice in the market and enable parents to more readily access childcare where best suits them.
27. Whilst it is recognised that there may be concerns regarding the sustainability of existing childcare providers in the proximity of these schools, should they start to take 2-year-olds, it is important to note that the number of places that will be developed is relatively small (approximately 20 per school). Furthermore, schools will be offering childcare during school term time, which is unlikely to meet the needs of all working parents, but will support 'disadvantaged' 2-year olds.
28. Parents may also choose to use both school based provision alongside local childminders and nurseries to access the childcare support as best meets their needs, as is already the case for many 3 and 4 year olds.
29. A public consultation on the proposal was held from 25 September to 25 October 2024, for each of the named schools, and statutory notices were published and posted outside each school. Schools promoted the consultation to local parents and all schools and childcare providers in the borough were also notified.
30. The number of responses received are as follows:
 - Colham Manor Primary School - 121
 - Field End Infant School – 41
 - Minet Infant and Nursery School – 50These were from parents, childcare providers, school and local residents, some of whom have raised concerns regarding increased traffic and footfall in the area which schools may need to take steps to address should the proposal go ahead.
31. At the time of writing, officers are reviewing the responses to determine the recommendations to put forward to Cabinet in December.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

32. There are no anticipated financial implications for the local authority for this proposal. Prior to the commencement of the process schools have been required to develop financial projections of the costs and income resulting from the proposed change, to demonstrate that they understand the costs associated with providing places for 2-year-olds.
33. Schools will be able to claim Early Years DSG Funding for eligible 2-year-old children attending the nursery and will be required to adhere to the same funding process as existing childcare providers, as per the Hillingdon Early Years Funding Code of Practice.
34. Schools will also be eligible to apply for Capital Funding to help develop places, as will existing Childcare Providers as part of the DfE Early Years Capital Funding passported to the Council to support the development of places.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Childcare Act 2006

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.