



# Walsall Council

## Walsall Children's Services

**Report to:** Schools Forum

**Date:** 4 December 2012

**Subject:** Enlargement of Phoenix Primary ESBD Special School

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**Purpose of the report:** To make the Schools Forum aware of proposals in relation to restructuring the provision for primary aged children needing additional support to emotional, social and behavioural development

**Recommendation:** The Schools Forum to note the enlargement of Phoenix Primary ESBD Special School by 6 planned places

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Following the last major review of special school provision in 2004 a series of structural changes were introduced to the pattern of special school provision together with an extension of the 'continuum of special educational needs' by the introduction of Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP). ARPs were designed to deliver specialist but inclusive special educational support across a range of identified need including communication, physical disability, specialised learning needs (specific learning difficulty) and sensory needs. Provision is made at both primary and secondary phases with ARPs located across the Borough.
- 1.2 ARPs are 'commissioned services' where schools provide a specific service on the basis of a written Service Level Agreement (SLA) at agreed planned place costs. The service is provided under the auspices of the governing body at the school and the staff are employees of the school. The SLAs provide for monitoring and review and, in the case where a service is to be discontinued, a 12 month notice of termination by either side is required. All the originally constituted ARPs are still delivering services through SLAs, albeit that some SLAs have been adapted over time to respond to changing patterns of need within the population.
- 1.3 As part of this pattern of provision the Little Acorns Nurture Group was established at King Charles Primary School. It was designed to support Key Stage 1 pupils who were identified as requiring a 'nurturing' approach to meet emotional developmental needs that inhibited their social behaviour and subsequently their effective access to the mainstream classroom. The nurturing approach was based on a set of principles that are nationally recognised and was adapted to suit the needs and resources in the Walsall context. The nurture group provides up to 10 places available for children across the Borough at a cost of £12060.00 per place. An admissions panel meets on a termly basis to consider referrals within an agreed individual assessment protocol and typically a child would attend the group for up to four terms. Children remain on the roll of their home school, normally spending the morning session at their home schools and the afternoon session at the nurture group.

## **2. Current Context**

- 2.1 King Charles Primary school became part of the Central Bentley Federation in September 2007, a structural change in governance and leadership with a single governing body and Executive Headteacher responsible for both schools. In March 2012, the governors of the Bentley West Federation served a termination notice to Children's Services Serco giving 12 months notice of closure of the Little Acorns Nurture Group. The provision will close on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2013.
- 2.2 The closure of the nurture group will be delivered through a staffing restructure at King Charles, a process which is being conducted currently. Staffing changes and subsequent redundancies will be subject to the normal processes, employment rights and liabilities for school staff.
- 2.3 The closure of Little Acorns has created an opportunity to review the pattern of provision for primary aged pupils with emotional, social and behavioural needs. Such a review has been undertaken in consultation with primary headteachers during the period April to October 2012.

### **3. Review of Primary Provision**

- 3.1 National policy, reflected in the Education Act 2011 and related changes to school funding emphasises increased autonomy at school level, encouraging groups of schools to work together, with leadership from within the profession. The local authority role in this context is that of championing choice. Consistent with this approach, Walsall Council is working with headteachers to determine a 'new relationship with schools' following a direction of travel that places less reliance on centrally retained services and increased emphasis on schools working together in groups or clusters with commissioned services from a range of potential providers. Significant changes to the landscape for special educational needs are signalled in the Green Paper ('Support & Aspiration', 2010) and the Local Offer, in relation the funding framework for schools management of special educational needs, together with the Pupil Premium are impacting on the pattern of resourcing for schools.
- 3.2 Current provision for primary aged pupils who have additional educational needs relating to their social, emotional and behavioural development are met through established centrally retained support services, a range of services at Phoenix Special School and the Little Acorns Nurture Group (KS 1 only).
- 3.3 This pattern of provision was subject to review by a group constituted as a Theme Group of the Primary, Nursery and Special Schools Forum (PNS Forum) during the period April to October 2012 which comprised primary and special headteachers together with senior officers from Serco and Council Transition Advisors. Regular feed back was provided to the PNS Forum during the review period and a set of agreed final recommendations was put before Forum in October 2012.
- 3.4 The recommendations to PNS Forum were based on 4 options (see Appendix 1) developed during discussion where perceived need was debated in the context of identifying the key 'gap' in provision against the changing funding and policy background in relation to analysis of placements and destinations across provision. The requirement to develop a Local Offer in relation to schools funding changes and the likely continuing pressure on centrally retained support services were significant features of this landscape.
- 3.5 In relation to this changing context, there was no support from representative headteachers for seeking to relocate the existing nurture group provision to an alternative host school. The changing financial landscape, the opportunities the SEN Local Offer presented for development of nurturing within 'localities' and the logistical challenges of a 'single' nurture group provision suggested a change to the current pattern of provision. The primary recommendation tabled to PNS Forum was that Option 4 be pursued and that Option 3 became a possibility within the Local Offer.

### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1 To commission an additional 6 planned places at the Phoenix Primary ESD Special in order to extend the provision available to meet the additional needs of children exhibiting emotional, social and behavioural developmental difficulties. These will be primary places and subject to a statutory assessment of special educational needs and Statement (under current regulations) prior to placement.
- 4.2 Currently, Phoenix school planned places are full as are the 6 additional 'assessment places' provided at Phoenix. The additional places will provide needed flexibilities in provision. The places will be introduced from September 2013 allowing the governors and headteacher to make necessary arrangements and recruit required staff.

- 4.3 The costs of individual planned places at Phoenix special school are currently in the range £12,129 – £19,826 per place although note needs to be taken of the revised funding structures from April 2013
- 4.4 To promote the development of nurturing within localities as part of the proposed Local Offer for children with special educational needs and disabilities. A training programme will be offered to support the initial development of nurturing and proposals to develop a nurturing infrastructure as part of Education Psychology service delivery will be pursued.

## **APPENDIX 1: Primary Behaviour (Schools Forum 4.12.12)**

### **Primary, Special & Nursery Headteacher's Forum: Little Acorn's Nurture Group Future Provision (Summary) Options Paper**

#### **Option 1: Relocate existing nurture group provision to another host school**

The existing provision could be commissioned at another host school. This would require the agreement of Schools Forum to fund a continuing centrally maintained provision.

#### **Option 2: Transfer existing additional nurture group resource to school/cluster partners with a commission to develop nurturing in clusters or areas.**

Utilise the existing financial resource to commission 3 schools/clusters with a track record in nurturing practice to develop area based work aimed at establishing nurturing provision across all Walsall primary schools as part of the Local Offer. It is envisaged that clusters would receive 'match funding', to create an additional resource, to develop practice and to work with other schools.

#### **Option 3: Discontinue any centralised nurture resource and designate 'nurturing provision' as part of the Local Offer**

Under new funding regulations schools will have a notional budget for disadvantage and SEN along with any additional elements such as the Pupil Premium.

This resource will be devolved to all schools and will form part of the 'local offer' (subject to School's Forum) reflecting the Green Paper emphasis on mental health and emotional needs. The approach would more accurately reflect both 'nurturing' principles and increasing 'school led' improvement.

#### **Option 4: Commission additional primary ESD places at Phoenix School.**

This Option includes two distinct elements:

1. The expectation that nurturing provision would be developed in all schools as part of the local offer in exactly the same way as Option 3 (above)
2. The existing nurture group financial resource would be used to commission additional specialist ESD places – effectively redirecting resources from 'nurture' to 'ESD' provision.

This approach would address the view that there are insufficient places of this type in Walsall. However it would be important that this approach happened in parallel with Option 3 and was not simply seen as an alternative. At current levels the Little Acorns funding could cover about six additional places.