

## Using Specialist Services and Identified Best Practice to Increase Local Capacity

### Developing Support for Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. As part of Strand 3 a review/ needs gap analysis of support for pupils with ASC has been undertaken. Reading has seen an increase in the child population, and consequently the number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). It should be noted that the percentage of children and young people in Reading with an EHCP remains higher than the statistical neighbour and England average. This rise has placed additional pressure on universal services such as schools, and also specialist service provision. Currently a number of children and young people have been placed in high cost provision out of the area in order to have their needs met. All of this has had an impact on the high needs budget.
- 1.2. The SEND Strategy recognises a need for a continuum of support and provision to ensure that we can collectively meet the needs of these children as locally as possible, and this review of specialist provision in Reading was initiated to consider what specialist provision was needed and propose how it should be best organised to meet the most complex needs of children and young people, as well as support local capacity in all settings and schools. It was recognised that at the same time consideration needed to be given to what we should stop doing to ensure that the greatest areas of need were prioritised.
- 1.3. This review is aimed at ensuring that provision matched to current and future high level need is developed locally in line with the SEND Strategy 2017.
- 1.4. A task and finish group from Strand 3 considered needs and gaps and their findings were reviewed and considered by the group. Strand 3 has subsequently agreed to present to the SEND Strategy Group a proposal, outlined within this document, to increase local capacity and improve outcomes for children and young people with autism.
- 1.5. In tandem with the Strand 3 work, Strand 1 has been looking at the range of specialist provision and specialist projects across Reading. Visits have been made to all schools and settings with funded projects and specialist/resourced provisions. These visits have included discussions with heads and key staff, students and meeting with some parents. A further visit to Prospect School has taken place to look at how the students integrate into and are supported in mainstream lessons. Delivery models were discussed with the school. Additionally a tracking exercise has been undertaken to identify where pupils have come from, where and when their needs are first identified, and where they have moved on to. The current

version of the report on this work is attached at Appendix A. This work has been taken into account within this report.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The number of children attending schools in Reading has increased by 18.6% in six years since 2011. In the same period the number of pupils with EHCPs has increased by 25.7% (218 children and young people) and is continuing to increase (although some of this increase is due to the transfer of Learning Disability Assessments (LDAs) to EHCPs in college placements). At January 2017 34.4% of children and young people with an EHCP were identified with a primary need of ASC. The home addresses of these pupils and young people have been plotted within the detailed SEND Data Report. This indicates that children and young people with ASC identified as a primary need live across Reading, although there are some concentrations in the West, North and South East, see Appendix B.
- 2.2. At present there is both a primary and secondary specialist provision in mainstream schools for pupils with autism. Christ the King Primary School provides a primary specialist provision for up to 21 pupils. The provision was increased in 2013 from 10 and has been at capacity for the last 2 years. Blessed Hugh Farringdon Secondary School provides a secondary specialist provision. The number of places has been increased in recent years to 19. Agreement to further increase capacity to 30 places is in place and there are plans to build a bespoke building to meet the needs of pupils in the near future. It is anticipated that this will meet the forecast increased demand over the next few years.
- 2.3. Within the Early Years Settings Dingley is commissioned to provide a specialised environment for young children with complex needs, Snowflakes at Newbridge Nursery School provides a specialised nursery setting for children who are awaiting an assessment for an autism spectrum condition OR who have a diagnosis of autism and Norcott Nursery has developed expertise in working with children with Autism.
- 2.4. Both of these operate a model whereby pupils are based within the mainstream classes across the school, and access a base when required to meet their specific needs.
- 2.5. We have seen an increase in the number of pupils who require a place in a specialist base in a mainstream setting in order that they can access the mainstream curriculum, but require a more personalised approach and significantly more time in a base classroom, integrating out from that base into mainstream lessons as appropriate to their individual needs. This model is more common in other LA areas.
- 2.6. Feedback from some parents and carers has also indicated that they are frustrated with the length of time it can take to receive a diagnosis. Sometimes at the end of this process it is identified that the child has

speech, language and communication difficulties, with associated social communication difficulties. Some of these children have significant needs and require a specific and personalised programme of support to enable them to access the curriculum offer, but would not meet the admissions guidance for an ASC specific specialist provision.

2.7. At present a number of providers support children with ASC and their families. These include Christ the King who provides outreach support to other primary schools and an autism service provided from within the Educational Psychology service offering training to schools, family courses and individual sessions. The voluntary sector also provides support including Parenting Special Children who provide courses and support, and Berkshire Autistic Society which provides support to families. Thames Valley School also offers workshops to professionals and is looking to develop their outreach support. They are also looking to expand their school places from 50 - 80 places for aged 5-16 years. Feedback from parent carers, schools and professional suggests that this is needed but currently not sufficient to meet need/demand.

### **3. Proposal**

#### **3.1 Educational Specialist Provision in mainstream school**

3.2 At their meeting in October 2017, it was proposed and agreed that consideration be given to spreading the specialist provision more evenly across the Reading geographical area. As part of a graduated approach, this should be focused on the children and young people with the most complex needs who require access to a mainstream curriculum, but due to their high levels of need and often anxiety, need a bespoke and personalised approach to ensure that their needs are met early. It is proposed that part of the formal remit of the specialist provision, they have a role in building greater capacity to support children in the local area in other mainstream schools.

3.3 The data and analysis by Strand 3 and feedback from the work in Strand 1 indicates a need for increased provision for children with ASC that is more local to where they live. Christ the King Catholic primary school currently provides 21 places, but this is in the South of Reading which takes some time to reach for those children who live in other parts of Reading, and does not best support them in being included within their local community. Feedback from some parents whose children access specialist provision indicates that this creates challenges for them at weekends and holidays, as their children have no familiar social groups in their local community. Parents spoken to indicated that if it were available they would prefer that provision for their children was closer to home.

3.4 Placing a high number of children with these levels of need in 1 primary school can place considerable pressure on a school. It is therefore proposed that rather than having 1 large primary resource, criteria for identifying 2 further

## Appendix 1

possible schools to host these are developed, 1 in the north of Reading, 1 in the west of Reading; retaining Christ the King to cover the south of Reading.

- 3.5 With the increases in the numbers of pupils with high levels of need, it is proposed that the development of specialist provisions with a capacity of at least 10 pupils per specialist provision is required, and that there needs to be the flexibility to increase this as required to meet both local need and forecast demand across Reading. Potential schools would need to have the right physical environment to provide this, as well as meet other criteria regarding existing quality assured good SEND provision. It is proposed that in order to support early identification and having the right support and provision in place at the right time, specialist provision schools should have a broader remit to include both children diagnosed with ASC and those with complex social and communication needs. The resource being available for children with both social communication needs and autism would provide further flexibility to meet local need.
- 3.6 If this proposal progresses, there would need to be a gradual transition for Christ the King in line with children moving in to secondary provision to ensure consistency of provision to existing children within the specialist provision where parents wish their child to remain there.
- 3.7 These proposals could be achieved through consideration of a formal process to change the designation of schools with existing provision for other needs, ceasing or changing and formalising provision currently being made through funded projects, and / or inviting expressions of interest from schools in the appropriate areas meeting specific criteria to set up new provision. A formal process of consultation will be required for each of these options.
- 3.8 It is recommended that the proposed 3 host primary schools also provide an area based approach, offering support to settings and schools as well as children and their families, bringing together partner agencies to offer a co-ordinated approach. This should be coordinated with the commissioned outreach and school to school support provided from special schools and the training offer from Thames Valley School, as well as any SEND specific school to school support provided through the Teaching School Alliance.
- 3.9 It is recommended that Blessed Hugh Farringdon is approached to operate a similar model to ensure consistency with the proposed primary model and that secondary schools in Reading are supported to meet the needs of the majority of pupils with ASC within their local school.
- 3.10 The admissions guidance and funding levels for provisions and the expectations of them will be set out in a Service Level Agreement SLA which will be monitored termly.

#### **4. Outreach Support**

- 4.1 There is a need for a more co-ordinated approach between services including the voluntary sector to ensure children, young people and their families receive support that meets their needs, and that guidance and advice is consistent.
- 4.2 The support from the primary specialist provisions would have 2 distinct roles:
- 4.2.1 Providing support to primary schools within their area closely aligned to their clusters. This would include offering training to schools, specific advice and approaches for pupils and where appropriate be involved in direct work with children.
- 4.2.2 Providing support to families co-ordinated through meetings between key professionals from statutory and the voluntary sector, identifying the right course and professional to support a family. This could be following diagnosis where referrals could be made to the area based resource to identify / provide the support required and signpost families to the relevant agency, parenting group/ support.
- 4.3 Through being a local resource, the overall needs of children and young people could be identified and responded to e.g. by putting on specific courses or preparing children for transition to secondary school.
- 4.4 It is recommended that existing parenting courses are supplemented through using programmes such as Early Bird and Early Bird Plus which are recognised evidence based training developed by the National Autistic Society. It is proposed that a comprehensive series of programmes of support for families meeting their needs. Each resourced provision school would need a specific worker to co-ordinate and provide support to families bridging gaps and supporting positive relationships between families and schools.
- 4.5 Further work needs to be carried out with Blessed Hugh Farringdon to explore the development of a comparative approach across secondary schools to support meeting the needs of young people needing specialist support.

#### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The development of 3 primary resourced provisions provides resilience through mutual support and learning. Through more local provision there is likely to be some reduction in the cost of school transport.
- 5.2 The costs of the additional specialist provision places can be counteracted in the following ways:
- 5.2.1 the reduction in places in other provisions in Reading where these are not the priority needs;
- 5.2.2 the reduction in out of area placements and higher cost placements within independent or special school settings;
- 5.2.3 the reduction of the escalation of need through increased support for inclusion within mainstream schools, enabling them to feel better able to meet the needs of more children in their schools.

5.3 Differentiated top up values may need to be developed to reflect the different costs of meeting the different types and levels of needs as set out below:

5.3.1 pupils who with the right support and provision are able to access a significant amount of mainstream classes;

5.3.2 pupils who due to their levels of need and anxiety require more time in a specialist base, and may only be able to manage a small amount of the whole school environment, but due to level of academic ability need to access a mainstream curriculum. These children will need a personalised programme of support that builds their confidence and ability to access a more mainstream environment over time and enable them to achieve the academic outcomes that they are capable of as well as develop the emotional and social elements of learning.

5.4 While it will take time to build this capacity and confidence of schools to meet a broader range of needs and confidence of parents/carers in local provision, this predicted reduction in costs could be used to support the creation of a post within each of the schools to support outreach to families, provide a co-ordinating role for agencies and bridge the gap between families and the school.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1 This paper outlines an initial proposal to develop 2 more primary age specialist provisions for pupils with ASC and social communication needs, and a reduction over time in the number of places commissioned from Christ the King Catholic Primary School.

6.2 This proposal was considered by the Strand 1 working group on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018, Schools Forum on 24<sup>th</sup> May and the SEND Strategy Board on 17<sup>th</sup> July. All groups recommended that the proposal be taken forward to start the process for requesting initiation of formal commissioning and statutory consultation.

## Appendix A

### SEN Resource Provision

#### Summary report of visits to schools with provisions/projects/SLA Dingley

On 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017 Schools Forum agreed with the proposal to review specialist provisions, including funded projects, taking into account occupancy, and alternative models of delivery.

Visits have taken place to the following schools/settings:

- Christ the King (primary ASC Provision)
- EP Collier (primary SALN provision)
- Manor Primary (Cognition and Learning - project)
- New Bridge Nursery (Snowflake Centre - project)
- Highdown (secondary VI)
- Blessed Hugh Faringdon (secondary ASC)
- Prospect (secondary LD)
- Dingley's Promise (commissioned project)

Further visits have occurred to meet students in the provisions at the secondary schools and meet with parents who have children accessing the provisions.

It was proposed and agreed at the Strand 1 meeting in October that in reviewing specialist provisions, consideration was given to spreading the provision more evenly across the Reading geographical area, focussed on children with most complex needs at the same time as building greater capacity to support children in the local area in mainstream schools. Strand 1 group agreed that decisions for change in resourced provision should be evidence based and asked for further information to be collated to inform proposals.

Analysis of the SEND data report would suggest that consideration needs to be given to different models of support for children with presenting behavioural difficulties, including support from other services. An initial meeting has been held with one of the school clusters to discuss their thoughts on how this could be achieved. They are meeting with the head of Cranbury College to discuss this further. It is important that provision is consistent across the authority area to support children with these types of needs. The secondary heads group (which includes the head teacher from Cranbury College) has also discussed this and have set up a small working group to consider options for next steps.

## Summary of visits

### Specialist Provisions

The schools with specialist provisions were set up many years ago under different school organisation processes to those in place currently. Any proposed changes would require a statutory consultation process under the current school organisation process to make any significant change to these provisions. Schools reported that the complexity of needs in their provisions have changed over time. There are no SLAs in place currently and no formal monitoring with the schools of the provisions. Schools have put in place what they think is right to meet the needs of their pupils. It was clear from the visits that the current designations of some of the provisions do not necessarily reflect the needs of the pupils accessing them. The destination data for primary provision (at the end of this report) suggests that sometimes the primary needs of the pupils become more apparent during their time at the provision, with pupils moving on to a range of types of secondary provision. This, alongside the impact of early intervention that is meeting their needs, would suggest that we may need to be more flexible around designation and admissions guidance for these provisions.

All of the staff in the provisions were keen to talk about the provision they were making and how it was working, as well as the changes they had seen in needs of both pupils in the provisions and the SEND population at their schools generally. All were open to discussion about what might be needed in the future and what they could do to support this.

All of the provisions use the resource as a base where pupils go to access the element of their education that is tailored to meet their specific needs. There may be some pupils who require access to a mainstream curriculum but are not yet able to operate successfully in mainstream classrooms. They may need to access their education in the base for the majority of the timetable, building up their mainstream opportunities over time. This all needs to be considered within future proposals and the development of SLAs with the schools.

Some of the schools were already providing informal and formal support to other schools regarding SEND.

Pupils with a statement or Education, Health and Care plan with autism as primary need against areas of deprivation (Page 23 SEN DATA report)



Appendix 1

