



Integrating effective support for children with additional support needs into the expansion of funded early learning and childcare

Case Study: Hillend Children's Centre, Greenock

Hillend Children's Centre is an integrated and inclusive setting and offers placements to children with Additional Support Needs across Inverclyde, and mainstream provision to children residing in the local area.

Hillend is run by Inverclyde Council and believes in a nurturing and inclusive environment where children will feel secure, happy and their individuality; encouraging them to play, grow and learn together.

The setting is registered for 50 children on a full-time equivalent basis plus 6 part-time under two placements. 15 of these spaces are for children with Additional Support Needs and respite support is also available for parents of children with Additional Support Needs from birth to age three.

This case study aims to highlight examples of good practice embedded in Hillend Children's Centre that ensure children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) can access provision of funded early learning and childcare.

Inverclyde Council support children across all settings within the local authority with additional support needs. Hillend Children's Centre is specifically targeted for children with the most complex needs.

16,500 children registered (18% of child registrations) for funded early learning and childcare in 2022 had an additional support need recorded, an increase of 2% from 2021. Furthermore, 1,410 (2%) of children registered were assessed or declared disabled, an increase of 1% from 2021.¹

Local Authorities are also reporting a year-on-year increase in the number of children without any additional support need diagnosis displaying more distressed characteristics, and where ASD

is no longer the main learning barrier within the early learning and childcare environment. An online survey in February 2022 indicated that 43% of ELC providers delivering early learning and childcare for a child with a learning disability said that they were not confident or were unsure about delivering this support.²

The wellbeing of children and their families is at the heart of everything staff at Hillend Children's Centre do. This begins with a **home visit** and carefully planned setting visits. Home visits have always been part of the induction/ transition to nursery process for children with ASN or PMLD as a means for staff to better understand the needs of the child and the family. However, recognising the impact covid-19 had on the wellbeing of young children, a decision was made by all staff at Hillend that home visits would form part of the induction process for all children joining the setting.

Home visits are made by the Head of Centre and the **child's key worker**. This eyes-on opportunity

¹ Schools in Scotland 2022: Summary Statistics, Scottish Government

² ELC -PMLD Report, The Indigo Group and The Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments

allows staff to observe children in their own environment and start to establish strong relationships with families as early as possible. By establishing positive relationships with families, a partnership approach to children’s learning and development is supported.

Hillend Children’s Centre has continuously demonstrated the ability to provide services that accommodate a range of learning styles and need.

The setting has three playrooms, two of these playrooms have been specifically **designed to meet the needs of children with additional support needs**. The Sunflower room is the provisions complex and medical additional support needs room, it provides individualised curriculum for each child within the playroom. The Snowdrop room focuses on communication and language. Snowdrop supports children’s understanding of language through visual stimulus for their timetable and as a means of communication. Both rooms have an extensive range of equipment available to support children access all areas of the curriculum appropriately. The Bluebell room is an integrated mainstream room. It allows all children in the nursery to work together with consideration and plans to ensure that individual children’s needs and learning styles are met.

The setting also has a quiet room and specially designed sensory room that enhances sensory experiences for children.

Values, Vision and Aims
At Hillend we are Getting It Right for Every Child through our Values, Vision and Aims

Our Values

- WISDOM**: We achieve this through all staff and children making sensible judgements and decisions based on their knowledge and experiences
- COMPASSION**: We do this through being caring and respectful to others and to support and encourage children and staff to be the best they can be
- INTEGRITY**: The service is a calm relaxed environment where children play and join in a wide range of activities and experiences of which all are included
- JUSTICE**: We do this through children having a voice, being listened to and their opinions valued. If children or staff make a mistake this is something we learn from

Our Vision
Our vision is that all children will be:

- Secure, Happy, Have Fun, Supported
- Confident, Successful, Safe, Included
- Progress, Responsible citizens, Enthusiastic, Listened to
- Respected

Our aim is to do this by:

Staff being – caring, motivated, dedicated, committed, sincere, honest, experienced and leadership of own key group	Effectiveness of service	Working in partnership with parents
High Level care	Continuous staff training	Monitoring individual progression
Resources	Team around the child	Communication

Achieving these aims will result in us being successful in delivering a child centred, individual, diverse, relevant, coherent service with parents and professionals who will enhance all children's education and development

Lunchtime is an opportunity for all the children at Hillend to come together, lunch is served in the dining room that is situated in a building within the vast outdoor garden area. Lunchtime is a self-service activity, and children are supervised by key workers. Children with more complex needs are supported by key workers. Families have reported positive home mealtime experiences with their children because of the whole nursery mealtime approach. For example, children join in with mealtimes are able to eat with few interventions.

Sensory stimuli are present throughout the setting. Visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli are used on the door of the playrooms, and in other areas throughout the setting. For example, the word and a picture of a sunflower, a push button ‘sunflower’ audio recording and an artificial sunflower are thoughtfully placed at the child’s level. Visual stimuli are used by children in the Snowdrop rooms to independently plan their daily activities and as a means of communication. These bring a lot of joy to the children – particularly, the small toy toilets affixed to the wall outside of toilets throughout the setting. Makaton is also used

widely throughout the setting – both in person and included on key documentation such as the Values, Vision and Aims.

Hillend maintains **close links with a range of specialists and professionals** from a number of other agencies through an ASN Forum, including Educational Psychologists. Often, Educational Psychologists report being presented with a list of names of children who a setting has identified as requiring additional support upon arrival at a setting. However, this is often found to be an ineffective approach. The approach of Hillend is unique, who instead work with the Educational Psychology team on systems.

In 2018, staff from Hillend and the Educational Psychology team undertook a piece of work focusing on Nurture Principle IV: Language is a vital means of communication and created a tracking and planning system that brought together three pre-existing **assessment tools**; *Curriculum for Excellence*, *Teaching Talking and, Realising the Ambition*, into one. In practice, this is used daily by staff as an observation tool. Once a term, for the most complex children, staff come together with the teacher to talk, problem solve and think against the benchmarks of the tool, where is this child? It is often very difficult to track children with complex needs as changes can be microlevel over a term or two, however staff were cognisant of this whilst designing this tool and ensured microlevel changes were also being tracked. The holistic nature of this tool allows the staff team to use this to determine 'what is next' for children.

Throughout this work, the level of collegiality and the level of background reading of the staff charged with the responsibility of reviewing the Speech, Language and Communication Needs processes was noted by Educational Psychologists as something that exceeded anything they had seen previously in any educational establishment.

The staff team at Hillend Children's Centre are very empowered, very focused on theory and outwards looking. Along with the assessment tool, staff also went on to develop guidance that is focused on what an inclusive communication environment looks like and includes a range of information and resources Hillend Children's Centre utilise to support and encourage staff in other establishments to further embed these ways of working into their own practice.

Leadership and ownership are also demonstrated across the entire staff team and staff feel empowered to develop and deliver training activities. All staff are allocated actions from the settings corporate learning plan and become the owner of this. During a recent open day celebrating the completion of the refurbishment, staff were confident and had a clear perspective when articulating the provision available at Hillend, and when leading tours.

"There is a whole devolved leadership throughout the establishment, and complete autonomy".

The implementation of 1140 hours came with some **challenges**. It has stopped the centre from being able to meet as a whole team and have staff meetings the way they would previously have been held. However, the Head of Centre has found ways to negotiate this to ensure the expertise of staff and standard of provision are not compromised. This includes bulletin style mailshots, staff led development sessions and focused in-service day learning and development sessions.

In Inverclyde, all local authority establishments have five delivery models.³ The implementation of the statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of funded ELC was the first time that families at Hillend had a **choice of delivery models**. Despite this, the setting continuously worked closely with children and their families to ensure their wider support needs were met, this also includes a transport service. Using a dedicate nursery mini-bus, children can be transported to an address of a family member or blended placement within Inverclyde.

Staff within the setting are cognisant of the **pace of the day**, and the amount of time children can manage in the nursery environment. Children accessing ASN provision do so on a morning or afternoon basis, and in a different model to mainstream provision, with funded hours being spread across the full- year.

3 Delivery models for Early Learning and Childcare, Inverclyde Council

An increase in engagement will illustrate a 'shift in emphasis, away from the relationship between parents and establishments, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

All staff at Hillend Children's Centre encourage **parents, carers, and families** to become involved in the life of centre. Stay and Play sessions, workshops, Grandparents Days are just some of the activities used to engage parents and families in all aspects of their child's learning and development. Handwritten two-way home link diaries are standard practice and, parents also formed part of a working group to develop the Values, Visions and Aims.



Staff know the children and families very well, which allows them to have a clear understanding and knowledge of children's individual needs. The ethos of Hillend is based on honesty and trust. The centre listens to parent concerns or views of the delivery of provision, feedback is also sought after events to ascertain what parents liked or what they would like more of.

In May 2023, Hillend Children's Centre hosted visitors from Iceland, who were keen to understand more about the Scottish approach to early education, and to explore the integrated model available within the setting.

Education Scotland have selected Hillend Children's Centre for the national thematic inspection⁴ looking at the impact of 1140 hours, and the Head of Setting was also shortlisted for the 2023 Education Scotland – Making a difference (ELC) award.