

# **LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE**

## **SEN GROUP**

Notes of on-site meeting with Anne Smart (AS) (Headteacher Marsh First School, Wycombe). Susan Lynas (SL) – Teacher and previous SENCO also present for first part of meeting.

Friday, 2 March 2001.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillors Michael Brand, Clare Martens, Rex Lingham-Wood.

### **1 Overview of School**

- 1.1 Marsh First School has 182 on roll. 45 children have special needs of which one is statemented.
- 1.2 Admission number now raised to 45.
- 1.3 Apart from school age children, school has a thriving purpose built and well equipped nursery for 3 and 4 year olds. This is a major factor in keeping applications buoyant.
- 1.4 Members were given a full and helpful tour of the school and AS explained many aspects of organisation, facilities, rationale behind the class groupings etc.
- 1.5 She has been Headteacher at the school for five years and results have increased dramatically during this time.
- 1.6 AS speaks in her own capacity but also as spokesperson for Wycombe First Schools and Nursery Heads. She believes the issues she raises are of general concern.
- 1.7 Issues reported as notes of meeting are those relevant to the SEN Group's Aims regarding Portfolio structures and Early Years/Early Intervention but we recognised that we gained much background information on the school and also local educational issues generally.

### *Issues*

### **2 The Type of Special Needs the Children Present**

- 2.1 Language problems are by far the most prevalent. Not necessarily those arising from English being a second language but more the fact that children arrive from homes where communication and interaction is poor. Some children can barely articulate.

- 2.2 In some cases parenting skills are poor – for many parents school was a negative experience which is in danger of repeating itself in the next generation.
- 2.3 The fact that many parents of children with special needs have no way of navigating the system themselves means that the school has to take the leading role in assessing needs and taking up the individual cases as necessary. This is time consuming and harrowing.

Also AS has anecdotal evidence of child abuse which causes enormous concern. She has great concern over the lack of Social Services support.

### **3 The Statementing Process**

- 3.1 They see this as part of Buckinghamshire County Council's policy to statement less children.
- 3.2 Out of 45 children with special needs only 1 has a statement. In their professional view this is a distortion of what is needed. They believe that the criteria by which statements are assessed are not consistent across the area let alone the county.
- 3.3 To assemble and write up the paperwork for a Stage 4 referral takes at least four hours assuming the reports are available. Where are they to find the time?

However the reports themselves require chasing and are delayed.

- 3.4 Significant delays on obtaining SALT (Speech and Language Therapy) reports from Health Authority who in general are regarded as unco-operative except in the case of individual local GP's. AS/SL say they have now powers to chase Health.

Educational Psychologist reports frequently delayed especially post 5.

- 3.5 Having assembled the statementing paperwork it is then submitted to Buckinghamshire County Council team.
- 3.6 At present virtually all the requests for statements are rejected as "Not Meeting Criteria".

Their professional view is that if a child is not statemented at 3 or 4 then he/she has no chance of a statement until 6/7 even though the case for a statement is clear.

- 3.7 However parents who understand the system can keep going up to tribunal. But their parents frequently are not able to do this.

- 3.8 AS and SL also point out that the 18 weeks only starts **WHEN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AGREES TO ASSESS** whereas for a parent the process of collecting reports/submitted may have started months before but been delayed.

(Clearly a source of huge frustration and misunderstanding on all sides.)

#### **4 Delegation of Special Needs Funding**

- 4.1 AS says many Heads agreed with the principle of uncoupling funding from statements but disagreed with the proxies.
- 4.2 Points out that the fee school meals proxy figure does **NOT** include children under compulsory school age as they go home for lunch. But many of these would otherwise qualify in the case of her school.
- 4.3 Marsh School SATs have improved dramatically – thus cutting their potential SEN funding – but she still has 45 special needs pupils.

#### **5 Portfolios**

- 5.1 Special Schools should be treated as any other school. The issue is equality of access.
- 5.2 But the difference value systems between Education and Social Services are deep-seated. AS suggests that one social worker should cover the areas thus building up local knowledge and relationships.

#### **6 Early Years/Early Intervention**

- 6.1 AS has no doubt that increased early intervention would produce dramatic results.
- 6.2 The chance of that happening given current pre-school staffing ratios is remote. Members saw that one teacher plus one nursery nurse were responsible for the entire afternoon 4 year old cohort despite some having obvious difficulties. There is absolutely no chance of 1 to 1 for these children and next week, when teachers is on training, AS herself must cover.

This is a crucial discrepancy.

#### **7 Siting of Language Departments in Schools**

- 7.1 AS would be willing in principle to have a language department at her school – space might be a problem – but the Health Authority have refused to contribute their share.
- 7.2 AS recognises the problem that schools are reticent to have departments. Schools are judged by PANDA reports and this can affect recruiting and parental perception.

*Ends*

## **8     **Statementing Under Fives****

- 8.1     AS agrees that apart from obvious needs, eg physical/autism/dyspraxia etc there is no need to statement under 5.

The critical issue is that sufficient resources are directed at special needs children early enough. At present they are mostly definitely not.