

**Improving Special School
Provision on Wirral for Children
and Young People who
experience Complex Learning
Difficulties**

**A Study into the Feasibility of
Creating a 2-19 Special School for
Children and Young People, who
Experience Profound and Multiple
Learning Difficulties**

Improving Special School Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Learning Difficulties

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).

This study was commissioned by the Director of the Department for Children and Young People following a decision made by Wirral Council Cabinet April 2009.

The study was conducted by GP Mount, B.A. Hons. M.Ed. (Educational Psychology). Graham is a registered Practitioner Psychologist (Health Professions Council), and is currently employed as Strategic Development Manager, Participation and Inclusion Branch, Wirral Children and Young Peoples Department. The study was carried out between June and December, 2009.

1. Introduction and Background

Wirral currently maintains five special schools, three primary and two secondary, for children and young people who experience complex learning difficulties. These are Elleray Park, Stanley and The Lyndale at primary and Foxfield and Meadowside at secondary.

Between them these schools provide for a little under 400 pupils, evenly split between primary and secondary. Complex learning difficulties (CLD) is a broad definition and, whilst all of the pupils so described would experience severe to profound learning difficulties, many also experience additional disabilities e.g. autism, physical, health and mobility problems, epilepsy and other medical conditions.

This provision is currently under review as, whilst the physical state of the schools varies, all are old and are finding it difficult to provide modern environments within which the children and young people can learn and develop. Of the 5 only two (Elleray Park and Meadowside) were purpose built as special schools and even then for a range of pupils whose needs were far less complex than those for whom they provide today.

The secondary schools in particular are finding it difficult to respond to the demands of the 14-19 agenda particularly at post 16 and one of the primary schools (Stanley) is not accessible to children who are wheelchair users. Whilst all of the schools work hard to include their children and young people in mainstream environments, in the majority of cases this is hampered by logistical problems, as only one school is currently co-located with a local mainstream school (Stanley School is co-located with Thingwall Primary).

The review of the provision began approximately three years ago with discussions between local authority officers, chairs of governors, head teachers, parents and staff in the five schools. These discussions led to a number of options being considered, which were subjected to public consultation and a subsequent report to Wirral Council's Cabinet in April 2009.

The decision of Cabinet was to approve;

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.

Children and young people, who experience profound and multiple learning difficulties comprise a group within the overall complex learning difficulties cohort who experience the most significant needs. In addition to profound learning difficulties, which means that their developmental progress will be both slow and limited throughout their lives, they also have significant medical, physical, communication and, often, sensory needs, which further inhibit their progress.

Options 1 and 2 (above), where each new school would be purpose built to provide for the full range of learning difficulties and disabilities found within the complex learning difficulty range were put forward as a means to address previously identified limitations of current premises and to maximise parental choice within the bounds of achieving value for money. The creation of fully inclusive CLD schools, accessible to and able to meet the full range of needs found within this group was the Department for Children and Young People's preferred option.

Option 3 was put forward at the request of parents, staff and governors at The Lyndale School as part of the original consultation process but at that time received little support from the wider CLD community. Nonetheless it was not felt to be without merit and it was determined that it should be investigated further.

This report seeks to address the issues raised by option 3.

Background and Rationale for the Creation of a 2-19 School for Children and Young People with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.

This proposal was put forward by parents, staff and governors of The Lyndale School, as part of the early and informal consultation process.

The Lyndale School was established as a school for primary aged children with complex learning difficulties in September 1999 following the closure of Clatterbridge School. It occupies the site of the previous Glenburn Infants, Eastham, which had been extensively refurbished for the purpose.

Over time the school has moved from being one, which provided for the broad range of children with complex learning difficulties, to one, which has sought to specialise in those with the most complex difficulties. The school is still designated by the Department for Children and Young People as one catering for the full range of CLD pupils.

Similarly over time, whilst overall pupil numbers in the school have reduced, the proportion of those with profound and multiple learning difficulties within the school has increased. In 1999 overall pupil numbers were 59 and the percentage of PMLD pupils (number of pupils = 12) was 20%. In 2008 overall pupil numbers were 33 and the percentage of PMLD (numbers = 24) was 73%. These figures have continued into 2009. The school is funded for 45 pupils and currently has 33 on roll. This change, not entirely supported by the local authority, may cause the school funding problems in the forthcoming consultations regarding the next 3 year funding cycle from 2011 to 2014.

The reasons for this change in pupil profile are complex and due to a number of factors. The number of PMLD pupils has increased nationally over the past decade but has begun to stabilise at approximately 8/9 per 10,000 children. Lyndale's decision to specialise with a particular group of

children has led them to be cautious in admitting the more active and challenging CLD children. As a consequence overall numbers have decreased and the proportion of those with more complex needs has increased. This is also partly due to direct parental preference and to factors noted below.

Stanley School, with 71 pupils on roll and situated in Thingwall, is not physically able to allow access to children with the most complex needs and, therefore, parents within its catchment area may express a preference for The Lyndale School. Stanley currently has one or two pupils who experience profound learning difficulties but who do not experience the additional significant physical and medical needs evinced by many of the Lyndale pupils. As an corollary to this Stanley has tended to take more pupils, who experience autistic spectrum disorders and, as a consequence, has tended to specialise in meeting their needs in addition to meeting the needs of the broader range of children with complex learning difficulties .

Elleray Park School in Wallasey has 75 pupils on roll, 23 of whom who could be described as PMLD. They also have a significant number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and, as such, provide for the full range of pupil need within the broad definition of complex learning difficulties.

As part of the process of how it has developed over the years The Lyndale School have, for some, time been proposing that they should specialise in meeting the needs of Wirral pupils, who experience profound and multiple learning difficulties.

During the complex learning difficulties consultation process, this proposal focused on the creation of a 2-19 school for children and young people with such difficulties. It is envisaged that this school, as proposed by The Lyndale School, would be co-located, provide extended services and, by preference, residential/respice facilities .

The key reasons advanced for this proposal, as compared to the Local Authority's preference for the creation of two new purpose built special schools designed to cater for the full range of need, including PMLD, within the CLD population, were, that it would facilitate;

- The creation of a learning environment, which would be specifically tailored to the needs of pupils with PMLD and which focuses upon their needs for safety, security, and access to additional adult support and medical intervention as and when necessary;
- The creation of a learning environment where children are free to explore and learn beyond the confines of their mobility aids without risk of danger and one which has the capacity to develop their full potential;
- A care environment, which would be sensitive to the individual needs of the children and young people and affords them the dignity to which they have a right; and,
- An holistic environment which would provide the children and young people access to the full range of expert professionals and services targeted at fully supporting them and their families.

The purpose of this feasibility study was to discover whether these aims, with which the Authority does not disagree, can be best achieved by the proposal put forward by the parents, staff and governors of The Lyndale School, i.e. by the creation of a 2-19 school for PMLD, or whether they can be achieved by different means e.g. within an all inclusive CLD school.

Scope and Methodology of the Study

The study set out to answer a number of questions in order to establish whether the creation of a 2-19 school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties would be;

- Feasible;
- Desirable; and,
- Viable.

These questions sought to address the issues of;

1. Identified potential need – i.e. how many such children and young people are there on Wirral who might benefit from such a provision;
2. Identified potential demand – i.e. of these children and young people how many of their parents would be likely to seek placement in such a provision for their children;
3. What are the educational, social and other arguments for the creation of such a specialist provision?
4. What would be the costs involved in creating and maintaining such a provision. What would be its long-term viability and would it represent value for money for the local authority?
5. Are there other ways in which the aims of The Lyndale School may be achieved.

In order to seek answers to the above questions a number of steps were employed;

Question 1.

To identify potential need it was first necessary to clearly define the range of pupil need it would be intended for the proposed new school to provide, i.e. by the establishment of clear criteria for admission to such a school.

This was achieved by reference to national and local definitions of profound and multiple learning difficulties and by consultation with the head teachers of the five schools for children and young people with complex learning difficulties. These criteria were then discussed and agreed with the governing body of The Lyndale School as the basis for the study, as were its parameters.

The head teachers of the 5 CLD schools were then asked to identify the pupils currently on their role who would fit these criteria.

Question 2.

In order to identify potential demand consultations were held with the parents and carers of the children and young people, who would potentially fall within the criteria for the proposed new school.

Question 3.

To answer question three a literature research was undertaken alongside discussions with the head teachers of the five CLD schools, our local experts, as well as senior researchers from the University of Birmingham and University of Bangor.

Question 4.

With respect to question four, reference was made to the other decisions made by Cabinet for improving special education provision for CLD pupils

on Wirral, the current model for funding of special schools, research into future projections for the incidence of PMLD and into other proposed relevant developments.

Finally, with respect to question four, regard was given to the records of our current CLD schools, comments made by parents and carers regarding their positive points and their shortcomings and ways the latter of these could be addressed through our proposed development programme for the CLD sector.

Question 5

Potential answers here emanated from the totality of the information gained throughout the study, both local and national, and the context of developments planned within Wirral's other CLD schools.

Outcomes of the Study

Identifying Potential Need

The following definition for the proposed new provision was reached by reference to The PMLD Network website, a national organisation, which represents the needs and interests of children, young people and adults with PMLD, national guidelines issued by the DCSF, local definitions which inform the pupil census and special school funding model and consultations with the head teachers of Wirral's five special schools for children and young people who experience complex learning difficulties.

Finally the definition was agreed with the Chair of Governors, Head Teacher and parent representatives of The Lyndale School as the representatives of the parents, teachers and governors from whom this option arose.

Definition/criteria of profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities for inclusion within potential cohort for proposed 2-19 provision:

The children and young people who might benefit from or be admitted to a 2-19 school for profound and multiple learning difficulties were agreed to be those who;

- Experience profound or severe to profound learning difficulties i.e. are likely to be functioning at P levels 1-4 throughout their school life. P scales are a means of charting children's early developmental progress prior to entering into national curriculum levels. P1 to P4 represents developmental levels approximately equivalent to 3-18 months. NB The criteria for development as measured by P Scale attainments was deliberately set a level higher than would normally be the case (i.e. from 1-3 to 1-4) to avoid excluding potential pupils.;
- Experience severe communication difficulties
- Experience significant mobility difficulties and/or complex and long term physical disabilities/medical conditions;
- Experience extremely low levels of independence and will require high levels of adult support and care;
- May experience additional sensory difficulties, and;
- Would benefit from a highly specialised learning environment, which provides continuity of education, support and care throughout their school lives.

Children and young people, who present severe and challenging behaviour, whilst they are usually included within the definition of profound and multiple learning difficulties, were excluded.

The last of these criteria, put forward by The Lyndale School as a means of safeguarding the interests of many of the young people for whom they cater, who often have severely limited mobility and may be physically and medically vulnerable, did not meet with universal agreement. This issue will be referred to again later.

A pro-forma listing these criteria was distributed to the 5 CLD schools in September 2009 and head teachers were asked to list those pupils currently on their rolls who might meet the criteria. From the returns the following profiles were obtained.

Number of Pupils per School as of September 2009, who potentially met the criteria.

School	Nos. on roll – school census Oct. 2009	Nos. potentially meeting criteria	Percentage
Elleray Park	75	23	30.7
Stanley*	71	0	0
The Lyndale	33	24	72.7
Foxfield	123	15	12.2
Meadowside	78	10	12.8
TOTAL	380	72	18.9

*This figure is zero because Stanley School is not yet fully accessible to children with the full range of disabilities.

From the above it will be seen that there is a possible need for a specialist provision for children and young people with PMLD for some 72 places, 47 at primary and 25 at secondary, based on current figures.

It is not clear why there is such a discrepancy between the primary and secondary figures and accordingly the returns were further analysed by year group to ascertain whether this had something to do with natural variation within a low incidence population or some other feature e.g. rate of progression of pupils identified early in their lives as PMLD, variations in incidence etc.

Incidence of PMLD by Year Group

Yr	F1	F2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Nos	7	6	8	3	6	3	10	4	1	3	5	4	2	4	4	2

For further comparison the incidence rates over years 7 – 10 were also examined for the previous 5 years with the following results.

Year	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
2008	5	4	1	4	2	5	5	2	28
2007	3	1	4	2	5	7	2	3	27
2006	1	4	2	5	6	2	4	5	29
2005	4	2	5	6	2	4	5	6	34
2004	2	4	6	2	5	5	6	4	34

The above results would suggest that, given the overall low incidence rate, we are looking at a relatively stable population where prevalence diminishes as the children and young people become older.

Consultation with Wirral CYPD Early Years Service indicates that there are potentially 5 PMLD pupils who will be entering the CLD schools over the next year.

Overall these figures would accord with a national reported incidence rate of approximately 8/9 per 10,000 children.

Moderation of Returns

Following receipt of the above data a moderation exercise was undertaken in order to exclude those pupils who did not or would not meet the agreed criteria. Reasons for exclusion were as follows;

Pupils who were described as presenting severe and challenging behaviour;

Pupils who were already achieving above Level P4;

Young pupils, whose current development, would suggest that they would exceed Level P4 within their school career.

This moderation exercise led to the following results;

School	Nos. on roll	Nos. potentially meeting criteria	Percentage
Elleray Park	75	14	18.7
Stanley*	71	0	0
The Lyndale	33	23	69.7
Foxfield	123	8	6.5
Meadowside	78	9	11.5
TOTAL	380	54	14.2

Figures per year group as follows;

Yr	F1	F2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Nos	6	5	8	3	3	2	8	2	0	3	4	3	0	2	3	2

Following moderation it is clear that we are dealing with a potential cohort of some 54 pupils overall, 37 in primary and 17 in secondary.

Thus we currently have approximately 54 pupils on Wirral, who might benefit from a 2-19 school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Whether this identification of potential need would convert into a viable school population is, at least in part, dependent upon whether there is a potential demand, i.e. would sufficient parents wish to opt for a 2-19 educational provision for their children.

Identifying Potential Demand

In order to address this question all the parents and/or carers of the children and young people (i.e. 72) identified in the first school based census were invited, via their child’s school, to meetings held in four of the five special schools involved – Elleray Park, The Lyndale, Foxfield and Meadowside.

Parents/carers could attend any meeting they wished and, as the main questions to be addressed were notified to them before hand, they were able to submit their views in writing, attend the meetings, or both. Parents were, therefore, given every opportunity to express their opinion regarding the proposal.

Fourteen parents/carers attended the meetings; 11 at Lyndale, 3 at Elleray Park and none at either Foxfield or Meadowside. These

parents/carers represented 10 children who attend The Lyndale School, 2 who attend Ellera Park and 1 each from Foxfield and Meadowside i.e. approximately 22% of the overall cohort of which 70% were Lyndale parents/carers. Each meeting was facilitated by a senior officer of the CYPD – the author of this report. Five parents/carers submitted their views in writing. Four of these parents also attended one of the arranged meetings.

After an introduction giving the purpose and context of the meeting discussions took place around the following questions, which had been notified in advance to the parents/carers. Each of the meetings lasted between one and one and a half hours.

Questions Raised

These were notified in advance to parents and were:

Wirral Council's Cabinet has asked the Children and Young People's Department to undertake a feasibility study into the possible creation of a 2-19 special school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

1. If the authority created a school for children with such difficulties would you choose such an option for your child?
2. If so, why?
3. If not, why?
4. Most children and young people with PMLD are currently educated within a mixed ability (CLD) school. What do you think are the benefits/ advantages/disadvantages of this arrangement?

5. We are currently intending to build new schools to meet the full range of needs within the complex learning difficulties community, including PMLD. What do you think we need to do to meet any of the concerns you have noted above?

6. Understandably, one of the major concerns for the parents/carers of our most vulnerable children and young people is about transitions – entering school, moving from primary to secondary school, from secondary school to college etc. – do you think these transitions are important, if so what can we do to make these transitions easier for you and, more importantly, your son or daughter?

7. Are there any other points that you feel we should take into account when the Director makes his recommendations to the Council?

Whilst recognising that the sample of parents/carers attending the meetings or returning the questionnaires was not representative of parents/carers as a whole it is still important to report their views as expressed.

At The Lyndale meeting attended by 10 parents/carers of children who attend Lyndale and 1 whose child attended Ellera Park the responses were as follows;

If the authority created a school for children with such difficulties would you choose such an option for your child?

If so, why?

There was almost 100% support for this proposal. The reasons given included:

Issues to do with health and safety for a number of children who are extremely vulnerable

BUT it goes beyond this as, because they are safe, the focus can be on providing them with the most appropriate education with teaching geared to their level of difficulty – without more able children's progress being impeded

Also children have full access to all parts of the school – there is no need for them to be isolated

Developmental progress doesn't match (arbitrary) transition ages.

Allows the creation of a specific and particular ethos and environment, which matches the needs of the children e.g. allows the creation of a multi-sensory environment which wouldn't be possible if too many active children.

If not, why?

Comment that it is possible to meet all children's needs within a 'mixed ability' class but takes great teacher skill.

Response – it may be but I haven't seen it or been convinced.

Most children and young people with PMLD are currently educated within a mixed ability (CLD) school. What do you think are the benefits/advantages/disadvantages of this arrangement?

Would offer no advantages for the children in The Lyndale School. Could possibly see some advantages of being with children with moderate learning difficulties, who are more mature and know how to behave.

Would question at secondary school whether the practice of moving from class to class is appropriate for our children

We are currently intending to build new schools to meet the full range of needs within the complex learning difficulties community, including PMLD. What do you think we need to do to meet any of the concerns you have noted above?

No specific responses to this question. Solution seen as the continuation of Lyndale school as an all age school for PMLD.

Understandably, one of the major concerns for the parents/carers of our most vulnerable children and young people is about transitions – entering school, moving from primary to secondary school, from secondary school to college etc. – do you think these transitions are important, if so what can we do to make these transitions easier for you and, more importantly, your son or daughter?

Transitions at arbitrary ages are not relevant for our children.

Discussed the possible benefits of developmentally rather than chronologically led transitions.

Comments that Wirral's secondary schools are not able to meet the needs of Lyndale children whereas a 2-19 Lyndale would

Are there any other points that you feel we should take into account when the Director makes his recommendations to the Council?

Lyndale works for the children it provides for and the needs of the children should come first.

Just because there are few other 2-19 PMLD schools in the country does not mean it is a bad idea. More of these children are coming through the system and we need to provide for them.

At the Elleray Park meeting which, because only three attended and all were parents from children at different schools, was more informal. The main points raised were;

Only one of the three favoured the 2-19 option and even then her opinion was equivocal.

Whilst fully understanding the views of parents at Lyndale i.e. aiming for an holistic approach to education not curriculum bound, more personalised learning etc. I'm not sure I'd want it for my child. She may be PMLD now but she may progress and I'm happy with Elleray Park.

Given the small number of pupils in the school and in each year group how relevant would the curriculum be. There would be no positive role models who promote progress and no real 6th form.

The primary schools work well but the secondary schools are not so good. My child often got babysat and I question the need to keep moving around.

Transitions need to be managed much better. People need a greater knowledge of the conditions, which affect our children and we need schools of excellence run by experts for all our children.

As stated, 5 written submissions were received. Four were from parents who attended one of the arranged meetings, 3 were from parents of children at The Lyndale School and two from parents with children at Elleray Park.

Responses from the 3 parents of children at The Lyndale School very much followed the themes identified at the meeting held at the school i.e. that the needs of PMLD children are highly specialised and they therefore need to be taught and cared for by specialised staff in a specialised environment. Similar concerns were expressed regarding PMLD children being placed alongside more active and challenging pupils and the risks this might bring to both the children's welfare and learning opportunities.

Of the two parents with children who attend Elleray Park School one was supportive of the idea of a 2-19 special school but would see it as catering for a much broader range of pupils than just PMLD as she felt her daughter benefited from contact and interaction with more able and mobile pupils. The other, whilst appreciating some of the merits of the proposal expressed concerns regarding the lack of opportunities for transition, interaction with more able peers, the absence of positive role models and questioned the dignity of older pupils being educated alongside those who are considerably younger, even if developmentally they are at similar levels.

Interpretation of the outcomes of the parental consultation, with such a low and skewed response rate, is clearly problematic. However, it is typical that when responses to such a consultation/survey are voluntary, responses from those with strong opinions in either direction tend to predominate. It is clear from the outcomes that the majority contribution comes from parents/carers of children attending The Lyndale School, who were, not surprisingly, in favour of the proposal. There was little if any clear support from any of the parents/carers of children and young people who attend the other CLD schools. This mirrors the response received by the Children and Young Peoples Department during their original consultation in the winter of 2008/09.

What are the educational, social and other arguments for the creation of such a specialist provision?

Children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties do, however, present significant challenges to educational, health and social care services in meeting their complex needs.

Whilst developmentally they remain very young throughout their school and adult lives they also experience a range of other complex medical and physical conditions, which may be either chronic or acute. The nature of the children and young people's needs, can, put considerable extra pressure on their families. For these reasons this group of children and young people and their families require highly specialised and well co-ordinated services if they are to progress.

Additionally, as their needs are due to wide range of causes, interventions frequently have to be highly individualised and bespoke thus requiring a high degree of expertise and experience from the staff who work with them. From an educational standpoint a fine balance needs to be struck between attending to medical, physical and care needs and promoting their overall learning and development.

PLMD children and young people are not simply operating at a very low level of development from which they will develop, albeit slowly, along the normal developmental pathways. In addition to their profound learning difficulties, they also experience significant cognitive and neurological difficulties, which can impact upon the way they process information, the way they store and retrieve information, their ability to control their own actions and to make associations between those actions and external events etc. Additionally, like young infants, their arousal and awareness levels may be limited and they may only be receptive to learning at brief and sporadic times. Typically many PMLD children often experience complex medical and care needs, which need to be addressed within whichever educational setting they are placed.

Children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties are, however, still capable of learning and making progress. They learn from their environment, both physical and social, by observation and interaction, and from direct intervention. Approaches such as environmental management (especially using ICT), intensive interaction, adult-infant simulated interaction, multi-sensory stimulation and teaching and motor control programmes have all been shown to be potentially effective ways of promoting development and learning. The impact of these approaches is, however, not specific to this group of children and young people and they are also applicable to children with severe learning difficulties, autism and other conditions, which impede their developmental progress. Moreover, and importantly, all these approaches need to be underpinned by a detailed knowledge of early child development if they are to have maximum effect.

The option for the creation of a 2-19 special school for children and young people, who experience profound and multiple learning difficulties but who do not present challenging behaviours, was put forward by parents, governors and staff at The Lyndale School.

They would argue that the most effective way of creating the level of specialism – environmental, educational and multi-disciplinary – required to fully meet the needs of these pupils is to create a specialist school which provides for such children and young people throughout their school lives.

This is not a view that is shared by others, within the Wirral complex learning difficulty community, nor by the Local Authority. The majority of pupils with PMLD on Wirral are currently educated within the broader CLD schools and indeed the majority of year 6 Lyndale pupils have, over recent years, transferred to either Foxfield or Meadowside, without either parents expressing significant dissatisfaction or the needs of the children and young people being compromised. In recent years both these schools

have been rated good with outstanding features by OFSTED and are well regarded by parents.

Elleray Park, also a school rated as outstanding by OFSTED, consistently has about 80 pupils on roll, approximately 20% of whom are considered the most vulnerable i.e. PMLD. This school accommodates for the needs of PMLD pupils both alongside and within the general CLD population. Again Elleray Park is well regarded by parents.

Identifying other schools in the country, which would be similar to that which is proposed has been difficult. Only three have been identified thus far, one independent and two local authority maintained. One of these has been visited by head teacher colleagues and was not found to be a model we should follow as leadership was poor and the needs of the pupils were not well met.

Whilst many authorities maintain 2-19 special schools these are usually for children and young people exhibiting a much greater range of need e.g. from complex to moderate learning difficulties, including children with autism and difficult behaviours and others with emotional problems. The reasons for creating such schools are often to do with geographical location, economic viability or particular local circumstances.

Educational research regarding the preferred organisational arrangements best suited to meeting the needs of pupils with profound and multiple learning is not easily identified. Whilst there is much evidenced based research around effective teaching methodologies e.g. multi-sensory approaches, the use of intensive interaction, approaches to improve motor co-ordination and control and the impact of effective environmental management, there is little, if any, regarding particular organisational arrangements. As noted above both The Lyndale and Elleray Park, who both meet the needs of primary aged children with PMLD, though in rather different ways, are both rated as outstanding by

OFSTED indicating that the aims of The Lyndale School may be met in different ways.

Locally the proposal put forward by The Lyndale School has met with little support from the head teachers or parents of the other four schools for children and young people with complex learning difficulties.

Whilst appreciating the additional needs that pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties might present they feel that these can be, and are, met within a broader and more inclusive complex difficulties environment. They feel that it is important for all children and young people to benefit from the presence of other children and young people with a range of abilities and also to benefit from the gains made from moving on to newer and more challenging environments.

They fully recognise parental anxieties regarding change and transition but feel that these can be addressed via a process of improved person centred planning and transition management.

A particular concern was expressed by head teachers of the other CLD schools regarding the proposal to exclude pupils who are particularly active or who present challenging behaviours from the proposed 2-19 provision. This was felt to be in contravention of The Disability Discrimination Act, to be against parental choice and to potentially skew the intake of the other primary CLD schools.

Further concerns expressed by the head teachers of the other four schools were how, on a prediction of a 2-19 school catering for 45-55 children young people across 5 key stages and 15 year groups, appropriate age related groupings could be achieved to the benefit of the children and young people involved. Also, the different incidence rates between the primary and secondary phases would suggest that, some children identified early as PMLD may well make sufficient progress to

transfer to an all ability CLD school at a later but unpredictable time. Such variable transfers could be problematic.

Costs, Viability and Value for Money

Wirral’s Cabinet has already agreed to the rebuilding of Stanley and Elleray Park schools within the primary CLD sector and to the merger of Foxfield and Meadowside Schools into a single 11-19 school built on separate sites. The 11-16 provision to be co-located with a mainstream secondary school and the 16-19 provision co-located with Wirral Metropolitan College.

All these new schools will be built to cater for the full range of special needs found within the complex learning difficulties sector, including PMLD. Thus it may be that any parental anxieties, which are currently felt regarding the provision for PMLD pupils within the CLD sector, will diminish.

In planning for, but not pre-empting any future Cabinet decisions, the new schools will be designed to cater for the current number of pupils within the CLD sector i.e. approximately 200 at primary and 200 at secondary. If it is agreed to build a 2-19 school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties then the capacity of the new schools can be reduced accordingly whilst assuring that they remain fully accessible to all children and young people within the CLD sector.

All new builds will be completed in accordance with the requirements of Building Bulletin 102, which would require building footprints of;

School	@ approx. £2k per sq. m
Elleray and Stanley	approx. 3500 square metres £ 7,000,000 each
Secondary (11-16) CLD	approx. 5500 square metres £11,000,000
Secondary (16-19) CLD	approx. 4500 square metres £ 9,000,000

More importantly the new builds will incorporate the most modern thinking in terms of creating specialist, learning environments for some of our most vulnerable children and young people and staff will be encouraged to use this opportunity to re-think their approaches to teaching, learning and care. They will, of course, be built with the full range of pupil need in mind.

These build costs are based upon all the current CLD pupils being provided for within the four new provisions. If a decision were made to also create an 11-19 provision for PMLD pupils, approx. 45 –55 places, the cost reductions on the above would be marginal as they would mainly represent a reduction in classroom space i.e. approximately 500 sq. ms @ £2k per sq. m = approx. £1m over the four schools.

To build a new 2-19 special school for PMLD would cost, at a minimum, approximately £4.5 - £5 million. Additional running costs would also be incurred by the creation of duplicate provision, especially at secondary level, over and above that already agreed by The Council's Cabinet.

On current planning a new 2-19 school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties would be behind the schedule for the other three schools, which would be open and operating in advance of any additional provision – between 2012 and 2014/5. As these schools will be purpose designed and built to cater for the full range of learning difficulties and disabilities within the complex learning difficulty domain, this would be likely to impact upon parent's preferences for The Lyndale School in the future and also any proposed 2-19 provision.

This may particularly be so since the new Stanley School, subject to consultation and approval, will be the first to open, probably in September 2012. Whilst parents of children with PMLD within the catchment area of Stanley are currently more likely to opt for The Lyndale this situation may well change.

This may impact further on the potential numbers for a 2-19 provision.

Are there other ways in which the aims of The Lyndale School may be achieved.

It is clear that the needs of children and young people who experience profound and multiple learning difficulties are complex and require specialist skills and approaches to meet them. What is less clear is the extent to which these needs are unique to pupils with PMLD or general to the broader CLD population.

Equally clear is that The Lyndale School has over a number of years developed many of these specialist skills and approaches and is, rightfully, well regarded by the parents of its pupils and by OFSTED. However, this is also the case for Wirral's other schools who meet the needs of PMLD pupils. Where there are deficits these are more commonly due to the physical environments within which the schools operate rather being down to any lack of staff expertise and experience.

The proposed developments for Wirral's CLD schools will enable the removal of any barriers to the establishment of an excellent range of provisions for all CLD pupils, including those with PMLD, and the creation of specialist learning environments designed to maximise the attainment of each child and young person's potential.

Summary and Conclusions

The Local Authority currently maintains 5 special schools for children and young people with complex learning difficulties, 3 at primary and 2 at secondary. All these schools have, in recent years, been recognised as either outstanding or good with outstanding features by OFSTED.

The Authority has determined that these schools no longer provide the kind of physical environment and amenities appropriate to the needs of

this particular population and, as a result, undertook a public consultation regarding a range of options for future provision.

Included within this range of options was one put forward by parents, staff and governors of The Lyndale School for the creation of a 2-19 school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

In April 2009 the Council's Cabinet approved the replacement of Stanley and Elleray Park schools for primary aged children with complex learning difficulties with two new build schools, each co-located with a local mainstream primary school. They also approved the merger of the two secondary CLD schools, Foxfield and Meadowside, and the creation of a new build school for children and young people with complex learning difficulties created on two sites. The 11-16 provision is to be co-located with a local mainstream secondary school and the 16-19 to be co-located with a local F.E. (Wirral Metropolitan) College.

The Cabinet also approved the undertaking of a feasibility study into the creation of a 2-19 school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties. During the Consultation this proposal met with little support from the broader CLD community but was recognised by Cabinet as having merit and deserving of further investigation.

This investigation is now complete and has identified that;

Following a review of the criteria for children and young people, who may be described as experiencing profound and multiple learning difficulties (excluding those with challenging behaviours) the Authority has identified 54 such pupils across its 5 CLD schools.

Twenty three of these pupils currently attend The Lyndale School, 14 Elleray Park, 8 Foxfield and 9 Meadowside. If **all** these and future pupils were to attend a specialist school for PMLD **and** this trend continued into the future then it would be potentially viable.

However, there continues to be little support outside of The Lyndale School for this option. The majority of parents/carers appear satisfied with the provision being made for their children within the all ability CLD schools. The head teachers of these schools, whilst sympathising with the rationale, do not agree that this is the best way to provide for children and young people with PMLD. The low level of attendance from parents/carers of children attending the other schools at the consultation meetings and the small number of written responses would tend to support this view;

Whilst there is strong evidence that pupils with PMLD require a particular and specialised approach to meeting their needs and promoting their development, it is not clear that this is uniquely different from that required by many pupils with complex learning difficulties or that this needs to take place within a separate environment. Indeed local and national evidence would suggest that PMLD pupils make equally good progress and are no more at risk in a mixed ability CLD environment as they do/are within a more specialist setting;

Pupils, who are identified as experiencing difficulties early in life do indeed grow and develop. The reduction in the incidence of PMLD over age would suggest that some children and young people so described, may have to move out of the proposed specialist setting, possibly at unpredictable times, thus providing unnecessary disruption.

Given these findings the creation of a 2-19 school for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, involving considerable capital investment, would appear to be a high-risk option as for the following reasons;

Less than half of the parents/carers of PMLD children currently attending our CLD schools have indicated that this would be their preferred option, whereas the option, in order to be financially viable, would require almost unanimous support;

This represents the views of current parents. Over the next 3-5 years the provision made for children and young people with complex learning difficulties, including those with PMLD, is likely to improve significantly. This inevitably will impact upon parental preference for schools and is likely to reduce the desire for a 2-19 option even further;

Where concerns have been expressed by some parents, regarding the broader PMLD provision on Wirral, this information may be used by the Authority to enhance this provision without recourse to the provision of additional facilities e.g. by reviewing curriculum, teaching and learning and transition strategies.

It should be noted here that if, subject to recommendations from The Director of Children's Services, Cabinet do not decide to proceed with the creation of a 2-19 school for children and young people with PMLD then this decision, in of itself, will not impact upon the future of The Lyndale School as a 2-11 provider for such children.

Supplementary Conclusions and Recommendations

The above represents the main conclusions in respect of the agreed scope of the feasibility regarding the potential creation of a 2-19 special school with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

However, irrespective of any decisions made in respect of that proposal, a number of issues have been raised during the course of the study, which would merit attention;

Parents have expressed greater satisfaction with the way the needs of their PMLD children are met at primary rather than secondary school. Although this is based upon a small sample and based mainly on perceived futures, this is an issue, which needs to

be addressed, as it impacts upon the confidence that parents have when it comes to secondary transfer;

Transitions, especially between primary and secondary and post 19 need to be re-examined, again to build confidence and certainty;

Wirral, as an whole, does not have a comprehensive policy regarding the best ways to educate, support and care for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties and the broader complex learning difficulties community.

Addressing these issues would serve to build confidence amongst parents regarding the provision made by Wirral for pupils with CLD and PMLD and improve the services delivered to such children, young people and their families. Development of a strategic plan to address these issues should, therefore, be given high priority.

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