

Flying Start

March 2014

Introduction

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's **targeted early years programme aimed at families with children below 4 years of age in some of the most deprived areas in Wales.**

This Research Note looks at the development of Flying Start since 2007 including the funding and evaluation of the programme to date.

Flying Start

Flying Start (FS) was **initially introduced in 2007** and funding allocated until 2010-11. The Welsh Government committed to **expanding of the scheme** from 2012 onwards with the aim of doubling the number of children gaining from Flying Start to from **18,000 to 36,000 by 2016.**

In 2012/13, **23,579 children benefited from Flying Start services.** This reflects the total number of children who have had a contact with a Flying Start health visitor during the year.

Within the Welsh Government, day to day responsibility for the implementation and effective delivery of Flying Start lies with the **Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty**, Vaughan Gething AM. Overall policy and budgetary responsibility rests with the **Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty**, Jeff Cuthbert AM.

Core elements of Flying Start

The Flying Start scheme consists of **four core elements:**

- **Free 'quality' part time childcare:** for all eligible 2 to 3 year olds for 2.5 hours a day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks. This should also include at least 15 sessions of childcare provision for families during school holidays;
- **Enhanced health visiting:** with caseloads of 1 health visitor per 110 children in Flying Start areas, (a significantly reduced caseload compared with the generic service);
- **Parenting support programmes:** provision of parenting programmes, to be decided upon local need, which have been judged to generate positive outcomes for children;
- **Early language development and play skills:** each eligible family should have access to a language and play group. Where needed, more specialist support can be offered.

Where is Flying Start delivered?

Flying Start was initially administered as a grant to local authorities and targeted on the **catchment areas of schools in deprived areas.** The expansion of the scheme from 2011 resulted in a **changed criteria** where funding was allocated according to **the estimated number of 0-3 year olds living in income benefit households in local authority areas** in lower super output areas (LSOAs).

An element of **outreach** was also included within the expanded scheme, requiring local authorities to identify children living outside defined Flying Start areas who would also benefit from Flying Start services. In January 2014, the Welsh Government stated that in future, the outreach element of Flying Start would allow local authorities to choose from a **suite of options** which they would then outline in the submission of their Flying Start delivery plans.

Funding Flying Start

The Welsh Government (WG) has spent over **£180m on Flying Start in revenue over the past 6 financial years¹** (2007-08 to 2012-13). There have been capital allocations of over **£7m** in this period.

There is a **projected spend of over £230 million on Flying Start over the current and next two financial years** (2013-14 to 2015-16).

The Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty's paper to the Children, Young People and Education Committee ahead of its meeting on 12 February 2014 outlines the following planned allocations:

- £61.550m revenue and £13m capital in 2013-14;
- £72.1m revenue and £8m capital in 2014-15;
- £77.1m revenue and £2m capital in 2015-16.

The Welsh Government's *National Evaluation of Flying Start: area case study synthesis report* 2013 provides the following information for Flying Start up to 2012/13:

- **Average spend per child, per year, was £1,677.60,**
- **Average cost per childcare setting (of which there were 270) of £55,470;**
- **Average cost per child per childcare session of £28.30.**

Statistics

The Welsh Government published its first annual headline statistics on Flying Start in June 2013². The statistics³ included the following facts:

- **23,579 children** were in receipt of Flying Start services in Wales at any time in 2012-13;

¹ This figure does not include central or capital costs for the years 2007-08 to 2010-11

² However, following a revision of the way that data relating to Flying Start developmental milestones was provided by local authorities, an update was published in September 2013.

³ Welsh Government, *Flying Start summary statistics, 2012-13: revised*, September 2013

- Flying Start children on the **Health Visitor caseload** of all ages up to 4 were seen on an **average of 6.6. times during 2012-13** by Health Visitors and a further twice by members of the wider health team;
- **90 per cent** of offers of **childcare** in a Flying Start childcare setting were taken up during 2012-13;
- **82 per cent** of children in the Flying Start programme reached, exceeded or were within one age band of their developmental norms at age 2 years while **55 per cent met or exceeded their milestones** at this age;
- **92 per cent** of children aged 3 and living in Flying Start areas were on roll at a maintained school (2012);
- **76 per cent** of children living in Flying Start areas were **fully immunised at age 4** (2011-12).

Evaluation of Flying Start

Following the introduction of Flying Start, the Welsh Government commissioned a programme of **on-going evaluation**. Reviews of various components (undertaken by external consultants on behalf of the WG) have been published periodically since 2010. These include an **interim evaluation**, a **review of Flying Start parenting support⁴**; **Flying Start: qualitative research with high need families**; an **Area case study synthesis report**, and a **Flying Start synthesis report**.

Two surveys have been undertaken to gather evidence on outcomes for parents and children in Flying Start areas and **compare them to outcomes for parents and children** in areas that were the most similar in terms of deprivation levels but which were **'non Flying Start areas'**⁵. Data was also collected on access to,

⁴ No longer available electronically

⁵ To estimate the impact of the programme, respondents in Flying Start areas were matched with respondents in the comparison group on a range of factors such as age, family size, education, type of housing, lone parent status and other socio-economic variables. [...]The Flying Start programme was rolled out to the most disadvantaged areas in Wales, which means the comparison areas are relatively less disadvantaged.

take-up, and perceptions of services. Baseline data was collected in **face to face interviews** between March and August 2010 and a second wave of data collected between June 2012 and January 2012.

Based on the findings of these surveys, the **final component** of the Welsh Government's evaluation of the programme was published in December 2013:

National Evaluation of Flying Start: impact report.

This **reviewed the overall effectiveness** of the programme. The report looked at three main areas and a summary of the findings are set out below:

Access, take-up and perceptions of services

- Parents in Flying Start areas had on average 5.7 more contacts with health visiting services, compared with the comparison sample, including an average of 4.6 more in-home visits;
- 17.9 per cent more families in the Flying Start group were aware of parenting programmes compared with those in the comparison sample. 12.5 per cent more families in the Flying Start group reporting attending at least one session;
- Although Flying Start has increased awareness, there was no statistically significant difference between FS and comparator areas in the take-up of non-Flying Start family services.
- Where Flying Start services are not sufficient to meet the needs of the family, the early identification of need should then lead to referral to other appropriate professionals. Children in Flying Start areas are **no more likely to have been referred to or received help** from professionals than those in matched comparison areas.
- Parents from Flying Start areas **are over 13 per cent more likely** to rate the quality of locally available childcare as **very or fairly good** than those in comparison areas. A similar percentage are more likely to rate childcare as **good or fairly good for helping children learn and develop**;

- Over seven per cent more parents in Flying Start areas perceived their local area to be a better place to bring up children. **17.4 per cent of parents** from the Flying Start group perceived these services to have **improved** over the last two years'.

Outcomes for parents

- There was no statistical difference between Flying Start and the matched comparison areas on immunisation rates, though the report states that 'rates were still high in both areas at over 87 per cent for the Flying Start group';
- 'Despite more health visitor contacts and a higher take-up of parenting programmes, Learning and Play (LAP) and other early years services in Flying Start areas, the analysis shows **no difference between parents in Flying Start areas and parents in comparison areas on parenting self-confidence, mental health or home environment measures**'⁶.

Outcomes for children

- 'There was **no statistically significant difference between Flying Start and non-Flying Start areas** in terms of child cognitive and language skills, their social and emotional development and their independence/self-regulation.'⁷
- The report states '**it is possible that Flying Start has had a positive impact on parent and child outcomes**. Assuming that families living in Flying Start areas started from a lower 'base' than those in the comparison group before the programme was introduced, the lack of difference between the two groups in this report suggests that Flying Start may have brought about improvements

⁶ The National Evaluation report states 'It is worth noting that in qualitative research conducted among high need families, parents reported that the programme had helped them to become more confident as a parent, manage their child's behaviour and engage more with their educational development.'

⁷ Ibid p7

among the families ... (in the most disadvantaged areas of Wales), so their outcomes are now on a par with those in less disadvantaged comparison areas.⁸

- The report states that there is very limited data which provides conclusive evidence that families in Flying Start areas (before the programme began) started from a lower baseline position for the outcomes measured in this evaluation. The data which is available, for example, educational attainment data, suggests that **this explanation is plausible**.

Why do Flying Start outcomes appear difficult to quantify?

The National Evaluation states it is 'plausible' that FS families started in **a lower baseline position** and therefore that '**bringing about parity**' with less disadvantaged comparison areas '**reflects what it is hoped Flying Start would achieve**'.

The Welsh Government's **Flying Start synthesis report** (January 2014), states:

The longer-term outcomes and impact of Flying Start will not be known for a number of years. The children born in the year when Flying Start was launched (2006/07), for example, are now only aged six to seven. The longer-term impact on their educational, social and health outcomes cannot yet be established, therefore. [RS emphasis].

It refers to data from the Welsh Government's Flying Start summary statistics for 2012/13, that there is evidence that:

- In 2012, and at age two, the proportion of the Flying Start cohort reaching or exceeding their milestones at age was 70 per cent or higher in some areas, though in others fewer than 40 per cent operated at this level.

- At age three, the outcomes for three-year olds were better (sometimes markedly so) than for two-year-olds in 14 authorities, particularly in some of the areas with the poorest outcomes for the younger children.

It concludes that

While these are two separate cohorts and the data is not longitudinal, this may suggest that interventions such as high quality free Flying Start childcare at age two to three **may be having a positive impact on rates of child development in some authorities**.

In a news release: **Welsh Government constantly striving to improve support for poorest children**, 5 December 2013, the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty, Vaughan Gething AM, stated that

[...] robust, independent evaluation such as this is crucial to make sure we are achieving the right outcomes for families in our most disadvantaged communities and doing all we can to improve their lives. To do this we must constantly monitor, evaluate and if need be change what we are doing.

⁸ Ibid, p9

Further information

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**See also: Welsh Government Statistics and
Research: National Evaluation of Flying Start.**

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