

**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SEN SUB-GROUP OF THE LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2001**

**Members Present**

Michael Brand; Jane Bramwell; Brenda Jennings; Clare Martens.

**Officers Present**

Anne Jeffries, Jill Hall

Apologies were received from Noel Brown

**1 Presentation**

1.1 The group received a presentation from Ian Rowe (IR) on the Special Needs Yearly Review 1999 which is a statistical analysis of trend information and allows for comparisons to be made over a three year period.

1.2 The group noted:

- The latest (1999) data is compiled from Form Day 2000
- Number of statements stable at around 2600
- Statements analysed by type showed that MLD statements predominate.
- Geographical analysis showed greater number and % of statements in Aylesbury Vale (AV) than rest of County. (In discussion the group noted that other pupil performance data including SAT's, 11 + showed that AV performed worse)

1.3 Trends of number of statements showed substantial fall in 1999, but slight increase likely in 2000.

Discussion arose on whether this was due to changes of procedure. Peter Scott (PS) explained that the Formal Assessment and Placement Panel had been formed to standardise the assessment criteria over whole County. This has led to a more consistent process.

PS also explained that BCC were adopting the 'Needs Led' assessment model taken from DfEE draft Code of Practice.

1.4 IR data highlighted important trends:

- Children were being statemented much earlier now at primary level. This indicated that early assessment is working. However it also meant that children were statemented for longer periods of time and that the number of 'statement years' - ie number of pupils x number of years they were statemented - was increasing, partially explaining the spending pressure.

- PS indicated that there were very few de-statements at present.
- Gender trend showed far higher incidence of EBD boys than girls. Why? Reasons not clear but may not just be need.

1.5 IR pointed out that average cost of placing a pupil in out of County Special provision had risen from £24k to £28k pa.

1.6 PS continued by explaining that the Trends data had identified a need for additional provision in the form of SLD and language departments attached to schools.

BCC has been trying to open two departments in the South of County and one in Aylesbury. However due to issues around Governors agreement, specialist staffing etc these have not opened.

The group noted that this had led directly to pupils being placed out of County at great expense. This led to discussion arising from question posed to PS in advance.

## 2 Questions to PS.

2.1 Q: How is Trends information fed into provision requirements?

LEA can identify trends but it is not in control of the schools. This is a major stumbling block to provision. As well as the secondary language department issue (para 1.6) there is not enough primary provision either. But reaching agreement with Governing Bodies is an issue as is staff training. Partly historical as responsibility stays with the LEA but money is increasingly delegated to schools. (See 2.2).

Also there can be resistance from schools as Ofsted inspections are increasingly reporting on behaviour and children with Special Needs can have behavioural problems which may reflect on school. (Is Ofsted recognising the effect of Government inclusion policies sufficiently?)

2.2 Q: How does LEA communicate SEN objectives to Heads?

PS explained the consultation routes.

Lines of communication were open between officers and Heads and user groups.

The group wanted to know how this information was fed to Members/portfolio holders. PS stated that this has not been clarified as far as his department is concerned. He illustrated this by pointing out that the potential reporting line of his statementing team through to portfolio holders.

Members observed that the demise of the SEN panel meant that at present there was no natural reporting structure other than direct to portfolio holders. Other members were unlikely to receive information.

PS said that at present there was confusion between Special Schools and SEN portfolio. He illustrated this by pointing out that a pupil with an SEN statement at

Special School would be in one portfolio but if moved to mainstream provision would then move to another portfolio in terms of budget/accountability etc.

2.3 Kim Hart (KH) contributed on the same issues.

We need to create the mechanisms to put the SEN strategy into practice working closely with Heads.

Once money has been delegated to school we must develop monitoring mechanisms to ensure that provision is delivered. But that monitoring must be supportive and perceived as supportive.

2.4 Q: What is the early assessment procedure? At what age does it start? How are the results used to support pupils/Schools/parents/LEA?

KH noted that Early Years covers year 0-8.

Current assessment pre school is ad hoc and poor. There has never been a system to provide consistent funding for this. We need to work closely with other disciplines at these ages including medical/Social Services.

Discussion around how potential SEN children came to our attention in the first place. KH drew the group's attention to Early Bird scheme for parents.

KH questioned whether statementing pre school was valid. Perhaps support money could simply be allocated on the basis of need.

Nevertheless a great deal of work is starting to come on stream. KH distributed copies of the Strategic Plan 2001-04 and the Implementation Plan 2001-02. The latter details the first year actions towards achieving the Strategic Plan.

In particular she drew the group's attention to the phased appointment of 12 new Area SENCO's to deliver a focussed early years plan and develop the clusters.

The group welcomed this and also hoped that recruitment would be on time. Group also commented that these appointments were scheduled at the same time as the Learning Support Team were being issued with redundancy notices. Recruit retain issue noted.

2.5 Q: Could you provide (anonymous) case studies to illustrate how early intervention has lessened the need for SEN support later and led to reintegration into mainstream?

PS pointed out that SEN is now based on need and leads to entitlement.

KH provided a case study of early intervention leading to dramatic improvement in behaviour (the group asked for this in writing as a case study).

2.6 Q: If early assessment and early intervention will lead to a reduction in number of statements how is SEN budget allowed to reflect this priority?

PS referred to IR trend data that in fact early intervention is leading to pupils with SEN being statemented earlier and for longer. An important spending driver.

PS also drew group's attention to the new formula for delegated funding of SEN money which was related to KS1/SATS results as well as other data. The group wanted to explore this further in the light of the possibility of the 'perverse incentive' that if schools improve pupils' performance at early years by lessening their need they would lose money!

Nevertheless PS thought that the new formula would produce an incentive by separating funding from statements.

- 2.7 Q: Within early years provision what milestones have been set to monitor progress to achieve the outcomes listed on page 23 of the SEN strategy (blue book).

PS drew group's attention to page 4 of report to last Education Committee (item 9) Appendix 1 of notes.

He pointed out that Phase 1 was on track.

Consultation on school clusters had as yet yielded only two responses and the group noted that the future of Learning Support was being radically changed as a result of delegated funding.

PS pointed out that when he had completed consultations on Special School consortia and School clusters he would need a decision on action and funding.

The group returned to the question of accountability and portfolios in this context and recognised that this needed to be reflected in our report.

- 2.8 Q: What are the practices used by support centres to support pupils in mainstream classrooms?

PS said we do not have support centres yet. We have departments, but as stated earlier we do not have enough. This was a critical issue and created many difficulties at school level. Yet the LEA has not been able to progress new departments for reasons detailed (para 1.6).

This issue needs resolution.

- 3 Michael Brand thanked Peter Scott and Kim Hart for their time and preparation.

- 4 Next steps.

- 4.1 The group agreed to meet Anne Smart (H/T at Marsh First School) on site, also to invite John Beckerleg to discuss portfolio structure (he had expressed interest in attending) with (on same day if possible) Bridget Campbell, parent of SEN child and member of consultative group.

Jane Bramwell to talk to Ruth Cutler.

Also in the light of PS comments on statementing management group agreed that Michael Brand and Brenda Jennings would visit this section.

4.2 Groups agreed to submit two reports:

- (a) report on portfolio structures - the split between Mike Appleyard's/ Margaret Aston's. This needed to be submitted to Lifelong Learning Select Committee on 20 March.
- (b) Interim report on Early Years and early intervention to be submitted to the following Committee
- (c) Draft report on (a) to be discussed by the group at a meeting on 5 March (1.30 pm) but meetings outlined in 4.1 to take place earlier.
- (d) Michael Brand to draft questions for John Beckerleg and draft objectives for the group to submit to Select Committee in line with minute.