

AT A MEETING- of the -  
**SOCIAL INCLUSION WORKING**  
**GROUP** held at the Council House,  
Walsall on  
**23 January 2007** at 6.00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

Councillor Arif  
Councillor Chambers  
Councillor Cassidy  
Mr Bob Grainger (Secondary School)

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Beth McPherson-Jones | Director for Learning – Participation (Education Walsall) |
| Mary Griffiths       | Head of nursing - NHS                                     |
| Connie Mergen        | strategic leader (SEN and inclusion policy and planning)  |
| David Bovell         | Strategic Manager (Children's Services)                   |
| Nikki Ehlen          | Scrutiny Officer  |

9/2007. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of David Jones.

10/2007. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

11/2007. **THE CHALLENGE OF INCLUSION AND PROPER RE-SOURCING**

Beth McPherson-Jones introduced Connie Mergen to the working group (the group), and gave members the context of inclusion within Education Walsall.

Connie Mergen tabled an information pack on Special Education Needs (SEN) in Walsall (annexed). Members were informed that they could access additional information and policy documents on the Education Walsall website.

Members were informed that Education Walsall had worked with schools to produce the vision for inclusion.

Beth McPherson-Jones explained that the SEN involvement Programme Part 1 had finished and the SEN involvement Programme Part 2 was now being planned. Members were advised that they were working with schools to embed SEN and inclusion in

Walsall. Work was also being completed on how to work and engage parents in an appropriate way.

Beth McPherson-Jones stated that although Education Walsall had attempted to reduce bureaucracy in the process they were constrained in the way that they work and often what was required made the process bureaucratic.

Members were informed that in terms of monitoring and accountability, a SEN profile report is produced annually that compares SEN information across Walsall schools (was provided to the directors of the service and this was reported nationally.) This was a way of monitoring and comparing data. Councillor Cassidy stated that it was useful way of presenting the information, and that she found it helpful.

Beth McPherson-Jones stated that it raised challenging questions, and allowed schools that required further assistance to be identified. Members stated that it was reassuring that progress was being made.

Councillor Arif questioned processes and procedures, asked how Education Walsall got involved and how they were notified if children were on the register. The group were informed that schools had internal processes to follow. Connie Mergen explained that they do not get notified if children were on or off the register and that this was a record kept by the school. Members were informed that when children were identified as SEN, it was important that it was identified and that an action plan was put in place to resolve it. Beth McPherson-Jones stated that there was a code of practice and that they follow. Connie Mergen stated that if a child had SEN, schools were able to call upon support and advice, and that (schools have Inclusion Planning Meetings where issues could be raised). there were forums where issues could be raised.

It was clarified that the definition of SEN applied across early years, junior and secondary years, which encompassed ages 2 – 19.

Beth McPherson-Jones informed members that a medical transition panel had been established, and that Walsall was fortunate that it had good relations with the health service. This panel allowed professionals to be aware if children under the age of 2 were likely to have specialised needs in the education system, to allow earlier consideration of the support required.

Councillor Cassidy asked if there was a direct correlation between free school meals and children with SEN. Beth McPherson-Jones explained that free school meals were used as a proxy indicator, and that this was a reasonable indicator to use as part of a formula. The group were informed that this gave a reasonable correlation.

Connie Mergen stated that children may be achieving as best they can, and there were lots of factors to consider.

Beth McPherson-Jones explained that identified schools were committed to being resourced provisions, and that Connie Mergen was working with these schools and the performance team to support the children.

Beth McPherson-Jones stated that this area could cause parents anxiety and that they recognised that it was important to work with parents to reassure them that their child was being offered the best support.

The working group were informed that all schools received 'table A', which informed them how much funding they had towards SEN elements. Councillor Arif stated that as a group they would be interested in seeing how much money was provided to SEN.

Councillor Arif asked if it would be possible to identify the difference money had made to the schools. Connie Mergen directed members to the statistical information inside member's information pack.

Members were informed that the critical pathway document outlined targets, and what education Walsall intended to do.

Beth McPherson-Jones explained that in the near future Education Walsall would have trend information and from this it would be possible to chart impact. Connie Mergen stated that Ofsted inspection reports were a good indicator as they included SEN, adding that a large number of schools were achieving 'good', and some achieving 'outstanding'.

Councillor Chambers suggested that a head teacher was invited to a meeting of the working group to provide information on the difference the funding has made. Bob Grainger suggested that the head teacher of St Francis Assisi Secondary School was invited. Beth McPherson-Jones emphasised that this would be an excellent person to invite as this school had shown excellent commitment to SEN, and had completed a lot of outreach work.

Beth McPherson-Jones stated that Rushall JMI would also be a good example, as they had actively attempted to achieve inclusive provision, which meant that children spent the main proportion of their time in mainstream education.

Councillor Chambers suggested holding the meeting at the school, and it was suggested that it could be held at a more appropriate time to suit the school.

## RESOLVED

That

- Information on the amount of money provided to SEN is provided to the group
- officers investigate the possibility of the head teacher from St Francis of Assisi Secondary School or Rushall JMI to be invited to a future meeting of the social inclusion working group, to give their account of SEN in the school setting.
- officers also investigate the possibility of the aforementioned meeting to be held at the appropriate school, if possible

## 12/2007 SEN STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Members were informed that the statistical information provided was national information provided by the DfES and that it did not include all the information, just a selected few.

Members discussed that there had been a significant drop in statements written. Beth McPherson-Jones explained that this was for a number of reasons, which included

- The establishment of criteria to allow more accurate measurement
- SEN money had been delegated to schools
- Those children, with complex lifelong difficulties access resources through school action intensive and without recourse to a statement

Councillor Cassidy made a point of clarification around statemented children and those with SEN. Beth McPherson-Jones explained that all children with SEN would appear in the schools profile. Connie Mergen highlighted that Walsall was alongside the national average of those children statemented.

Councillor Arif stated that Walsall appeared to be above average in terms of funding. Beth McPherson-Jones stated that the amount given to schools to support SEN was a decision made by Education Walsall. Connie Mergen stated that a formula was applied to determine how much funding was allocated to schools for SEN, and this amount was considered to be 'at least adequate'.

Connie Mergen stated that schools understand how to use it appropriately and were much better placed to meet the needs of children with SEN. Bob Grainger stated that this money was notional and not ring-fenced.

Councillor Cassidy asked if officers knew how many children were educated outside of the borough due to SEN. Beth McPherson-Jones stated that she could provide the group with information on:-

- Looked after Children with statements
- Number of children in independent special schools and how they were funded.

Councillor Arif asked if the formula that determined the amount of funding allocated to schools based on their children's SEN, was a national formula. Connie Mergen explained that this was formula was unique to each Local Authority.

Members attention was drawn to best value indicator 43a (BVPI43a) and Beth McPherson-Jones explained that when referring to the percentage of statements completed within 18 weeks, this 18 weeks includes a significant number of stages required by law.

Members were also advised that the phrase 'with exceptions' meant those cases where medical advice was received late. Members were also advised that there would always be external factors that have an impact on these figures, and quite often these could be small numbers. The working group were informed that the educational psychologist team was now up to capacity.

Councillor Cassidy stated that it was positive news to see that the number of appeals to Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunals Service (SENDIST) had reduced each year, considering the cost to the service.

Members of the working group thanked officers for their contribution.

Beth McPherson-Jones tabled the CISS Schools and Settings Survey 2006 report to Directors (annexed).

## RESOLVED

That Beth McPherson-Jones provide the group with information on:-

- Looked after Children with statements
- Number of children educated in independent special schools and how they were funded.

## 13/2007 NRF GRANT INFORMATION

David Bovell gave the working group background information on the NRF grant. Members were informed that the NRF grant allocation was split into 4 pillars and that each pillar group had an executive peg, of which CYPEG was the children's executive group.

Councillor Cassidy asked where most of the money was spent geographically; officers explained that money followed the children.

Mary Griffiths clarified a point raised on the reduction of obesity in children. Councillor Chambers asked how robust exit strategies were, in consideration that the Council would receive this funding for just two years.

David Bovell explained that change would need to be embedded within the structure of the Council and as part of the bid robust exit strategies had to be out into place.

Councillor Cassidy stated that she was reassured by information received by Pauline Pilkinton and her staff, which was that the group of foster parents in Walsall was growing.

Councillor Arif stated that it was positive to see the NRF money received was going to deprived areas, as was intended by this funding.

## 14/2007 NETWORK OF CHILDREN'S DISABILITY SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIP

Members noted the information, and officers stated that for accuracy purposes it should be noted that schools for children with physical disabilities had closed but that provision existed in primary and secondary schools.

## TERMINATION OF THE MEETING

It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held on 20 March 2007. There being no other business the meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.