

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION – THE FUNDING OF GILBROOK SCHOOL'S OUTREACH SERVICE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

- 1.0 A report to Schools Forum on 24 June 2009, detailed actions taken to improve special educational needs provision on Wirral. The Director of Children's Services recommended the establishment of a subgroup to review the funding model for the Gilbrook School outreach service and to consider ways in which its future viability could be assured.

This group has met on three occasions and is now in a position to report on its findings.

Gilbrook Outreach

- 2.0 Gilbrook is a special school for primary aged children who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). In the past three years the school has developed its provision to include in-house support for excluded pupils and an outreach service to improve the capacity of mainstream primary schools to meet the needs of pupils with behavioural problems.
- 2.1 The outreach service consists of 1.8 full time equivalent teachers and 2 fulltime teaching assistants. A range of services is provided subject to detailed initial assessments of presenting problems – these may be at the level of individual pupils, the class or the whole school dependent upon need.
- 2.2 Provision of the service is subject to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between participating mainstream primary schools and Gilbrook and may be purchased at a number of levels – 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% - with the variation being governed by the identified need and the mainstream school's identification of required support.
- 2.3 Before 2009-10 Gilbrook's outreach service costs have been kept low because residual funding from the Behaviour Improvement Programme has been used as a subsidy. This funding is not sustainable in future years and in order to continue the service a different financial model will be required.

Scope and Effectiveness of the Service

- 3.0 Gilbrook currently has SLAs with 38 primary schools on Wirral and these are not restricted to those schools who, because of their demographics and catchment areas, might be considered to be providing for more challenging pupils.

- 3.1 Recent evaluation carried out by the school indicates that the service is rated as between useful to very useful in assisting the schools concerned in meeting their own needs in promoting positive pupil behaviour and engagement.
- 3.2 Feedback from head teacher members of the subgroup supported this positive view of the service.

Context of the Service

- 4.0 The Children and Young Peoples Department operates a number of outreach and support services aimed at supporting schools to meet the special educational needs of children and young people. These include;

The Special Education Support Service (SESS), which comprises Educational Psychologists, the Portage/Early Year Team, Sensory Support, Special Educational Needs Assessment and Advice Team, and the Social and Communications Difficulty Team; Kilgarth Outreach for secondary pupils with BESD, and; Orrets Meadow Outreach (OMO) for primary pupils with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia).

- 4.1 The funding of these services and their modus operandi varies from Gilbrook Outreach varies in significant ways.

SESS is centrally funded as it provides significant statutory functions but the psychologists in particular are heavily involved with BESD pupils; Kilgarth Outreach is funded via the DSG is non-statutory and is not subject to SLAs; OMO is funded via agreements reached between mainstream schools and Orrets Meadow but these are facilitated by the Local Authority criteria for children who experience specific learning difficulties.

- 4.2 These variations were a theme which consistently exercised the minds of the subgroup, there was some discussion to see if we could create a level playing field amongst traded and central services.

Financial Position

- 5.0 As noted above the costs of providing the current Gilbrook Outreach Service relate to the personnel of 1.8 f.t.e. teachers, 2 full time teaching assistants and on-costs. This equates to approximately £150,000 per annum. Current projected income from SLAs in place equates to approximately £85,000. Both these figures are for the financial period 2010 to 2011 when the monies to cover the funding gap will cease.
- 5.1 In order to achieve the level of income generation Gilbrook require to cover all costs, this would need a full service offer to the f.t.e. of 18 mainstream primary schools. On current staffing it currently only has the capacity to deliver a full service offer to 12 f.t.e mainstream primary schools.
- 5.2 It is clear, therefore, that without the identification of an additional source of income Gilbrook Outreach Service will cease to be financially viable as of March 31st 2010.

Potential Resolutions

- 6.0 A number of potential solutions were considered in order to cover the funding gap. These included;
- Gilbrook increasing its charges to those schools with whom it has SLAs to reflect the full costs of the service. This would in effect double the current costs to schools and would be likely to prove prohibitive thus probably reducing the number of SLAs and, thereby, reduce income;
 - Continuing to support Gilbrook in providing the outreach service from the local authority budget. This would not be possible as the central funds required are no longer available.
 - Proposing to the Schools Forum that the whole of the budget for Gilbrook outreach be drawn from the DSG thus placing Gilbrook in the same position as Kilgarth. This would mean all primary schools potentially receiving a service from Gilbrook outreach at a much reduced level than those with SLAs currently enjoy with the possibility of 'topping' through an SLA.

Comments for the Working Group

- 7.0 The Working Group considered that of the above possible solutions have their advantages and disadvantages and all would take time to explore and fully consult with schools. The final proposal could not be implemented until April 2011 when the new funding cycle commences. They do not, therefore, address the central issue of how Gilbrook Outreach is to be funded from April 2010 to March 2011. The conclusion of the Schools Forum sub-group was that the financial shortfall of approximately £65,000 should be covered from DSG reserve in order to continue the service until March 2011, during the intervening period detailed consultations could be undertaken to seek a long- term solution.

Recommendations

- 8.0 That the Schools Forum agrees to the allocation of £65,000 of its reserves to Gilbrook School to maintain its outreach service during the period April 2010 to March 2011.
- 8.1 That the Schools Forum approve the carrying out of a consultation exercise to determine the longer term future and funding for Gilbrook Outreach.