



Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15th December 2009

Report from the Director of Children & Families

For Information

Wards Affected: ALL

Special Educational Needs: update on progress of SEN Improvement and Efficiency Review

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 A report providing an overview of progress and provision for children with special educational needs was presented to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel in November 2008. It was noted that a SEN review was scheduled to take place under the Council's Improvement and Efficiency Scheme and members recommended that progress on the implementation of the review and other SEN developments were reported back to the Committee. This report provides an update on progress.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That members note the report and comment on the issues arising.

3.0 Detail

Improvement and Efficiency Review

- 3.1 A SEN service review is underway as part of the Council's Improvement and Efficiency programme. The remit of the review also includes the work of the Children with Disabilities Team whose work is focussed on providing support to carers through provision of care at home, direct payments and short breaks. This aspect of the review is not included in this report.
- 3.2 The scope of the review was agreed in April 2009 and it is anticipated that the review will be completed by the end of the year. In relation to SEN, the following areas are included in scope:
- Review of SEN staffing structure within central local authority services
 - Statementing criteria
 - Placements, including commissioning of out-Borough placements
 - Processes, including performance against national performance indicators for timescales in completing statements
- 3.3 The service review has been set a savings target of £250,000 as part of the One Council Transformation Programme.

- 3.4 The review is currently at the evaluation and analysis stage and interim findings have yet been formally reported. However, there are a number of emerging issues which are likely to be included in future improvement programmes. These are set out below.

Emerging Finding 1

- 3.5 There continues to be insufficient in-borough provision for children with SEN which is leading to significant overspends in the Dedicated School Grant and which in turn puts pressure on local authority central budgets, such as transport.
- 3.5.1 The numbers of children with SEN requiring a statement has risen significantly over the past 3 years. In 2006, 196 statutory assessments of SEN were started. In 2008, this figure rose to 242 and a further increase in 2009 is projected.
- 3.5.2 There have been major improvements to special school provision following a previous SEN review in 2004/5. However, there continues to be a pressure on places in Brent special schools arising particularly from the increasing numbers of children with autism and associated learning difficulties and increasing numbers of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- 3.5.3 There is a major proposed development programme at Hay Lane and Grove Park special schools which will assist in meeting the demand for specialist places. The Council's Executive agreed in May 2009 to proceed to design phase for a scheme to rebuild Hay Lane and Grove Park schools. The schools are both all age special schools and are located on adjacent sites. The current state of the buildings is poor. The proposed rebuild will ensure that the educational environment is well suited to the needs of students and will provide much needed improvement to specialist facilities. It will increase the combined capacity of the schools from 210 to 235 places. The two schools have formed a hard federation under a single governing body. The local authority is currently consulting on a proposal to merge the two schools.
- 3.5.4 There are also improvements planned to specialist provision within mainstream schools. Designated mainstream provision for secondary aged students with autism is being established at Preston Manor High School to be operational by September 2010. This will provide 12 places for students who are able to manage the curriculum demands of a secondary school but who require specialist support and a carefully structured environment to help address their social and communication needs. Some students with this profile of needs currently attend specialist out-Borough provision. It is anticipated that designated mainstream provision for autism will also be established in the primary sector but a host school is yet to be identified.
- 3.5.5 In addition, further improvements to SEN provision are also planned as part of Brent's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) proposals. It has been agreed that, as part of the BSF vision, all Brent Secondary Schools will establish a centre of excellence for young people with SEN with enhanced facilities, specialist teaching, strong professional development arrangements and on-site health and therapeutic services. This will enable more young people with SEN, particularly those with moderate learning difficulties and complex physical and medical needs, to have their needs successfully met in mainstream settings.
- 3.5.6 The review is highlighting the short-term need to provide additional in-Borough provision whilst longer-term developments come to fruition.

Emerging finding 2

- 3.6 There is an opportunity to explore alternative models for commissioning out-Borough placements, joining up education and social care commissioning arrangements.
- 3.6.1 There will continue to be a need to place some young people with exceptional needs in specialist out-Borough provision. Residential placements may be sought where there are exceptional education, social care and/or health needs which cannot be met locally. These will be the most complex and vulnerable group of young people in Brent.
- 3.6.2 Currently, residential placements may be secured by education through the SEN Assessment Service or by social care through the Planning and Resources service. There is a case for combining these functions within a single commissioning service. This has the potential to bring about efficiencies, ensure consistency in placement and monitoring processes and improve the way in which contracts with providers are managed.

Emerging finding 3

- 3.7 Strategic management of SEN needs to be strengthened. This is a key area for development in order to respond effectively to projected increases in demand and to mitigate the budgetary impact.
- 3.7.1 Senior managers within SEN Services have a range of operational and management responsibilities and there is insufficient capacity for strategic planning.
- 3.7.2 It is proposed that a SEN transformation programme is developed which would bring together the following 7 inter-related strands of work
- strategic management
 - lack of in-borough provision
 - budgets and commissioning
 - relationships with schools
 - performance against national and local indicators
 - integration of services
 - legal issues
- This work would be supported by a dedicated specialist project manager.
- 3.7.3 This is similar to the model which has been successfully used to drive the Social Care Transformation Programme and has brought about efficiencies and improvements to service delivery.

Issues outside the scope of the review

- 3.8 Members have requested that this report also covers issues of delivery of services at the front line, through schools. This has not been the focus of the review.
- 3.9 An analysis of school Ofsted reports between September 2006 and July 2009 show that provision for pupils with SEN and disabilities is at least satisfactory or better for 98% of primary, secondary and special schools and good or better for 69%.
- 3.10 Latest comparative data on attainment and progress of pupils with SEN produced by the National Strategies show the following
- In Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving below level 1 is higher than the national average but improving.
 - In Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving below level 3 in English and Maths combined is higher than the national average but improving faster than the national average
 - The percentage of pupils making 2 levels of progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in Brent is better than the national percentage.
 - At Key Stage 2, the gap between pupils with SEN and their peers is below the national average, but this must be viewed in the context of higher than national average percentage of pupils with SEN

- At Key Stage 4, there has been a significant rise in the percentage of pupils attaining 2 GCSE's. The progress of pupils across key stage 3 and key stage 4 is better than the national average
- At Key Stage 4, the gap between pupils with SEN and their peers has widened but this must be viewed in the context of rapidly improving overall attainment in the local authority

The National Strategies adviser for SEN monitors the work of the local authority in improving outcomes for children and young people with SEN. The evaluation from the latest visit in June 2009 was that Brent's making good progress in developing a flexible range of provision and improving the capacity of mainstream schools.

3.11 The local authority provides a comprehensive range of support to schools including the following:

- Advice and guidance on planning and evaluating effective SEN provision through provision management
- Advice on using data to evaluate performance and progress
- Advice and guidance of disability equality and accessibility, including making reasonable adjustments to include pupils with complex needs
- Advice and guidance on developing high quality provision for pupils with sensory and communication needs
- Advice on assessment and progress of pupils with SEN
- Advice on developing the role of parents in their child's learning
- Promoting the sharing of good practice and regular meetings and briefings for SENCO's
- Tailored school-based training, both twilight and training days, to support the raising of attainment of pupils with SEN
- Extensive centre-based training programme in areas of leadership and management, inclusive practice and specialist needs

The list is not exhaustive.

3.12 A rolling programme of SEN audits of mainstream schools has been introduced as part of the local authority monitoring strategy. All mainstream schools will be audited over a 3 year period 2008-10 to monitor the use of SEN funding, support school's self-evaluation and identify strengths and areas of development.

3.13 Members have also expressed some concerns about the use of terminology and have requested clarification. Nationally, the following terms are commonly used.

- Special educational needs (SEN) – relating to children and young people at Early Years/School Action, Early Years/School Action Plus and those having statements of SEN
- Learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) – this is a broader term including children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), as above, and those who maybe experiencing no significant educational difficulties but who may have physical/medical needs requiring adjustments to be made to enable their full participation in school and other settings
- Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) – this is a relatively recent term, now widely used to encompass children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities.

In line with national expectations and practice, the above terms are used in Brent and we are careful in use of language to avoid labelling child solely in terms of their disability or special educational needs.

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