

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM – 15th MAY 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN SERVICES

SENSORY SERVICE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update Schools Forum on the Sensory Service.

2. BACKGROUND

Wirral has at present 604 children and young people with a significant visual/hearing impairment (0-19 years) accessing the Sensory Service. They all meet a National Eligibility criteria for intervention. This document can be found on the Local Offer. Clinical information informs this process. There are 326 children who receive intervention from the Hearing Support Team and 248 children with a visual impairment receiving input from the Vision Support Team. There are also, in addition, 34 children with dual loss i.e. both vision and hearing loss, where input from both teams is needed. These figures do not include new referrals in assessment.

Out of county placements have reduced from 11 to 2 over the last decade. One pupil is placed at St Vincent's Blind school and another at the Royal School for the Blind in Liverpool. These each cost approximately £29,000 (including transport). One deaf student will attend Secondary provision in Doncaster in September 2019 at a cost of 55,000 per year (includes transport). The service continues to maintain a highly flexible, very highly skilled workforce in order to meet the changing needs of children across the Wirral.

The number of referrals and numbers on the active caseload can vary but the general trend in the last 5 years has been for an increase in numbers and an increase in complexity of needs. Early intervention is a strength of the service as is the drive to develop pupil independence.

The service provides advice regarding the needs of children for all schools and Early Years settings to help them meet requirements of the Equality Act and the Code of Practice.

There are 4.8 FTE Qualified Teachers of the Deaf and 4 Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired. The Sensory Service has one full time Rehabilitation Officer and 9.1 FTE Specialist Teaching Assistants. There are 70 children who receive targeted interventions involving a combination of Teacher and Specialist Teaching Assistant. These interventions range from full time support for those using braille or sign as their first medium to 30 minutes a week or short blocks. The rest of the children are monitored by the Teaching team from monthly to annual visits where they offer advice, support and training for staff.

The 2018/19 year has been a challenging year for the Service due to a move from Liscard to Hamilton Building which caused some disruption, but also due to 5 members of staff being off due to maternity leave or long-term sickness. The service would like to thank Schools for their co-operation and patience during this period.

3. SPECIALIST PROVISION

There is one primary school (Townfield) with specialist provision for children with a hearing loss who require sign language. Currently there are 9 pupils attending. The number of funded places at the provision will reduce from 11 to 10 in September 2019. Place funding is £6,000 and top up £10,000 per child attending.

At present there is a projected shortfall overall of £25,423 in funding for the base in September. This is due to the staffing levels for children who require one to one communication support. The children are more spread out throughout the year groups resulting in fewer instances where one member of staff can support communication for two children.

The base is managed well by the school. There has been one Halton pupil placed at the school this term and there is interest from 3 other families from outside of Wirral with possible starts in September 2019. These will be externally funded by the other Local Authorities.

4. OTHER SERVICES

Children and young people are provided specialist equipment to help facilitate access to the curriculum in mainstream schools. There are 52 hearing impaired children who use radio aids to help reduce background noise and help focus more on the class teachers voice.

The Service has run 4 British Sign Language courses across Wirral this year to help develop a broader base of parents, children and staff who can communicate with pupils with a need to sign.

For the first time ever there are 4 children who are blind and learning through the medium of Braille in mainstream school. Transition in September will be exceptionally challenging for the Vision Support Team as they will be supporting 4 Brailleists, 2 in Secondary schools, 2 in Primary schools who will all be in transition.

Projections suggest an unusual spike in Early Years cases of children who are blind. An example of a recent purchase specialist equipment is the Braille Note, costing £4,500. This enables the pupil to record and produce braille in an electronic format that can link to school networks. The availability of Specialist Teaching Assistant support will need to be reviewed in preparation for September 2019.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Forum notes the report

Paul Boyce
Corporate Director For Children Services