

ENHANCED PRIMARY PROVISION (SEMH PILOT) AT NETHERFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Purpose of the Report

To comply with the request of the Chair of the Forum that a report be brought to the next meeting to answer the concerns raised by some members, and by the Chair, regarding the transparency surrounding the pilot for pupils with social emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) at Netherfield Primary School.

Background

Agenda item 4(g) of the meeting of the Forum on 4 June 2015, 'SEN Review, 2015' developed into a discussion among members about arrangements made by the Council in regard to a pilot undertaken at Netherfield Primary school. The Chair requested that a report be brought on this matter to the next meeting.

SEMH Pilots

Following the publication of '5 Steps to Collective Responsibility' the County Council began taking action to ensure an improvement in the education of pupils at risk of exclusion, to reduce the number of permanent exclusions, to establish local behaviour partnerships and local pilots to trial a number of school-based provisions.

Primary behaviour partnerships were established and lead head teachers were approached or self-selected on a voluntary basis to support, guide and challenge the development of this work. These leads made key decisions in the formative stages of partnership working, including the devolution of funding and resources. The County Council would not have made the significant advances without them.

Netherfield SEMH Pilot

Netherfield Primary School had been supporting local schools and the County Council by offering a nurture provision for pupils causing concern prior to the establishment of the pilot in the financial year 2014/15. A decision was taken by senior officers to build upon this pre-existing provision. Ten pupils from the Gedling area (including one pupil from Rushcliffe) have accessed the provision. The placing schools were:

- St John's Primary, Colwick
- Carlton Central Infants
- Carlton Central Juniors
- Manor Park Infants

- Priory Junior
- Porchester Junior
- Robert Mellors Primary
- Abbey Road Primary
- Netherfield Primary

The pilot provision was funded by the Council in both the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial years at a cost of £78,800 and £108,000 respectively. In addition, there was a further £73,500 for named pupils with higher level needs, in 2014/15 only. The funding was allocated by top slicing the high level needs (HLN) budget and then stopping the HLN funding for all the named pupils, who were accessing the provision. All of these pupils were entitled to HLN funding. Had this funding remained allocated to pupils, the cost would have been approximately £193,000 annually. The funding was spent on a teacher, 3 teaching assistants, counselling and therapy services, ICT and educational resources.

Given the experience of the school in making high quality provision for children with behavioural difficulties and the school was judged by Ofsted to be outstanding, monitoring by the County Council was relatively light touch. Officers spoke and met with teachers and senior leaders from the primary school and also took feedback from the primary behaviour leads meeting. However, although the progress of pupils was judged to be good by the pilot school, concerns were expressed by the primary behaviour leads and some local head teachers, about how pupils were identified, the number of pupils accessing the provision and for how long. This led to an increase in the monitoring of the pilot by the County Council (visits, conversations and case-studies on sample individual pupils) and ultimately the review of caseloads by the local partnership operational group, hosted by the Gedling Behaviour Partnership.

The County Council acknowledges that the initial set up and monitoring arrangements could, and should, have been more open, transparent and rigorous. The County Council also believes more robust accountability measures should have been implemented following the concerns expressed by the primary behaviour partnership leads. However, officers felt confident that they were building upon good and outstanding practice that was already established and that they were obtaining good value for money for the Council because overall spend on the children concerned was being reduced, by more than £60k over the period, while the quality of provision was high. If the unintended AWPU (see paragraph below) is included the saving is reduced by £26,819. More transparent and robust procedures were put in place from the outset with the two more recent pilots.

Evaluation of Netherfield Pilot

The judgement of officers is that the pilot was good value for money, resulting both in savings over anticipated HLN funding per pupil and with good outcomes for the pupils. However, the pilot did not become a 'turnaround' provision, as officers had hoped. All but one pupil who accessed it are now on roll at Netherfield, which in turn created confusion locally about how many pupils were able to access the pilot. This also means that Netherfield will have received additional, unintended, monies such as the AWPU at £2979 per pupil, which were not part of the pilot agreement. For these reasons, and because of significant staffing changes at the school, the pilot will begin to wind down from September 2015, as opposed to December as planned. The Netherfield Primary school will need to prepare relevant HLN bids for pupils who are now on their roll. The Council will ensure that all bids submitted by the deadline are considered by mid-November using the regular

HLN process. The local Primary Behaviour Partnership will make the decision about what role, if any, Netherfield Primary school will play beyond that date.

SUMMARY

This review has shown that there was insufficient clarity in the arrangements for the selection of one particular school to host the first primary SEMH pilot. However, officers acted in good faith believing, rightly, that they were building on good practice and providing value for money. The children concerned have benefited from the provision. The County Council will apply the learning from this review to any future pilots that are undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION

The Forum notes the report on the SEMH pilot project at Netherfield Primary School.

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