Breaking the link between disadvantage and low achievement in the early years

Everyone’s business
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The Government is committed to making Britain a fairer society, and this needs to be a reality from the earliest years of a child’s life. Every child deserves the best possible start. A positive start is crucial for later success; a springboard not only for academic achievement but also for a happy, healthy and more prosperous life.

Last year we published evidence on the link between disadvantage and low achievement. This document forms part of the same series about how those working with children, young people and families can contribute to breaking this link, and help to make our country the best place to grow up – for all children. There is compelling evidence that we have the best opportunity of increasing the life chances of our most vulnerable children, if we identify potential issues as early as possible.

Over the past twelve years the lives of young children have been transformed. We have tackled a legacy of underinvestment in the early years, ensuring that all parents have the freedom to make choices that support their child’s development and that families with young children have access to the high quality services they need. We have established over 3500 Sure Start Children’s Centres, free early learning and care for all young children, and support for a better trained and a better qualified workforce.

The improvements we have seen in young children’s outcomes are a huge credit to the commitment of those working in children’s centres, schools and other early years settings, supported by their local authority and wider Children’s Trust partners. There are examples of excellent practice in early years services in all areas of the country, including examples of where high quality leadership and vision is making a difference. This document contains some examples of this; the kind of practice we need to ensure excellent services are a reality for all children.

I want a culture in which children have high expectations for themselves and their families and practitioners have high aspirations for them. We are making progress, but we have more to do to ensure that our society is one where all children can realise their full potential.

Dawn Primarolo
Minister for Children, Young People and Families
This document is intended for leaders of early years services in local authorities, Sure Start Children’s Centres, schools and other settings. The document aims to celebrate progress so far, to promote the importance of narrowing the achievement gap in the early years and to offer some practical examples for leaders of what to do next.

The Children’s Plan set out our commitment to make England the best place for children to grow up. Achieving this commitment involves giving all children the best possible start in life. Section 1 sets out the importance of a good start and the investment we have made in the early years.

In order to make a significant difference, we need to ensure that we get the best value from this sustained investment. This means reforming services to ensure that they are having a real impact on children at risk of falling behind. Section 2 sets out our reforms of these services.

As leaders of services you need to have confidence that you are putting your efforts and resources in the right place – where they are needed, and where they will have an impact. Section 3 sets out the importance of using data and evidence to tackle gaps in young children’s achievement, and some examples of effective approaches. This includes information on national patterns that you can use to inform your local narrowing the gap strategy.

Parents are a child’s first and most important educator. In order to make the most significant and sustained difference to young children’s outcomes, you will need to put families at the heart of your strategy and consider how your services impact on parenting and the learning environment at home. Section 4 sets out what effective engagement with families looks like and provides ideas for you to try in your area.

In order to break the link between disadvantage and underachievement, we need to identify early reasons why children may be falling behind. As a result you will identify some children that need additional support in order to make good progress. Section 5 sets out examples of effective universal and targeted approaches to ensuring that no child is left behind.

We hope this document stimulates ideas for what you could do in your local area or organisation to help break the link in the early years.
Section 1:
The early years of life are crucial for later success

Breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment – everyone’s business (March 2009) was the first in a series of documents looking at how to narrow gaps in achievement so that all children and young people achieve their potential. This section describes the importance of a good start in life, particularly for children at risk of falling behind.

The importance of a good start

A positive start in life has a significant and lasting impact: 94 per cent of children who achieve a good level of development at age five go on to achieve the expected levels for reading at Key Stage 1, and they are five times more likely to achieve the highest level – Level 3. 86 per cent of children achieving a good level of development go on to achieve the expected levels in writing, and 94 per cent in mathematics. Research shows that the impact of this good start is felt throughout primary school and into secondary school.

The chart below shows an example of the strong correlation between outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and at Key Stage 1. It shows the most likely level achieved in reading at Key Stage 1 for each average point score in the EYFS Profile, with a higher score making it more likely that the child will achieve the expected level or above at Key Stage 1.

![Chart 1:
Chart of the 2009 Key Stage 1 pupils tracking their past performance from the Early Years Foundation Stage

Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families]

Average EYFS Profile Score (2007) vs Modal KS1 Reading Outcome (2009)
Breaking the link between disadvantage and low achievement in the early years

We are learning more and more about the astonishing pace at which young children develop, and the opportunity this presents to make a difference in the early years. At birth, a baby’s brain is only 25 per cent fully formed, developing to 80 per cent by age three. The patterns of connection that form between the brain’s nerve cells govern the development of language, emotion, physical and sensory abilities. These patterns are heavily influenced by children’s experiences, positive and negative. Many young children are making excellent progress despite potential barriers to their development. Children living in the most deprived areas are improving almost twice as fast as children living in the least deprived areas. But despite these gains, deprivation is still holding children back in the early years. Research shows that differences between children’s cognitive development related to parental social status are evident as early as 22 months and that the highest early achievers from deprived backgrounds are overtaken by lower achieving children from advantaged backgrounds by age five.

The case for investment

The significance of this early period for children’s later outcomes makes a case for investing in the early years and there is further strong evidence to support investment in this phase. Backing the Future, a report from Action for Children and the New Economics Foundation, sets out the benefits to society of investing in children, and particularly in the early stages. Many of the most effective interventions they considered were focused on the early years, including early learning and care and Family Nurse Partnerships.

Fair Society, Healthy Lives, a review of strategies for reducing health inequalities by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, also stresses the importance of investment in the early years to achieve equity from the start and more equitable outcomes later on in terms of health, education and skills. The recommendations of the review highlight the particular importance of pre- and post-natal interventions, breastfeeding, parental leave, early learning and care, parenting, the transition to school and outreach.

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1 Early Home Learning Matters – a good practice guide, Kim Roberts 2009 (FPI)
Investing in a good start

The Government has recognised the importance of the early years and has increased investment to record levels. We have invested over £25 billion since 1997 in transforming early years and childcare services, targeting much of this investment on children at risk of falling behind and in areas of deprivation. Going forwards we are committed to sustaining this level of investment in the early years, over £5 billion each year. This investment includes ensuring that:

- **we support families so they can make choices that work for them.** We introduced statutory paternity leave and pay for the first time in 2003 and increased statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance from 18 weeks to 39 weeks. All parents have access to useful information and resources including free book packs for families with babies and every young child at ages 5 and 11, and high quality information and advice on childcare, health, parenting and relationships.

- **all families with young children can access high quality early years provision.** Families with children are now entitled to free early learning and care – up to 10 hours a week for two-year-olds living in disadvantage, from September 2010 15 flexible hours a week for all 3- and 4- year olds, and from September 2011 a full-time reception place for all children from the September after their 4th birthday. Additional financial support for childcare is available for parents who need it. We have implemented the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – a single quality framework for early learning and care, quality improvement programmes focused on narrowing the gap such as Making a Big Difference and Every Child a Talker and we are working towards having a graduate leading practice in every early years setting, two in disadvantaged areas, and all other practitioners qualified to at least Level 3 by 2015.

- **services are well integrated to meet the needs of all families with young children.** We have established over 3500 children’s centres, providing access to health services, parenting and family support, outreach services, integrated early learning and childcare, and links to training and employment opportunities.

- **any additional needs or problems are identified early and addressed.** This includes regular checks through the Healthy Child Programme to identify problems as soon as they emerge; other services helping to identify, support and refer; and well integrated support for young children with additional needs through, for example, the Early Support approach for young disabled children.
Section 2: Together we are making progress

The Children’s Plan underlined that narrowing the achievement gap is one of our top priorities. In the early years this has meant significant investment, detailed in the previous section, and also reforming early years provision. These reforms are focused on making services more accountable for improvements in outcomes, and making them better integrated so that they work together and are easier for parents to use. This section describes these reforms and the evidence so far on the impact of these changes on children’s outcomes.

Services focused on outcomes

The first ever Childcare Act in 2006 introduced a duty on local authorities and their partners to improve outcomes for young children and reduce inequalities between them. As a leader in the Children’s Trust, your success in meeting this duty is measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile – an observational assessment at age five. Local authorities and their partners in the Children’s Trust now agree statutory targets each year to narrow the early years achievement gap in their area.

As well as outcome-focused accountability at the strategic level, local providers are now more accountable for improvements in outcomes. All early years settings are now subject to more holistic Ofsted inspection against the EYFS, and from April 2010 Sure Start Children’s Centres will be subject to inspection by Ofsted. In addition to these improvements in inspection, teams of Early Years Consultants are in place across all local authorities, working with local settings to raise the quality of early learning and care, especially in the poorest quality provision. School Improvement Partners are supporting and challenging headteachers to raise standards and address gaps in achievement.
Integrated early years services

We have established children’s centres as the universal service for families with young children just like schools or hospitals – bringing together the services they use. They now have a legislative basis; local authorities have a duty to ensure sufficient provision of children’s centres to meet local need – so that children and their families all over England are now able to access services through their local children’s centre.

An increasing variety of local services will be delivered in an integrated way through children’s centres – Primary Care Trusts and JobCentre Plus now have a duty to consider providing services through children’s centres. Alongside this document we are publishing statutory guidance for Children’s Trusts which highlights joint working between Primary Care Trusts and local authorities in maternity and early years as one of six areas essential to ensuring the best outcomes for children.

This universal and integrated approach to providing services will help to tackle inequalities by removing some of the barriers to accessing services. Offering a local point of access through universal provision takes away the potential stigma associated with more specialist or targeted services, and also encourages take-up. The fact that services are offered under one roof, or are clearly signposted from the children’s centre, also makes it easier for people to find what they need. Children’s centres play a key preventative role by bringing together a range of local partners who can identify potential needs early on, and by taking a family-focused approach instead of looking at individual issues in isolation. The OECD report, Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care (2006) commends our approach to the delivery of integrated services, with an over-arching strategy for children and integration of early education and care.

Improving access to integrated services, Rotherham

Rotherham’s Childcare and Community Inclusion Project aimed to improve access to local services, particularly for families less likely to use children’s centres. An independent evaluation found that the project was effective in increasing the number of families registered at children’s centres, including more children under five from the poorest local areas.

The project brought services closer to families, providing services in different physical locations, and took action to make services feel more accessible to families. While children’s centres provided the hub of local service delivery, other local venues were used to deliver outreach activities, ensuring those who do not usually take part in services and activities had access to them. It involved working across a wide range of providers in the Children’s Trust area including: early learning and childcare, adult learning, oral health, the women’s refuge and others.

For more information on this example and others go to: www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyyears
Better services

We are seeing the impact of this investment and reform on families’ experiences of services:

• In the first year of Ofsted inspection against the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework, two-thirds of providers were judged as good or better.

• 60 per cent of parents think that the quality of childcare in their area is fairly good or very good; 27 per cent were not sure.

• Awareness of, and satisfaction with children’s centres is high. The Sure Start Children’s Centre Survey of Parents found that 78 per cent of all respondents knew about their local centre and 92 per cent of all users said they were satisfied.

• Parents’ experiences of services for disabled children have improved. Our national indicator measuring parental confidence is based on the results of an independent survey and improved from a baseline score of 59 in May 2009 to 61 in December 2009.

Impact on outcomes

These improvements in services are starting to pay off. Since 2007, 44,000 more young children achieved a good level of development, and the gap between the 20 per cent lowest achieving children and the rest narrowed from 37 per cent in 2007 to 34 per cent in 2009. Children at risk of low achievement are generally improving faster than others:

• Children living in deprivation are doing better. The proportion of children living in the most deprived 10 per cent of areas according to the index of deprivation affecting children (IDACI) who achieved a good level of development improved from 35 per cent in 2008 to 39 per cent in 2009, improving almost twice as fast as children living in the least deprived 10 per cent of areas. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development improved from 32 per cent in 2008 to 35 per cent in 2009, the same rate of improvement for children not eligible for free school meals.

• Children from minority ethnic groups are doing better. Some ethnic groups are over-represented in the lowest achieving group, but more children from almost every ethnic group achieved a good level of development in 2009 compared to 2008. The proportion of children with English as an additional language achieving a good level of development improved from 38 per cent in 2008 to 42 per cent in 2009, an improvement twice that of children with English as a first language.

• And other groups over-represented in the lowest 20 per cent of achievers are doing better including children with special educational needs (SEN), boys, and children from urban areas.

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4 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2008 - National Centre for Social Research


Young children’s achievement is connected to their healthy development, and we are also seeing progress on health outcomes for young children. For example children’s obesity is now levelling off – The Health Survey for England shows that this is the case for children aged 2-10 and the National Child Measurement Programme shows this is the case for children in reception year and Year 6. Breastfeeding protects the health of babies and mothers and The Infant Feeding Survey 2005 shows that more mothers are starting to breastfeed, with breastfeeding initiation rates rising from 69 per cent in 2000 to 76 per cent in 2005.

Going forward there are increasingly rich data you, as a leader of early years services, can use to better understand how to deliver services to narrow gaps in achievement. The next section describes an effective evidence-based approach.
Section 3: Responding to local need

Local authorities and their partners have a duty to tackle inequalities in the early years. This duty extends to Children’s Trust partners – such as the NHS and JobCentre Plus – because of the contribution these services make to improving young children’s outcomes. Children’s Trust partners will be most effective at tackling inequalities where the local strategy is informed by a sensitive understanding of the local population, the quality of local provision and drivers of gaps in achievement. This section describes features of an effective evidence-based approach, with examples of how Sure Start Children’s Centres, schools and other early years settings are responding to local need.

The national picture

Nationally we are making progress against our Public Service Agreement target to narrow the gap between the 20 per cent of lowest achievers and their peers by three percentage points from the 2008 results. The graph below shows that we are on track to meet our target of 33 per cent by 2011.
As a leader in the Children’s Trust, your local Children and Young People’s Plan will be informed by an analysis of your area and local population. Many leaders have also drawn from comparisons with other areas and from comparisons with the national picture.

Nationally, the composition of the group making up the lowest 20 per cent achieving five-year-olds is complex. Children with certain characteristics are more likely to be at risk of low achievement. Some children in this group share more than one of these characteristics, but many have none – two-fifths of the lowest achieving group are White British children with no special educational needs and aren’t eligible for free school meals.

Table 1:
Make up of the lowest 20 per cent achieving group nationally at age five in 2009

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children with FSM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7% (15,000)</td>
<td>6.9% (8,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9% (6,000)</td>
<td>2.0% (2,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.1% (17,000)</td>
<td>4.6% (5,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.7% (16,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority ethnic groups</td>
<td>Of which all other children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.0% (46,000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with SEN*</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Sources: Department for Children, Schools and Families

National data published on the achievement of five year olds by pupil characteristics\(^7\) shows that those children at particular risk of low achievement include:

- Children growing up in deprived areas: In 2009, 35 per cent of children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development, and 39 per cent of children living in the most deprived 10 per cent of areas according to IDACI achieved a good level of development. This compares to 52 per cent nationally.
- Boys: 43 per cent of boys achieved a good level of development (compared to 61 per cent of girls).
- Children from some ethnic groups, including: Irish Traveller children (16 per cent achieved a good level of development), Gypsy and Romany children (17 per cent), Bangladeshi children (38 per cent) and Pakistani children (39 per cent). 42 per cent of children with English as an additional language achieved a good level of development.

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\(^7\) Early Years Foundation Stage Attainment by Pupil Characteristics, England 2008/09 (www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000911/index.shtml)

\(^8\) The pupil census takes place in January 2009
• Children with special education needs: 15 per cent achieved a good level of development.

Comparing local data to this national picture with other areas will help to identify groups of children at greater risk of low achievement, and to benchmark the performance of services in your area. You, as a leader of early years services, may need to consider targeted responses for groups of children and families who are falling significantly behind local or national achievement.

The picture of low achievement also varies across the areas of learning in the EYFS. Although there are some areas of learning where, nationally, the group of the lowest 20 per cent achievers are less far behind such as physical development; in areas such as communication skills there is already a significant gap at age five – an area which is critical for future progress. For this reason we have invested in improving the skills of early years practitioners on communication, language and literacy through Every Child a Talker and the Communication, Language and Literacy Development Programme. We will also be working with Jean Gross, the Communication Champion, to promote the importance of young children’s language development as part of the National Year of Speech, Language and Communication in 2011.

Table 2:
Achievement of lowest 20% by areas of learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Learning</th>
<th>% of children achieving 6 or more points in 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSED: Dispositions and attitudes</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSED: Social development</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSED: Emotional development</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSED: Language and communication and thinking</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLL: Linking sounds and letters</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLL: Reading</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLL: Writing</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSRN: Numbers as labels for counting</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSRN: Calculating</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSRN: Shape, space and measures</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KUW: Knowledge and understanding of the world</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phy: Physical development</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE: Creative development</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families
Nationally, our approach has been based on an understanding of the drivers and features of inequality. We have encouraged service leaders to use an approach of understand, plan, do then review through guidance for local services\(^9\). As well as data from the EYFS Profile, there are a variety of other local and national data sources you can use to ensure that your approach is based on a robust understanding of your families with young children. This includes demographic data, data on outcomes and information on the take-up of local services.

**Children’s Trusts**

Children’s Trusts bring together all services in the area, underpinned by the Children Act 2004 duty to cooperate, to improve outcomes for all children and young people. As a leader of services in the Children’s Trust, your plans to make a difference for young children at risk of poor outcomes will be part of your Children and Young People’s Plan. This evidence informing your plan may be from your services, or from your Children’s Trust partners and it may suggest areas where you need to work together to make a change.

The Childcare Act 2006 introduced a duty on local authorities to ensure sufficient childcare for all families. As part of your authority’s sufficiency assessment it may be useful to consider whether there are families in which the children may be at risk of low achievement for whom there is insufficient childcare and how you can use your market management role to address this. Even if there is sufficient provision, you will also want to consider take-up of the free entitlement for two-, three- and four-year-olds from disadvantaged or at-risk backgrounds to ensure they have access to high quality early years provision.

One of your most powerful levers as a leader of early years provision in the local authority is workforce planning. A highly skilled, well qualified workforce – and in particular graduate leadership – is critical to the quality of early years provision and will feature in your plan to narrow the achievement gap. You will want to explore ways of encouraging the best qualified staff such as Early Years Professionals, to work with the most disadvantaged children. Your Early Years Consultants can draw on support from the National Strategies and have a key role to play in ensuring that your quality improvement strategy is implemented in all settings. They will have a greater focus on settings and schools where quality is worse or that have a disproportionate number of low achieving children. You will also want to consider how your Early Years Consultants and School Improvement Partners can work together to support improved delivery of the EYFS in schools as well as in settings.

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9 Guidance includes: Raising Standards, Improving Outcomes, Childcare Sufficiency Assessments guidance, children’s centre performance management guidance and National Strategies e-learning on interpreting the EYFS Profile
The Making a Big Difference approach aims to tackle gaps in achievement through quality improvement, and is now being rolled out nationally. The 25 pilot authorities showed faster progress than other authorities on both overall achievement and narrowing the achievement gap at age five.

**Making a Big Difference (MABD), Waltham Forest**

Waltham Forest used the eight strands of the Making a Big Difference approach, focusing on 10 schools with large gaps between the lowest achieving children and the rest in comparison to their statistical neighbours. These schools also had rising populations of children from deprived areas and a high turnover in Reception teachers.

A team of partner professionals including Early Years Consultants, Communication, Language, Literacy Development (CLLD) consultants and Quality Improvement in Learning and Teaching consultants shared ideas on how Waltham Forest’s existing programmes – CLLD, their Improving Schools Programme, EYFS Profile moderation and their own local authority quality assurance scheme would help raise overall performance and could be sustained.

Each school was supported to audit its own particular needs and the programmes were then tailored to meet these. The visiting consultants then spent time with the Senior Management Team in the nursery and reception classes to build their understanding of EYFS practice. In addition the participating schools’ MABD leads regularly attended cluster meetings to share and form a ‘community of learning’ which has formed an on-going resource.

In order to effectively monitor children’s progress throughout the course of the programme, a working party met to produce guidance on assessment in the EYFS and ‘Special Books’ are now used extensively in Reception classes; they belong to the child and are shared with practitioners and parents.

For more information on this example, see the Making a Big Difference handbook at: [http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/160669](http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/160669)

**The contribution of early learning and care**

The quality of childcare provision is second only to the quality of parenting in shaping how well children do in the early years, and how well they progress – especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project, which tracked 3000 children over time, shows that high quality early years learning and care acts as a protective factor against moving onto a less effective school and having a poor home learning environment to age 11 and beyond.

The impact a leader of early years provision in a school or other setting has on narrowing gaps in achievement depends on knowing who the lowest achieving children are and ensuring that they receive high quality learning experiences. For those leading on early years provision in the local authority, this will need to be part of your quality improvement strategy, and be informed by an understanding
of why children might not be getting access to this kind of input. It could be that the
provision is good for most children but not sufficiently relevant or engaging for some
children who are choosing to opt out of some learning experiences in the setting.
Using a quality assurance scheme in settings may help to identify these gaps –
childcare providers who take part in quality assurance schemes are much more likely
to be good or outstanding.\(^\text{10}\).

Sure Start Children’s Centres’ contribution
Some of you will be leaders of children’s centres, providing access to a range of
universal mainstream services for all families with young children. As the primary
local means of improving the outcomes for all young children you are critical to
narrowing the gap, especially with your particular focus on those children at risk
of falling behind. All children’s centres, when fully operational, offer access to
integrated early learning and care for children from birth to age five; a range of family
support and health services including ante-natal and post-natal advice; employment
and training advice for parents; and support for families with special needs.
Local authorities monitor the performance of their children’s centres – often using
the outcome-focused key performance indicators suggested in DCSF guidance.\(^\text{11}\).
This framework enables centres to focus on local priorities and to tailor their targets
to, for example, reaching the most vulnerable families in their area.
As well as providing ‘core’ services similar to other children’s centres, you may also
need to consider tailoring your services to meet the needs of the local population.
The intensity of provision will also vary to meet local demand. This includes
addressing the needs of children living in ‘pockets’ of deprivation surrounded by
otherwise affluent families. Around a third of the most deprived children under five
live outside the most deprived areas – over a million children nationally.
Outreach in practice: Buddies children’s centre, Barnsley

An outreach project was set up to encourage use of early years services by traveller families. The centre provided playgroup facilities on the travellers’ site – giving family support workers the opportunity to build trusting relationships with parents and address barriers to their children’s inclusion in early years settings and schools. Once parents had agreed that their children would attend the children’s centre nursery, staff worked closely with them to ensure they settled in happily. The children’s centre worked closely with the local authority cultural diversity team, who helped to assess the progress of children in the nursery, and provided resources to aid their integration. Barnsley is one of the local authorities involved in the Two Year Old Pilot scheme, so staff were able to promote this as an additional opportunity to encourage attendance at the nursery.

Through the outreach project children from four families have now taken up free nursery places, with consistent attendance and there are improvements in the development of the children’s speech, language and social skills. More families are submitting applications for school places and there is evidence of increased confidence in the use of mainstream educational settings reported by parents. Parents are also showing increased confidence and willingness to consider adult learning and training opportunities as a route to paid employment.

High quality practice in early years settings and in children’s centres involves, of course, working with families and sharing information about children’s development. The next section outlines what services can do to support the learning environment at home.

In order to maximise your impact on narrowing gaps in young children’s achievement you may want to consider some of the following factors:

As a leader in the Children’s Trust:

- Use a range of data, including sharing data with your Children’s Trust partners, to understand the needs of your local population and identify children at risk of low achievement.
- Assess the services that these families use. Is there sufficient good quality provision, particularly sufficient early learning and childcare provision, for children at risk of low achievement? What outreach do you have in place for families not engaging with services?
- Ensure your pre-school settings, including children’s centres, know the EYFS Profile results of their children when they are assessed at school.
- Do all those with a part to play from the strategic level to frontline delivery share an understanding of the importance of early years?
- Use your workforce plans, commissioning and performance management to support a focus on narrowing the gap – in what areas can you improve the quality of your provision that will have an impact on children at risk of low achievement? CWDC’s12 online audit tool may help you to target support for your settings and plan their learning and development.

12 www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/early-years/audit-tool
As a children's centre leader:
• Use a wide range of information to understand the needs of your local population including, for example, information from Children’s Services Mapping on breastfeeding.
• Know what EYFS Profile your children achieve when they go to school.
• Consider how to tailor your services in response to the needs identified.
• Which families cannot or choose not to access your services? What outreach are you using to engage these families and can you make services easier to access for them, possibly by bringing them together?
• Ensure that your early learning and care provision supports children at risk of low achievement (see below).

As leader of any early years setting:
• Use quality assurance schemes to inform your plan for quality improvement. Strong provision on communication, language and literacy will be particularly important for the lowest achievers.
• Engage all your parents in their children’s development by sharing their learning from the setting.
• Consider areas where you might work together with other settings on quality improvement, with joint professional development.

As a headteacher of a primary school:
• Work with your leadership team and School Improvement Partner to identify children at risk of low achievement – use information from feeder settings and parents. From autumn 2010 you will be able to access EYFS Profile results on RAISEonline.
• Identify children who may struggle with the transition into Key Stage 1 and provide additional support – including use of extended services – for these children, as outlined in Building Bridges13.
• Work with your local children’s centre and early years provider to understand the needs of children and families as they join the school and to feed back to them on the progress of children at age five.

13 Due to become available at: www.nationalstrategies.org.uk
Section 4:
Putting families at the heart of local services

A child’s family, in particular their parents, is the biggest influence on a young child’s development. We know that parenting behaviour influences children’s development from the moment of birth\textsuperscript{14}. The quality of developmental experiences at home varies, but this is not about who parents are, but about what they do – good parenting makes the difference. Children’s centres and early years practitioners can promote better parenting – this section is about what you, as a leader of early years services, can do to support the family in their role as their child’s most powerful educator.

The influence of parenting

Children have better outcomes if their mothers and fathers\textsuperscript{15} are engaged with their development from birth. Warm and stimulating parenting is the single biggest influence on a child’s development and therefore the most significant way in which we can break the link between disadvantage and low achievement. For example, we know what parents do at home with their babies and young children – the home learning environment – is more important for children’s intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income\textsuperscript{16}. In fact, research from DEMOS shows that, controlling for factors such as parental confidence and self-esteem, the differences in child outcomes between richer and poorer families are not statistically significant.

However, a child growing up in a deprived family is more likely to have a lower quality home learning environment. Differences emerge as early as 22 months\textsuperscript{17} between the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. By age three, children from privileged families have heard 30 million more words than children from underprivileged families\textsuperscript{18} and at age five children from the most advantaged groups were found to be over a year ahead in vocabulary, compared to those from disadvantaged backgrounds\textsuperscript{19}.

\textsuperscript{14} Gutman and Feinstein 2007; Feinstein, 2003 – Parenting behaviours and children’s development from infancy to early childhood: changes, continuities and contributions
\textsuperscript{16} Sylva et al., 2004 – The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project: final report. A longitudinal evaluation 1997-2004
\textsuperscript{17} Very early evidence: how early can we predict future educational achievement (2003) Parenting behaviours and children’s development from infancy to early childhood: changes, continuities and contributions
\textsuperscript{18} Hart and Risley (2003) – Meaningful difference in everyday parenting and intellectual development in young American children
\textsuperscript{19} Hansen, Kirstine, Heather & Dex, Shirley – Children of the 21st Century (Volume 2). The First Five Years
Evidence from the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study shows that the quality of parenting in the early years has a stronger influence on children’s outcomes than at any other stage, and it can help protect against other negative factors in a child’s life. We also know that high quality services make a difference to parenting at this early stage. The National Evaluation of Sure Start\textsuperscript{20} showed that parents living in Sure Start areas had more positive parenting skills than those in similar areas, helping prepare children to do well at school. We also know that early years practitioners are able to effectively engage with even the most vulnerable parents and improve their parenting\textsuperscript{21}.

**What does a good home learning environment look like?**

A good home learning environment provides the love, security, stimulation, encouragement and opportunities that help children flourish. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study used the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment scale to score the home learning environment in terms of responsivity, acceptance, organisation, learning materials, involvement in learning and variety.

The EPPE study, along with other research found that the following activities had a marked impact on children’s learning: child-centred play; letting the child take the lead when playing; getting down on the floor and playing together; reading with and to children, and telling stories; arranging for children to play with their friends at home; playing with letters and numbers; visits and community activities; singing songs and nursery rhymes; painting, drawing and messy play; and problem solving and encouraging children’s ideas. These features of a positive home learning environment build on warm and loving parenting from birth, and a foundation of strong attachment between parents and their baby.

**The national framework**

The *Families and Relationships Green Paper* describes what we have put in place, at a national level to support parents to balance work and family life. This includes ensuring that parents have flexible working arrangements and time with their children and that they have good advice, information and – where necessary – additional support on parenting. There are also free resources for all parents such as book packs, information about parenting and childcare choice through Family Information Direct and Family Information Services, and high quality relationship and parenting support and home visiting for vulnerable families.

\textsuperscript{20} *The impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on Child Development and Family Functioning* (March 2008)

\textsuperscript{21} Evangelou et al., 2008
**Early Home Learning Matters** provides good practice guidance for those commissioning and working in early years services. Local NHS professionals, children’s centres staff and those working in early learning and care are particularly well placed to support the learning environment at home.

**Engagement from before birth**

We want parents to be engaged with children’s centre services and wider health services before the birth of their child – midwives and health visitors have a role to support parents with information and advice from the very start. Other professionals working through or with children’s centres, such as doctors, outreach workers, family support workers and the Families Information Service, are also likely to have these opportunities. The Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists are working together to develop professional guidance for maternity staff on how best to engage fathers around the birth of their child.

As well as the contribution these professionals make to children’s health, they are well placed to discuss, for example, how parents can support their children’s speech and language development. The Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit’s review of maternity and early years sets the vision for how professionals should work together during pregnancy and the earliest years of a child’s life and in particular describes how we will share learning from the Every Child a Talker programme with health visitors.

Many children centres provide stay and play sessions which encourage mothers and fathers to join in enjoyable play activities with their children. They are supported by early years practitioners to understand the value of play in children’s early learning. For practitioners, such sessions have been an opportunity to model learning and play based interactions, especially with the under-twos, through a range of simple play activities. Practitioners support parents on how they can follow the child’s lead in play in the home learning environment, how they can communicate more effectively with their children, and how they can encourage children’s language development during play.
Early learning and care
The influence that early years provision has on children’s development is not just about what happens in the early years settings, but also about how early years practitioners share their skills and knowledge with the families of the children in their care. This two-way dialogue starts from when the child first attends the setting, perhaps with a home visit or when the family attends the setting with the child to help them settle. But opportunities for these conversations continue, whether they are a quick chat at drop-off and pick-up times or – as used in some settings – a more structured programme of parental engagement.

Family Workers at the Pen Green Centre for Children and Families
At the Pen Green Centre all children have a family worker. It is the family worker’s role to build up a relationship with the child and their family. As well as visiting the child at home before they start nursery and throughout their time in the centre, family workers talk on a day-to-day basis with parents about their child’s interests and progress both in the nursery and at home. Workers and parents share video observations to analyse children’s learning. Together with the family, they map children’s progress against the development matters statements in the EYFS. This ensures that the family workers fully understand the children’s needs and have a relationship of mutual trust with their family, enabling children to experience the richest learning opportunities both at nursery and at home.

The EYFS requires settings to provide information to parents. Sharing and explaining information on the child’s interests and demonstrating their learning will help parents to better understand and play a full role their child’s development. Parents will often learn more about their child’s interests and how to build on these by taking home ideas from what happens at the setting. As a leader of an early years setting, you will need to have a clear vision of what successful parental engagement looks like and ensure this is shared across the setting. Sometimes practitioners will lack the confidence and skills to speak to parents about their child’s progress and learning – something you may need to address as part of their continuing professional development. We are conducting research on which practitioner behaviours have the most impact on the learning environment at home which is due to report in 2011.
Parenting training, Darlington

The Child Development Programme Pilot in Darlington aimed to narrow the achievement gap by improving the home learning environment. The programme had a positive impact on the EYFS Profile results of children involved, particularly the proportion of children from disadvantaged areas achieving six or more points in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy.

The programme is based on a resource pack for parents and offers structured physical activities targeting thinking skills and the development of pre-requisites for literacy and numeracy as well as information on healthy eating. It also involved joint training for parents and practitioners and support from the early years setting for parents, such as a weekly drop-in. It included parents recommended by health visitors and early years practitioners. Children were assessed at the outset to establish a baseline in physical development, thinking and language skills. They were then re-assessed to measure the impact of the programme after six months.

For more information on this example go to: [www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyyears](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyyears)
In order to maximise your impact on parenting, you may want to consider some of the following factors:

**As a leader in the Children’s Trust:**
- Ensure that your Children and Young People’s Plan promotes delivering services in ways that works for families and includes outreach for those that don’t use them.
- Use the LA Parenting and Family Support Guidance to develop commissioning that tailors family services. This should include ongoing engagement with parents to evaluate the quality of services already offered and when developing the Children and Young People’s Plan.
- As part of your workforce strategy, consider what professional development your workforce may need on parental engagement.
- Can you use your communications to families to promote the importance of a good home learning environment and practical tips?
- Use Family Literacy Language and Numeracy (FLLN) to give parents the skills to improve their children’s development in classes where parents and children learn together.

**As a children’s centre leader:**
- Offer advice and information to new parents on what makes good parenting, how to put this into practice and where to get help.
- Use Parenting Experts and Practitioners to deliver evidence-based parenting programmes for parents of children at risk of poor outcomes.
- Can you use your outreach and communications to families to promote the importance of a good home learning environment and practical tips?
- Hold high quality stay and play sessions to give parents the ideas and confidence to try new things at home.

**As a leader of any early years setting:**
- Work with parents in a co-educator role. Ensure that practitioners are having regular conversations with parents about their child’s development.
- Communicate to parents the impact and key features of a positive home learning environment, how they can make a difference and explain what they can do to develop this in their homes.
- Base your communications with parents on a clear understanding of each child’s progress (use, for example, Development Matters statements) and use Progress Matters to review children’s learning and development in line with the EYFS framework. Section 5 includes a best practice case study.
- Encourage stay and play sessions to give parents the ideas and confidence to try new things at home.
Section 5:
Providing the right support for children as individuals

Every child is an individual and ensuring that all children make good progress in the early years requires a good understanding of their development, the early identification of any problems, and support for these children through universal and more specialist services. Whilst many children progress well, some will require additional support, even for a short period of time, to enable them to achieve as well as they are able. For a relatively small number of children, a particular disability or special educational need may be affecting their progress. This section is about how services can ensure that all children’s needs are met to secure the best outcomes for them in the early years.

Universal services identifying children’s individual needs
Universal services including Sure Start Children’s Centres are often the place where emerging difficulties are first spotted, or where families will first ask for help. Families will have contact with health professionals from pregnancy onwards. Midwives can signpost families to children’s centre services and the children’s centre will have a named health visitor. The Health Child Programme, led by health visitors, makes provision for all families from pregnancy. It offers a core programme of screening tests, immunisation, developmental reviews – including the child’s physical, social, emotional, language and behavioural development – and support and guidance to assist with parenting and healthy choices.

During these first few years many children also begin to use early learning and childcare in the children’s centre or at another setting. Within early years settings the EYFS framework helps professionals to understand and track the development of the unique child and spot any problems early. Progress Matters guidance24 enables leaders and managers review young children’s learning and development in line with the EYFS framework. Practitioners in your area or setting may have professional development needs in relation to identifying children at risk of low achievement and ensuring that they have high quality learning experiences. Every Child a Talker is an example of professional development that supports this approach.

24 Progress Matters guidance available at http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/173145
Better communication through better partnership, Fun time Community Voluntary Pre-school

The Every Child a Talker programme encourages local authorities to take a ‘team around the setting’ approach to narrowing the gap in early language development by improving practitioners’ skills and helping parents to better support their children. This case study illustrates how this approach worked in Rotherham for Libby a two year old reluctant communicator.

Libby attended a pre-school where Julie, the Early Language Lead Practitioner, was concerned about Libby’s reluctance to communicate. Julie had support from Laura and Kara, the Early Language Consultants – one with a speech and language therapy background and one with an early education background sharing the role – and also from Angela, the lead teacher attached to the setting. Julie involved Libby’s mother and father as well as her granddad and childminder in joint observations of Libby’s communicative behaviours. The setting also ran stay and play sessions focussing on talk and provided ‘story sacks’ for families. The story sacks really engaged Libby in talk at home and she was keen to share them at pre-school too.

As a result Libby’s confidence has grown. She is more independent and no longer a reluctant talker and is able to use rich conversational language and make her own stories and rhymes. Her family and childminder have become involved and are sharing ECAT beyond the pre-school. Julie has also grown in confidence as her knowledge of early language development has improved and, with Angela, and supported by Kara, is developing Every Child a Talker in the locality with other settings and schools. Ann, the local authorities Early Years Consultant for the area is ensuring that working with parents is also part of the local EYFS provision, through disseminating good practice across the local authorities, providing ongoing support and training for all settings to work in partnership with families and making links with other programmes such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Development.

For more information on this example and other examples of Every Child a Talker see guidance for consultants and lead practitioners at: nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/277287
Where early identification of children’s needs works well, professionals from health, early years settings and other services, such as children’s centre family support services and outreach are working closely together and sharing information effectively to ensure that all children’s needs are followed up on. The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health will be publishing a leaflet on sharing information between staff working within, and with children’s centres – including the children’s centre leader – addressing issues that practitioners have raised. The leaflet will cover guidelines for sharing information about an individual child, parent or family; sharing information about a group of children, parents or families; and facilitating appropriate information sharing locally.

Where children may be at risk of harm, early identification is essential. If you think a child is at risk you should follow the procedures set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.

**Providing additional support**

Assessments by health professionals, children’s centre staff, early years practitioners and others will identify children who need additional support, even if only for a short period of time. Early intervention may prevent problems escalating and is likely to be more cost effective. We are legislating\(^\text{25}\) to require arrangements for early intervention to be set out in your Children and Young People’s Plan that all Children’s Trust partners must have regard to. We are also publishing guidance at the same time as this document to support Children’s Trusts to fulfil their new responsibilities.

Sure Start Children’s Centres and schools with extended services bring professionals together to support children who have additional needs – outreach workers and family support services can prevent many of the difficulties that children may face from escalating, enabling children to progress alongside their peers. The National Evaluation of Sure Start indicates improved outcomes for children and families living in areas served by well-established integrated early years services. Crucially, the evaluation found that this good quality early years provision can reduce children’s chances of being identified as having special education needs from one in three to one in five.

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\(^{25}\) Regulations requiring arrangements made by Children’s Trust Board partners for co-operating on early intervention and preventative action to be set out in the local Children and Young People’s Plan are due to come into force on 1 April 2010 and all Children’s Trust Boards will have to publish their CYPP by 1 April 2011
Swift and easy access through Extended Services, Servite RC Primary School

Servite RC Primary School offers wrap-around care to its pupils and families. The school offers extended provision from 8am to 6pm, with a breakfast club and a wide choice of after-school clubs and activities. The school team works with a multi-agency team of professionals, including a social worker, clinical psychologist, play therapist and family support worker, who provide support on a daily basis and meet regularly to discuss issues concerning individual pupils.

Fiona, the parent of a child at the school, had been suffering from depression. The family was living in poor housing and was concerned about the imminent release from prison of the child’s father. Teaching staff observed that the girl was expressing a sense of neediness and seemed unstable. She had some special educational needs and was receiving speech therapy as a result of some hearing difficulties.

Knowing that the school offered some parental support and had a school-based social worker, she approached the assistant headteacher. They quickly realised that Fiona was in a great deal of distress and invited the social worker to join them to help put a plan of support together for the family.

An understanding of Fiona’s troubles gave an insight into the behaviour the girl was demonstrating at school. The school team provided advice and guidance and made contact with external agencies to help Fiona access services. They encouraged the pupil to join the after-school and holiday clubs to give her mother time to take up offers of support and reach her goals.

The family has now been re-housed. They are much happier and more confident and the girl is doing very well at school. Fiona has been very impressed with the way the school supported her and is even considering becoming a support worker herself.

For more example on the impact of extended services see Transforming lives at www.tda.gov.uk/about/publicationslisting/tda0711.aspx

For some children and their families a more intensive intervention may be needed in order to improve their outcomes. For example, Family Nurse Partnerships are designed to help the children of vulnerable, first-time, young parents get off to a good start. It provides them with intensive home visiting from early in their pregnancy until their child is two years of age.
Family Nurse Partnership, Derby

In Derby a family nurse and children’s centre outreach worker supported a teenage mother with learning difficulties to care for her newborn baby. Pre-birth, the family nurse supported the mother to understand the importance of recognising and responding to infant cues, in order to provide responsive care giving.

After birth, with concerns about the baby’s weight, the family nurse completed a Common Assessment Framework which lead to the baby being identified as a ‘child in need’. The family nurse enlisted the help of a children’s centre outreach worker to encourage the young family to visit a children’s centre. The outreach worker made a number of home visits to the family and went with her, on public transport, to the children’s centre and other family friendly venues. By working collaboratively to support the mother’s understanding and abilities in relation to parenting, the family nurse and outreach worker saw the number of positive interactions between mother and baby increase. The baby’s development improved with good weight gain and she is no longer considered a ‘child in need’. The family continue to attend other activities within the children’s centre.

For the nine per cent of children nationally who have a Statement or School Action Plan by age five, and for many of those with disabilities, receiving appropriate support quickly can make the difference between enabling them to progress to their full potential or leaving them behind, before they even enter full time education.

Helping services to work together more effectively

In some cases children and their families will be engaging with more than one professional. Your local authority may already have established Team Around the Child arrangements to ensure that professionals work with whole families in a coordinated, coherent and supportive way.

Arrangements like this are working well for the families of young disabled children through the Early Support Programme. Ninety percent of local authorities are now involved in or at the early stages of using the Early Support Programme to implement well integrated services with these families.
The impact of Early Support, Bradford

“Early Support was the only relevant, practical help we received before a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in November 2008, when my son was 4 years and 10 months old. It provided us with information about practical, tangible strategies such as: training, access to an out-of-school play scheme which my son enjoys (and which offers his brother and myself some respite during school holidays); funding which enables him to attend; planned, supported transition and subsequent integration into a mainstream school; the development of a statementing process which means my son now receives 1:1 support at school.

Our Early Support Key Worker has a wealth of knowledge, expertise and dedication. The ‘burden’ of having to co-ordinate everything ourselves was lifted, while our full approval was sought and our involvement was maintained. This allowed a sharing of information, with our consent, that meant we did not have to carry on repeating our story over and over again – we were not so overwhelmed. We were taken seriously, listened to and our opinions were valued from the outset. We were sign-posted to other services and entitlements such as Statements of Special Educational Need, the Disability Living Allowance.

My son is a very different child today than he was twelve months ago. In part this is down to natural maturity, but we also feel it’s because of all the support, understanding and expertise that Early Support has given us.”

Parent of young disabled child using Early Support.

This same group of children can also face barriers to accessing childcare which settings, parents and the Family Information Service need to work together to overcome. Ten local authorities have been involved in the Disabled Children’s Access to Childcare project, developing expertise in enabling disabled children to benefit from good quality childcare. £20m will be invested in 2010/11 to roll out this learning to all local authorities.

In addition, the National Strategies are preparing guidance for local authorities on supporting young children with SEN and promoting inclusive practice, and encouraging local authorities to consider how they can promote this practice as part of their quality improvement strategy.

As outlined in Section 1, the early years present a real opportunity to ensure that all children make good progress and this is particularly true where children need additional support – providing well integrated support early can make a significant and lasting difference to children’s outcomes.

In order to maximise your impact on providing the right support to ensure all children make progress you may want to consider some of the following factors:
As a leader in the Children’s Trust:

- Have agreement on the sharing of information at Children’s Trust level in order to drive area-wide expectations on how professionals will work together to ensure children’s needs are identified early and supported quickly. Ensure that this agreement reflects sensible minimums, such as the sharing of new birth data between Primary Care Trusts and children’s centres.
- Understand your local profile of children with special educational needs and use this to actively manage a system of early years support which works preventatively to address problems before they escalate.
- Ensure that supporting children who are recognised as being in need or who have special educational needs is part of your plans to fulfil your Early Years Outcomes Duty by enabling them to progress in the early years and fulfil their full potential at age five.
- For children and families who require support from a range of professionals with different expertise, have systems in place to ensure that they work together effectively – for example by adopting Team Around the Child arrangements, or using Early Support.

As a children’s centre leader:

- Base your outreach on mapping of vulnerable groups in the local community and an understanding of the cultural values, needs and anxieties which may need to be addressed to help them engage in services.
- Ensure that where you are providing more intensive support to some families, that they are the families that will benefit most from this support.

As the leader of any early years setting:

- Monitor the progress that your children make using the tools provided with Progress Matters so that any delays in their development are recognised early and supported appropriately. Ensure that this information is shared with parents, new settings or primary schools, especially where you have concerns about a child.
- Be well equipped to recognise when children and families need extra support and know how to ensure their needs are met. Using key workers is a good first step in achieving this, as is ensuring a special educational needs co-ordinator is well informed about local support.

As a headteacher of a primary school:

- Put in place arrangements to ensure that children don’t fall behind at transition points – effective arrangements include excellent two-way communication between early years settings and schools so that children’s progress is understood by the school, and early years settings get feedback on the achievement of children at age five to influence future planning.
- Consider the provision of joint professional development and planning which brings together early years professionals and teachers to identify and plan for children with additional needs.
Next steps

In this document, we have described the importance of a good start for young children falling behind and how you, as a leader of local early years services, can raise the achievement of these children. Throughout the publication there are suggestions and case studies of approaches you may already be using and others you might consider trying. You may already be aware of other places to look for ideas. As well as other local institutions or improvement partners, you could look to organisations such as C4EO, Together for Children, TDA, National Strategies and your Government Office, who all have other examples of strategies that are having an impact elsewhere.

There will already be strategies you are using that are working really well, and are helping to narrow gaps in achievement for young children using your services. Where this is the case, you might consider whether others know what you’re doing. How can you promote what you have learnt about successful approaches?

Tackling gaps in young children’s achievement will not be your only priority, and should not be viewed in isolation. We have aimed to demonstrate through this publication how this forms part of your overall strategy for improving outcomes for all children and their families.

For Children’s Trusts, how this might form part of your Children and Young People’s Plan and contribute to your other work such as your local child poverty strategy.

For leaders of children’s centres, how this fits with your objectives to improve a range of inter-related outcomes for young children and their families, particularly young children at risk of poor outcomes.

And for headteachers working with other leaders of early learning and care, how this can be part of your plans to raise the standards of your provision for all children, and how it contributes to later achievement.

As the ever growing body of evidence suggests, if we do focus our efforts on addressing these issues early in a child’s life, then we will have the maximum chance of making a difference to those children who have the odds stacked against them. By working together, this could mean we can break the historic link between deprivation and under-achievement, and improve the life chances for every child.