

2.4 - Annual Report on Early Years

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Schools Forum with an update on the latest participation rates in early years education in Milton Keynes as compared to the wider local and national picture and make recommendations for next steps in that context.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To **note** the annual report on early years and agrees the funding request included in item 2.6 Government Updates and 2021/22 Budget Setting report.

3 Background

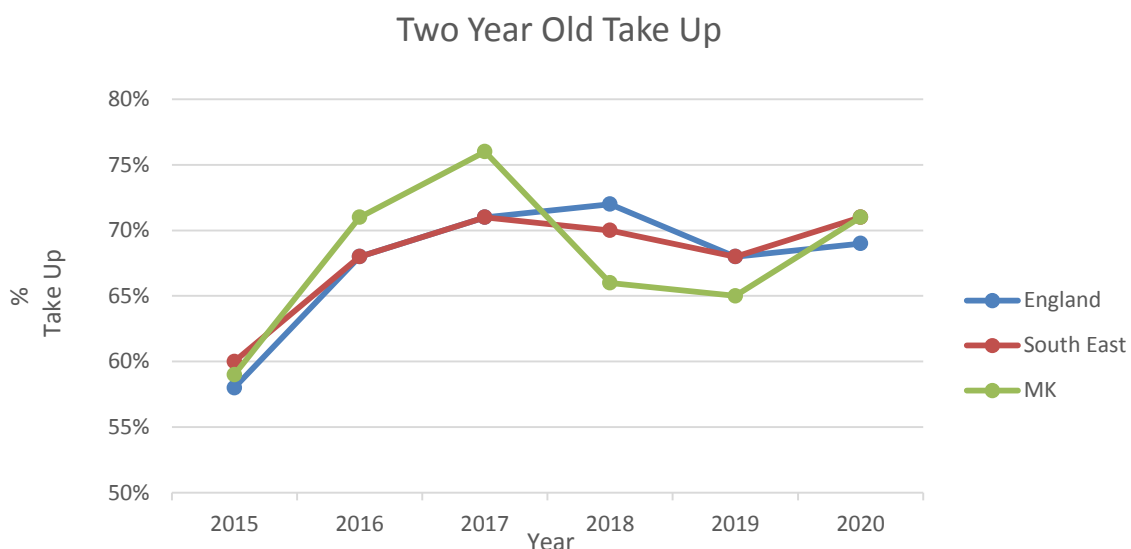
- 3.1 In September 2010 the Department for Education introduced an entitlement to 15 hours of free education and childcare per week for all three and four year olds in England. In September 2013 it extended this to include two year olds from disadvantaged families. In September 2017 most working parents became eligible for 30 hours a week free education and childcare for their three and four year olds. These entitlements are known nationally as the ‘two year old entitlement’, the ‘three and four year old universal entitlement’ and the ‘extended three and four year old entitlement’.
- 3.2 Funding for two, three and four year old places is provided via the Early Years Block. The funding received is linked to the number of places accessed using January census data. High levels of participation are therefore important not only because this provides high quality investment in children’s education from an early age, but also because a drop in participation will drive a drop in funding for our settings.
- 3.3 For settings to be able to access free places for their customers they must be able to demonstrate, via their Ofsted judgements, that their provision is of sufficient quality to merit the funding. For two year olds funding will be withdrawn immediately if a setting becomes ‘inadequate’. For three and four year olds the funding is expected to

be removed in most cases. There is therefore a direct link between the quality of provision and sufficiency of places.

4 Key Issues

Two year old entitlement

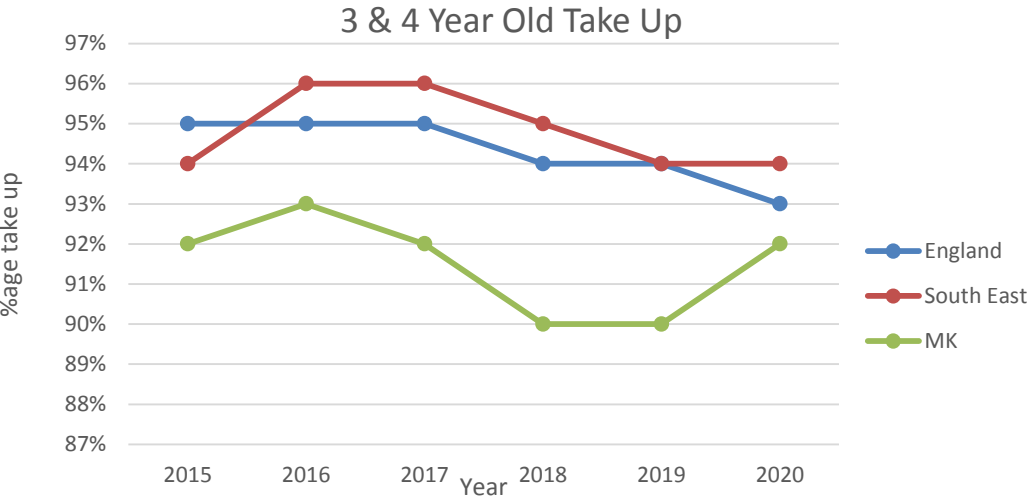
- 4.1 Since the introduction of the statutory duty to offer all disadvantaged two-year olds 15 hours a week of early education, participation rates in Milton Keynes were consistently higher than that of the south east region and the national average. Milton Keynes was recognised nationally for its efforts and success in this area. This achievement was supported by a participation project which included a significant promotional campaign funded from 'initial trajectory funding' from the Department for Education. The participation project and promotional campaign stopped following the expiration of the initial trajectory funding, and Milton Keynes subsequently experienced a decrease in participation rates during 2018 and 2019.
- 4.2 In recognition of the reduced take up, a participation project and promotional campaign was re-instated in 2019. This was supported by a £45,000 budget agreed by School's Forum. Consequently, there was a marked increase in take up (6%) in January 2020. A significant element of the planned promotional campaign was due to be launched in March, to further increase take up, but this had to be paused due to Covid-19.



Universal three and four year old entitlement

- 4.3 Historically, Milton Keynes participation in universal three and four year olds has been consistently lower than regional and national levels. Previous investigations have resulted in knowledge that much of this is to do with the mobility of families.

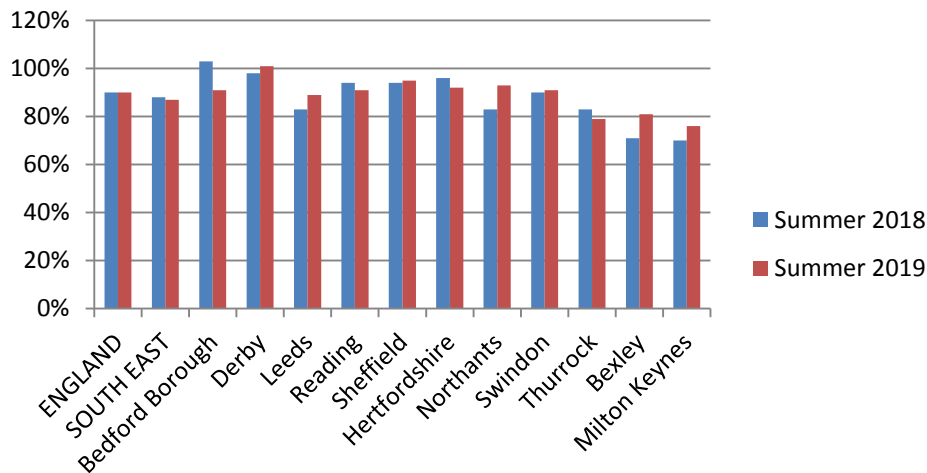
DfE participation data for 2020 showed that national take up is 93%, regional take up is at 94%, and that Milton Keynes continues to perform slightly lower with take up at 92%. However, take up in Milton Keynes did increase in 2020 following compared to the rates recorded in 2018 and 2019, which bucks the national and regional trends. In line with the increase in 2 year old take up, this increase follows the re-instatement of the participation project.



Extended three and four year old entitlement

4.4 Whilst there is no recent data for this area, the last DfE Experimental Statistics released in the summer 2019 show that 76% of the people in Milton Keynes that have shown an interest in the entitlement have taken it up. This is an increase of 6% compared to summer 2018 when participation was reported at 70%, although it still significantly lower than the national average of 90%.

Children in 30 hours place as a % of codes issued



Covid – 19

- 4.5 It is anticipated that Covid-19 will have had an impact on participation as all promotion in this area was paused due to the immediate closure of settings. Even when settings did start to re-open to limited children in June, there needed to be a balance to enable providers to adjust and conform to the relevant guidelines, and as a result of this promotional activity remained paused until the start of the new academic year.
- 4.6 Given the impact on participation rates, it has been necessary to ensure that early years providers have not been significantly disadvantaged as a result. Following consideration by the Early Years Reference Group, a strategy was implemented to fund providers based on their autumn 2020 headcount, but with a 90% top up payment being given to any providers experiencing a drop of 10% or more, compared to the same period last year.

Next steps

- 4.7 Schools Forum previously agreed to support this area of work by agreeing a 2020/21 budget of £45,000 to support a participation project and promotional campaign. This funding is being requested again for 2021/22 and is included in item 2.6 Government Updates and 2021/22 Budget Setting of this forum meeting. Whilst the emergence of Covid-19 means it has not been possible to deliver the full extent of the proposed promotional campaign, it is clear that there has already been a significant and positive impact from this.
- 4.8 Following the wider re-opening of early year settings in September, the planned promotional campaign has been altered to account for Covid-19 restrictions, and will continued to be progressed throughout the later part of the Autumn Term to support and improve participation ahead of the Census in January 2021.

- 4.9 As the amount of early years funding received in Milton Keynes is determined by participation at the January Census, it is recommended that the additional funding is maintained in the future to enable the continued delivery of the participation project and communication campaign. This would maximise the Early Years funding received for Milton Keynes and maximise the number of children benefiting from free early education.