

# **REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INCLUSION STRATEGY IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

## **MINUTES OF THE REVIEW BOARD HELD ON 12<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2007 AT RUFFORD GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB**

### **Present:**

Rob Skelton (acting Chair) – Head of SEN Strategic Services  
Janice Addison – Head Teacher, Brunts School  
Sally Bates – Head Teacher, Albany Infant and Nursery  
Paul Betts – Head Teacher, Yeoman Park School  
John Bradley – Head of Inclusion Services  
Pat Bullen – SEN Review Project Manager  
Edwina Cosgrove – Acting Parent Partnership Officer  
Val Dodson – Head of Service, Health Visiting and School Nursing  
Sharon Jefferies – Head Teacher, Orchard School  
Jonathan Jones – Head Teacher, Lady Bay Primary School  
Carol Jones – Head of Social Care and Health  
Rob Lancaster – Head of Education Otherwise Than At School  
Elaine Lyon – Head Teacher, Eastwood Infant School  
Janet Neely – School Improvement Adviser (Secondary)  
Lynn Parkes – Head Teacher, Kirkby College  
Gareth Parsons – Head Teacher, Intake Farm Primary School  
John Peck – Head Teacher, Peafield Primary School  
Lorraine Smith – Head Teacher, Gateford Park Primary School

### **Supporting Officers:**

Louise Almond – Administrative Assistant (Inclusion and Engagement)  
Alison Holloway – Operational Support and Resources Manager (Inclusion and Engagement)  
Philip Martin – Head of Performance Standards and Business Support (Inclusion and Engagement)  
Andy Smith – Education and Schools' Budget Policy

### **Apologies for Absence:**

Kate Cumberpatch – Head Teacher, Abbey Gates Primary School  
Mark Dengel – Head Teacher, Fountaindale School  
Simon Dennis – Head Teacher, South Wolds Community School  
Pat Graham – Coordinator, East Midlands Regional Partnership  
Liz Hallam – General Manager Services for Children and Young People (NHS)  
Patricia Head – Head Teacher, Grove School  
Neville Killick – Treasurer, Nottinghamshire Association of Governors  
Gary Stokes - Children's Locality and Specialist Services  
Jeanne Wilson – Head Teacher, William Lilley Infant School

## **1. Welcome/ Introductions**

Rob Skelton welcomed the members of the board and drew their attention to the letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007 from Anthony May, indicating that Anthony would

no longer be Chair of the SEN Review Board due to his appointment as the Acting Strategic Director for the Children and Young People's Department. Rob Skelton informed the Board that he would be chairing future meetings in the interim period until a successor is appointed as Acting Service Director for Inclusion and Engagement.

Rob Skelton also welcomed Val Dodson to the meeting who was representing Children's Locality and Specialist Services on behalf of Gary Stokes and Louise Almond who had been appointed as the SEN Review Project Administrative Assistant and would be providing support for the Project Manager, Pat Bullen.

## **2. Minutes of the previous meeting on 14 November 2007**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed, subject to one amendment to reflect that that Lillian Ward was in fact, in attendance at the meeting.

## **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **4. Review Budget**

Philip Martin presented the paper on this which had been circulated as Appendix 2.

It was noted that travel expense claims for Board members should be sent to Alison Holloway at County Hall.

## **5. Sub-group arrangements and proposed dates**

Concern was raised over the proposed dates for the meetings of the Inclusive Standards sub-group and the Behaviour sub-group in December and January due to the high concentration of commitments for Head Teachers over that period in the school calendar.

Pat Bullen explained that meeting arrangements had partially been dictated by the tight timeline of the review reporting schedule and agreed that it would not be sensible for the groups to meet where attendance was likely to be low.

It was agreed that the Inclusive Standards and Behaviour sub-group meetings originally scheduled for 17<sup>th</sup> December and 19<sup>th</sup> December 2007 respectively would be rearranged.

It was agreed that the sub-groups would also benefit from additional Early Years representation.

Pat Bullen explained that during the recruitment of sub-group members, it had been suggested that some volunteers should join certain groups in order to

ensure that there was a balance in membership, but if a Head Teacher had indicated a preference for a specific group, this had been respected.

**ACTION**

- **Pat Bullen and sub-group Chairs to discuss suitable alternative dates for meetings to take place.**
- **Pat Bullen to address the concerns over composition of sub-groups.**
- **Val Dodson to suggest Health Representatives**

## **6. Reporting schedule**

Pat Bullen drew the Board's attention to the reporting schedule listed in Appendix 4 and asked for comments.

It was felt that Stage 2 of the consultation process needed to continue into September 2008 as school calendar commitments in July, followed by the summer vacation period would make adequate consultation with stakeholders difficult. It was agreed that there would be two consultation events at Stage 2 in the North and South of the county and that these would now take place in September 2008.

It was suggested that the consultations could be linked to the existing calendar of district Head Teacher meetings.

Pat Bullen drew attention to alternative communication routes. There was a strong consensus that 'WIRED' was not the best vehicle for consultation and e-mail communication was preferred.

**ACTION**

- **Consultation stage 2 events to be held in September 2008. Schedule to be amended accordingly.**
- **District Head Teacher meetings to be utilised for consultation purposes, where possible, with specific consultation to be arranged with the Special School Forum**
- **Direct e-mail database to be established for consultation**

## **7. Nottinghamshire Learning Centre (NLC) Review Group**

Rob Lancaster informed the Board of the establishment of a sub-group to consider the role and function of the NLC, which will link with the Behaviour sub-group of the SEN Review. He informed the board that membership of the group would be extended to include Head Teachers across all education phases and the SEN Review Project Manager.

The group will be considering how the NLC links with the network of Special Schools and with integrated services/Family SENCOs, as well as the NLC's admissions policy and funding mechanisms. He invited members of the board to volunteer to become a member of the group.

**ACTION**

**Rob Lancaster to forward terms of reference and dates for the sub-group meetings to Alison Holloway for circulation amongst the Review Board members**

## **8. Audit of current strategy**

Rob Skelton explained that the current strategy was established as a result of the SEN Best Value Review. Pat Bullen had undertaken an analysis of the existing Improvement Priorities and the extent to which the priority milestones had been achieved. The current review would need to focus on *Removing Barriers to Achievement (DfES 2004)*, with key themes being early intervention, the provision of quality support and the role of Special Schools.

Pat Bullen explained that there were 26 milestones in the 12 improvement priorities. She drew attention to the fact that over the past five years the strategy had become out-dated in parts and that she would be reviewing the strategy in terms of national policy changes, such as Ed Ball's recently announced 10 year strategy.

Rob Skelton drew the Board's attention to the difference in perception of SEN provision in Nottinghamshire in relation to external evaluation by the DCSF or Audit Commission (very positive) and the Local Authority's internal stakeholders/partners (less positive). He asked board members to consider these discrepancies during their discussions today.

The Board then divided into two break-out groups, one led by John Bradley and one by Pat Bullen, to discuss milestones which had been assessed as being 'partially achieved' or 'not achieved' or which were considered to be no longer relevant. Pat invited members to e-mail comments to her relating to any points that were not covered in the breakout session, these comments should be forwarded to Pat by the **end of the first week in January 2008**.

Appendices 1 and 2 attached summarise the main points discussed during the breakout session.

## SEN Review Board – 12 December 2007

**Group 1 discussion group (chaired by John Bradley) on the audit of the outcomes of the 2003 SEN and Inclusion Strategy for Nottinghamshire.**

**a) *LA's capacity to support SEN as judged by schools in the Audit Commission schools' survey.***

There is an issue about why schools rate the LA so lowly when on a number of national SEN indicators the DCSF and/or Audit Commission rate Nottinghamshire comparatively highly. The following comments were made in response:

- School responses to the Audit Commission survey are influenced by resource concerns. This is often the only medium that head teachers have for telling the LA that they have concerns about such things as SEN policy and funding. Heads often give the LA poor scores on the survey as a way of signalling their general discomfort with policy and funding issues.
- Schools sometimes experience difficulties in accessing support for pupils with SEN because of the different layers of funding/support
- There are concerns about the nature of some LA support and the level of the support. Schools feel they need more direct hands on support, not training.
- It is accepted that a greater proportion of children with SEN attend mainstream schools in Nottinghamshire compared to nationally. There are many pupils in mainstream in Notts who in other LAs might be in special schools. The mainstream funding available does not reflect this. There is a commonly held belief in schools that more SEN pupils in Nottinghamshire mainstream schools have more complex needs than in other LA areas and that there are insufficient resources available to support them.
- Secondary schools in particular are concerned about levels of pupil behaviour. There are concerns about the LAs ability to support these pupils. Greater clarity is also needed about the role of the Behaviour Support Team, Behaviour consultants and the NLC.
- Resources for SEN aren't targeted on the neediest areas of the County – there is no consistency or differentiation between schools in terms of the exceptionality of pupils' SEN and the disproportionate numbers in some schools compared to others. Exceptionality is a difficult concept for schools to subscribe to.
- The LA's ambition to include pupils with SEN in mainstream schools has outstripped its ability to resource such arrangements.
- Some pupils within SEN are not being placed correctly – either in mainstream or special schools.
- Support service staff are often too strong in their commitment to keeping pupils in mainstream.
- The LA's funding system is seen as being complex – some LA support services staff do not seem to understand the different funding streams. Support service staff

sometimes make promises to parents about funding streams that are available that in fact can not be delivered by the school and family

- Funding allocation procedures (e.g. HLN Panel) are seen as bureaucratic and a waste of money given the relatively limited resources they allocate.
- Schools that effectively support SEN pupils can be penalised in respect of resource allocations – i.e. the SEN funding system is seen to “reward” failure.
- Special schools in Nottinghamshire regard themselves as well resourced – the issue for them is the exceptionality of some of their pupils.
- Parents lack trust in LA advice about placements – feel the LA misleads them about the role of special schools vis-à-vis mainstream schools – this can lead to inappropriate mainstream school placements. Parents need objective/impartial/good advice in order to help them make decisions about their children’s education.
- Health endorses the comments made about parental trust/views – in their experience parents are not fully informed about the alternative placements available.
- The overwhelming majority of head teachers were felt to be supportive of the inclusion of SEN pupils in mainstream but there was a small minority of pupils for whom mainstream education was not in their opinion the best option e.g. pupils with significant behaviour needs who disrupt other pupils’ education or pupils whose very complex needs cannot be meaningfully met in mainstream.
- Schools now routinely meet the needs of many children with SEN (e.g. those with moderate learning difficulties) without the need for additional resources compared to when the Children First Initiative was introduced – the difficulties now relate to children with severe, challenging needs who are quite a different proposition.

#### Summary:

Schools’ concerns can be summarised as relating to:

- 1) the adequacy of SEN resources;
- 2) the mechanisms for allocating such resources;
- 3) the fairness of the allocation arrangements;
- 4) the role of the LA support services in advocating inclusion, particularly where this doesn’t fit with a head teacher’s professional judgement of what is best for an individual pupil;
- 5) the quality and impartiality of the information and advice given to parents.

The Audit Commission questionnaire provides an opportunity for some schools to air their generalised dissatisfaction regarding these issues.

**b) *Quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, judged by Ofsted as satisfactory or better.***

Ofsted no longer makes a judgement about the quality of provision made for SEN pupils but there is now a judgement on the progress/achievement of pupils with LDD.

An issue was identified in relation to the difference between the data on this provided by the LA and that provided in the APA dataset.

It was agreed that some further research should be undertaken to identify an appropriate measure to be included in the LA's updated SEN and inclusion strategy.

**c) *Families pooling some resources with the Inclusion Support Service***

It was reported that only four families of schools had in the event piloted these arrangements. Heads commented that more would have been done if the arrangement had been deemed to have been effective. It was not suggested that any further work was necessary in this area.

**d) *Assessment and statementing panel***

There were some concerns expressed about the effectiveness of these arrangements and what they achieve. It was not felt to be a reliable tool – membership is variable in that head teacher representatives aren't always in attendance, nor are representatives from the educational psychology service or Health. Recommendations by the panel may be made influenced by the quality or otherwise of submissions from schools, some of whom don't seem to know what is required.

It was felt the current arrangements need to be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose.

**e) *Area based SEN casework teams***

Although the SEN casework team had not relocated as originally envisaged, stronger links had been developed with other locality based SEN teams.

**f) *Local discussion groups***

It was felt that these discussion groups had run their course and it was not suggested that they be resurrected.

## SEN Review Board – 12 December 2007

**Group 2 discussion group (chaired by Pat Bullen) on the audit of outcomes of the 2003 SEN and Inclusion Strategy for Nottinghamshire****a) *By 2004, no child will be required to leave the school premises at lunchtime, unless this is an arrangement included in the Individual Education Plan, and agreed with the child's parents or carers.***

- It was agreed that it is difficult to obtain performance indicators, and although anecdotal evidence signifies a decrease in children leaving school premises at lunchtime, no data to confirm this is easily available.
- It was felt to be an unachievable outcome as such arrangements are based on an individual's need and dependent to some degree on the staffing and resources available at a school. It was agreed that it is an aspirational target rather than an achievable outcome.
- It was suggested that the issue is not just a resource one but is also dependent on issues around locality and parental influence.
- It was agreed that health and safety issues may cause schools to require a pupil to leave the school grounds at lunch time.
- It was agreed that this issue also links with issues around the provision of extended services. It was suggested that a target should be established relating to access to extended services. It was felt that a large part of the problem surrounding access to extended services is in relation to transport, as limitations on transporting children outside normal school hours then prevents them accessing pre-school and after-school care.
- It was felt that a decrease in playtime during the lunch period had a positive impact on issues around lunchtime supervision.
- It was felt that lunch time was the most difficult time to ensure that specialist provisions are provided due to staff requiring breaks, and that currently such arrangements are a result of goodwill on the part of teachers and/or teaching assistants.
- It was suggested that the legality of lunch time requirements for children should be investigated.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that this priority was linked to the once common practice of requiring children to leave the school premises during lunchtime who had specialist dietary requirements or who required medical intervention.
- There was a general consensus that in order to make lunchtime and extended services provision work, extra resources would be required.

**ACTION:**        **It was recommended that this objective is taken forward within consideration of overall extended services available to children and young people.**

**b) *By 2006, the majority of Nottinghamshire schools, in the Audit Commission school's survey, will judge the LEA's capacity to support special educational needs as being good or very good***

- It was explained that school survey feedback had ranked Nottinghamshire in the bottom quartile for some areas of SEN arrangements for statutory assessment. However, there had been only a 24% response rate to the questionnaire.
- It was commented that all schools did not hold the view that arrangements with the LA were unsatisfactory.

- It was explained that the low amount of statements in Nottinghamshire is often misconstrued and misunderstandings remain that funding is linked to a statement.
- It was agreed that many head teachers do not have the time to complete questionnaires for such surveys and that potentially the relevant responses could be obtained in a more user friendly way i.e. by telephone survey.
- The view was expressed that the issues for head teachers are not solely about funding but about a lack of interaction and expertise provided by some LA support services. It was agreed that schools would welcome more practical advice which impacts directly on learning in the classroom.
- There were some concerns about the nature of some LA support and the lack of consistency of practice. Particular reference was made to the Educational Psychology Service. Schools would prefer more direct hands on support involving a dialogue with the child and advice regarding relevant strategies that could be implemented for that individual in school. The view was currently held that support was provided through too many meetings which did not provide the required practical experience, ideas, strategies and resources.
- It was felt by some members that increased support should be provided by special schools for mainstream schools. It was commented that whilst waiting for support service intervention, some schools would often contact the local special school for advice.
- The benefits of well-trained teaching assistants were acknowledged. However, standards across schools varied and the establishment of short-term employment contracts could be problematic when experienced teaching assistants then left the school.
- The designated Family SENCO pilot project was considered to be an effective model which should be used across the county. There were concerns that in some families of schools, funding allocations were based upon the influence of eloquent arguments from head teachers rather than the level of need across the family. Criteria for allocation should be established and adhered to in family meetings.
- It was agreed that the new national agenda on personalisation needed to be addressed as part of the review.

Pat Bullen closed the discussion by inviting any further comments/suggestions via e-mail to her at [pat.bullen@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:pat.bullen@nottscc.gov.uk)