

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 July 2007

Special Educational Needs – Strategy Monitoring Board

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides information about the activity of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Strategy Monitoring Board.

Background

2. The SEN Strategy Monitoring Board meets three times a year. It confirms, annually, SEN development priorities and monitors the impact and implementation of SEN development activity.
3. The work of the Board was last considered by this committee on 29 November 2006.
4. This report relates to two meetings of the SEN Strategy Monitoring Board held on 30 January and 22 May 2007.

Meeting of 30 January 2007

5. The Board reviewed the progress made up to the end of December 2006 in implementing the SEN Strategy 2006-2007 Action Plans. It was agreed that progress was satisfactory and no additional specific actions were required.
6. The Board considered updated outcomes of the SEN Strategy, the means by which long term progress towards Wiltshire's six key objectives are measured. Information about different outcomes becomes available at different points in the year. New information was available at this meeting for seven of the sixteen outcomes.

KS2 results – it was felt that this was not a very informative indicator. Officers undertook to explore possible alternatives.

KS4 results – an increase in the percentage of pupils, in the identified SEN population, gaining five GCSEs A-G or equivalent from 61 to 67% was welcomed.

Primary Specialist Learning Centres - Board members heard about the development of a new system to monitor the activity undertaken by the centres.

Permanent exclusion - the positive trend in permanent exclusion figures was welcomed, overall reduction from 89 to 74 pupils, a 17% reduction (10 primary pupils, 62 secondary pupils and 2 special school pupils).

Fixed term exclusions – the overall trend was felt to be positive with a 6% reduction in the number of days lost. Board members considered the increase in the primary phase, up 10%, the reduction across secondary schools, down 5%, and the change in practice of the special schools that meant that the total number of days lost was 47, a reduction of 86%.

Number of appeals to the SEN and disability tribunal – Board members raised concerns about a 25% increase in the number of appeals, forty-seven cases during 05-06. There was a detailed discussion of actions being undertaken to reduce appeals such as changes to the responsibilities of education officers. Board members were re-assured by the information that part year figures were greatly reduced when compared with the same time last year. More detailed information about appeals was requested by Board members for the May meeting.

Percentage of annual review documents received by the department – Board members were told of actions to be taken by Central SEN to improve this outcome as performance had remained static at 85%.

7. The Board considered three areas of activity within the SEN Strategy that had been identified at the previous Board meeting held in October 2006.

Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development

This area of development has been considered more than any other by the Board. Heather Clewett attended and provided an update across different aspects of this area of need such as the promotion of the 14-19 area partnerships and the movement of some parts of the Behaviour Support Service to Downland School site. Board members raised questions about the advice provided by some local authority teams, the impression given is that exclusion is recommended as a means to access services. The Board agreed that this issue should be followed up by Heather Clewett outside the meeting.

Training

Board members considered a paper about different aspects of training. It was agreed that training is crucial to prevent loss of expertise through staff changes. It was recommended by the Board that audits undertaken with school staff about their qualifications should aim to collect information about the age of teachers to inform planning. This idea was conveyed to staff responsible for the analysis of training needs.

Secondary Provision

The Board was advised of progress in the development of core principles, and an implementation plan, for secondary SEN provision to be shared with secondary school headteachers in March.

8. Board members were invited to make any comments on the SEN Strategy document covering 2007-2008.

Meeting of 22 May 2007

9. Throughout the year the Board monitors progress in implementation of the SEN Strategy action plans. Each year at the May meeting the Board considers a summative report on all sections of the SEN Strategy reviewing activity completed in the previous financial year. Therefore at this meeting all aspects of SEN developments undertaken during 2006-2007 were discussed. Board members accepted the contents of the report, and particularly praised recent improvements in communication with schools.
10. The Board considered the outcomes of the SEN Strategy, five were updated for this meeting.

Number of pupils placed in independent special schools outside Wiltshire – Board members welcomed a further 4% reduction in the number to 85.

The number of pupils with statements who travel more than 20 miles to school – a reduction of a further 6%, meaning 130 pupils attend a school more than twenty miles from their home, was warmly received by Board members. There was a detailed discussion of the needs and age of the 130 pupils and how the outcome is calculated.

Number of statutory assessments required - there has been a reduction of 4%, with 248 assessments taking place during the year. Consideration of this outcome prompted debate amongst Board members. It was noted that there are variations across the county; in particular requests are higher for the south of Wiltshire and from Early Years settings. A detailed report was requested for the next meeting in October.

Number of pupils identified with SEN – the number of pupils at School Action and School Action Plus has continued to increase, but at a lower level, 3% this year. The Board discussed whether increased identification was a good or bad trend because of the number of different factors that could be involved. No conclusion was reached.

Number of pupils with statements – this has reduced by 3% to 1927 children and young people. It was agreed that this outcome is closely related to the outcome about the number of statutory assessments required, above, and that the Board will form a view about the trend at the October meeting.

11. As requested at the January meeting the Board received a detailed paper about appeals to the SEN and disability tribunal. Board members noted that Wiltshire had a higher number of SEN tribunals in 2005-2006 but that this was also the national trend. The potentially more positive

pattern of the number of appeals in the current year was welcomed by Board members.

12. The Board accepted sets of detailed action plans for activity being undertaken in 2007-2008. Specific points were clarified in response to Board members' questions.
13. Feedback was provided to the Board about the visit from the DfES SEN Adviser in March. The report drawn up by the DfES Adviser was generally very positive, and highlighted a number of strengths and new developments being undertaken.
14. The Board were briefed on the new Self-evaluation framework for SEN and Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. This will be used to re-evaluate a wide range of processes and protocols across the Department for Children and Education. It will inform both the Joint Area Review and SEN developments to be undertaken in 2008-2009.
15. Board members were informed about an SEN Operational Plan that shows actions being undertaken across a range of priorities. It was drawn up to support communication with Primary Heads Forum about different activities. The Operational Plan does not contradict or supersede the SEN Strategy.

Next Meeting

16. The next meeting will take place on 8 October 2007. It will consider progress on implementation of SEN developments up to the end of July 2007, and receive detailed reports about Statutory Assessments and progress in the SEN Strategy area of Behavioural Emotional and Social Development.

Proposal

17. The Committee is asked to note the report.

CAROLYN GODFREY
Director, Department for Children & Education
