

Taking Scotland Forward – Quality Improvement throughout a Child’s Journey

Mark McDonald MSP, Minister for Childcare and Early Years

As a parent of young children, I am as deeply committed as anyone when it comes to making sure all children across Scotland get the best possible start in life and have every opportunity to thrive and succeed. I am honoured to help drive government’s vision of making Scotland the best place to grow up and learn.

As Minister for Childcare and Early Years, I’ve had the privilege of meeting teams across the public and third sectors who are working directly with children, young people and families in need of support. I have been so impressed by your dedication and work to ensure the health, wellbeing and education of children and to see how you ‘walk alongside’ families in need. Often helping to break down the barriers of poverty, substance misuse, domestic abuse and deeply entrenched intergenerational difficulties, so that families can build brighter, better lives.

We know that as children grow up, the most effective way to support them and their families is to find difficulties early and stop them from growing into a crisis. This is one of the key pillars of public service reform, along with building stronger partnerships and improving performance.

We must ensure that all services are well designed, based on the best available evidence and able to meet the needs of children, young people and families using them.

In 2012, government introduced the world’s first, quality improvement programme for the early years – the Early Years Collaborative (EYC). Four years on, we have trained thousands of early years practitioners to use quality improvement methodology to strengthen services; through testing new ideas for improvement, gathering evidence about what works, putting learning into practice and sharing this best practice across Scotland.

Through the EYC we have made significant improvements. Health professionals are finding better ways to improve family uptake of the important 27-30 Month Child Health Review so that any developmental issues can be responded to as quickly as possible. Midwives have tested and implemented new ways of signposting pregnant mums on low incomes to the benefits and welfare they are entitled to, tackling poverty and disadvantage. Local practitioners have made improvements to attract more vulnerable families to early years and family centres to build the skills and confidence of parents. Health and early years services are testing and implementing new approaches to engage parents/carers in their children’s learning, recognising the importance of early brain development.

Complementing our focus on quality improvement in the early years is the Raising Attainment for all Programme (RAfA). Launched in 2014 to support Government’s drive to raise attainment and put excellence and equity at the heart of Scotland’s education system, there are now 24 local authorities and over 180 schools participating in RAfA. Teachers and pupils are working together to identify their own approaches, using quality improvement methodology in areas such as literacy, numeracy, parental involvement, teaching quality, study and home learning and

health and wellbeing. RAfA supports the implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, which aims to reduce the gap in educational attainment between children and young people living in our most and least deprived areas.

Through the EYC and RAfA, we are empowering people to work differently with the resources available to them. This allows them to do what is proven to work and provides the evidence that leaders and decision makers need to make informed choices about the most effective ways to deliver services.

We want to build on all this positive work to ensure quality improvement is delivered throughout a child's journey and make the best possible use of resources. We have joined up the EYC with RAfA to create a single Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative that is closely aligned with the Maternity and Children Quality Improvement Collaborative – an integral part of the Scottish Patient Safety Programme. So that quality improvement is the routine way to ensure, through measurement and evidence, that services across health, early learning and childcare, family support and education are the very best they can be for children, young people and families.

Our quality improvement work is contributing towards better, stronger services and our Quality Improvement Awards will showcase many examples of this later in the year. I look forward to this and remain determined to do everything I can to support those working in frontline services to help get it right for all of Scotland's children.