

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 24 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

IMPROVING SPECIAL SCHOOL PROVISION ON WIRRAL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE COMPLEX LEARNING DIFFICULTIES - THE FEASIBILITY OF CREATING A 2-19 SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO EXPERIENCE PROFOUND AND MULTIPLE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2009 Cabinet, amongst other decisions, gave approval for a feasibility study to be undertaken into the possible creation of a 2-19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). This has now been completed and the main findings are as follows;

The study has identified that there are currently 54 children and young people, in the age range 2-19, on Wirral, who might benefit from such a provision. This is in line with national incidence rates.

Whilst the proposal received strong support from parents of children, who attend The Lyndale School, there is little if any support from parents whose children attend the authority's other special schools for complex learning difficulties (CLD).

Given this lack of broad support and the fact that the authority is planning to significantly improve the provision it makes for PMLD children in all its CLD schools it would make the creation of a 2-19 school for PMLD a high risk option, which would be highly unlikely to represent value for money.

1. Background

- 1.1 In April 2009 Cabinet received a report on proposals for the development of Wirral's special schools for children and young people who experience complex learning difficulties (CLD) – Elleray Park, Stanley and The Lyndale School at primary and Foxfield and Meadowside at secondary.
- 1.2 CLD refers to those pupils with severe to profound learning difficulties many of whom also experience additional medical/physical difficulties, communication problems, autism and sensory problems. All of these pupils require highly specialised teaching and teaching support as well as therapeutic input from various medical and paramedical services. Many of these children and young people and their families also require social care support.

The report detailed the excellent work being carried out by our 5 CLD schools but also highlighted the limitations placed upon them by the inadequacy of their buildings and put forward proposals as to how this situation might be remedied.

The proposals put to Cabinet were based upon a lengthy and detailed consultation process with all key stakeholders. At the April 2009 meeting Cabinet approved the following;

1. The rebuilding of Elleray Park and Stanley schools, with each new school to be co-located with a mainstream primary school:

2. The merger of Foxfield and Meadowside schools into a new rebuild secondary school with an 11-16 provision being co-located with a mainstream secondary school and a 16-19 provision being co-located with a local FE college – Wirral Metropolitan College (WMC), and;
3. The undertaking of a feasibility study, into the possible creation of an all age, (2-19), school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Proposals 1 and 2 are being progressed and this report relates to action taken on proposal 3.

- 1.3 A feasibility study was undertaken into the creation of a 2 –19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties by a senior officer of the Children and Young People's department, who has extensive experience in this area and a background in research methodology. The study was conducted, in liaison with staff, governors and parents from The Lyndale School, who originally put forward this option, between June and December 2009. The full report of the study is available to members as part of the background papers but the essential findings were as follows.
- 1.4 Following the achievement of an agreed definition of profound and multiple learning difficulties between all interested parties some 72 Wirral pupils who might benefit from such a provision were identified. This figure was later moderated by the application of more finely tuned criteria to 54.
- 1.5 Parents of the 72 children and young people initially identified were invited, either by attendance at consultation meetings or by written submission, to express their views regarding the creation such a provision. Only 14 (22%) of parents responded and the majority of these (70%) were of Lyndale children i.e. those who had made the original proposal.
- 1.6 Whilst Lyndale parents remained supportive of the proposal, other parents who responded were either opposed to it or were equivocal and it was determined that there is little parental support for the creation of a 2-19 provision for PMLD.
- 1.7 Nationally 2-19 provision for such a narrowly defined cohort (PMLD) is highly unusual and a literature research does not reveal any compelling arguments in its favour. Whilst the needs of this extremely vulnerable group require a high degree of specialism, expertise and additional support to ensure that they are adequately met it is by no means clear that they are significantly different from the broader group of CLD pupils in this respect.

In order for such a provision to be educationally viable, 54/55 pupils would be a minimum number i.e. representing approximately 8/9 pupils per key stage (though there would still be significant concerns regarding curriculum delivery, especially in the older age groups, and age appropriate groupings). Current evidence would suggest that this would be difficult to achieve, especially when set against the context of the improvements intended for the rest of the CLD sector. Indeed Lyndale is currently funded for 45 pupils and for the past few years pupil numbers have been in the low 30s. This raises financial concerns, which are detailed in Appendix 1. Enacting such a proposal would, therefore, constitute a high-risk option and would not represent good value for money especially when set against the developments already being progressed in respect of Stanley and Elleray Park Schools.

It is not the view, therefore, of the Children and Young People's Department that the creation of a 2-19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties should be proceeded with.

However, a number of issues have been raised during the course of the feasibility study, which do need to be addressed. Specifically these relate to the provision we make for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties, particularly at secondary level, and the arrangements we have in place for the management of successful transitions.

2. Risk Management

- 2.1 The major risk for the authority in considering the establishment of a 2-19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties is that of making a considerable financial investment in a project, which is then substantially underused. The most appropriate action in this case is, therefore, that of not proceeding.
- 2.2 However, as a consequence of this action there is an associated risk to The Lyndale School in terms of its continuing financial viability and subsequent concerns for parents and staff. In order to manage this risk the authority's officers are in ongoing discussions with the head teacher, governors and parents at The Lyndale regarding its future place within the authority's provision for children and young people with complex learning difficulties.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Wirral is currently planning to spend approximately £34 million on improving the special education provision it makes for pupils with complex learning difficulties, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. On current evidence, the additional £4.5-5 million required for the 2-19 option cannot be justified.

4. Staffing, Equal Opportunities/Health Impact Assessment, Community Safety, Local Agenda 21, Planning, Anti-Poverty, Social Inclusion Implications

- 4.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

5. Local Member Support Implications

- 5.1 All of the council's CLD schools accept pupils from all of the Wirral

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 Cabinet report and minutes from April 2009.

Report into "A Feasibility Study into the Creation of an All Age Special School (2-19) for Children and Young People with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)."

RECOMMENDATIONS

That

1. Cabinet accept the outcomes of the feasibility study, and the advice of the Director of the Children and Young People's Department, that there is no case to be made for the creation of a 2-19 school for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
2. The Lyndale School continues to operate as primary school for children with complex learning difficulties.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services

Appendix 1

A Financial Analysis and Forecast regarding the establishment of a 2-19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

In completing the following financial analysis and forecast a number of assumptions have been made viz;

The new 2-19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) would be based upon the current Lyndale School;

That such a school would grow over time from being a primary school for pupils with complex learning difficulties to an all age school for PMLD, and;

Pupil places would reflect the numbers of such pupils identified in the recent feasibility study i.e. approximately 37 at primary age and 17 at secondary age.

The Lyndale School is currently funded for 45 places for children with complex learning difficulties. The annual school budget is:	£ 771,117
Pupil numbers over the past 3 years have been in the low 30s and are currently at 32. This means that the predicted cost per pupil per annum is-	£17,136
Whereas the actual cost is -	£24,097
This represents an annual place funding in excess of pupil numbers of-	£222,767
This excess enables The Lyndale School to provide significantly improved teacher and teaching assistant to pupil ratios – teacher:pupil ratio at Lyndale 1:4.8 and Elleray Park 1:6.8 and TA:pupil ratio at Lyndale 1:1.5 and Elleray Park 1:3.	
If pupil numbers at The Lyndale School were increased to 55 all age PMLD, at a ratio of 2:1 primary:secondary (in line with feasibility study findings) the annual school budget would rise to -	£935,937
If all places were filled then this would equate to an annual cost per pupil of-	£17,017
However, again on the basis of the feasibility study, only approximately 25 places could be guaranteed to be taken up, which would equate to an annual cost per pupil (accrued over time) of -	£37,438
And an increase of the annual place funding in excess of pupil numbers to-	£510,522

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Clearly the above could be mitigated if steps were taken to ensure that all PMLD pupils in future would attend the proposed 2-19 provision. Such steps would, however, fly in the face of expressed parental opinion, would reduce parental choice and potentially contravene the Disability Discrimination Act.