Scotland: Free nursery plan 'on course' [GB] [1]

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EXCERPTS:

An increasing number of three-year-olds in Scotland have access to free nursery care, according to the Scottish Executive.

New figures show that the government is on target to deliver free pre-school places to all three-year-olds by 2002.

Ministers revealed that 80% of children in this age group were now receiving nursery education, up from 68% at the same time last year.

The executive also pledged to close a loophole which meant that some children were missing out.

"We are now well on track to delivering our committment to provide pre-school places for every three-year-old whose parents want it by 2002." - Nicol Stephen.

Children who turn four in January and February end up being either the youngest or the oldest in their class. If parents choose to wait until their child is five before sending them to school, they are not entitled to an extra year's free nursery care.

The executive said that, from next year, these youngsters will also be included in pre-school provision.

Speaking at the One Stop Childcare Agency in Edinburgh, Deputy Education Minister Nicol Stephen said: "We are now well on track to delivering our commitment to provide pre-school places for every three-year-old whose parents want it by 2002."

He added: "Involving partners in the expansion of pre-school education and childcare is vital to meet the wide ranging needs of parents."

The Programme for Government target for pre-school education is for all three-year-olds to be involved by April 2002.

Owing to the fact that participation in pre-school education is voluntary, ministers say they are now aiming to make sure 85% of youngsters in this age group take part in nursery education.

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