

Scottish government to invest \$329m in increasing child care over the next two years ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Angela Constance was speaking at the start of an advertising campaign aimed at making parents and carers more aware of the expansion in free childcare.

All three and four-year-olds are now entitled to 600 hours of funded care a year, with this being extended to disadvantaged two-years-olds, helping about 15% of this age group this school year and increasing to about 27% next year.

A total of £329 million of Scottish Government cash is being invested over the next two years.

Ms Constance said: "We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up and this significant investment underlines our commitment to expanding quality early learning and childcare provision as we aim to match the best in Europe."

The engagement was her first since replacing Mike Russell in the role of Education Secretary when new First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced her Cabinet team at the end of last week.

Ms Constance, who visited Melville Street Nursery in Edinburgh, spoke about the £192,000 advertising campaign, the second phase of which has just got under way.

She said: "Thousands of families across the country are already benefiting from the additional hours of childcare which came into effect in August and we want to ensure everyone who is eligible, including those who can start in the new year, continues to register with their local authority.

"By providing high-quality, flexible childcare that is affordable and accessible for everyone, we can help improve outcomes for children and support parents or carers who want to return to work or study."

Ms Sturgeon has already pledged to increase the amount of free childcare eligible youngsters receive from the current level of 16 hours a week to 30 hours if she wins the Holyrood election in 2016.

Ms Constance said: "We have expanded funded hours by 45% since 2007 - an increase worth up to £707 per child per year. And we have made clear our wish to go further.

"The First Minister has outlined our ambition to increase early learning and childcare provision by the end of the next parliament from 16 hours a week to 30 hours a week. Of course, the more powers that are delivered to the Scottish Parliament, the more we will be able to do."

Region: Europe ^[3]

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