



Executive Summary

Introduction

The Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee of Nottinghamshire County Council agreed to undertake a review into the County's preparations for implementing the responsibilities contained within the Children Act. The Every Child Matters agenda is a complex one and will require many schools to make a fundamental shift in their outlook on education. The Children Act Study Group was formed to assess what progress had been made in implementing the responsibilities of the Children Act and its associated policies and to suggest recommendations to Cabinet for future action.

State of Play in Nottinghamshire

Four Nottinghamshire schools were visited and asked questions surrounding their understanding of the Children Act and its associated policies and the practicalities of implementing them. In addition Local Education Officers' views were sought, and a Headteachers meeting called to further gain a cross-section of the current state of play in Nottinghamshire.

Current Changes

A number of different strategies were currently being employed to progress the Children Act agenda, and in particular the recommendations from Every Child Matters. Current changes made by schools included restructuring staffing to increase pastoral care and monitor and control student behaviour. In addition many schools had already set up extended services mainly onsite but also offsite. These were still in the early stages and many practical problems had occurred but schools in general were supportive of their introduction. The relationship between schools and the LEA were investigated and tested as both parties underwent changes of focus. Likewise schools were asked regarding the new focus of Ofsted inspections and were generally supportive of the concept.

Key Issues of Concern

A number of items were raised by schools as key issues of concern, the most prevalent being the inability to effectively interact with social services organisations. The lack of knowledge of local health services was also raised as a concern. The main problem schools identified with extended services was the possible loss of contact between a child and their home by providing a wraparound services from 8am-6pm. Extended services transportation concerns, that take up and usage of extended services and a perceived dwindling level of LEA support were other concerns raised.

Recommendations

A list of recommendations have been provided for the consideration of Cabinet and the LEA to assist schools in the practicalities of implementing the fundamental principles of these policies.

CHILDREN ACT STUDY GROUP – FINAL REPORT

Introduction

The Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee of Nottinghamshire County Council agreed to undertake a review to assess Nottinghamshire schools'

progress in understanding and implementing the requirements of the Children Act and its associated policies.

With the imminent restructure of the LEA into the Children's Services Department it was felt by the Select Committee that the time was right to gauge the impact these changes were having on schools. Given that the area for review was so large, the Study Group would attempt to identify some key themes identified by schools and suggest future actions for the LEA to take to assist schools.

Membership

Membership of the Study Group comprised :

Councillor Yvonne Woodhead (Chair)
Councillor Sybil Fielding
Councillor Martin Suthers
Councillor Kevan Wakefield
Councillor Keith Girling
Mr David Richards
Ms Paula Burbidge

Support for the group was provided by :

Chris Gilbert, Scrutiny Officer, Chief Executive's Department, Nottinghamshire County Council;
Di Morton, Assistant Director, Research & Development, Education Department, Nottinghamshire County Council
Philippa Hadfield, Administration Officer, Education Department, Nottinghamshire County Council

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Study Group were agreed by the Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee on 6 December 2005 as :

1. To consider the impact that the Children Act and its associated policies will have on schools within the County;
2. To examine preparations already underway in schools within the County for the introduction of the new model of children's services;
3. To ensure that partnerships between schools and various organisations are established to provide a seamless transition into the new system for children, particularly focusing on inequalities.

Nottinghamshire schools visited

Priestic PS; Headteacher – Dave Binks

Tuxford School; Headteacher - Chris Pickering

Serlby Park School; Headteacher - David Harris

Bowbridge PS; Headteacher – David Dixon

At Tuxford the Study Group were conducted on a tour of the school by students **Dino Papadamou and George Papadamou**. Members wish to record their thanks to them both for their informative tour.

Methodology

The Study Group undertook its evidence gathering on the following timetable :

Tuesday 1 November - 1st ***Children Act Study Group meeting***

Wednesday 30 November-2nd ***Children Act Study Group meeting***

Thursday 22 December - 3rd ***Children Act Study Group meeting***

Tuesday 17 January - 4th ***Children Act Study Group meeting***

Monday 13 February - Priestsic Primary school visit

Tuesday 14 February - Tuxford Comp. school visit

Wednesday 15 February - Serlby Park school visit

Friday 17 February - Bowbridge Primary School visit

Tuesday 28 February - Local Education Officers meeting

Tuesday 7 March - 5th ***Children Act Study Group meeting***

Thursday 30 March - Headteachers visit to County Hall

Tuesday 25 April - Final report submitted to Select Committee

State of play in Nottinghamshire

1. The Study Group began its investigations by receiving background briefings on the Children Act and its associated policies, focusing particularly on the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Members developed a set of questions to ask schools they were to visit and headteachers who would visit county hall.

Information provided

2. In general the Study Group found that schools were confident they were well informed regarding their new responsibilities under the Every Child Matters agenda. As one school put it, “if you are only becoming an extended school because the government told you too, forget it you have missed the point”. The five outcomes of Every Child Matters were generally regarded as just good practice anyway and something that schools should have been striving for regardless of this new legislation. It was in the practicalities of implementation that schools felt that information was lacking.
3. Schools commented that a school’s “infrastructure should encourage the development of a learning community” and that “children at the centre is the key”. The emphasis on child welfare was causing some concern but again this was based more on the implementation of the changes than the policy or the rationale for the policy itself. It was agreed that there was a wealth of information to absorb and that most schools were detailing with the detail only when and if a particular facet was needed.
4. Headteachers warned that a number of the initiatives were trying to change a very established culture and there was some discussion as to whether the culture in some instances required changing or not. Schools were adamant that the changes had to benefit the child and that if demonstrable improvements could not be evidenced they would not make the change. Flexibility was the key both when deciding to implement a change or not and in its timing. Some required immediate change, others could be a gradual series of smaller changes and schools were confronting these problems now.
5. In general however the Study Group was pleased to learn that schools felt confident in the expectations being placed upon them by the new legislation and that they were all tackling the problem in a positive way. The schools spoke positively of the LEA in its assistance in providing the broader agenda setting briefings to allow schools to understand and begin the transformation of their school environment.

Current changes – pastoral care and student behaviour

6. Under the promoted new ethos of child welfare, schools were tackling the twin issues of increasing pastoral care and controlling student behaviour.
7. One school had already made a massive change to its structure some 3 years ago pre-dating the ECM mandate which had positioned it at the forefront of providing an excellent pastoral care service of children. The Study Group heard how it had employed a sizable number of support staff and had implemented a personalised development plan for each of its

students. It found that its incumbent Head of Years structure did not focus on the child enough so it revamped its structure to allow middle managers to be strategic. Coinciding with this change the school provided a massive increase in pastoral care staff. An increase in class sizes was seen as a small price to pay to allow a genuine feeling of support for students to become embedded within the school culture.

8. Controlling pupil behaviour was also seen as paramount to the successful implementation of the Every Child Matters agenda. The LEA through its local education officers had encouraged communities to work together to tackle the issue of student discipline. Pupil Placement Panels were one example of this new community focus involving a round table discussion where excluded children's needs are aired and solutions found. These panels have links with the Youth Offending Team, Social Services organisations, District Councils, community groups, colleges, education psychologists and police schools liaison officers.
9. Likewise some areas had begun the move to re-configure educational provision and share provision of vocational courses across the community. In general though the study group felt these changes to be ad hoc and not well integrated across the county and that this required some work, particularly from the LEA. These issues are taken up more fully in the Study Group review carried out simultaneously by the EDP – Attainment and Targets Study Group. (A copy of the report can be found at www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk by following the "overview and scrutiny link" to "scrutiny studies").

Current changes – extended services

10. In terms of being able to deliver the extended services agenda, schools felt that there needed to be clear management and structure in the new Children's Services department within the Local Authority. Clear advice on responsibilities on schools and the LA was required. Schools commented that they would always be perceived as being at fault should anything go wrong even if it was not their fault. This was felt to be a concern that schools had in general terms however and not necessarily related solely to extended services. However an issue does exist for schools in that if the extended service is held off site and a problem occurs, headteachers were frustrated that complaints were coming back to them and not through the service provider.
11. Extended services are driven by the social needs of a community. In the larger towns a school could offer extended services whilst another could not, possibly breeding an unhealthy competition between the schools as parents prefer to send their children to the school with onsite services rather than to the one that has to bus their students around the town? Even though schools only have to 'signpost' parents to the extended services providers, those schools with advantageous locations within a town may be regarded as more attractive potential schools and thus also be seen as 'poaching' students by those less well off.
12. Schools held the belief that extended services were being run on an individual basis at the moment and that the family of schools concept was not being effectively used in providing these services. Schools needed to

pursue this concept of joint working as a family of schools to share costs and where possible provide shared services.

13. In more remote areas headteachers felt that if they did not offer the extended services onsite, travel costs would be too excessive as the children are having to be transported a number of miles to the service. This put a lot of pressure on schools to use onsite facilities for extended services. Headteachers informed the Study Group that they were loathe to change the classroom set up in a school to provide these services as once the service finished in the very late afternoon, someone had to be around to re-organise the classroom for the first lesson the next day. The pressure on school staff, as well as the school's facilities were not considered to worth the effort in a number of circumstances reported to the Study Group.
14. Headteachers were adamant that they did not want to have their time taken up managing extended services provision to the detriment of providing a decent curriculum to the students for the school day. They had been assured by the LEA that extended services should not increase their workload or the hours they worked in any way but experience was showing that, at least in the initial phase, a lot of the stimulus to organise and operate extended services was heavily reliant on the will and time of the Headteacher.
15. It was felt that more funding was needed for staffing to manage extended services through schools. In primary schools for instance this could equate to an additional manager costing about £35K who could manage programmes for the school and act as a fundraiser and work with the community. This would free up head teachers' time to focus on raising standards. Given the enormous financial cost this would bring about however it would seem an impractical solution. Far more likely would be that within a family of schools there needed to be a staff member other than the Headteacher, perhaps on a rotational basis, who took responsibility for the co-ordination of extended services.
16. Some concern was raised by schools that not all members of a particular family of schools had the same needs and these are the types of practical issues that schools were currently facing. Overall schools felt that staff in schools needed to be in front of pupils teaching for most of the day so any inter-agency working had to be done after school and this was an unwanted burden on most staff with no financial incentives tied to it.
17. Some schools were also beginning to offer adult education services on their site. These initiatives were designed to motivate and stimulate adults to learn and then also to have a more positive impact on their children's learning experience. Bowbridge Primary School was an excellent example of a school at the heart of its community providing a raft of both adult education courses and extended services for children. Headteachers were wary though of engaging too much with these types of services feeling that they could detract some way from the prime purpose of schools, that is to teach children to learn.
18. Sure Start units were seen as an excellent way to incorporate these types of services. Again though it was a time issue for staff who felt that whilst it was good to liaise with other services it was difficult finding the time to properly engage.

19. The Study Group also wanted to stress that in making extended services 'affordable', lower income families should not be restricted or excluded from participation. This needed to be balanced against the fact though, that schools should also not feel obliged to subsidise these services to allow universal attendance. The dichotomy between provision and cost was proving to be a difficult one for schools and one that would require attention to achieve the goals set out in the Every Child Matters literature.

Current changes – relationship with LEA

20. As already mentioned headteachers were frustrated that although they had been assured that the new responsibilities would not impact on their time, experience was showing quite the opposite. Many schools were adamant that the new Children's Services department would have to closely monitor the workload issue. With more and more demands for driving forward initiatives in schools dependent on staff time, it needs to be ensured that education was not lost as the central focus of a school.
21. In general though the Study Group found that schools and the local authority had worked well together with schools not wanting to lose this relationship, particularly with key people in the department leaving. Headteachers believed that the new Director of Children's Services would have a public relations job to do with schools in the first instance and be committed to working in partnership with schools.

Current changes - Ofsted inspections

22. The change to the Ofsted inspection regime was in the main well accepted by schools. It was felt that the change was necessary to back up the new focus on child welfare with an inspectorial visit or schools could merely be paying lip service to the Every Child Matters agenda. Some comment was made on the robustness of the inspections but this was a general concern about the system itself and not about the change to the inspections following on from the Children Act and its associated policies.

Key issues of concern:

23. The Study Group received frank and honest comment from schools and officers and discovered that some issues were providing the most concern to schools in implementing these new responsibilities. Whilst in the main supportive of the central tenets behind the changes, schools were concerned that some practicalities were not able to be pursued as easily as the policy dictated.

Partnerships with social services agencies

24. Clearly the biggest issue of concern, enhanced by comments from every school visited, was the inability of schools to effectively liaise with social services organisations. The links between schools and social services were developing in some areas but overall they were seen as obstructive particularly related to privacy issues, had too rigid processes with no flexibility, were reactive and not proactive, were generally slow to respond and had an inherent inability to see the wider picture of a child's overall welfare needs.

25. Schools felt that they lead the work with other agencies and were not receiving much support back in establishing and maintaining links. One example given to the Study Group involved social services staff refusing to give out generic advice by phone to a school without a direct referral in writing being made. The school felt that the issue could have been dealt with there and then but were forced to wait to go through the official social services channels meaning that the advice wasn't received for over a week.
26. Schools are sympathetic to social services' commitment to privacy issues but some form of closer link needed to be formed to overcome this issue and move toward becoming almost the same organisation working for the benefit of a child.
27. Headteachers were further concerned that the transfer to children's services would move funding away from education to social services. Likewise schools were worried that regarding the swift and easy referral paradigm of the legislation and just how hard it would be to measure. A school for example where quickly refer the matter but if there is no response or follow up from the service provider the school should not be held accountable.
28. The Study Group believed that the LEA should assist in developing a database for other agencies in a school's vicinity as experienced Headteachers were claiming they did not know where local services were. It was felt that a new Headteacher would be even more unable to help.
29. The Study Group noted that the LEA and the functions devoted to children within the Social Services Department within the County Council would soon be merging to form the Children's Services Department. This merger should lead to better communication at the County level and it is hoped this will filter down to schools as a better integrated service as both sectors begin to understand the complexities and processes of the other. Both Departments should be made aware however of the problems in communication that so evidently exist at the present moment and rectification should commence immediately.
30. One example of good practice was a scheme where a speech therapist, of which there is a great shortage, was training up teachers to be able to provide lower level skills to the children leaving the professional to handle only complex cases and thus attend less regularly. Not only was this giving staff extra skills and more job satisfaction but it also meant that the speech therapist could visit more schools in a week than previously and was only dealing in the most serious of cases. This system of course again relies on a time input from a member of staff to receive the extra training and the willingness of the Headteacher to give the staff member time off to learn and develop the new skills.
31. Another concern raised by schools involved those pupils who came to a new school already attached to another area or region's agencies. This made it very difficult to convince parents to change service providers if necessary as well as forcing the school to forge links with yet more organisations who may well be quite a distance from the school.

32. The Study Group were concerned to discover that linkages with health services are either in the very early stages of being forged or have not commenced at all. Members feel that this could be potentially the key breakdown of the new focus on child welfare as GPs in particular had not as yet seemed to embrace the ideals of the Children Act. Headteachers themselves commented that schools required a well being clinic attached to them in some format to be truly successful in providing health services. They felt this had been eroded over the years leaving many schools with very little access GPs. Indeed some headteachers did not even know where the GP surgeries were within their immediate area. Conversely some schools had found that their closest GP surgery was over 2 miles away from the school site. This was an area that still required a substantial amount of work.
33. The Study Group were shown evidence on their visits that some schools were embracing the health service by establishing links with school nurses. Schools had nurses visiting twice monthly with some even claiming to have an 'on demand' service also.

Division between school and family life

34. Whilst the Study Group and the schools which they visited were supportive of the principles behind the Children Act a key concern emerged regarding the breaking of the link between the child and their home. It can be a long day for a child to be away from home from 8am to 6pm, particularly where the child is attending a preferred school and where they may also be travelling some distance. This is particularly relevant in primary schools.
35. It was also recognised however that although children should not be at school for such a long day it did depend on what their home circumstances were. For instance school may be more stimulating environment and in extreme cases a safer one. This issue was considered to be a balancing act between providing services that eased the strain on parents, yet delivered them in such a way that the linkage between the child and parent was not affected unnecessarily. In summary younger children should not be expected to be away from home for 8-10 hours per weekday. Losing contact with parents is the worst possible scenario of Every Child Matters.
36. There were also reservations expressed about having children in a school for long periods of the day as facilities in the school were geared to education and a normal school day. A separate Sure Start facility was regarded as much more suitable as it was anticipated that this would have both breakfast and after-school clubs. Of course some schools did not have the space for this type of facility and transporting of students to various locations brought with it a whole host of other difficulties.
37. Headteachers were quite adamant that they did not want to adjust their educational settings too much as this was their prime role towards the children. They went on to say that there should be "no drop in the quality of educational provision just to provide profit margins for extended services providers".
38. One pleasing aspect of the concept of wraparound schools were breakfast clubs with most schools actively engaged in providing healthy breakfasts

for their students. Improved attendance, better social skills and increased learning outcomes, particularly in the morning sessions were all self evident side effects of providing this service. Again this needed to be balanced against each student's personal circumstances. A student receiving no breakfast or interaction from home would most definitely benefit, however a student receiving both at home would not use the service and rightly so.

Usage of services

39. Aside from breakfast clubs, which in the main were being well attended, the Study Group found that the take-up of extended services was incredibly low. One school for instance had 8 of its 500 students regularly using any form of extended services that were provided. This was leading the Headteacher to question the validity that these services were what parents actually wanted. It was felt in this school that a one size fits all model was not appropriate and that services needed to be tailored to the needs of the particular area. Even within families of schools there were differences making the planning and costing of these services crucial to their success.
40. The four schools the Study Group had visited were all doing a good job at satisfying the particular needs of the parents and pupils in their area but this did not mean it was what everyone wanted. Schools were convinced that parents did not want all activities for their children provided through school, this was too prescribed. Rather parents wanted individually tailored programmes for their child and this type of service could not be provided.

LEA Support

41. In general schools were very appreciative of the support provided for schools. The Study Group found that the initial briefings on the new responsibilities of the Children Act and its associated policies were informative, well run and very well received by schools. Schools felt well briefed on what was being expected of them in setting up extended services, forging links with partner organisations and the general principles behind the legislation.
42. Schools did show some frustration however that the LEA seemed now to have taken a watching brief and was not leading schools through the implementation of these changes. Whilst recognising that individual schools had their own unique situations and that this was difficult to manage from the centre, schools were critical that the LEA had not continued their close support of schools during the initial briefing phase.
43. The Study Group however, whilst taking on board these concerns, agreed that individual schools had a close relationship their own communities and therefore needed to take the lead on these practical issues. Only if assistance was sought from the school could the LEA possibly know in as much detail as the school the types of problems that were being faced. The Study Group were also made aware that members of schools' governing bodies were concerned that their support from the LEA was not of the required level. This is one area that the LEA should take action to rectify.
44. Provision of service was one end of the changes required but who was checking the quality of the service providers? The Study Group found that schools believed the LEA could be doing more to set up databases of

approved service providers in each location to ensure children were receiving not just the extended service but a quality one.

45. Schools were also critical that there had been no mention of a capital programme to support the extension of schools. Although the policy is that schools need only be a signpost for extended services, expectation from the local community was that the school site itself would provide at least some of the services. Without a capital funding injection many schools were having to alter educational settings to provide before and after school facilities and this was not considered to be in the best interests of the school. The Study Group were well aware however of the excessive costs involved in rolling out any new form of capital funding and could not support this request.
46. A major issue highlighted by schools centred on the provision of transport for off-site extended service provision. Headteachers were asking who was responsible for providing the vehicle and who was liable from an insurance point of view. Schools did not want the transportation of students to become another task for school staff or something else that the school would have to pay for.
47. The Study Group felt that schools should not suffer any losses at all and that transport should be provided by the service provider and recouped through whatever fees they were charging. Members were aware though that this was not always practicable and that the LEA should investigate this issue and provide advice to all schools regarding the transport of students to extended services.

Recommendations

The Study Group, bearing in mind its terms of references, proposes :

1. That the LEA pass on schools' concerns regarding social services organisations to the Social Services Department to ensure that seamless services can more effectively be established (it is worth noting that the LEA and the functions related to children from the Social Services Department will soon come merge to become one service);
2. That the LEA produces a list of social service and health service providers by district, to allow schools to better identify those services they should be creating linkages with;
3. That the LEA ensures that members of schools' governing bodies are kept up to date with the latest developments involving the Children Act and its associated policies;
4. That the LEA provides advice to schools as a matter of urgency regarding the transportation of students to extended services provided off-site

5. That the LEA in consultation with schools monitors the charges being placed on extended services to ensure that lower income families are able to utilise any extended services being provided, without financial strain being placed on the schools themselves.