

Final Report of the Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group

Purpose

1. To present the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group for endorsement.

Background

2. The Task Group was established by Children's Services Select Committee in September 2010 with the following terms of reference:
 - a) To establish the strengths and weaknesses of current special school and post-16 SEN provision in Wiltshire, taking into account the views of service users, parents and other stakeholder groups;
 - b) To consider examples of best practice in special school and post-16 provision in Wiltshire and other authority areas;
 - c) To make recommendations with respect to how special schools and post-16 SEN provision can be developed to ensure improved outcomes for Wiltshire residents with SEN.

Methodology

3. Due to some difficulty establishing membership the Task Group began its work in May 2011. It met formally on five occasions and comprised the following membership:

Cllr Graham Payne (Chairman)

Rev Alice Kemp

Cllr Carole Soden

Cllr Tony Trotman

4. Early on in the Task Group's work, it was concluded that its terms of reference were very broad and could potentially encompass a huge area of work. It was agreed that it would be most productive to focus on particular areas of concern or interest as they arose through the Task Group's evidence gathering.

5. The first area of interest identified was the physical condition and capacities of Wiltshire’s six special schools and the Task Group decided to visit each of them. During these visits, conversations with headteachers and other staff were useful in highlighting further issues, which subsequently became part of the Task Group’s review and recommendations.
6. The Task Group also attended a meeting of the Special Schools Heads’ Forum – a sub-group of the Wiltshire Association of Secondary School Headteachers.
7. The Task Group visited Studley Green Special Learning Centre for Complex Needs and Speech and Language. This is a ‘resource base’ attached to Studley Green Primary School in Trowbridge.
8. The Task Group also met with the following witnesses from Wiltshire Council:

Cllr Lionel Grundy OBE	Cabinet Member for Children’s Services
Cllr Laura Mayes	Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services
Mark Brotherton	Head of Targeted School and Learner Support
Julia Cramp	Joint Director for Commissioning and Performance
Nick Glass	Head of Schools, Buildings and Places
Karina Kulawik	Inclusion Manager
Tina Pagett	13 to 19 Education and Skills Coordinator
9. The Task Group wish to express their gratitude to all the witnesses who contributed their time to this scrutiny review.

Summary of special school provision in Wiltshire

Name of School	Age range	Sex	Residential / Day	Designation	Capacity	Day/ Residential
Downland, Devizes	11-16	Boys	Boarding & Day	BESD	70	Day and 22 residential places
Exeter House, Salisbury	2-19	Mixed	Day	SLD/ASD/PML D	100	Day
Rowdeford, Rowde	11-16	Mixed	Boarding & Day	ASD/Complex needs	130	Day and 23 residential places
Larkrise, Trowbridge	4-19	Mixed	Day	SLD/ASD/PML D	78	Day
Springfields, Calne	10-16	Mixed	Boarding	ASD/BESD	70	Residential
St Nicholas, Chippenham	2-19	Mixed	Day	SLD/ASD/PML D	68	Day
Total					516	

Projecting and meeting future demand for SEN provision

10. The Task Group has received evidence that no overall increase in demand for special school places is expected in Wiltshire. Demand specifically for places suitable for pupils with Severe Learning Disability (SLD) is expected to increase, due to the increased survival rates of babies born very prematurely and with profound and multiple disabilities. This is a national trend supported by academic research, including the report of the 'Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project', led by Professor Barry Carpenter OBE. The report states:

“The increase in numbers of children and young people with complex learning difficulties and disabilities (CLDD) is widely recognised by the Government, independent researchers, academics, Ofsted and educators themselves. The numbers of children with severe and complex needs in one local authority more than doubled between 1981 and 2001. Between 2004 and 2009, the total number of children with severe learning disabilities (SLD) increased by 5.1%, and the total number of those with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) rose by an average of 29.7%.”
11. Officers have reported that the increase in demand for special school places for children with very complex needs will be balanced out by the 'inclusion agenda' of children with less complex needs remaining in mainstream education. Therefore, there will be no overall increase in demand for special school places. This is based on the current demography of Wiltshire and a recent analysis of trends over time that was carried out during the SEN review 2009/10.
12. If the numbers of children with complex needs are projected to continue to increase this suggests to the Task Group that demand for places in Wiltshire's three designated Severe Learning Disability (SLD) schools will rise. This is a concern because of the lack of capacity at two of these schools (Larkrise School, Trowbridge, and St Nicholas School, Chippenham) – further details of the capacity issues faced by these SLD schools are included below. The Task Group has also understands that the prevalence or identification of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is also increasing. Members have received anecdotal evidence that disorders of this kind may be more prevalent amongst those in the armed forces. The Task Group cautions that it has not been able to verify this theory, but if correct, it would be of particular relevance to the south of the county (and Exeter House School) with the significant expansion of the military in that area. Whatever future projections reveal, it is of the utmost importance that Wiltshire Council plans and develops provision now for the future needs of all those with SEN.
13. The Task Group is aware that future need for mainstream school places is calculated using numbers of projected housing developments detailed in the Core Strategy and a formula of the likely number of children per dwelling. This allows the Council to plan and develop appropriate mainstream school provision for

future populations. The Task Group is not aware of equivalent projections of demand specifically for children with SEN and it therefore feels uncertain whether the current special school provision will be sufficient and appropriate as demand changes and possibly increases. The Task Group therefore recommends that an analysis projecting future demand for SEN in Wiltshire and a strategic plan detailing how the projected need will be met (including post-16 education) be brought to Committee for further consideration. (**Recommendation 1**).

14. The special schools report good working relationships with the Council. However, they also report that they would welcome a clearer strategic direction in terms of special school provision. As detailed above, there is uncertainty around how changing demand will be met in the future and also about whether the schools' current designations may be changed. This uncertainty inhibits the schools' ability to plan their own provision, which is further reason for the Council to produce projections of demand matched by an appropriate strategic plan.

Healthcare in Wiltshire's special schools

15. One of the biggest concerns of headteachers at Wiltshire's special schools is the provision and funding of in-school healthcare for pupils. This is particularly the case for Wiltshire's three designated Severe Learning Disability (SLD) schools, who take pupils with the most complex needs, some with conditions considered to be 'life-limiting'. These are Exeter House School in Salisbury, Larkrise School in Trowbridge, and St Nicholas School in Chippenham.
16. The schools receive no funding for in-school nursing except the community nurses 'attached' to particular children with life-limiting conditions. As a consequence school staff who are not medical specialists are responsible for providing a level of medical support that the schools feel uncomfortable with and the Task Group have concerns about the safety implications of this.
17. Most pupils with statements have a care plan that stipulates the number and training level of staff who should be on-hand to meet that pupil's medical needs. In some cases the care plans dictate that multiple staff must be present who can perform procedures such as emergency tracheotomy tube changes, rectally administered drugs and resuscitation. One headteacher reported performing a medical procedure that paramedics had refused to perform as they had not had the required training.
18. One school reported having had to consider excluding three pupils in the past year on the basis of their medical needs and the difficulty the school would have in meeting them without the outside support they feel is required. Excluding a child with severe learning difficulties can place enormous pressure on the parents because they must then provide or purchase daytime care for the child.

19. Officers have reported that there is national guidance on the kinds of healthcare that schools are expected to deliver and the list does include some serious and complex procedures. The Task Group have concerns about the weight of responsibility this places upon school staff and the potential risk it could pose to children's health and safety. The schools reported that some staff had refused to undertake further medical training due to the specialised nature of some of the procedures they were (potentially) being asked to perform.
20. Special schools have also reported that they feel the lack of in-school nursing places a significant drain on school staffing and funding. The management of paperwork, resources, liaison and organisation related to pupil's medical needs is time consuming and some special schools believe it has become a 'full time job'. The Task Group believe this must be detrimental to staff's ability to concentrate on teaching and headteachers' ability to focus on leadership and strategic planning.
21. The Task Group are concerned that schools are not fully supported in meeting the sometimes complex healthcare needs of pupils. One school funds a nurse¹ from their own teaching and learning budget in order to meet the medical needs of its pupils and another is fortunate enough to have a trained nurse on staff. In order to meet the requirements stipulated in children's care plans, the schools also spend a very large proportion of their budgets on overall staffing. One school reported spending 95% of their annual budget on staffing – a situation that the headteacher feels is unsustainable.
22. Schools also try to maximise the amount of medical training that their teaching and support staff undertake. However, the schools have reported various concerns in regards to the medical training provided. In May 2012, the Wiltshire Association of School Headteachers agreed a document setting out in detail the schools' concerns about provision for pupils who have a specific health care need, plus some recommendations for improvement (this document is attached at Appendix 1). It has been reported that Council officers have now met with the special school headteachers to discuss this document and that agreement has been reached in some areas. The Task Group recommends that the Committee should receive a report on where agreements have, and have not, been reached on these matters in order that the schools' concerns be fully explored and pursued to resolution (**Recommendation 2**).
23. The Task Group has received evidence that some other local authority areas (including Bristol, Plymouth, Gloucestershire, Portsmouth and Hertfordshire) have a funding matrix whereby the local Health bodies contribute some level of funding for in-school nursing provision. This appears not to be the case in Wiltshire, and in order to clarify current arrangements the Task Group recommends that the

¹ The member of staff is currently a Teaching Assistant who trained as a nurse but from September will be employed as a nurse.

Committee receives a report setting out the funding agreements in place for all in-school healthcare provision and how these compare with equivalent agreements between PCTs and local authorities in Wiltshire's statistical neighbours (**Recommendation 3**).

Capacities, facilities and accessibility at Wiltshire special schools

24. During the Task Group's visits to Wiltshire's special schools, members have been impressed with the ingenuity shown by the schools in adapting their existing building stock to meet the needs of their changing or growing cohorts. The fundraising projects run by the schools, which have allowed for investment in their sites and facilities, are also to be commended. However, the Task Group are aware of issues with the condition, capacity and accessibility of some of Wiltshire's special schools and in certain cases believe that development is required to make the schools fully compliant with disabled access legislation, the demands of meeting the need of their current cohorts and fit for purpose as 21st century learning institutions. Additional priorities for development may be identified from the projections of future demand requested in Recommendation 1. The areas the Task Group have identified as being of priority from their visits to the special schools are detailed below.

Larkrise School, Trowbridge

25. Larkrise School in Trowbridge is a special school for children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) including those with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The school was built in the 1970s, when the needs of its cohort were less complex than today. Over the years the profile of pupils admitted to school has changed. In order to accommodate this change the school has already remodelled its facilities and have made a number of reasonable adjustments to ensure that the needs of the pupils are fully met. With the growing complexity of need and prediction for future admissions reflecting this trend the Task Group are concerned it will not be a possible to continue to make such adjustments; especially in the mobile part of the building. This is particularly affecting Key Stage 4 and 5 (pupils aged 14-19) of the school population.
26. Partly as a result of its changed cohort, the school faces a number of challenges in terms of its current buildings and grounds. The school is housed in a mixture of permanent and temporary classrooms and the site has become constrained in the last few years with a decreasing amount of outdoor space as some new building has taken place on the footprint. Outdoor space is particularly important to pupils with ASDs and this is restricted at present. The kinds of needs catered for at Larkrise also requires a lot of equipment such as wheelchairs and sensory apparatus, which was obviously not accounted for when the school was built.

27. Larkrise School also experiences challenges in terms of access. The school, which is located in a residential area, is adjacent to Paxcroft Primary School and during pick-up and drop-off times the access road becomes very congested. Additionally, many Larkrise pupils travel by minibus, which must exit the school site via the car park causing a potential hazard to other pupils and pedestrians leaving the school at the same time.
28. The Task Group believes that potential solutions to both these challenges lie with the redevelopment of the Paddocks adult care home next door to the school, which was closed in 2011 and is due to be redeveloped in 2013. The Chairman of the Task Group has asked the Leader of the Council to keep options open with respect to the care home's redevelopment until this report has been considered at Committee and the relevant Cabinet Members have provided a response to solutions proposed, which are as follows: In planning the buildings and grounds for the new care home on the former Paddocks site,
- 1) land is allocated to Larkrise school to increase its current outdoor space to the benefit of its pupils' education and wellbeing;
 - 2) provision of a new access route to Larkrise school running from the Hilperton Road (A361) is incorporated. This would:
 - ease the severe traffic congestion experienced in the residential area during pick-up and drop-off times at Larkrise School and Paxcroft Primary School;
 - decrease the potential danger of accidents resulting from congestion currently experienced within the school's car park;
 - free-up space at the front of the school (the existing access route and car park) for possible development and expansion of the school.
29. The Task Group have therefore recommended that, following consultation with the school, a feasibility study is conducted and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Adult Care, Communities and Housing give consideration to these proposals and provide the Committee with a response (**Recommendation 4**).
30. Larkrise School faces another challenge: Only the parts of the school used by the younger years are currently able to accommodate hoists. Children with more complex needs (such as those that require hoists) are currently mainly to be found in the school's younger years, but as these pupils grow, more and more hoists will be required throughout the school – many parts of which cannot structurally accommodate them.

St Nicholas School, Chippenham

31. St Nicholas serves the whole of north Wiltshire and, like Larkrise, has an SLD designation with all pupils having a statement for severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. A large majority of pupils have additional difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), challenging behaviour or sensory impairment. Again, like Larkrise, an increasing number of pupils joining the school have complex medical conditions.
32. The school is located in a residential area of Chippenham and has no room for expansion on the current site. The school currently has 7 small classrooms but the school has suggested that, for the number of pupils it accommodates, it should have 11, based on national guidance for the recommended number of pupils per classroom depending on need:
 - The school currently takes 68 pupils, which with 7 classrooms equals an average of 10 pupils per class.
 - Approximately 1/3 have ASD. The recommended number of pupils per class for pupils with ASD is 6.
 - Approximately 1/3 have SLD. The recommended number of pupils in a class for pupils with SLD is 6.
 - Some have functioning at an under-5 level. The recommended number of pupils in a class is 8.
33. Two of St Nicholas' seven classrooms have no adjoining toilets. This means that pupils who are incontinent (sometimes double incontinent) can spend a significant period of time out of class. Like Larkrise, due to the complexity of the pupils' physical needs the school requires a large amount of storage space for wheelchairs and other equipment. It is evident that the school has made maximum use of the space it has, but the site remains cramped. The staff room is also very small for the number of staff working at the school. The school tries to make the most of the outside space it has, but one of St Nicholas' playgrounds requires renovations that would cost £28,000 to bring it back into use.
34. In recent years, St Nicholas have been running a pilot project in a nearby rented house, where a small group of sixth formers have been based to follow a learning programme within the context of a real house. St Nicholas wants to develop a learning programme for sixth formers that focuses on the skills needed for supported living to promote their success in maximising their own independence in the future. The school's aspirations for developing its sixth form provision in this way is as follows:
 - Giving pupils opportunities to learn skills of independent living - including learning to choose how to spend leisure time and use public facilities – and thereby preparing them for their adult lives.

- Giving pupils real experiences that will help to inform their life choices upon leaving school and beyond.
 - Giving pupils their first experiences of sleeping away from home – with friends and the support of staff
 - Showing teenagers how they can be part of the community as a young adult rather than a child.
 - Giving families the opportunity of seeing their youngster cope independently and away from home.
35. Unfortunately because the house is rented the school cannot develop it as they would wish. Also, because rents in the area are high, they may not be able to afford it in the future. In 2011 the school made preliminary approaches to Wiltshire Council regarding the possibility of receiving capital funding to purchase a nearby three-bedroom bungalow (for approximately £300k) for development as the school's sixth form centre, but it was indicated to the school that a formal bid of this nature would be refused.
36. The Task Group have recommended that the Cabinet Member give further consideration to St Nicholas' request and reports his response to the Committee (**Recommendation 5**).

Rowdeford School, Devizes

37. Rowdeford School near Devizes is a secondary, co-educational, special school for 130 pupils with complex learning disabilities. This includes pupils whose measured ability and attainment place them on either the moderate learning difficulties spectrum, or at the top end of the severe learning difficulties spectrum. Many pupils also have associated medical conditions and/or syndromes. The school provides a boarding provision for up to 24 pupils.
38. This school is situated in a Grade II listed Georgian house, set in 20 acres of parkland on the outskirts of a village. The main school building is listed, which rules out serious alterations. There is no wheelchair access to boarding and the boarding house is unsuitable for some disabilities, e.g. visual impairment. The older areas of the school contain very small rooms (e.g. the library), poorly-suited to large secondary school children and wheelchair users. The school's most serious accessibility issue is with the main entrance, which was an area of concern at the last disabled access audit. The newer areas of the school are more spacious with wider corridors. The Task Group have recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services responds to the Task Group concerns in respect to the accessibility issues raised (**Recommendation 6**).

39. Like St Nicholas, Rowdeford School have aspirations to expand their post-16 SEN provision. The school would like to build an Eco-learning Centre in their grounds where post-16 learners can take horticultural courses. This would build upon the school's existing horticulture programmes and provide longer-term opportunities for vulnerable students to develop vocational, social and life skills. The Centre would mean that some young people would not have to leave the school aged 16 – particularly more vulnerable ones with communication difficulties who are less ready to attend a mainstream college. The schools see the Eco-learning Centre vision as a resource for the whole community and in the early stages would be offering opportunities for groups to book outdoor learning programmes. The school have suggested that the Centre could save the county money on expensive out-of-county placements as well as generating income for the school.
40. Like St Nicholas, the key challenge to developing its post-16 provision is capital money and its projected cost is around £500,000. The Task Group notes that this type of change to school registration would require a formal consultation. It recommends that the Cabinet gives consideration to allocating capital funding to the development of Rowdeford School's proposed Eco-learning Centre for the provision of post-16 education for those with SEN (**Recommendation 7**).

Springfields Academy, Calne, and Downland School, Devizes

41. Wiltshire has two schools for children and young people with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD): Springfields Academy in Calne and Downland School in Devizes.
42. The Springfields Academy in Calne is a residential academy school catering for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Behaviour Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). Most have additional complex needs. The school was recently named the Overall 2012 Outstanding School of the Year at the national TES Schools Awards and has received an "outstanding" rating by Ofsted. It has an extensive range of recreational facilities on site including three mini football pitches, a full size football pitch, basketball, netball and tennis courts and a junior sized rugby pitch.
43. Downland School is a day and residential special school for up to 69 boys with Behaviour Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) in Devizes. The school offers 22 boarding places for young people who require care and accommodation for up to four nights a week. The school is situated within a residential area and is close to local amenities, although the school has its own transport to enable young people to visit other amenities in the surrounding towns. Downland School has limited access for those with disabilities. The school itself has narrow corridors and space is limited.

44. Wiltshire is unusual in having two schools offering a relatively high number of residential places with a BSD designation. Some counties having no BSD schools whatsoever and many of Wiltshire's neighbouring authorities refer children with BSD into Wiltshire to attend Downland and Springfields. Because the two schools share the same designation and also because Downland school faces challenges in terms of its capacity and buildings, the Task Group feel that the schools should consider maximising all opportunities for joint working. The Task Group also recommend that the Council should ensure Wiltshire's current BSD special school provision is correctly configured and that, if it is not, creative solutions be found (**Recommendation 8**).

Exeter House School, Salisbury

45. Like Larkrise and St Nicholas, Exeter House School in Salisbury caters for pupils with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties (SLD) and a significant number have autism spectrum disorders (ASD). All have statements of special educational needs, with an increasing proportion having sensory and physical disabilities along with more complex learning needs.
46. In recent years, Exeter House received funding through the Target Capital Fund, which allowed the school to significantly enlarge its buildings and has also increased pupil capacity from 96 to 100. Although obviously pleased with this development, the school has expressed concern that it has received no increase in revenue funding in order to fund the heating and lighting costs of its new larger buildings.

Capital funding for development

47. The Task Group has made some preliminary enquiries as to the potential cost of meeting some of development needs identified and for the purposes of discussion it suggested that £10m would have a significant impact. The Task Group recognises that a loan of this size would carry revenue costs (the cost per annum of borrowing would be £0.635m), that budgets are stretched and that all proposals for capital spend must go through the capital gateway process². However, the Task Group considers that the current and – subject to the outcome of the projections requested, future – needs of Wiltshire special schools in terms of physical enhancement or expansion must be considered a priority when budget discussions are underway.

² This would involve an outline business case which would be considered by the Transformation Board followed by an informal meeting of the Cabinet Capital Assets Committee (CCAC). If the OBC is approved then a Full Business Case (FBC) would need to be considered by a formal meeting of CLT and CCAC – approval would be required here before a project could be given the go ahead and added to the capital programme.

Post-16 education for pupils with SEN

48. Until 2010, the budget for post-16 SEN placements was held by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Task Group has received evidence that it was more generously funded than at present. A higher number of young people with SEN from Wiltshire were funded to attend Independent Specialist Providers (ISP), but the emphasis has subsequently shifted to funding placements within mainstream colleges. Due to the legacy of the previous situation, parents and service users had come to expect to be able to transition to their preferred post-16 provider once they had finished compulsory schooling and understandably it has caused frustration that the criteria for accessing appropriate placements is now more rigidly enforced.
49. The result of this enforcement has been a greater proportion of students with SEN accessing Wiltshire College. The Task Group has not visited Wiltshire College and therefore cannot comment on the quality of its SEN provision. However, the Task Group is aware from recent reports in the local media that Wiltshire College is facing some financial difficulties and feels it is imperative that this must not have a detrimental impact on the education available to post-16 students with SEN in Wiltshire. The Task Group has received evidence that the transition from school to mainstream college for students with SEN can be particularly difficult and the threat of them dropping out of education altogether is significant and can have long-term implications.
50. Officers have reported on new joint initiatives that have resulted in an increased number of admissions to Wiltshire College and a reduction in the drop-out rate for the most complex pupils. However, some of the special schools are concerned that mainstream colleges do not always have the expertise required to meet the specific needs of learners with SEN. The Task Group believes it is important that reductions in funding do not lead to young people with SEN being forced to pursue their further education in a mainstream college when that does not meet their particular needs. It is to be remembered that Wiltshire students who do not have SEN have a wide range of providers to choose from when considering where to continue their education and training and the Task Group do not feel it is acceptable for students with SEN to have only one option. This further persuades the Task Group that maximum support and opportunity should be given to Wiltshire's special schools to develop their own in-house post-16 provision, and this includes the projects at St Nicholas and Rowdeford referred to in Recommendations 6 and 7.

Residential care for children with SLD in Wiltshire

51. Wiltshire's three special schools with an SLD designation admit pupils who can have physical disabilities, complex medical needs, autistic spectrum disorders and exhibit challenging behaviour. Sometimes pupils can have a very low

developmental age (in the months, rather than years) and yet be physically large and able and therefore have the potential to be violent. Children with these needs benefit from highly structured support, which can sometimes be more effectively provided in a residential school. At present there is no residential school for children with SLD in Wiltshire.

52. Residential provision can also be employed when a child cannot be accommodated with parents. Because of the lack of a residential SLD school in Wiltshire, this can mean that children moves to out-of-county residential provision, potentially taking them further away from their family and community. Only a very a small number of pupils meet the thresholds for such provision per year, but each place can cost around £250k per annum and winning the funding for these places can sometimes be the subject of legal disputes between parents and the local authority. Because of the high cost of placements of this kind and the benefits of children remaining close to their family, the Task Group have requested figures showing the Council's total expenditure on such placements in recent years, and also estimates of the costs of developing and running an equivalent in-county facility (**Recommendation 9**).
53. Because caring for a child with SLD can be demanding, respite care provides vital breaks for some parents that help them to continue to keep their child at home and the child to attend a non-residential SLD school in-county. At present there are two facilities in Wiltshire providing short-term respite care for children with SLD: Canon's House is an eight bedroom home in Devizes that provides short-term residential breaks for young people (age 5-17 years) with a severe learning disability who have such specialist needs that all other sources of short breaks. Hillcote is a similar facility providing respite and day care accommodation (age 8-18 years) and is run by the local Health authority.
54. The Task Group understands that Canon's House is often operating at full capacity and booked up for long periods. Conversely, anecdotal reports suggest that Hillcote is not as heavily used. The Task Group believes it essential that respite facilities for children with SLD and their parents be used as efficiently as possible and therefore request that the Committee receives a report detailing the usage of and waiting times for these two facilities. The Task Group understands that a Council review of short breaks is currently underway and requests that details of this be included in the response (**Recommendation 10**).

Resource Bases (Specialist Learning Centres)

55. The Task Group visited Studley Green Special Learning Centre for Complex Needs and Speech and Language. This is a 'resource base' attached to Studley Green Primary School in Trowbridge. Resource bases are one of the ways that Wiltshire Council provides specialist provision within a mainstream school, for pupils with statements of special educational needs.

56. During the Task Group's visit, it was reported that the referral of primary school aged children with complex needs to the SLD centre has improved in recent years and this is to be commended. However, there was some concern that the referral of children with speech and language difficulties was not as good. It was acknowledged that the identification of such difficulties can be difficult due to them being easily confused with other issues, such as ASDs or hearing impairment. The Task Group have not been able to pursue this further and ascertain whether Wiltshire has particular problems in this area. It therefore requests a report detailing what programmes are in place for the identification of speech and language difficulties in school aged children, how the Council measures its performance in this area and how it compares with other local authorities (**Recommendation 11**).

Concluding remarks

57. The Task Group wish to note and commend the commitment shown by staff working with special educational needs in Wiltshire. Members' visits to Wiltshire's special schools and Studley Green Specialist Learning Centre have displayed staff's dedication to ensuring children receive the best possible care and education, with limited resources at their disposal.
58. The Task Group was also impressed by the fundraising projects run by some of the schools. A particular example is the work of Rowdeford School's Rowdeford Charity Trust, which has funded many innovative projects using resources within the school campus that could not otherwise have taken place. There were also many examples of special schools adapting their current building stock and facilities to better meet the needs of their pupils.
59. The Task Group wishes to note the real challenges faced by the parents of children with special educational needs, especially those parents of children with severe learning and physical impairments. Local authorities must fully support these parents and the schools and colleges that educate their children. Special schools and post-16 SEN provision directly affects a small proportion of Wiltshire's population, but the Task Group concludes that the quality of that provision has an enormous impact on the quality of life of service users. The Task Group therefore urge those addressed in its report to give serious consideration to its recommendations, even those where investment may be required.
60. The Task Group is mindful that it has not explored the full breadth of its terms of reference and has not considered best practice in other authority areas or gathered the views of service users or parents. Members are also aware that some of the issues raised herein are complex and require further exploration, which is why in many cases it has been recommended that more information be brought to the Committee. Once this information has been received the

Committee may feel that some issues would be better explored in a task group setting and the Task Group is prepared to reconvene should this be the case.

Recommendations

Predicting and meeting future demand for SEN provision

1. The Task Group believes it is of the upmost importance that Wiltshire plans and develops now for the future needs of those with SEN. This is of particular importance because of the capacity issues being faced by Larkrise School and St Nicholas School. The Task Group understands that no overall increase in demand for places in special schools is expected. Given the population growth projected in Wiltshire and academic evidence suggesting that the numbers of children with ASDs and SLDs are increasing nationally, the Task Group is concerned that demand for special school places may in fact increase in the future.

The Group therefore recommends that the following work is undertaken and brought back to Committee:

- an analysis projecting future demand for SEN in Wiltshire based on the Core Strategy
- a strategic plan detailing how the projected need will be met (including post-16 education)

Healthcare in Wiltshire's special schools

The Task Group recommends:

2. That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and, if appropriate, Wiltshire PCT bring a report to the Committee responding to the concerns raised by Wiltshire's special schools in relation to joint agency provision for pupils who have a specific health care need. This report should set out how the concerns raised by the school will be addressed.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Wiltshire PCT enter a dialogue with respect to the provision of nursing care in special schools and a report is brought to the Committee setting out the funding agreements currently in place for its provision and how they compare with equivalent funding agreements in Wiltshire's statistical neighbours.

Larkrise School, Trowbridge

4. That in planning the buildings and grounds for the new care home on the former Paddocks site, a feasibility study is undertaken with respect to the following

proposals, which would benefit the education and welfare of pupils at Larkrise Special School:

- 1) additional land is allocated to Larkrise school to increase its current outside space;
- 2) following consultation with the school, provision of a new access route to Larkrise school running from the Hilperton Road (A361) is incorporated, which would:
 - ease the severe traffic congestion experienced in the residential area during pick-up and drop-off times at Larkrise School and Paxcroft Primary School;
 - decrease the potential danger of accidents resulting from congestion currently experienced within the school's car park;
 - free-up space at the front of the school (the existing access route) for possible development and expansion of the school.

St Nicholas School, Chippenham

5. That the Cabinet of Wiltshire Council gives consideration to allocating capital funding to the purchase of a suitable property to accommodate St Nicholas School's post-16 provision, which would both allow its continuance and development and free-up space within the main school buildings.

Rowdeford School, Rowde

6. That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services notes the Task Group's concerns with respect to disabled access at Rowdeford School and provides the Committee with a response.
7. That the Cabinet of Wiltshire Council gives consideration to allocating capital funding to the development of Rowdeford School's proposed Eco-Learning Centre for the provision of post-16 education for those with SEN.

Downland School and Springfield Academy

8. That the Council should ensure Wiltshire's current BSD special school provision is correctly configured and that, if it is not, creative solutions be found.

Residential provision for children and young people with SLD

9. That the Committee receives figures showing the Council's total expenditure on out-of-county residential placements for children and young people with SLD in recent

years, plus estimates of the comparative costs of developing and running an equivalent in-county facility

10. That a report is brought to the Committee detailing the usage of and waiting times for Canon's House and Hillcote respite facilities. The Task Group notes that a Council review of short breaks is currently underway and requests that details of this be included in the response.

Resource Bases (SLCs)

11. That a report detailing what programmes are in place for the identification of Speech and Language problems in school aged children, how the Council measures its performance in this area and how it compares with other local authorities

Proposal

61. The Committee is asked to endorse the recommendations of the Special Schools and Post-16 Task Group.

Cllr Graham Payne – Chairman of the Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group

Paul Kelly – Designated Scrutiny Officer and Scrutiny Manager

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Joint Agency Practice Guidance: Concerns And Recommendations
– Wiltshire Association of Special School Heads

Background documents

['Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project – developing pathways to personalised learning'](#) by Specialist Schools and Academy Trust and iNet