

## Notes of SEN FORUM, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2008 at Devizes Sports Club

*The notes which follow are based on the written responses received from the people answering the questions. We have incorporated notes from the major areas of discussion at the most appropriate points.*

### **Question 1 - Response by Fiona Boxley-Lang, Principal Educational Psychologist**

**ASD is recognized as a main priority. Will the LA offer suitable provision for each of Aspergers, ADHD, and High Functioning Autism rather than spend huge sums on out-of-county placements?**

- ASD is nationally recognized as a growing issue and this is acknowledged in Wiltshire. The Local Authority's ASD/SCD Position Statement is about to be published.
- The LA aspires to support children with ASD/SCD in county in their own community, where and whenever possible. However, both we in Wiltshire and the Government recognize that there may always be a few children and young people whose needs would be met more effectively, in an out of county placement.)
- We are currently developing Enhanced Learning Provision (ELP) to build upon the provision already available in our Secondary Schools where the needs of the majority of children with complex learning and communication needs at secondary level will be met. A great deal of planning, additional resources and training have gone into this facility which will be operational from September 08 however, there will still be a small number of pupils with SEN, in need of a more specialised placement.

#### Other discussion comments:

- The LA is currently undertaking a complete review of Wiltshire's special schools. This will include the future direction of provision, including specialisms such as Autism. The timescale for the review is expected to be established during the next term.
- It was noted that there is clearly a pattern of strong joint working between the four primary ASD centres.)

## Question 2 - Response by Karina Kulawik, Central SEN Manager

**Many parents ask for private assessments in the hope of speeding up the SEN process, often at considerable cost. What value is placed on these by schools and by the SEN Panel? Are they given the same level of acceptance as those completed by LA staff?**

- Private assessments don't speed up SEN process and all timescales from the Code of Practice apply.
- All the evidence is taken into account when decisions are taken. However, Panel will take note of the fact that some private assessments are based on a one-off visit/short assessment and are often not based or linked with any school evidence. Environmental factors are very important and when assessing children's needs, they must be considered.
- It is always best to discuss these assessment issues with schools and, if necessary, contact EP Service direct, contact details can be found under Local Education Teams at [www.wiltshire.gov.uk/education-and-learning/sen-educational-psychology-service](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/education-and-learning/sen-educational-psychology-service) )

Further discussion comment:

- In response to questions about the panel, a basic explanation of the process was given. It was noted, for example, that the panel looks at all reports on a child to get a 'whole picture' on which to base a decision; that it has several permanent members and others attend in rotation; and that a majority view is taken on decisions.
- In response to a query about instigating assessments within schools to get the system moving, it was stated that any parent can access Educational Psychologists through their Local Education Team (LET), for support.

## Question 3 - Response from Jimmy Doyle, Assistant Director

**At the last SEN County Forum there was a discussion about parent involvement in strategy and policy. Will the LA develop a detailed policy with reference to training, timing of meetings, expenses and expected level of involvement?**

- The LA accepts the importance of encouraging, supporting and facilitating parent and service involvement in the development of strategy and policy.

- Since the last Forum, the LA has established the SEN Strategic Management Group to oversee and coordinate SEN development and activity within the County. It is the intention to work towards achieving parental participation in this group – see below
- One means of achieving this would be to establish a ‘parent reference group’ with clearly defined terms of reference, which could offer feedback on strategy/policy developments. The LA would be prepared to offer independent facilitation for the formation of the group together with reasonable expenses for members to support engagement. Following this Forum, the LA propose to work with **ask** with a view to considering the practicalities of such an initiative.
- In addition, the LA will utilise the ‘Regional Standards’ for participation, which were developed by the South West Regional Partnership in 2006/2007, to analyse and improve our practice with regards to participation. The standards are based on the principle that “successful and effective service planning and strategic development can only be achieved with the direct involvement of children, young people and their parents or carers at every level”.
- The standards were designed to support participation of parents in the planning and review of services which they need, use or could make use of. The approach is based on four principals for participation against which a number of standards have been set:

Engagement  
 Enablement  
 Access and Equality  
 Impact and Transparency

The document includes an evaluation tool which can be used as an aid to using the standards to work towards best practice.

The LA is committed to supporting participation and will take appropriate steps to take this forward.

Other discussion comments:

- The parental response was very positive, and several people volunteered to be part of the reference group.
- In response to questions, it was confirmed that the intention would be for the group to feed into the management group in a meaningful way, as well as responding to issues set by the management group – and that various models could be trialled, to achieve this.

#### Question 4 - Response by Jimmy Doyle, Assistant Director

**During Early Years, many parents feel there is now a clear support path for them and their child, but this confidence cannot be carried forward when the child goes to school. Can the LA explain how this can be developed?**

- The LA is working in line with Government aspirations set out in Every Child Matters and more recently in Aiming High for Disabled Children, where part of the 'core offer' is to achieve joint assessment and transparent, accessible information for parents, together with involving parents, children and young people in service development.
- The Wiltshire C&YP Trust Board, through the Disability Sub Group and the LA SEN Strategy fully supports that aspiration.
- Both of these groups are working to improve information for parents and to promote the work of the 'lead professional' role in supporting a joined up approach. A 'shared processes' approach is currently being developed to support more effective joined up working between health, education and social care in respect of children with complex needs. Our aim is to ensure that all families who seek a service from more than one agency will have an identified 'lead professional'. This role will include:
  - Holding the Common Assessment Framework for a child
  - Co-ordinating the provision of services in accordance with the action plan
  - Acting as a point of contact for the family and other professionals
  - Monitoring changes in the child's needs, review and update action plans
  - Referral to services as required)
- The development of 'Contact Point' which will become operational from April 2009 will further support a 'joined up approach' and will provide a simple directory for professionals showing which professionals and services were working with a child at a given time..

#### Further discussion comments:

- There was discussion of the good practice already in place in the Early Years, with special mention going to the role of Early Years Area SENCOs and their close links to the District Specialist Centres.
- It was noted that there has been a significant investment (£250,000 from Schools' Forum) to support the TISM's (Transition Inclusion Support Meetings) which appear to be making a difference at Early Years. This will enable additional support to be in place for the child's first terms at school. It is envisaged that parents will feel better informed and less isolated, now that TISM's are operational.

## **Question 5 – Response by Phil Ward, Head of SEN**

**There appears to be an inequality of provision at special schools. Some placements can be continued to age 19, whilst others are expected to move to college at age 16. Does the LA have plans to standardise statements to age 19?**

- As outlined in question 1, a review of Wiltshire’s special schools is currently being planned. A timeframe for this review will be produced over the next term. Age will be considered, as a part of this review.
- It should be noted however, that whilst transition arrangements need to be equally good for all young people, it may not be appropriate for all young people to leave at the same age.
- It will be important to ensure that appropriate support is available for all pupils, whether they are moving into education, employment or training.
- The Transitions Group (involving colleagues from schools and colleges, education, adult services and health) are developing a Transition Policy for ages 14-25, which will consider these issues and outline how transitions arrangements will be improved.

### **Discussion:**

- Parents raised the issue of inequality between special schools, using Rowdeford as an example – since children at this school have to go to college for post-16 education, and use LSC funding. It was agreed that the review would consider this issue.
- It was noted that, equally, young people attending schools which do provide post-16 education, may also need more support to be made available, so that they can choose to go elsewhere for education, if appropriate.

## **Question 6 - Response by Karina Kulawik, Central SEN Manager, and Fiona Boxley-Lang, Principal Educational Psychologist.**

**Where schools are bordering on other authorities there are mixed messages about SEN/Statementing. How do parents access support at School Action (SA) and School Action Plus (SA+) and who is responsible for organizing and completing assessments?**

- Children on SA & SA+ - the school is responsible for making appropriate SEN provision and supporting pupils’ special educational needs. The Local Authority that the school belongs to is also responsible for organising help through their own support services.

- Children with a Statement of SEN – the Local Authority for the child’s home address is responsible for maintaining the Statement. This includes financial responsibility and provision of support from supporting services.

Further Discussion Comments:

- The policy listed above is part of a national agreement.
- Examples were used to clarify the points listed above e.g.  
If a child or young person lives in Wiltshire but is educated in Hampshire and does not have a statement then the Hampshire school is responsible for SEN identification and support.  
When a request is made for a Statutory Assessment this is the responsibility of Wiltshire as the home LA.  
If a child lives in Wiltshire and is educated in Hampshire and does have a statement of SEN then Wiltshire is responsible for all support and Wiltshire staff will attend Annual Reviews, as needed.  
There is a named Educational Psychologist for children with Statements of SEN who are being educated out of county.

**Question 7 - Response from Karina Kulawik, Central SEN Manager**

**Specialist Learning Centres (SLCs) have now been in operation for a while. Can the LA give us some details on how they operate, how referrals are made and how is this communicated to parents within their cluster?**

- There are 5 types of primary Specialist Learning Centres (SLCs):
  - 18 x Complex Needs SLCs
  - 4 x Speech and Language SLCs
  - 4 x Autism Spectrum Disorder SLCs
  - 1 x Physical Impairment SLC
  - 2 x Hearing Impairment SLC
- All work towards inclusion
- Admissions are via a Statement of SEN (SEN Panel) and some referrals for children on School Action Plus (for complex needs SLCs ) are made through Resource Allocation Meetings (RAM). Any school in a cluster can refer a child to RAM for possible outreach / inreach.
- Special Schools and SLCs are currently being reviewed as part of the continuum of provision.

Further Discussion Comments:

- Parents were pleased to be made aware of all of the above but expressed concern about how this information is communicated to parents. Several

parents had expressed their concerns about whether their child could / should have been referred at SA+ but had not been made aware of the possibility by their child's school. It was hoped that the LA could highlight this with schools to rectify this problem.

### **Question 8 - Response by Lindsay Long, SEN Adviser**

**There continues to be concerns about the level of SEN understanding, both in schools and within the authority. Parents would have a greater confidence in the support and decision making processes if they knew that all staff involved had an up-to-date depth and breadth of knowledge in relevant conditions. Is there a way in which parents can be given information about training courses completed by staff and how knowledge gained from those courses is shared with other team members? Are any of the courses offered based on the National Occupational Standards for Working with Parents?**

It is not a requirement for schools to declare the specialist qualifications of their staff, however, some schools may choose to.

The LA endeavours to ensure the following:

- All schools are encouraged to have leading staff that have specialist qualifications for SEN in addition to and/or including the SENCO. There is an expectation that training is coordinated through this lead person who will then ensure necessary training is shared across all staff.
- Schools also plan whole school training giving staff additional skills and strategies for teaching students with SEN.
- The LA has a diverse programme of courses for teachers, teaching assistants and support staff in Special Educational Needs, ensuring quality of provision across the county. Training provision is currently being reviewed and analysed and will be reported upon to the SEN Management Group
- The LA is disseminating information about the new National Inclusion Development programme to all schools, enabling teachers and support staff to access training on inclusion. This is a web based resources that parents can view at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/inclusion/idp\\_flier](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/inclusion/idp_flier)
- The LA supports teachers across the County to follow post graduate courses in Specific Learning Difficulties and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorder as well as other courses as the need arises – a list is held centrally to ensure that schools have a qualified specialist and if necessary the school will be targeted to engage further staff in being trained.
- In addition to this there is additional support from the Educational Psychology Service and other specialist teams including the Learning

Support team and the SEN advisor who will deliver training as the need arises.

- Every Secondary school has a SENCO and/or Senior Leader attending 6 days of intensive training to enable them to provide an equality of provision across all schools. The aim is also for them to be able to disseminate this training to the whole school. Within this frame there is work on developing the theme of 'Skills for working with parents'.
- The Learning Support team uses the annual Primary SENCO Network and annual conference to keep schools updated on new developments
- The LA teams keep up to date with local and national developments and disseminate training to meet needs across the schools.

#### Further Discussion Comments:

There was lengthy discussion on this subject which covered a range of points.

- Parents questioned whether there is any training available for parents/carers. The LA responded that:
  - Some is already available through the Early Bird and Early Bird Plus programmes for ASD.
  - There may also be developments from the Online Inset which is available to teachers.
  - Education Officers undertook a series of meetings for parents on the Year 5 transfer review for statemented children, and Transition Information Sessions are a requirement of the Extended Services Core Offer. These are currently being planned and initial training has been undertaken.
- Parents asked what training was given to the LA officers responsible for writing Statements. The LA replied that The Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) who write the Statements are trained in SEN and receive regional training to ensure standardisation. In answer to a question it was specified that AEOs are not aware of the placement for any child at the time of writing the draft statement and their job is to summarise the expert reports of other professionals. The first draft of the Statement then goes to the SEN Panel, where it is checked and amended as necessary, before a placement is decided upon
- Parents asked how a decision is reached at the panel meeting. The LA responded that the members of the panel base their decision upon all of the information given in the expert reports, and summarised in the Statement. The SEN Panel has occasional observers as part of Continuing Professional Development. Many of these are head teachers who eventually become part of the panel team. About 80% of all panels have head teacher representation.
- One of the biggest concerns to parents is how supply teachers get their training on SEN issues. It was noted that all schools have a responsibility to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met and that all staff, including those who are temporary, are aware of specific needs.

### **Question 9 - Response by Karina Kulawik, Central SEN Manager**

**Why does it appear to be so difficult to get medical reports included in the statement?**

- Part 2 & 3 of the Statement includes information/summary of medical reports under heading 'Physical, Sensory & Medical'. In addition, all medical reports are always forwarded to schools as part of a formal consultation.

Further Discussion Comments:

- Parents accepted the accuracy of the statement above. However the major concern is with schools actually using those reports so that the 'whole-child' can be provided for. It was felt that medical needs should be seen as a priority.
- The LA highlighted the fact that the initial Statement sent to parents is a draft Statement, which can be amended if necessary. Parents should raise the issue with the officer named in the letter, if they feel that something important has been overlooked)
- The point was made that this may not always be clear to parents/ carers. Karina accepted that the covering letter, which accompanies a statement, should be amended to make it a more user-friendly document. However, it is a legal document and changes are sometimes difficult to make.

### **Question 10 - Response by Karina Kulawik, Central SEN Manager**

**Continuing the theme from previous forums of 'the whole child', can the LA and PCT please provide details of any policy to ensure that transport provision is based on the needs of the child? Can this also include a review of PTU as the district forums provided several examples in which provision was totally inappropriate, badly organized and poorly communicated.**

- The Central SEN Service has agreed to appoint, on a permanent basis, a Transport Manager. To date, this has been a temporary post based on a pilot scheme set up to develop good practice in this area.
- The Transport Manager is part of the SEN Team but physically based within Pupil Transport Unit, therefore working closely on:
  - Best possible transport arrangements
  - Health and safety risk assessments
  - Periodic reviews of all travel arrangements

- The Transport Manager is also going to focus on developing a proactive approach to independent travel training for young people. This is following a very successful project at Rowdeford School.

Further Discussion Comments:

- One parent asked whether the method of communication regarding their child being ill could be changed. The LA responded that this would be looked at by the Transport Manager as part of the periodic review but it was noted that most of these events occurred during out-of-office hours. Parents were particularly concerned about taxi drivers being forced to use their mobile phones whilst driving when this is being discouraged by road safety groups.
- Parents questioned whether transport arrangements could include after school activity. The LA responded that transport arrangements currently cover school hours only. However, they are trying to increase the flexibility of the arrangements, and this will be included in the Extended Schools agenda. It was noted that there are other options available as an alternative to the LA providing transport, such as payment to parents for transporting children themselves or acting as escorts. Parents reflected that this would need to be made clear to parents/ carers.

The PCT representative was unable to attend but subsequently added the sentence below as their response.

The PCT doesn't directly provide any transport. However, there is the facility for people in receipt of particular benefits to claim back the costs of public transport, and in some cases, taxis to enable them to attend health appointments.

