

IMPROVING PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH COMPLEX LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report summarises the outcome of informal discussions with headteachers, parents and other interested parties concerning the provision the Authority makes for pupils in the three primary special schools for pupils with complex learning difficulties. It proposes that a more formal review of the options is undertaken.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Local Authority has three primary special schools for pupils with complex learning difficulties (CLD). These schools meet the needs of pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have associated needs such as autistic spectrum disorders or physical and sensory disabilities. Elleray Park School, Stanley School and The Lyndale School all meet the needs of pupils aged 2-11. Following initial work undertaken by the special school headteachers and discussions with stakeholders within each of the three schools the Authority have been asked to undertake a comprehensive review of current provision and to produce a plan for the future development of Wirral's special schools

2.2 Initial exploratory discussions have been held with Headteachers, staff, governors and groups of parents in each of the three primary special schools for pupils with CLD to gather views on current provision and how it could be enhanced. A dialogue has also started with partners in the Health Authority to consider how educational, social care and health provision for this group of young people could be more effectively integrated.

2.3 The work with the primary CLD schools has considered the quality of the current provision, including the standards of teaching and learning, the accommodation, facilities and the opportunities available to the pupils and their families. Despite Wirral having in place high quality special school provision for this group of pupils there is some agreement amongst many of the staff, governors and parents on areas for further improvement. Some of these issues would require reorganisation of provision and changes in accommodation to be made. There is general support amongst stakeholders for exploring in more detail the benefits and implications of any changes.

2.4 This report proposes that a more extensive examination of alternative options for organisation of provision for primary aged children with complex learning difficulties is completed to assess the feasibility and benefits of changing existing provision and the degree of support for making such changes amongst all of the relevant stakeholders. Once completed this work can lead to a draft plan for developing special schools in Wirral in the future in order to offer pupils and families a more comprehensive and integrated provision.

This plan could then be implemented over the next 5-10 years, as and when funding opportunities become available as part of Wirral's broader primary school strategy.

2.5 The special school Headteachers group have worked collaboratively to consider the special school provision for primary aged pupils with complex learning difficulties in Wirral, laying out their vision for how this could be developed and improved in the future. There was a consensus amongst the Headteachers that while the present standard of school provision is outstanding it could still be further improved. They suggest a number of options for changing the accommodation, provision and services offered by the schools, and possibly the size and location of provision. The Headteachers are keen that various options that they believe could benefit their pupils and schools should be explored and considered.

2.6 **Current primary provision for pupils with Complex Learning Difficulties**

2.7 Elleray Park School, Stanley School and The Lyndale School provide for a combined current population of 208 pupils (Elleray Park School currently has 83 pupils; Stanley School has 91 pupils; The Lyndale School has 34 pupils). This includes a small number of part time places for very young pupils in nursery classes.

2.8 The numbers in the three primary schools have fluctuated over the years. At present numbers in The Lyndale School have reduced while Elleray Park has seen a recent growth in numbers. Stanley School's numbers have been more stable for many years. Factors such as a change of key staff in the school, new and improved facilities or developments in teaching and learning can all influence parental preference.

2.9 In spring 2008 Council agreed with the proposal to change the number of funded places at Elleray Park School and The Lyndale School. There was an increase in the number of funded places at Elleray Park to 75, and a reduction in the number of funded places for pupils with social and communication difficulties at The Lyndale School from 55 to 45 over a two year period.

2.10 Stanley School and The Lyndale School were both inspected in 2007 .Elleray Park School was inspected in 2008. All three schools were judged to make outstanding provision.

2.11 The accommodation available at the three primary schools has a number of limitations. Stanley School shares a site with Thingwall Primary School and close links are maintained between both schools, much to the benefit of the pupils. Stanley School does not however meet current accessibility requirements and pupils who are wheelchair users cannot be placed at the school. Elleray Park School has many accommodation restrictions, particularly given the recent rapid rise in the number of pupils on roll. The building does not fully allow for effective delivery of much of the therapeutic provision that is required within the pupil's timetables. The Lyndale School opened in 1999 and is within a refurbished building. Its facilities are attractive and modern but its limited number of classrooms restricts the number and range of pupils it can accommodate. Elleray Park School and The Lyndale School are not co-located alongside a mainstream primary school

3.0 **The findings from initial discussions with Governors, staff and parents**

3.1 A series of meetings have been held in each of the three primary CLD schools. These were attended by the Head of Branch for Participation and Inclusion and the seconded special school headteacher. Staff and governors were all invited to a meeting and parents were given the opportunity to attend two meetings in each school. A number of parents attended the initial discussion meetings in each of the schools. All of those parents present were very positive about their child's current school and the education and care that was provided.

Given the high standard of current practice within all three CLD schools there is agreement that any changes that were made to local provision must build on existing standards and bring clear benefits for pupils and their families.

- 3.2 The development of extended schools provision for pupils with complex learning difficulties, including wrap around child care and school holiday activities is a priority for future development. This was a major feature in comments from parents, many of whom indicate that a lack of accessible, appropriate and affordable child care that meets the special needs of their child prevents them from seeking or maintaining employment. Better year round access to health professionals and integrated provision from education, social care and health professionals in one location was another priority for future development amongst all parents.
- 3.3 The practical issue of combining groups of pupils with a range of needs was explored in many of the discussions. Within the existing primary CLD schools in Wirral there are a wide range of pupils including those with severe learning difficulties, autism, physical disabilities and profound and multiple learning difficulties. While each school is designated as a generic CLD special school custom and practice has resulted in individual schools taking more pupils with a particular type of need. If local provision were to change in the future parents, staff and governors want reassurance that the cohorts of pupils across the complex learning difficulties continuum could continue to have their education, health and care needs met appropriately in a safe environment. A small number of parents also voiced concern over a potential loss of choice of schools if there was to be any change in existing provision.
- 3.4 There was support amongst a group of parents at The Lyndale School for the creation of a special school in Wirral for pupils aged 2-19 with profound and multiple learning difficulties. These parents argue that specialist provision for this cohort of pupils who currently attend a number of the primary and secondary CLD schools in Wirral should be established on a single site. This would also remove the need for these pupils to transfer from a primary to secondary school setting when they reach 11 years old.
- 3.5 While recognising the accessibility problems in their school's accommodation the parents, staff and governors at Stanley school strongly support the co-location of their building alongside Thingwall Primary School. This offers opportunities for the inclusion of their pupils into mainstream school activities which can be very beneficial. Many parents, staff and governors at Elleray Park School and The Lyndale School feel that their children miss the opportunity that is available to the Stanley School pupils and so would like to move to premises that were also co-located on a mainstream primary school site.

4.0 Financial and Staffing Implications

- 4.1 The proposed consultation exercises would be undertaken by officers within the Children and Young Peoples Department, in conjunction with the special school headteachers and other relevant partners

5.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 5.1 The pupils at Stanley School benefit from the opportunities available as a result of being co-located alongside a mainstream primary school. These benefits are not currently available to the same extent to pupils at Elleray Park School and The Lyndale School, although some links with mainstream primary schools exist.

5.2 Pupils with CLD who are wheelchair users are not currently placed at Stanley School because of restrictions in space and accessibility within the building. This results in pupils who use wheelchairs being given a restricted choice of which of the three schools they can attend.

6.0. Community Safety Implications

6.1 There are none arising out of this report

7.0. Local Agenda 21 Statement

7.1 There are none arising out of this report

8.0 Planning Implications

8.1 At this stage there are no implications from the recommendations

9.0 Anti Poverty implications

9.1 There are none arising out of this report

10.0 Social inclusion implications

10.1 Any additional co-location of special school provision with mainstream schools would increase the opportunities for pupils with learning difficulties to be included in activities alongside their mainstream peers.

11.0 Local Member Support implications

11.1 Pupils from all three of the primary schools for pupils with complex learning difficulties come from all areas of the Wirral

12.0 Background Papers

None

13.0 Recommendations

That

(1) a formal review of the provision the Authority makes for primary aged pupils who have complex learning difficulties be approved - such a review would be completed in March 2009 when a further report would be submitted to Cabinet; and

(2) this review would include a widespread consultation with all stakeholders and the assurance that any development would be an improvement on the current high quality provision.

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