

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Report of the Inclusion Consultation Working Group

22 January 2009

Councillor W Hyde (Chair)

Mr T Britten

Ms C Foote

Mr I Falkingham

Mrs S Knights

Officer attendance – Pat Toner and Carol Jordan from Education Leeds

Background

This working group was established in November 2008 to track progress with Recommendation 2 of the Scrutiny Board's Statement on Inclusion, originally published in April 2008:

"That Education Leeds commits to early consultation with parents and professionals on any proposals for changes in the location of specialist SEN provision."

Following the first meeting of the working group in December 2008, the full Scrutiny Board agreed that the working group should meet again in January 2009, to ensure that momentum was maintained. Specifically, the following objectives were set out:

- 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.

In order to assist the working group, Education Leeds provided an update report covering each of the areas identified, alongside a copy of information that had been circulated to parents and carers of SILC pupils about the Leeds Inclusive Learning Programme, since the previous meeting.

Working Group Meeting

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

- .building on the discussion at the previous meeting, the group discussed progress with each of the identified phases of communication: information, consultation and engagement.

- The working group noted the information that had been sent to parents and carers of SILC pupils since the last meeting, and the plans for further information to go out to the different audiences as soon as is practically possible.
- It was agreed that future information needed to reach a wider audience and that the momentum needed to be maintained by continuing to issue updates in advance of moving to the consultation phase.
- Members of the working group made a number of suggestions including:
 - Providing relevant information about the LILS Programme Management Board;
 - Pen portraits of key contacts;
 - Raising awareness of the Parent Partnership Service;
 - Information on the proposed timeline for the forthcoming consultation process.
- Officers once again stressed that any consultation is dependent on political approval of the proposals for consultation as a starting point. It was hoped that this would be achieved in March.
- Members emphasised the importance of the consultation plan that would be included as part of the proposed report to Executive Board.
- The group was also concerned that the target of early March for the Parent Information Officer to be in post is achieved.
- Officers indicated that, providing an appointment was made on 26 January, it would be possible to update the timescales in the parent carer consultation activity plan before the Scrutiny Board meeting in February.
- Members queried the six-month term for this post. They were told that Children's Services had also recently appointed to a similar post for children with disabilities. Management would need to assess the ongoing requirement for two separate posts in the longer term, to ensure best use of resources and to avoid duplication.
- It was acknowledged by all that good quality communication is especially important in relation to LILS because it concerns some of the most vulnerable children in our city and their families.
- Officers stressed that in drawing up options for consultation, they are asking themselves how any proposed changes will result in improvements in the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people.

- Officers explained their intention to work over the early summer period in setting up appropriate groups to be involved in developing plans for the transition period. This would include parent representation.

Conclusion

The working group is pleased to see the progress now being made, and the demonstration that Education Leeds has taken action to address their concerns.

Subject to receiving confirmation of the appointment of the Parent Information Officer and an updated version of the parent and carer consultation activity plan, the working group recommends that the Scrutiny Board reverts to the standard quarterly recommendation tracking process to monitor further progress with this scrutiny recommendation.

This will be separate to any potential scrutiny activity in relation to the forthcoming consultation.