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Toddlers to trial scheme to see if play can close preschool language gap

ABOUT 20 Aberdeen toddlers will take part in a pilot study around play in the new year, the Evening Express can reveal.

In an exclusive interview with Childcare and Early Years Minister Mark McDonald, he explained the Stay and Play study would see parents from Middlefield bringing their children to Manor Park School for play sessions alongside childcare practitioners.

He said the aim is to help children's development with



EARLY YEARS: MSP Mark McDonald is launching the Stay and Play pilot.

EDUCATION

By Jennifer McKiernan
political reporter

language and socialisation skills before they start at nursery.

He said: "We've had feedback parents were reluctant to leave their children with practitioners in other play activities, because they want to maintain involvement.

"This way of doing things means parents can be an active part of play-based learning.

"Parents will help shape the programme, so we could have a story that involves interaction with puppets to help children understand different concepts and ideas."

Mr McDonald said there could be a vocabulary gap of up to 18 months between toddlers from the most and least deprived backgrounds.

He said: "Children from less affluent backgrounds often have a vocabulary gap compared to their peers and play-based learning in the early years has a critical role in that.

"The Growing Up in Scotland

report has shown us there can be a vocabulary gap of 18 months.

"Part of the motivation for this pilot is to try and improve that preschool experience for children and address that gap.

"Some of that work will need to start further back, from birth, but we think this could be one way to help support greater attainment for these children in future.

"We need to empower parents to play a full role in their child's educational performance and part of that is making sure they're confident with different ways of playing with their children."

Being able to play with children of a similar age is also sometimes difficult, Mr McDonald said.

He said: "For a lot of children, if there's no close family or friend network it can be difficult for those children to get opportunities for play interaction with children the same age. This will offer socialisation opportunities as part of a group, so children will be able to play and parents will also be able to form friendships."

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