

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	School Readiness
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	April Davies
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Your Reference:	ADavies
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report will inform the Scrutiny Panel of current initiatives, progress, and impact regarding school readiness in Plymouth, with a focus on children being ready to start school. However, we recognise that school readiness is not just about starting school in reception but around staying steady in school across the key stages.

The report highlights strong partnership working, effective practice, and forward plans that contribute to ensuring children are prepared to thrive in school.

Recommendations and Reasons

- I. It is recommended that the panel note the initiatives that have been developed across multiple partners and the impact of these approaches to date to enable continuous development of this work on behalf of the youngest children in our city.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The activity described in this report aligns with key strategic priorities of the partnership, as shown below:

Achieving Excellence

The work outlined in this report contributes by:

- Ensuring a data-informed, standardised transition approach through the Transition Portal.
- Providing a framework for equitable support at universal, targeted, and specialist levels.
- Offering high-quality professional development and cross-sector collaboration.

Bright Future

School readiness initiatives support the city's goal that *every child has the best start in life* by:

- Promoting inclusive practices from early years through school entry.
- Engaging families and communities to support communication, wellbeing, and development.
- Supporting timely, child-centred transitions that reduce gaps and raise long-term outcomes.

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

None

Financial Risks

There are no current financial risks. The transition portal has been funded by the Virtual School and this funding will continue based on the efficacy of the approach. This is within the parameters of the grant for the virtual school.

Additionally, Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs funding has been extended for another year by government, and this has supported the Transition Networks.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Potential increase in travel across the city as families access support in community-based settings such as Family Hubs and practitioners access training. Where appropriate, online events are also held.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

Research shows that education plays a crucial role in counteracting child poverty as education can provide children with knowledge and skills that can lead to higher incomes and better life outcomes. Furthermore, through these approaches, families are linked to community-based support such as Family Hubs that provide support beyond school readiness and include access to other services that support low-income households.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							
C	Climate Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)
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	If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
<p>Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Amanda Davis, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills</p>											
<p>Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes</p> <p>Date agreed: 08/07/2025</p>											
<p>Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Cresswell agreed verbally</p> <p>Date approved: 08/07/2025</p>											

Introduction

Good levels of development (GLD) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in Plymouth are slightly below the national average in some areas of learning. In addition to this, since the pandemic, some children and families have required additional support to be ready for formal education in school across the country and within our city.

This report highlights the approaches we have taken to supporting our children in the earliest years, to achieve a steady start to their school life.

The Transitions Portal

A significant part of our school readiness strategy has been the development and use of a transitions portal. This is a secure online platform enabling Early Years settings and childminders to share holistic child information with primary schools to enable the children's skills, preferences, learning styles and any specific needs to be understood and planned for in advance of the beginning of the school year.

For the Year 1 (2023 intake), 127 settings used the portal. 91 were Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI settings) and 36 were school nurseries. 2,132 children supported through detailed transition planning. 696 children were flagged via the Early Intervention Indicator (EII) for enhanced supporting school, giving them a steadier start to their Reception year.

For the Year 2 (2024 intake), 111 settings used the portal. 75 were PVI and 36 were school nurseries. 1,974 children were supported in total and 545 flagged for enhanced EII transition. The reduced figures in year 2 are attributed to the fact that there were lower birthrates and therefore a reduced cohort. There was also a small number of PVI closures. Schools with their own nurseries managed internal transitions due to the seamless nature of interaction with colleagues and children already being part of the school community, with their skills and needs already understood.

Additionally, a small number of settings on the site of feeder primaries felt they already had close links and could share key information outside of the portal. A very small number of PVI settings did not engage with the project and nine childminders did not have Reception aged children moving up this year.

The impact of the use of the Transitions Portal has been earlier identification of vulnerabilities to enable improved transition planning and classroom readiness, as well as more consistent practice across providers, gathering and sharing the same key information.

Here are some reflections from users of the portal:

"The Transition Portal is a very effective tool for schools to use."

"Speeding up the process of information sharing."

"Giving vital information to schools to help the transition process and hopefully aiding schools to help settle the children into their new classes / routines."

"Helps with needs of incoming children being known, affects staffing and budgetary requirements."

"Having everything all in one place. It is set out clearly to include all the important information necessary for a transition with the added extra of being able to upload additional documents is great."

"The schools our children are attending who were flagged as having extra support all contacted us."

The Plymouth Enhanced Transition Framework

The second element to enhance school readiness is The Plymouth Enhanced Transition Framework. This is a key tool developed collaboratively by Plymouth City Council and education partners to ensure all children experience smooth, well-planned, and inclusive transitions from Early Years into school and between educational phases.

The Framework supports practitioners to plan structured, child-centred transitions across educational stages. It does this through identifying levels of support required—Universal, Targeted, or Specialist which is based on vulnerability, complexity, or need. It ensures early identification and joined-up communication between settings, schools, and families and reduces the risk of poor transition outcomes for vulnerable groups such as children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or English as an additional language (EAL) as well as children in care.

The framework covers transitions from early years settings to Reception and year-to-year transitions within primary and secondary schools. It also includes transitions between key stages, including Year 6 to Year 7.

The Framework contains tools and appendices to guide and standardise practice. These are the vulnerability identification tool which helps assess the level of support a child may need and the planning checklists and proformas which help to ensure clear communication of key information such as learning needs, emotional and behavioural considerations and health or safeguarding information. The framework also includes pupil profile templates to provide consistent, succinct information from settings to schools. Additionally, it includes parent and carer information leaflets to support understanding of what transition means and how families can be actively involved.

A clear set of definitions within the framework helps practitioners differentiate between:

- Universal Support: For all children (e.g., visiting the new school, shared stories, transition books).
- Targeted Support: For children who need some additional preparation (e.g., transition passports, extra visits, small group sessions).
- Specialist Support: For those with complex needs (e.g., multi-agency meetings, individual transition plans, personalised resources).

To enable robust implementation and reach across the education community all Plymouth schools and Early Years settings are expected to use or refer to the Framework when planning transitions.

The framework is promoted consistently through Plymouth City Council's Early Years and School bulletins, the Inclusion and SENDCO networks and the Early Years forums and leadership briefings. Guidance is routinely referenced during transition planning meetings and is embedded into the work of inclusion staff.

The impact of the framework and the benefits identified through feedback and local case studies shows that there is greater consistency in information-sharing between settings and schools. There has been earlier identification of needs, allowing schools to prepare staffing, resources, and support plans, where required. It has reduced anxiety for children, particularly those with SEND or additional vulnerabilities. There has been increased confidence supported among practitioners and parents in the transition process.

In practice, the framework ensures that transition is not a one-off event, but an ongoing, planned process. It also ensures that all stakeholders including families, settings, schools, and any services supporting the child or family are involved in preparing the child for school. Through the framework, children and their lived experiences are seen holistically, beyond attainment or snapshots of information about their behaviour.

As part of our commitment to ongoing improvement and development, the Framework is currently under review as part of the Place-Based Plan, with the following planned improvements to strengthen inclusion guidance, especially for children with complex needs and English as English as an additional language (EAL). There will be updated digital tools for easier sharing and recording and greater integration with the Transition Portal, ensuring that schools not only receive data but can align this with graduated transition planning.

Transitions Networks

The third element of our approach to school readiness is our development of Transition Networks for supporting children from early years to reception. Held twice each year, these events offer reflective learning, shared practice and evaluation of existing approaches. The latest event took place on 11th March 2025 at Plymouth Marjon University and was jointly delivered by Plymouth City Council, the Early Years South West Stronger Practice Hub, and Marjon University. It included a lecture on the emotional and developmental impact of transitions on children and families. Workshops at the event explored play-based transition methods and the role of practitioner-parent partnerships. A dedicated evaluation space enabled settings to reflect on last year's transition outcomes.

Some of those captured were:

‘It was beneficial to share transition ideas and reflect on our current practice’.

“Perfect reminder of what school readiness is and an opportunity to discuss transitions ensuring we also now liaise more with other settings”.

“Made us evaluate more and think about what we want from nurseries and how to reach out”.

“Helps to ensure that communication between settings is consistent”.

Smooth Start – Communication and Play Webinars

The fourth element of our approach is two online webinars run by the Early Years South West Stronger Practice Hub. The hub offered morning and evening sessions to maximise access for practitioners. It was attended by 87 early years professionals and topics included supporting anxious children, using play to develop school readiness and embedding “school-friendly” language into everyday routines.

Whilst not provided directly by Plymouth City Council, we actively promoted this opportunity to settings in our city and learned from the event, to strengthen our collective approaches.

Let's Get Chatting Campaign 2025

In addition to all the above approaches, there has been a social media and outreach campaign aimed at parents and carers of children from pre-birth to age 5, supporting home communication and early development. This was re-launched in April 2025 and delivered via Early Years setting bulletins and packs and weekly social media themes and ready-made content for providers.

The topics covered include “Notice and respond” to maximise communication with young children and interact at opportune moments to encourage good spoken language (where appropriate) and communication. It also includes the importance of everyday chat with children as well as bespoke focus on how to support school readiness. It advises parents and carers when and where to seek further help.

Through this approach, families are also signposted to the offer in our Family Hubs, the Peep Learning Together programme and Healthy Movers. These programmes are evidenced-based and therefore proven to support school readiness.

The Healthy Movers Programme is led by Active Devon and promotes physical literacy and enhances communication development. It is evidenced to support social-emotional readiness for school.

The Healthy Movers training offer includes a one-day practical course for Early Years practitioners with a printed handbook and 16 activity cards for settings to utilise with children and access to an online practitioner network.

It is targeted at early years staff, family hubs, and school-based settings.

The Graduated Approach to Inclusion and Plymouth Ordinarily Available Provision (Early Years) provides a range of information for practitioners and includes Early Years SENDCo Briefings to support leadership for our youngest children with special needs or emerging needs.

We continue to seek opportunities to enhance the experiences of our youngest children, helping them and their parents and carers feel confident about starting school and maximising the opportunities of this key phase of development. As such, we continuously seek new opportunities and to strengthen and develop our collective approaches in Plymouth. The Nasen Whole School SEND Project which will run from September 2025 to Feb 2026 is a new collaboration with the Local Authority and Nasen to embed inclusive and effective transition practice.

It will focus on inclusive, timely, and person-centred transitions. The participants will be Early Years SENDCOs, Reception teachers, and leaders across the system. There will be 5 online sessions to support practice over the 6 months and there will be a balance of Early Years and school professionals.

We are also creating a School Readiness Video with Early Years South West to support curriculum planning and to further embed a shared understanding of expectations for supporting Plymouth children into school and giving them a steady start.

Further to this there will be a SENDCO Transition Event in early spring 2026. This will be a half-day conference jointly hosted by Early Years South West and Plymouth City Council. There will be a continuous professional development component and transition strategies for children with SEND will be explored.

Currently there are a low number of Education, Health and Care Plans for children in the early years, and we want to ensure, as part of our wider strategy for SEND, that needs are identified early and supported robustly and we believe such events will support us in highlighting the importance of this.

The event will also be an intentional networking opportunity, offering time for nursery and school staff to meet and discuss transitions for specific children.

Conclusion

Plymouth continues to demonstrate a strong, coherent, and child-centred approach to school readiness. These efforts promote equality, inclusion, and confidence, all hallmarks of the Achieving Excellence and Bright Future visions.

Through early identification, improved communication, and cross-sector collaboration, Plymouth is ensuring that more children are entering school have been emotionally and socially prepared and recognised and supported for their individual needs.

This work has been widely appreciated by the education community and is seen as a strength of the partnership. The value and impact of each element is individually assessed, and we would hope to see an improvement in outcomes for children at the end of the Foundation Stage and the Good Levels of Development measure.

To further strengthen our focus, we have added a specific early years element to our Special Educational Needs and Disability Delivery Plan. We will also ensure that once Good Levels of Development are reported, the Plymouth Education Board will oversee plans in response to the outcomes.

Furthermore, we are ambitious to explicitly embed the voices of parent and carers and our youngest children into this work, to ensure we co-create initiatives and evaluate impact based on lived experiences of children and their families.