

# BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

## FINAL REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

1. There are three key stages of reporting in Best Value reviews:
  - (a) initial scoping report
  - (b) interim report
  - (c) final report and implementation plan
2. The final report is supported by the following appendices:-
  - (1) Executive summary
  - (2) Report of the SEN Funding Task Group
  - (3) Improvement Plan
  - (4) Analysis of improvement priorities and their links with areas of review focus
  - (5) Risk assessment report
  - (6) Report of the internal auditor
3. The review focuses on 7 discretely managed, but operationally and strategically connected service areas. These are known as the 7 areas of review focus. They are:
  - the Inclusion Support Service (ISS)
  - the Behaviour Support Service (BSS) (excluding Pupil Referral Units)
  - the Educational Psychology Service (EPS)
  - the Physical Disability Support Services (PDSS)
  - Assessment and Statementing
  - the Mainstream Support Group (MSG) decision-making structure
  - the SEN funding strategy
4. This executive summary draws out the key messages from the final report and implementation plan (also referred to as the improvement plan). The report is structured around the 4 Cs of Best Value: challenge, consult, compare and compete. After the sections on the 4 Cs, the report outlines the identified areas for improvement and links these to review findings and related priorities for improvement as set out in the improvement plan. Sections follow on capacity for improvement in services as evidenced by the review, and the impact of the review on sustainable development. A number of broad conclusions are set out, followed by a recommendation that the Select Committee commends the recommendations to the Overview Select Committee.
5. The subsequent sections of this executive summary provide paragraph reference numbers to enable cross-referencing with the full report. In addition, a contents list of the main headings in the full report is included at the end of this summary.

## Challenge

6. This section is introduced by making important links between the area of SEN and existing County Council priorities. It outlines the four key questions which drive the consideration of 'Challenge' as:
- (i) Why is the service provided?
  - (ii) Why is the service provided in the way it is?
  - (iii) Could the service be delivered in other ways?
  - (iv) What would happen if service budgets were reduced?
- 17-19
- Why is the service provided?***
7. This section explains the statutory framework for SEN and outlines the development of inclusion in Nottinghamshire
- 20-26
- Why is the service provided in the way it is?***
8. This section describes the responsibilities of an LEA to provide an appropriate range of SEN support to children and schools. It provides core information on the structures, staffing and costs of the four SEN support services which are included in the review. The purpose of assessment and statementing is explained, as is the process of the MSG decision-making system.
- 27-71
- Could the service be provided in other ways?***
9. This section discusses a range of issues associated with alternative models of service delivery. It covers:
- (i) reconfiguration of services
  - (ii) partnership arrangements with other organisations
  - (iii) delegation of SEN funds
  - (iv) consolidation of new services
  - (v) achieving improved performance from existing contracts with other services
- 72-90
- What would happen if service budgets were reduced?***
10. In the context of very low funding, this section concludes that reduction in budgets would jeopardise the provision of efficient education for children with SEN. It refers to the detail in the SEN Funding Task Group report and describes the detailed impact of reduced funding on schools, numbers of SEN appeals to the Tribunal, complaints, and stability in the current levels of inclusion.
- 91-107

## Consult

11. Consultation has been a particular strength of this review. The first phase of consultation provided a detailed list of areas for improvement. These were translated into a framework of options for improved service delivery. The second phase of the consultation process involved the development of options for improved service delivery with mixed groups of stakeholders, and discussion on draft improvement priorities within the context of how they might be translated into action.
- 108-154

- |  | <b>paragraph<br/>number</b> |
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| 12. The interim report referred to a process of discussion with children. The results of this are described in this report. In addition to a child-centred approach to the development of options, the comments from children have added a powerful reminder about the need to view improvement of services from the perspective of children with SEN. Many of the children have severe and complex needs, with different perspectives to adults on what is important to them. | 137-138                     |
| 13. A feature of the consultation process has been the achievement of increasing consensus between stakeholders, particularly head teachers who have played an active part in the review. There is an acknowledged increase in levels of trust.  | 155-157                     |

## **Compare**

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| 14. This section compares the performance of Nottinghamshire LEA in making provision for children with SEN in mainstream schools, with that of other LEAs and other organisations. It uses the following three-fold framework as a means to ensure effective analysis and reporting: | 159 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cost</li> <li>- policy and policy outcomes, and</li> <li>- support services</li> </ul>  |     |

## **Cost**

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| 15. In addition to verifying the very low funding position of Nottinghamshire LEA generally and in particular with reference to SEN, this section highlights the difficulties in making meaningful comparisons between LEAs. This is because of the direct relationship between statementing and SEN funding approaches, and the impact of varying levels of inclusion and different approaches to delegation. | 160-165 |
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## ***SEN Funding Task Group Report***

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| 16. This report compares Nottinghamshire's spending profile with that of other LEAs. It highlights difficulties in the current funding strategy and related decision-making processes, including Mainstream Support Groups. The report proposes a new framework for funding which will be subject to further discussion with head teachers and governors over the autumn term as part of the statutory LMS consultation arrangements. A series of new SEN funding principles and objectives are put forward as a basis for a funding strategy which will be operated jointly by schools and the LEA. The report concludes with a list of recommendations which are linked to activity programmes in the improvement plan. | SEN<br>Funding<br>Task<br>Group<br>report |
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## **Policy and Policy Outcomes**

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| 17. This section considers the policy-related areas of statements, permanent exclusions, inclusion levels, appeals to the SEN Tribunal, and out-county placements. It shows that Nottinghamshire is amongst the top 25% of LEAs in relation to its low numbers of statements, high level of inclusion and low numbers of permanent exclusions. The LEA also performs well in having low numbers of appeals and a low reliance on out-county provision, although evidence has emerged over the last six months of increasing pressure to use out-county schools. Although the LEA has shown significant improvement in the time in which it issues statements over 2000/01, its performance has dropped over 2001/02. This is accounted for by difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff in the SEN casework team and in the EPS. This section also highlights gaps in provision for children with very challenging behaviour and severe levels of autism. | 166-213 |
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- |   | <b>paragraph<br/>number</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 18. An analysis of school Ofsted inspection reports published in 2001 evidenced good or very good provision for SEN in the majority of schools. Whilst the data is not directly comparable, there appears to be an increase in the number of schools with good or very good provision for SEN, compared to the situation between 1996 and 1999.                       | 214-217                     |
| 19. The review has identified weaknesses in the LEA's arrangements for monitoring the pupil-related outcomes of the investment of targeted SEN funding, including the provision of support through SEN support services. Lack of appropriate attainment data, and underdeveloped data systems make it impossible to reach judgements on value for money in this area. | 218-223                     |

### **Support services**

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| 20. The different SEN service structures and delegation policies of other LEAs made it difficult to make meaningful comparisons. There is no single recognised template for delivering services. Trends in other LEAs are towards increased specialism, increasing delegation and improved co-ordination, particularly with other agencies. These issues are all reflected in the improvement plan. | 224-248 |
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### **Variations within Nottinghamshire**

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| 21. The significant differences in inclusion levels across the 7 administrative districts of Nottinghamshire appear to be levelling out. There is a marked increase in the number of children with SEN, especially those with statements who attend a mainstream school which is not their catchment school. | 261-266 |
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### **Compete**

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| 22. There are very few competitors in the area of providing SEN services to children with SEN who attend mainstream schools. However, there is an emerging trend, evidenced by examples of innovative and successful practice in Nottinghamshire, for the development of service delivery partnerships between LEAs and the specialist voluntary sector. Whilst immediate value for money and cost effectiveness is not always easy to identify, there are clear examples of services which are provided more cost effectively by other organisations, e.g. education for key stage 4 permanently excluded pupils by a local FE college. Tailoring service delivery around the service user seems to achieve improved value for money, although it is not always the LEA which benefits directly from savings. | 273-294 |
| 23. The Local Government Act 1999 sets out a range of options for competition. These were all considered and applied to the findings of the review. The most relevant options were those of:   | 295-302 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- transfer or externalisation of services</li> <li>- restructuring and repositioning</li> <li>- renegotiations of existing arrangements</li> <li>- joint commissioning or delivery.</li> </ul>  |         |

The improvement plan provides examples of all of the above.

## Areas for improvement

24. An analysis of review findings has led to the organisation of a range of areas for improvement into two categories: 303-360
- (i) strategic management of SEN by the LEA, and
  - (ii) provision of services to pupils, parents and schools.

The areas for improvement are listed and supported with explanatory text. Each area for improvement is linked to an improvement priority in the improvement plan. There are 8 improvement priorities.

## Capacity for Improvement

25. This section of the report describes the way in which the review has already secured improvements in service provision, including the commitment of significant new investment from the County Council through its medium term financial strategy. It comments on the balance of radical and incremental change that will be driven by the improvement plan. 361-368

## Improvement Plan

26. The improvement priorities are supported by a total of 25 activity programmes, which describe how each activity programme will be implemented. The improvement priorities and activity programmes are listed on the last two pages of this executive summary. The monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure effective implementation of the plan are described in the introduction to the plan. They include the establishment of a stakeholder steering group. The resource implications are also summarised in the introduction to the improvement plan. Improve-ment Plan

## Sustainability considerations

27. This section of the report addresses the principles of sustainable development as required by the Best Value regime. 369-375

## Conclusions

28. The report ends with a summary of the main findings of the review which demonstrate the LEA's potential for significant improvement. 376-387