

Parent Carer's Council Follow up Education Event
9.30, Friday 21st January 2011
Brighthelm Centre, Brighton

Welcome by Parent Participation Worker, Debbie Collins (DC)

DC briefly reviewed the previous Education Event from which was produced the Executive Report which was circulated to all guests and parents who came. This 2nd Event is an opportunity for our guests to feedback and respond to our recommendations.

Guest Introductions

Jacqueline Coe (JC) – Head of SEN, primarily involved in the education arena, also has responsibilities beyond education within adoption and children in care.

Bob Wall (BW) – Head of Hillside -a special school for children with severe and profound learning disabilities and autism in Portslade which has an intake from the West side of the city. His remit covers Children from the west of the city but he also heads up the Sensory Outreach Service which helps to supervise children in mainstream schools with complex sensory needs. He proudly presented his certificate of outstanding practise to us!

Kim Bolton (KB) - Executive head teacher of Downs' Park and Patcham House schools. She is on secondment for some of her time to work with Jacqueline Coe to give extra capacity around projects looking at statement thresholds, special facilities and developing outreach from the three complex needs schools.

Jenny Brickell (JB) - Head of Services for Children with developmental delay and disabilities, overseeing child health services i.e. physio, OT, SLT, nursing services social work, residential and family support services, her main hub being Seaside View. She also oversees the relationship between NHS and Education in special and mainstream schools, ensuring that the services are joined up and the links are working, i.e. directly when therapists or social workers going in to mainstream schools, but also works with the links with the teachers and heads. She co-chairs the Partnership Board with the Director of Amaze in which JC and head teachers are represented. Links are strong and they're working together to make sure they're doing the right thing for children with special needs in Brighton and Hove.

Adrian Carver (AC) – Head of Downs' View special school for school age children in Woodingdean and Link College for 16 to 19 year olds at Varndean. Downs' View is similar to Hillside being a special school for children with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple difficulties and autism with learning difficulties. Like Hillside, they provide outreach for schools where children with severe learning difficulties are included but in the East of the city. They are currently developing a service for assessing the use of Augmentative Communication for children across city in mainstream schools.

DC – Mentioned that AC and BW have responsibility for children with SEN in mainstream schools.

Key recommendations

DC - Explained that everyone present should have received a 3 page copy of the Executive Report which includes the Key Recommendations, also that the full 26 page report is available through the Amaze website, or individual copies are available on request via PaCC.

Complex Needs Project (CNP) – in the report it was recommended that this needed more clarification from both parents and teachers.

The lead on the complex needs project is Kim Bolton. KB apologised that the Emotionally and Behaviourally Disturbed (EBD rep) couldn't be here today. She said that children with Complex Needs

fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum and are therefore hard to define, it is difficult to say one type of provision will work for that EBD child. The old days of describing children as having MLD have long gone and we are moving towards more of a recognition of complexity and overlapping needs. The CNP to which KB is in her 2nd year of secondment, was set up as part of the SEN strategy to reorganise and rationalise special schools and SEN and look again at if special schools meet the needs of our children today; do we still want to do what we were doing 10 years ago? The other part of the project is about optimising funding. An example was given of how funding for empty places at the Cedar Centre can't continue. Historically, special schools were funded on places regardless of whether they were taken up or not. Since the first Education event last summer there have been 3 inspections that have shown a positive affect; Patcham House moved from Good to Outstanding, the Cedar Centre which moved from Satisfactory to Good and Downs' Park moved from Satisfactory to Good. Downs' Park underwent an HMI monitoring visit and was reported as being good – which is an exceptional achievement as only a very few schools achieve this. Across these three schools, provision is as good as it possibly can be.

Another strand of their work is to develop outreach provision. They had identified that special schools were over-resourced so in order to develop the transition of bringing the special schools down in size and budget, and in order to develop expertise, they commissioned the outreach service this year. They are working with JC to develop the strategic development of inclusive learning at mainstream schools, working with the schools' leadership teams on a strategy to put in place really good inclusive practise. Some of that will be done with individual support for pupils.

KB has good case studies of how things are improving. Individual pupil work was about developing capacity within the school to meet the needs of the child within the school, and significant money has gone in to mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with SEN in addition to their statement, or if they don't have statement. This work is about building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools – some of which has been fantastic, some has not. Funding for this work is very clearly ringfenced to build that capacity through Partnership Agreements and measuring outcomes. Some schools haven't yet engaged with the process, and whilst they might have done some really good work with individual pupils, they might not have built capacity, and therefore wouldn't be seen as value for money. The project is moving on to improve schools through outreach, being clear about what areas need work and working on them. Examples of this work are TAs shadowing senior staff therefore cascading work and experience down. This is an evolving piece of work. KB is very happy to take feedback from parents with children in mainstream. It is important to pass on this information as that is the way we learn. At the moment, the outreach is less to do with parents, it's about building strategic capacity within the schools, from which your children might benefit. It's not really for the individual parents to request outreach. At the moment they have no powers to link in with statemented provision. This may change when the green paper is released.

DC – asked what are the implications of our children with SEN in mainstream – how does she see the future?

KB – There is ongoing communication between special schools and mainstream schools involving a huge amount of specialist teachers. There is difficulty managing that due to these special teachers being out of their school for half the day when doing outreach etc, but the advantage is that they are building up a continuum. They have stopped thinking that a child might need a special school place for ever and instead look at the child at each key stage. Special school provision at 14 to 16 might not be on a special schools site (Patcham High School is an example of this). They are finding this hugely supports post-16 transition. These children move on at 16 to inclusive provision – so need to think about that during their school career.

Training There needs to be an independent review of SEN practise in all schools which looks specifically at the level of training that teachers receive and makes recommendations to change the disparity in different schools across the city.

AC – Broadly, there is nothing in the report that he couldn't have anticipated or would find difficult to see ways forward, to help schools develop their practise. He acknowledged parents' frustrations in

the delay of training/ staff. He has often encountered time lags between change and staff/training becoming effective in class, even in special school. One of the challenges of his job is to ensure that children are accommodated as quickly as possible. The schools seem to be happy with the service, but that's not to say they get everything right. Within the mainstream system there are a number of ways, including outreach, in which staff can be skilled up to deal with SEN. Schools do not have to "firefight" so that as soon as a child with additional needs enters the school there is full provision in place for that child. Creating fully effective provision right from the outset is still very difficult as each child with SEN is unique, with a diverse package of need and no matter how much prep work has been done for (eg) autism, learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties, the unique pattern of need presented will challenge that school. Unfortunately today there are no mainstream heads engaged in this process. One of the biggest decisions of today would be to look at how we take this info forward to support and influence colleagues in mainstream schools to think about these implications. Some are struggling and are still a way off and need more support.

BW – If we are to look at truisms, mainstream staff looking after children with SEN are the least experienced, qualified, paid etc; so in addressing the training issue, we need to look at that scenario. Also there is a reverse issue when talking primarily about TAs who for a lot of these children are their key worker. The question is how is this issue addressed in an economic climate where there's no more money for training. We need to support capacity within schools for a population that is always going to be there. Because of the infrequency of complex children attending mainstream schools, there is a risk of losing expertise when the child leaves the school, e.g. training staff in Braille which takes about two years, then TA may choose not to move schools with the child, (i.e. from primary to secondary). There is capacity to work successfully with more "common types" of disabilities, and BW is very supportive of KB's work in this area, but major problems can occur with a child's highly unique presentation in mainstream.

JB – There is a national minimum standard expectation that 80% of residential staff have to be trained to NVQ level 3, and she is wondering whether a similar expectation of minimum standards could be applied to TAs.

JC – B&H is fortunate in having experts and specialists within the support services who are able to share their knowledge and raise capability to others in mainstream and special schools, and in this respect compares favourably with other authorities; she will fight tooth and nail to keep these people. A hefty piece of work has been done and services commissioned to raise the level of knowledge and expertise for SENCOs, to identify their needs, and hold a SENCO forum where they come together for peer support and share information etc – This project is now being reviewed, evaluated and reported on to assess the impact of this level of support to mainstream SENCOs in order to work out whether they can maintain that level of funding for this project. Very sadly the level of core training for teachers is absolutely appalling. SEN training is expected to be covered in one 2 hour slot. JC wants to influence and support core training in SEN. Newly qualified teachers are supported and the LA also runs a learning development centre for TAs and teachers and other staff. In the past schools paid for cover staff to enable others to attend training, but this doesn't happen so much now as it's difficult to find the money to pay for supply staff. Over the previous 2 years SENCOs have had to follow a mandatory training program, but now unfortunately with the new government, it is no longer mandatory. Our best way forward is to share expertise as best we can throughout city. "National Strategies", were a government initiative to improve capacity, capability, and measurement of progress of children in the LA in areas such as SEN and literacy, with training support. However, this valuable training has now been withdrawn. PRESENS have responsibility to manage transfer and work with children up to the end of their 1st term at reception with the view that the school will take over at that point.

AC – Whilst minimum levels of training is a good idea, there are quite a few really exceptionally good TAs in both mainstream and special schools who wouldn't necessarily want to train further within an academic process whom the school might be in danger of losing if they are forced to do so. From the education report, AC was least happy that there is a clear sense of insensitivity that some parents experience which "we as head teachers" need to take on board. The challenge is how we address this with colleagues. Different needs for parents with a child with SEN should be acknowledged. They, JC and KB etc need to talk about, examine and address why some schools have failed to engage with

parents as it is a big theme in the report. Think it would be helpful to have clear, real examples in this area to demonstrate to head teachers what impact this has on parent carers' experience.

Communication between schools and parents. Parents wanted to see a revision in the way that schools communicated with parents and more use made of the home/school book with a record made of outside agencies involved with their child

JC – Acknowledged that parents are saying they would like a home/school book, but the LA's role of directing particular ways of how the school does things is long gone. Within the new government the LA has become a commissioner of services, so we will ask schools to fulfil tasks and set outcomes, but what they can't do is influence how the schools go about that – that has to be entirely within the gift of the school. The government now puts the power and responsibility directly with the community and the parents for directing, influencing and managing the school. The government supports academies where there'll be no directive from LA. These academies will be totally independent and self directed. JC wanted to say to us as parents that we need to find ways of how to influence what goes on in our schools i.e. via parent governors, and use Amaze to help support that, also to use existing and new systems and procedures for complaints in order to get what we want. For instance, in the past you might have gone to the LA to make a complaint about a school, but now you would have to use the school's own complaint procedures. One key element is to try to develop a healthy relationship with school, establish an ongoing dialogue with them so any complaints are not seen as a challenge or threat.

KM – Concerned that if 20% of the school population has SEN, is having a home/school books for that number of pupils really what parents want? As the child gets older new ways to engage with them and develop independent living would mean that the home school book did not have a place anymore.

KM as a professional wouldn't feel comfortable using a home/school book with a child at the age of 16. Communication is crucial, probably the most important thing for children to learn; how can they thrive if parents don't know what's going on? Concurred that if a parent specifically asks for a home/school book then they should be listened to and at least have a trial run, and if not satisfied to use the school's procedures to make a complaint.

AC – Every child needs daily communication whether it be via book, phone call, email or some other mechanism, as good practise this has to sit within everyone's framework. Lots of parents are experiencing battles when it comes to complaints within services. Colleagues need to understand what it's like for parents, so as a preventative measure should be more proactive with good practise.

BW – We tend to know when we get it wrong more than when we get it right but it would be very useful to have positive feedback too. Underlying communication is partnership and relationship. Communication can go wrong at times, but as long as partnership and relationship is good, then it'll work. He likes the wording within the Code of Practise around partnership rather than communication – demonstrating investment etc.

KB – what might be helpful from this group would be to know if parents feel that communication is better in special schools than mainstream, if so, why, and could it be something we could all adopt.

DC – (from parent comment) "Any child with speech problems should 100% have a home school book".

JB – This is a big issue, but we must use the procedures that are in place. We can advise schools around expectations and as a set of professionals we could be influencing schools to do more around this issue, we are there to support parents.

Statutory Overview Eligibility for statements needed to be made clearer. Statements need to be more specific in setting out the requirements for each child's provision and the amount of outreach needs to be stated in the child's statement

JC – Specificity about statements is something that nationally is about promoting good practise to help us make our statements more specific in terms of outcomes (not just input). Outcomes are very

important in order to evaluate the impact of the services. Have been working with a group of mainstream schools; message is sometimes that they don't want things tied up too tight as they don't want to limit their response. Instead of saying in statements x number of hours per week, put in x number per term – allowing for blocks of input. Children could then receive a 10 day programme where new skills are taught and then spend the rest of the term putting those skills into practise. More money is attached to school rather than individual child. Outreach is about skilling staff rather than working with individual child. Looking at the whole picture of child, i.e. will the statement make a difference to the child? Some school are anti statements, some are pro. One of the things they are trying to do is to tighten up their thresholds which are descriptors of different elements of need; a matrix to help guide what to issue in a statement; KB has been asked to tighten up the thresholds. Trying to improve our practise whilst trying to anticipate SEN Green Paper, which is likely to be proposing a national matrix.

BW – Mentioned that at his school they have home/school agreements and if parents are happy with what their child is getting in school, then they don't look too closely at statement.

Independent Monitoring There needs to be an independant monitoring system in place to ensure that all children are receiving the level of support set out in their statement

JC – The current process is the annual review, and until we know if the Green paper will change the statutory process, the annual review is our opportunity to voice concerns when writing in Parental Advice. In terms of independent monitoring, the LA has responsibility. In an OFSTED inspection a school can only be graded as good if they are meeting their SEN targets. The LA asks mainstream schools every year how they spend their resources – A school can spend in best way they think possible as long as the needs of children are met. But it is not something that can be enforced.

Systematic resourced involvement in strategic delivery

JC – SEN strategy group is coming to an end now as not much more they can do now whilst awaiting Green Paper – Amaze has been represented on this group. In terms of SEN panel it consists of 2 assessment managers, head of SENCOs etc, but no parental part yet. Review of how that panel works is taking place. She fully anticipates changes to take place in light of report, and while reluctant to accommodate parents until Green Paper is published, will look at this for afterwards. They have looked at what other authorities do and found that some spent a lot of money on very occasional hi - tech presentations, but JC's panel meet regularly every week within a low key format which is able to address issues as they arise.

Jo Lyons (JL – Lead commissioner for Schools Skills and Learning) explained the structure in which she sits. Described how we are very much in a time of change whilst awaiting Green Paper, and we need to know how roles will evolve within the council, schools, new and existing groups. The challenge is to work more closely with schools, so that as schools become more autonomous they are still able to achieve good outcomes for the children.

Questions

[Chrysryssi](#) – As far as parents are involved – why do we have to wait for the Green Paper? Shouldn't we be involved anyway? It's a cop-out if the Annual Review is parents' only opportunity to voice concerns if statement isn't specific.

There is a lot less provision of hearing units in secondary than in junior schools – as far as she is aware there is still no provision in secondary, therefore no role models etc – are there any plans to improve provision for deaf children in secondary schools?

JC – B&H had a number of meetings about deaf provision. Legally they had a responsibility to liaise with East and West Sussex, and agreed at the time to support Bevendean as 1st and Lewes Priory as 2nd. A year and a half ago this was reviewed and the decision was made that it wouldn't be cost

effective to set up local provision – there are not enough deaf children to have 2 specialist schools so close (Lewis being retained).

BW mental health issues for children who are deaf is recognised.

Lisa - Does the LA have a system where problems are flagged up before a child is excluded?

JC – There is a system in place which is trying to collect data and pick up emerging issues directly from SIMS system.

JL – Exclusion is something she knows intimately about. She knows of all the cases where a child has been or is in danger of being excluded and has a lot of liaison with heads to lower the incidence.

Numbers have been lowering. Exclusion information comes in centrally including the number of times a child has been excluded. Staff from the LA visit schools to see what interventions have been put in place to reduce the number of exclusions and to hold the schools to account.

One of their major targets is to bring the number of exclusions down. Lisa feels as though she's not been kept informed at all. JL needs to be careful in her role as schools have a right to exclude and there are legalities, procedures in place. Unless child's behaviour is unprecedented, then parents should always be informed and involved in process. JL's team wouldn't get involved unless the child had a statement.

KB – There is a panel of SEN school governors – maybe this could be part of their role?

Nicky G – How do you monitor children who are on part time timetables?

JL – Angry that some kids aren't having access to full entitlement of education and she has issued bulletins that part time timetables shouldn't be used in many cases. Any personalised learning needs discussed with parents, should be supervised properly and ensure that the child is receiving their full entitlement of education. There is a need for people to feedback.

Sophie – Her child is currently attending Cedar Centre Primary (which is closing in July) and moving on to The Hub in Coldean. There is a huge reduction of special school places – so will there be more units opening in mainstream schools? How much involvement will parents have? There is also some concern over the idea of a Federation of schools being set up.

JL – B&H hasn't proposed any federation. Not got closure date of Cedar Centre yet.

KB – Complex Needs Project feels it's really important to look at what special schools are offering and are looking at academies. Role for special schools within an inclusive education system needs to be defined. Era where children with special needs are segregated from society is over. Part of education system, not APART from it. What can we do to ensure our children are co-located.

Sophie -So will there be more?

KB At present we can't answer that because we will need to look at the outcomes. Concern is recognised. Confidence around communication is higher in special school provision. It's not a budget issue. Provision being developed is innovative and groundbreaking. We need to keep a very close eye on it and parental part to be important. Huge protocol around this, massive work and have consulted with parents from early stage.

JL – need to think further about how we communicate with parents more (in addition to the Bulletin)

AM - How are decisions made as to whether a child is suitable for mainstream or special school?

There is a lot of confusion and a lot of battles, parents are often exhausted and don't have the energy to go to chair of governors, how will you make things less of a battle for parents?

JC – Thresholds; the SEN panel are guided by codes of practise where mainstream is considered first option.

AM - So can they put together what the child needs in a mainstream setting? A lot of it is pioneering, but parents still have a right to express a preference. SEN Panel has to think about efficiency issues and sometimes has to look at "best fit". You will see children in special schools with very similar needs to some in mainstream; so evidence of parental wishes?

AM – Westdene is struggling to find first £1000 per piece of equipment.

JC – There has been an extra £1million injected into SEN therefore would argue that Westdene has been given extra resources over the past few years that should enable them to meet their needs; their legal responsibilities are to meet needs of children, rather than e.g. a new slide for the playground.

BW – Working in partnership is sometimes tricky but is part of the challenge....

DC - Thank you ... If parents have any concerns about the education of their child then they need to talk to Janet or Ros at Amaze.