

## **Improving Special Educational Needs Provision**

### **A Briefing for The Schools Forum 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

As part of the review of special educational needs provision a number of significant changes have taken place of late and a number of others are under consideration. Wirral maintains 11 special schools as well as Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit (WASP) and the Hospital School (Joseph Paxton). In addition it also maintains a number of educational inclusion bases. These various facilities provide for the broad range of special educational need and this briefing will refer to developments by sector. Where no reference is made there are no current proposals for change but the review will be ongoing and further developments may be expected.

### **Complex Learning Difficulties**

The authority maintains five schools for children and young people who experience complex learning difficulties – severe to profound learning difficulties often with additional needs e.g. autism, medical/physical difficulties, sensory problems. The three primary schools – Elleray Park, The Lyndale and Stanley – and the two secondary schools – Foxfield and Meadowside – cater between them for approximately 400 pupils, 200 each at primary and secondary.

Whilst all these schools are rated by OFSTED as either outstanding or good with outstanding features the quality of the education and extended support they are able to offer is hampered by the limitations of their physical environments. There are particular problems in meeting the demands of the 14-19 agenda. Only Meadowside and Elleray Park were purpose built as special schools but even then in an age when they catered for children with far less complex needs than currently. The other three are adapted, surplus to requirements, mainstream schools.

Following discussions with head teachers, parents and governors a number of proposals as to how the schools might be developed were established. These went out to public consultation between October 2008 and January 2009. Following this a paper went to Cabinet in April 2009 where it was agreed to;

- Replace Stanley and Elleray Park schools with two new-build primary schools, each co-located on a mainstream site (to be identified) and each catering for 100 pupils;
- Replace Meadowside and Foxfield schools with a new-build 11-19 school built on split sites but with a single governing body and head teacher. It is intended that the 11-16 provision, catering for approximately 140 students, will be co-located with a mainstream secondary school (site to be identified) and the 16-19 provision, catering for approximately 120 students, to be co-located with a local college – most likely Wirral Metropolitan College. The places available at the 16-19 provision will give additional capacity to provide for students from other schools e.g. West Kirby Residential, Clare Mount, some mainstream secondary schools, who may benefit from additional support to facilitate their transition from school into college, vocational training or work;

- Undertake a feasibility study into the possible creation of a 2-19 provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties or whose medical/physical difficulties may make them particularly within a mixed ability setting.

Funding for the primary re-build will come from the Primary Capital Programme and other possible sources of monies e.g. SEN capital. Replacing Stanley school will be first priority as this school is currently not accessible to wheelchair users and pupils with the most complex needs.

Funding for the 11-16 provision will be from the Secondary BSF programme – already allocated – and that for the 16-19 provision subject to application to the Learning and Skills Council.

At present it is anticipated that these three new facilities should be open by September 2013.

### **Moderate Learning Difficulties**

The authority currently maintains two schools for children with moderate learning difficulties – Hayfield at primary and Clare Mount at secondary. Hayfield, with 120 places, also caters for a significant number of pupils (approx. 40) who also experience significant social and communication difficulties. Clare Mount has approximately 200 places but is currently operating above this (approx 225).

Hayfields premises are poor and there are early discussions regarding a re-build, co-located on a mainstream site.

Similarly with Clare Mount, which is also in a poor state, subject to regular flooding and has poor disability access, we are in early discussions regarding a possible re-build and co-location. Other changes are also under consideration. Forum will already be aware that the authority has recently created resource bases in 4 mainstream secondary schools – Hilbre, Wallasey, Oldershaw and Bebington High - primarily for pupils with moderate learning difficulties but with some places for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. These bases give parents a mainstream option for their children and it is anticipated that, over time, the demand for places at Clare Mount will diminish.

Allied to this it is intended that the balance of need at Clare Mount will change towards that at Hayfield by the inclusion of pupils with social communication needs and/or autistic spectrum disorder. Eight such places have been created at Clare Mount for September and this will increase over time This move will both provide a natural transition for pupils from Hayfield within the maintained sector and reduce the authority's reliance on 'out-borough' placements for such pupils, thus bringing about savings.

The resource bases referred to above are subject to separate reporting but it is pleasing to note that informal evaluation would suggest that they are working well and numbers are increasing – x from September 2009.

## **Specific Learning Difficulties**

The authority maintains a primary school – Orrets Meadow - for children who experience specific learning difficulties. Orrets offers 60 full time places and also supports over 200 other pupils via part-time placements and its outreach services. Accommodation is again poor and restricted.

The head teacher of Orrets is due to retire at the end of this academic year and in seeking a replacement we are exploring ways in which the focus of the school's activities may become more proactive and reduce the current reliance on pupils needing to attend the school to have their needs fully identified and met.

We are also in early discussions regarding a possible re-build on a co-located site.

The authority also maintains the Sanderling Unit at Rock Ferry High School, which offers 40 places for pupils, who experience specific learning difficulties and additional social and emotional difficulties, which makes accessing a mainstream secondary school full time problematic.

If the proposals go ahead for two new academy schools in Birkenhead it is intended that pupils in Sanderling should transfer to the mixed gender school in a secondary resource base which will both meet their specific needs and offer greater opportunities for mainstream inclusion.

## **Emotional, Behavioural and Social Difficulties**

The authority maintains 3 schools for children who experience emotional, behavioural social difficulties.

At primary level Gilbrook school offers 50 fulltime places and also makes provision for excluded pupils. For some time it has been realised that Gilbrook's current premises are cramped and do not lend themselves to providing the full range of services their pupils and families. Following Cabinet approval we are currently consulting upon the proposal of Gilbrook moving to the premises to be vacated by Arrowe Hill Primary this summer.

No proposals for the two secondary schools – Kilgarth and the Observatory School – are currently under consideration.

Graham Mount  
Strategic Development Manager  
Participation and Inclusion  
15/06/2009