

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

5th March 2019

Interim Report of the SEND School Provision Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the task group for endorsement by the committee and referral to the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills for response.

Background

2. The task group was originally established at the 5th September Children's Select Meeting where the committee resolved to establish a task group to look at the plans for the future provision of SEND schools and school places in Wiltshire.
3. The task group undertook a large piece of work and submitted an interim report to the 15th May 2018 Cabinet meeting alongside the Cabinet report on Special Schools Provision. The task group report included 11 recommendations relating to the potential future provision of SEND education in Wiltshire.
4. Following this Cabinet agreed to enter a pre-consultation stage on three options for the future provision of SEND education in Wiltshire. Since the end of this pre-consultation the task group began evidence gathering regarding the Wiltshire vision for SEND school provision.

Terms of reference

5. The following terms of reference for the task group were endorsed by the Children's Select Committee on 31st October 2017:
 - 1) To consider the future provision of SEND education for Wiltshire's children and young people in the context of the challenges outlined in the "Wood Report"/WASSPP report (May 2017).
 - 2) To receive evidence from:
 - a. Wiltshire Council officers;
 - b. Wiltshire schools;
 - c. Parents/guardians of children with SEND.

Membership

6. The task group comprised the following membership:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman)
Cllr James Sheppard
Mr John Hawkins (Children's Select Committee Teacher Representative)
Ms Jen Jones (Wiltshire College Representative)

Methodology

7. The task group received evidence from the following witnesses:

Wiltshire Council witnesses:

Cllr Laura Mayes	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Cllr Jane Davies	Portfolio Holder for Disabled Children and Adults
Terence Herbert	Corporate Director, Children and Education
Alan Stubbersfield	Interim Director, Education and Skills
Judith Westcott	Lead Commissioner, SEN

External witnesses:

Jo Stoaling	Head Teacher, Three Ways School, Bath
Lyn Dance	Head Teacher, Milestone School, Gloucester

8. The following written evidence was received by the task group:

- Wiltshire Council's Vision for SEND Education Provision

9. The task group performed visits to all six of the SEND schools in Wiltshire. The task group also attended a WPCC public meeting to discuss the provision of SEND schools with parent carers.

10. The task group met 5 times, as demonstrated in the following table:

Date of meetings	Item / topic	Details
23 rd October	Pre-Consultation Briefing	Task group members received a briefing following the pre-consultation.
9 th November	SEND Provision Wiltshire Vision Briefing	Task group members received a briefing on the vision and proposals for SEND provision in Wiltshire.
13 th November	Visit to Three Ways School, Bath	Evidence gathering visit.
21 st November	Visit to Milestone School, Gloucester	Evidence gathering visit.
19 th December	Task Group Meeting	To consider the task group's report.

Evidence

Wiltshire Council

11. The task group were informed by officers and the Executive in a confidential briefing of the intention to close Larkrise, St Nicholas and Rowdeford schools and the opening of two “Centres of Excellence” located nearby the Rowdeford and Exeter House sites. They were informed that the resulting consultation would be set to begin after Christmas 2018 with the results feeding back to the March 2019 Cabinet meeting. Closure of the schools would be planned for 2022.
12. The process for opening the Centre of Excellence would be separate to the closure process. New providers for the academies would be invited to express interest whilst a phased-out closure for older children would be put into place to avoid requiring them to transition to the new schools.
13. The rationale for the proposals focused on the removal of physical restrictions currently preventing the achievement of “outstanding” Ofsted rated SEND provision in the county. Central to the proposals was also the need for futureproofing and reducing the current need for reliance on out of county provision through improvement in quality and level of provision in Wiltshire. At the time of the Task Group’s briefing there were 77 children with SEN in independent school provision aged between 5 -16. The Wiltshire vision outlined the aim to reduce the future numbers, whilst acknowledging that there may always be a small number due to the complexity of some needs.
14. A strong message received during the pre-consultation following the Cabinet decision in May 2018 was that parents and carers did not want to travel through the traffic congestion during the routes from Melksham to either Chippenham or Trowbridge. It was explained that the village of Rowde is located on the congestion-free side of Devizes. The site by Exeter House School is located north of Salisbury City Centre. It was noted that having SEND provision located in towns on Wiltshire’s borders such as Chippenham and Trowbridge was problematic due to proximity with out of county schools.
15. Green sites such as Ashton street in Trowbridge (previously noted by the task group in their report received by Cabinet on 15th May 2018) were explained as not viable in planning terms. Problems with the Ashton Street site included access issues. Department for Education regulations meant that the Larkrise site couldn’t be used to build a new school. The site near Rowde primary school was identified as the best location by the planning team for a new SEND school. One of the value facilities of the site was the ample outdoor facilities and space. It was also confirmed to the task group that the original Rowdeford School building would remain due to its listed building status.
16. The Centre of Excellence would receive £20mil of funding which was planned to be used to provide new opportunities to improve training and develop closer working with Wiltshire’s secondary schools. It would also offer the chance to

improve the quality and access to facilities such as hydrotherapy pools and visual/sensory rooms.

17. The new schools would operate through a campus model and as such would be designed to provide effective transfer opportunities within the school for children when progressing through each key stage. The Centre of Excellence model also allows for the chance to engage and provide access to mainstream schools. The development of post-16 provision were proposed to take place through cross-county provision, including Chippenham and Trowbridge, and would include improved links with Wiltshire College.
18. There were plans in place for current staff in SEND schools to be TUPE'd across to the new schools when necessary.
19. In early November, the task group conducted two visits to nearby SEND schools which had been rated "outstanding" by Ofsted. These were Three Ways School in Bath and Milestone School in Gloucester. Three Ways School is a modern, purpose-built school near Bath which was created to replace three special schools. Milestone School was created out of the physical merging of three special schools through the construction of a "link block".
20. Three Ways school contained a number of modern facilities including a water-mobility pool/hydrotherapy unit regularly rented out to external groups. They also have a visual and sensory room with 180degree projector units, interactive lights and ambient 360degree sound. The sensory room is used for a variety of purposes including dance, general education and preparation for children before they embarked on potentially stressful trips to public places, such as airports.
21. A work skills café was constructed at Three Ways through a successful fundraising campaign (including funding from local businesses). The café operates out of a building adjacent to the school and is open to the public. It is used by the school as a community hub/informal meeting place and is also used to promote professional skills for students through letting them work and assist in the running of the café.
22. Milestone School have renovated their hydrotherapy pool to include a café run by pupils and students, along with an activity zone. This was done to create a community space for use by parents and external groups. During hours of non-school use, the hydrotherapy pool is made available to external groups at a rental charge.
23. Rooms such as food tech had been protected from classroom conversion by Three Ways during the requests for increases in their planned admission number (PAN). This was done to protect the school from losing a valuable education resource which teaches students independence and had opened many to careers in the culinary sector.
24. Milestone School had invested in a challenging behaviour unit (CBU) with high spec, durable fittings to reduce replacement costs. They noted that this was an

important facility to have if there was the intention of reducing the future spend on out of county independent provision. It was also explained that including this facility during the initial build was a cheaper option than retrofitting in the future.

25. The multi-agency workers at Three Ways were provided with their own section in the school. Although the team members were sometimes working away from the building this was described as a valuable resource to have on site. Milestone School had offices available for specialists which reduced the number of hospital trips required.
26. Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo's) at Three Ways school work with mainstream primary schools alongside any other specialists that may be required to ensure that they can receive the help they need.
27. Staff at Three Ways are issued a "wish list" annually to ask them which other areas of the school they might be interested in working with, or whether they are satisfied continuing where they are.
28. Transition throughout education in a single school was managed at Three Ways through a gradual process catered to the individual child. This was done with the aim of avoiding any potential shock from the transition, such as a move from a focus on one teacher in primary to multiple teachers in secondary. A focus was also placed on the child's stage in the curriculum, rather than their age.
29. The parking and drop-off/pick-up situation was noted as problematic at Three Ways. It had been altered slightly since opening to include a single way in and a single way out, however the number of parking spots was relatively small and the size of the area was not large enough to easily deal with the amount of traffic flow during key hours.
30. Both schools noted the increase in the complexity of needs and referenced the importance of SEND schools being ready to adapt to year-on-year changes in the complexities of school intakes. Reference was also made to a general increase in autism complexity and the number of requirements and medical professionals attached to each child.
31. Having wide corridors and adequate storage space which would be able to withstand future demands was noted by the schools as important. Milestone School were using some corridor space for equipment storage and had to create some improvised storage space in classrooms.
32. Milestone School emphasised the need to have "quiet rooms" built in to each classroom to provide children with the option to withdraw from the rest of the class for a period of time if necessary.

Conclusions

33. All SEND schools in Wiltshire, especially any new build, should act as a hub of knowledge and expertise to all other schools in order to promote, build and

share knowledge for the better of children with SEND. With this in mind the specifications of the new Centre of Excellence should be built to a high level from the start to prevent any replace or retrofitting costs in the future. This would be in line with the advice received from Milestone School.

34. To ensure a practical design and building layout from the final product the architect and other relevant professionals or contractors should work closely with the school staff throughout the entire process. Similarly, a sense of community ownership needs to be promoted from the outset of the process. The community need to be involved in the process from the start to opening day. This is to ensure that there is a sense of familiarity any ownership of the building by the community and the parents when the school opens. This could be done through arranging monthly meetings between the architects and the school staff. However, clarification is needed on when the academy will be appointed and what role they will have in the design. The task group expressed concerns if the process was that none of the school staff would be involved in the design stages of the Centre of Excellence. It was felt that school staff provided important sources of information and opinion, and that their input in the early design stages would serve to assist in producing a well thought out and practical finished design.
35. The plan to create a futureproof SEND education provision should protect important rooms and facilities in the schools such as food technology rooms from any potential future classroom conversion. Facilities such as this provide children with important life skills and in some cases potential careers.
36. As demonstrated by both Three Ways School and Milestone School it is important to ensure that there is easy access for parents and external groups to relevant facilities in the school building(s). This is to provide an ease of flow and prevent any potential safeguarding issues. Three Ways school has a direct route from the entrance and reception down to their hydrotherapy pool, which bypasses any of the education areas. Milestone school noted that one of their ideal improvements would be to reduce the distance from their reception to the parent meeting areas.
37. As seen at Three Ways school there is a clear benefit from providing Multi-Agency Workers with a work space on site. Also, as seen at Milestone School there is a similar benefit to providing health specialists with dedicated on-site work space. These reduce the travel requirements off site for children and provide a central collection of knowledge and expertise for the school to use.
38. The task group was originally worried about the loss of, or watering down of the transition model in education from the proposed new schools. However, since performing the evidence gathering visits it was demonstrated that the sense of transition can be improved if the advantages a single school are correctly implemented. This has been demonstrated through the implementation of a gradual transition which focuses on the child's development level and is catered to their individual needs. An effective way of implementing this was through splitting the school into separate physical blocks based on educational level, each with a separate deputy head teacher.

39. One of the most impressive modern facilities seen by the task group was the café attached to Three Ways School. The task group agreed that there should be a focus on embracing the potential in Wiltshire to be build a similar café into any new builds. This should be done to take advantage of the opportunities to build a space that can be used by the community, parents, staff and students, and to also have the space run by the students themselves. It should also be noted that it is worth engaging with other local businesses to promote a wider range of potential skills and careers for students.
40. After hearing about the serious problems with the parking and drop-off/pick-up arrangements at the relatively new Three Ways School the task group felt that the need to emphasise the importance of sufficiently considering traffic flow management and an effective parking strategy. It needs to be ensured that the parking and traffic flow design for any new schools is efficient and can manage current and future demands.
41. The task group felt that plans on reducing the current demand for and reliance on Independent Special School Provision needed to be made clearer. The reliance could be split into two situations. Firstly, when parents/parent-carers visit a current SEND school, are unhappy with it as a choice and wish to send their child elsewhere. This first situation is a preventable situation which could be avoided through the new Centre of Excellence. Secondly, the needs presented by the child are so complex that we do not have the provision to meet them. This is a situation which is generally unavoidable and requires a degree of acceptance that not all needs can be catered for, and will therefore require independent provision.
42. However, there is still a need to address the current overreliance on independent providers. Based on the visit to Milestone School a serious part of reducing this reliance should be the creation of a challenging behavioural unit at the new school site.
43. The task group heard about the importance of effective early assessment of mainstream and SEND School suitability to ensure that early intervention takes place for those that need it. If this is properly in place then the situation of “waiting until a child fails” in mainstream education before action is taken can be avoided. This should be supported with specialist support in mainstream schools in the form of resource bases to provide better for mainstream inclusion and integration for those that need it. Resource bases and mainstream schools should be properly supported by the new Centre of Excellence.
44. In order to maximise on the potential reduction in demand for spaces at the new Centre of Excellence that can be provided by implementing resource bases a graduated response to young people with SEND should be implemented:
 - a. Local school
 - b. Supported education in a mainstream school
 - c. Resource base
 - d. Comprehensive resource base
 - e. SEND School (such as the new centre of excellence)

45. There also needs to be a clear code of practice for how children with SEND can transition between mainstream schools, resource bases, and SEND schools. It also needs to be ensured that this provision also allows for deescalating from SEND schools down to resource bases and also into mainstream schools. Transition into further education at Wiltshire College also needs to be covered.
46. The task group also felt that there could be potential benefits in developing a close working relationship between the Centre for Excellence and the future Whole Life Care Service and Wiltshire College. This could improve the support provided throughout childhood and adulthood.
47. To strengthen the effectiveness of the resource bases a deal needs to be agreed early in the process. As such, they need to be included as part of Wiltshire Council's expectations during the exploration for new providers and as part of the bid to ensure that it is included in the future provider's budget.
48. One of the serious concerns from the task group is the location of the new school in the village of Rowde. Whilst they were informed that transport to the community will be utilised the task group wish to seek reassurance that there will be clear details about what transport and plans will be in place and how they will work effectively to provide children with effective integration into the local communities.

Proposal

49. That the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Members of Cabinet consider the following recommendations from the task group when considering the report on Special School Provision:

Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills:

- 1. Makes suitable arrangements, such as monthly meetings, for the school staff to work closely with the architect and development team to ensure that the finished buildings are practical for all purposes.**
- 2. Clarifies the role of the academy provider in the design of the Centre of Excellence building.**
- 3. Works to keep the Wiltshire parental & parent-carer community consulted, closely involved and informed throughout the development process to promote community ownership and governance of the new schools.**
- 4. Includes the opinion of Wiltshire parent & parent-carer community, through the medium of the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC), in the**

decision-making process for choosing the new academy provider of the Centre of Excellence.

- 5. Ensures that all relevant parties, such as parents/parent-carers, are kept well informed throughout a transparent decision-making and selection process for the academy provider who will be chosen to run the new Centre of Excellence.**
- 6. Ensures that the chosen academy provider for the Centre of Excellence is specialist in SEND education.**
- 7. Ensures that school facilities such as hydrotherapy and sensory rooms are available for use by external groups and parents/carers, and that they are located suitably within the building to minimise disruption and provide independent access.**
- 8. Provide a dedicated office, meeting and therapy space within the new builds for Multi-Agency workers and health specialists to serve as a base for the workers.**
- 9. Ensures that there is an effective educational transition process in place which caters to the individual child and allows them to grow whilst progressing through the school.**
- 10. Ensures that the design of the school is made up through a collection of sub schools (or “blocks”) to allow each child to progress through these “blocks” based upon educational need, rather than age.**
- 11. Develop a close working relationship between the future Whole Life Service, the Centre of Excellence, and Wiltshire College.**
- 12. Creates community facing student-run cafés at the new builds and utilises them as a resource for use by the community, parents/carers, staff and students.**
- 13. Sufficiently considers the current and future traffic flow and parking requirements for the schools and creates a system that can exceed these demands.**
- 14. Include the development of a Challenging Behavioural Unit in the proposals to reduce future out of county provision and ensures there is an effective admissions procedure developed for the unit in consultation with SEND schools with existing Challenging Behavioural Units.**
- 15. Supports mainstream integration, in line with the Task Groups comments in para 44, through providing specialist SEND support in both primary and secondary schools across the county in the form of Resources Bases supported by the Centre of Excellence.**

16. Provides details on the transport plans which will be used to provide children with effective integration in the local communities.

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Appendices

None

Background documents

None