

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Report of the Inclusion Consultation Working Group

8 December 2008

Councillor W Hyde (Chair)

Councillor J Elliott

Ms C Foote

Mr I Falkingham

Mrs S Knights

Officer attendance – Pat Toner, John Fryett, Wendy Winterburn and Dee Reid from Education Leeds

Background

In April 2008, the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) published a statement on Inclusion, which included six recommendations.

In line with normal practice, the Board received a response to the recommendations from Education Leeds in July 2008. Two recommendations were signed off as completed at this stage. The remaining four recommendations were added to the Board's recommendation tracking system for quarterly updates.

The Scrutiny Board considered the quarterly recommendation tracking report in October 2008. Members of the Board decided that they were not satisfied with progress against two of the outstanding recommendations from the Inclusion statement – recommendations 2 and 4.

Further information in relation to recommendation 4 was provided by Education Leeds and circulated to Board members at the pre-meeting for the November Scrutiny Board meeting. That completed the action required in response to recommendation 4.

In the case of Recommendation 2 – which relates specifically to consultation with parents and professionals – the Board agreed to set up a working group to meet with officers from Education Leeds and discuss progress, reporting back to the full Scrutiny Board in December. This would ensure that action was taken, rather than waiting for the next quarterly recommendation tracking report in January 2009.

The purpose of the working group was to consider what progress had now been made in responding to recommendation 2 of the Inclusion statement, and to recommend to the Board any further steps that should be taken to ensure that the recommendation is achieved.

In order to assist the working group, Education Leeds provided information on their proposals for consultation with parents and carers, including the recruitment of a Parent information Officer.

Members were also provided with information on the membership and remit of a number of groups with responsibility for delivering the Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy (LILS) and also for engaging parents and carers in service provision. The purpose of this was to give a picture of how parents, carers and professionals are already being engaged.

Working Group Meeting

The following key information emerged from the discussion at the working group meeting:

- Pat Toner, Director of Organisational Improvement, has been assigned to provide leadership capacity in terms of delivering the LILS programme, in a similar role to that he is performing for the 14-19 review. Carol Jordan retains professional responsibility for the strategy.
- Education Leeds accepts that the original timetable for delivery of the LILS programme has slipped significantly. This partly explains the lack of consultation with parents and professionals, as there have been no specific proposals brought forward so far on which consultation could take place.
- The elements of the LILS programme to be delivered by September 2009 have been narrowed to a more achievable programme.
- It is anticipated that proposals for reorganising provision, including schools for pupils with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) and Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), and other provision such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), will be taken to the Executive Board in the spring. Once political agreement is reached, the proposals will then go to consultation.
- Any capital projects proposed will take time to deliver, and there will also need to be plans for managing the transition period from now until any new provision is delivered.
- Recruitment is underway for the Parent Information Officer. The closing date is 15 January 2009. Hopefully this will mean there is someone in post for March 2009.
- The working group discussed various aspects of communication with parents and professionals. For the purposes of this meeting, and in the context of LILS, this was seen as including:
 - Informing – telling people what is happening
 - Consulting – seeking views on specific proposals for changes in provision

- Engaging – involving stakeholders in shaping plans for the transition period
- The working group asked for the following further information on the Parent Carer Consultation Activity Plan:
 - Baseline figures to be used to assess the 'success criteria' of
 - 1 reduction in parental complaints
 - 2 increased parental satisfaction
 - 3 increased numbers of parents engaging in participation and consultation process
 - Confirmation of the responsible officer assigned to each activity in the plan
 - Timescales for each activity in the plan
- Members of the working group strongly advised officers to get some factual information on LILS progress out to parents and professionals as soon as possible to start to fill the current information void and help to re-establish trust. In the absence of facts, gossip and rumours are prevailing, and previous ground is being lost in regard to relationship building.
- This advice, and the lack of regular communication with parents and professionals on LILS, was acknowledged by officers.
- The working group also discussed current developments in inclusive provision such as at Allerton High, Rodillian, Temple Moor and Priesthorpe High Schools and Hugh Gaitskill, Oulton and Richmond Hill Primary Schools, which were being delivered as a consequence of mainstream school capital projects. There is a need for information/engagement of parents and professionals in the plans for who will access these facilities. In addition, there is a need to consider the wider impact of such developments (which now cover a significant number of schools) on the overall pattern and demand for specialist SEN provision. This was accepted by officers.
- The working group also advised that parents needed to be reminded of the continuing Leeds City Council commitment to ensure that specialist provision will remain available as an option where appropriate for those parents who want it for their child. This was accepted by officers.
- On a side issue, a member of the working group queried the continued requirement for a child to have a statement in order to access SILC provision in Leeds. Officers explained that this was a legal requirement, but undertook to explore this further if details could be provided of special schools elsewhere that were able to take pupils without statements.

Conclusion

The working group believes that there is a need to keep a close watch on progress with implementing this recommendation in the short term, in order to see that commitments now being made are delivered.

Therefore the working group recommends that the Scrutiny Board commission a further meeting of the working group in January 2009 to:

- monitor short term progress;
- review the next stage of plans for informing/engaging/consulting parents and professionals;
- receive and consider the further information identified in relation to the parent carer consultation activity plan.

The working group would report back again to the full Scrutiny Board after this meeting.