

INCLUSION REVIEW

September 2014

Context and process

Lorna Walker and Winifred Wood, two national experts in the field of inclusion, undertook a year long review of inclusive practice across Aberdeen City. The review concluded in August 2014.

The review comprised:-

- Analysing reports, documents and policies
- Meetings and discussions with senior and middle managers in Education, Culture and Sport and Social Care and Well-Being
- Visiting all 12 secondary schools, 20 primary schools and all special school/ specialist provisions where they visited classrooms, met with staff, managers, parents and pupils

The review was conducted within the framework of Scottish Government legislation and guidance. This helped to ascertain the extent to which Aberdeen City has taken full account of its obligations and included the consideration of:-

- The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000
- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Equality Act 2010
- Getting it Right for Every Child
- Curriculum for Excellence

General findings

The reviewers found a great deal of innovative and inclusive practice that can be used to disseminate best practice and enhance the experiences of all Aberdeen's children. Many senior managers model acceptance and inclusion and encourage creative approaches to meeting learning needs. Some schools have creatively developed more enhanced provisions within their schools to offer targeted support to pupils based on sound analysis of data. The most highly effective provisions redesign their support systems by carefully planning for the varying needs of pupils across the school, as a result these provisions are providing excellent inclusive experiences.

Many schools use solution focused approaches and collaborate with a range of partners to offer timely personalised pathways to meet changing needs.

The reviewers witnessed a high level of commitment from staff in all positions and praised how well staff had engaged with this review of inclusion.

Presumption of mainstreaming, as outlined in the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act, was not seen to be fully understood and applied. The unusually high numbers of specialist provisions, coupled with cumbersome referral process, limits the flexibility of systems and the development of a smooth continuum of provision. The reviewers believe that staff resource could be better allocated and that access to some buildings and Information Technology should be considered in light of the Equalities Act. They also suggest that we consider our use of language around both provisions and children in need of additional support.

Recommendations

In the first instance Aberdeen City must agree and share its vision and direction at all levels for effective inclusive practice, and clarify how it will meet the needs of all children and young people, including those who are gifted and talented as well as the most vulnerable.

1. Appoint a suitably experienced and qualified Head of Service (Inclusion) and Inclusion Team to lead, implement and quality assure developments.
2. Improve both the strategic partnership and collaboration at operational level within Education and Children's Services, and between Education and Children's Services and NHS.
3. Recognise and formalise the contribution of the Third Sector, particularly in relation to their enterprising and creative approaches. This will ensure more equitable and timely support for vulnerable children and young people.
4. Develop a more equitable allocation of **mainstream** school staff and through the implementation of a robust annual audit of needs ensure equitable allocation of **support** staff. Ensure thresholds of additional support across the different visiting specialist services, and the consequent allocation of visiting staff is equitable and in line with the audit of needs.
5. Provide professional development to ensure the five roles of support for learning are better understood by all and demonstrate how they can play a key role in supporting staff and pupils within inclusive settings. Consider the establishment of an Inclusion Co-ordinator post in each school to coordinate the approach and delivery of additional support.
6. Take full account of the valuable role of PSAs in supporting inclusive practice and consider how to improve their conditions of service and provide them with on-going, comprehensive, training programmes to improve their career progression.
7. Fully consider the nature of support required from the educational psychology service by schools, children and families to promote best inclusive practice. Consider allocation, continuity, the development of specialisms and the need to link research to priorities within the Education and Children's Services Service Plan.

8. Align, clarify and disseminate Educations' Framework for Identification, Assessment and Support and the GIRFEC Model of Intervention. This will ensure all managers, practitioners and parents are clear about expectations of practice and provision at each stage, including the contribution of Nurture groups and the role of educational psychologists. In so doing pay particular attention to developing earlier intervention strategies and support for children in need of universal or targeted support.
9. Ensure curricular guidance always takes account of the wide spectrum of learning needs and that teachers have access to updated advice and exemplars on curricular planning, including group and individualised approaches. Clarify the legislative importance of Coordinated Support Plans (CSPs) and the alignment of learning plans with the GIRFEC Child's plan, in a way which minimises documentation.
10. Update guidance to reflect the City's aspiration for zero tolerance of exclusion, part-time timetables and 'managed moves' as well as on lateness and attendance to support the good work of HSLOs; and consider the future role of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs).
11. Fully consider who is best placed to have management responsibility for promoting attainment and monitoring relevant data for educational outcomes of Looked after Children both within the City and those placed out with the City. Take forward the City's vision for a virtual school to ensure effective support for Looked after Children.
12. Consider how to better use the skills and expertise of personnel in existing specialist provisions and services to develop a more coherent continuum of provision, in which mainstream opportunities are maximised in line with the guidance provided within Scottish legislation; reduce the number of Admissions groups who 'gate-keep' admissions to specialist provision.
 - 12.1 *Consider earlier intervention and support for children with significant and complex needs, and their families, and ensure close links with health professionals, so that the educational potential of each child is more fully considered at entry to nursery. Provide support to mainstream nurseries to meet the needs of a wider range of children and ensure skilled staff from the new special school have strong links with children with the most complex needs at the nursery stage.*
 - 12.2. *On the basis of an annual audit of needs and equitable allocation of support teachers and PSAs, and consideration of the appointment of skilled Inclusion Coordinators - over a period of time - presume that children will attend their local nursery/school, unless they meet the specific circumstances where the requirement of presumption of mainstream education will not apply.*
 - 12.3. *Take account of the expertise of the teachers and speech therapists in the 'Language Units' and consider alternative means of supporting a wider group of children with significant speech and language delay or disorder within their local school.*
 - 12.4. *Take account of the expertise in the 'Dyslexia Unit' along with the excellent mainstream practice, and consider alternative means of supporting a wider group of children with significant specific learning difficulties at an earlier stage within their local school.*
 - 12.5. *Consider the threshold of need, line management, links with health staff and impact of the Hospital and Home Tuition Service with a view to redefining roles and responsibilities. In particular, ensure the Inclusion team has a greater role in agreeing admission to this provision and that schools understand their responsibilities when a child does not attend school through illness.*

- 12.6 . *In light of the increasing numbers of children and young people with a diagnosis of autism in the absence of well understood inter-agency diagnostic methodologies and appropriate learning pathways, consider the place of Autism Outreach in terms of size, remit and line management.*
- 12.7. *The role and remit of the Visiting Sensory Services should be clarified to ensure improved collaboration with key people within each school leading to better dissemination of knowledge and strategies. The thresholds of need and caseloads of visiting services should be reviewed on a regular basis.*
- 12.8. *Within the context of the totality of support services, consider the nature of the management structure of the EAL service, and agree thresholds of need and consequent levels of support. Ensure that priorities which are linked to literacy within the Authority's Education Improvement Plan make reference to the skills, resources, experience and contribution of this service in relation to the development of (the English) language. The Authority should review links with EAL communities and consider how to support mothers, in particular, whose first language is not English.*
- 12.9. *Consider the future of TASCC, including line management and access to the service and ensure a wider role in delivering training such as digital examinations and its links with Call Scotland. Issues of responsibility for an audit and the continued maintenance of equipment already in schools also require careful consideration.*
- 12.10. *In order to more proactively support schools with the challenges of behaviour, devolve 75% of Pupil Support staff (teachers and PSAs) to ASGs, on an annual basis using information from the robust audit of individual pupil needs. It is suggested that these devolved members of staff will remain as 'central' staff and work in accordance with Authority guidance on practice, but will be managed on a day-to-day basis by the headteacher of each school. It is also recommended that 25% of PSS (teachers and PSAs) should be regarded as central additionality who can be deployed flexibly for stated timescales linked to planned outcomes, by the Inclusion team via the Head of Service (Inclusion). Their key role will be to support children as early as possible to ensure continued engagement with learning and earlier access to relevant services, as well as provide additional support to children and young people causing significant concern at any stage, despite the school having used a range of strategies and support.*
- 12.11.a. *In order to ensure earlier intervention and proactive support for children and young people with challenging behaviour and reduce the need for exclusion and part-time timetables, particularly for primary aged children, it is recommended that Cordyce school be replaced by two smaller provisions in different areas of the City, each supporting a maximum of 15 children aged from Primary 4 to Secondary 2, providing a Broad General Education and personalised planning.*
- 12.11.b. *In order to improve the life and work chances of young people at S3/4 and beyond and replace Cordyce with (a) Life-Skills Academy/ies (each) supporting 15 young people and provide pathways for an individualised balance of care and education which take account of the good practice in existing provisions.*

- 12.11.c. *Consider the appointment of two knowledgeable and experienced Service Leaders, working to the Head of Service, to lead, manage, support and monitor all provision for challenging behaviour, beyond mainstream schools. The postholders, who will have a lead role in promoting partnership working in respect of children and young people with challenging behaviour, will have the overview of all children and young people in provision additional to mainstream, as well as those young people whose mainstream placement and/or living situation is vulnerable.*
- 12.12. *In light of the need to offer parents and their children more choice about secondary school placements, develop capacity in all secondary schools to reduce pressure on the Bucksburn Wing. In the longer term consider how this provision sits within the continuum of provision.*
- 12.13. *Take account of approaches to inclusion within Mile End Primary School and clarify its place within the continuum of provision in meeting the needs of children with more complex needs, particularly autism.*
- 12.14 *Consider the place of the School for the Deaf within the continuum of provision, and reflect on alternative means of supporting children with significant hearing loss in their local school. This will include consultation with Aberdeen's Deaf community as well as taking full account of the national and international perspective. Longitudinal monitoring of the social and emotional needs as well as the academic attainment of the four children with cochlear implants is also important to help inform future strategy.*
- 12.15 *The plan to build the new special school must take the following important issues into account:*
- *Clarify criteria for admission for children with the most significant and complex needs*
 - *As a proposed centre of excellence, consider the special school as the work base for a number of visiting services and provider of outreach support to mainstream nurseries/schools for children and young people with complex needs*
 - *Take account of the broad and pivotal outreach role of the special school when agreeing the management structure*
 - *Ensure the accommodation takes into account the need for sufficient storage space for large equipment, suitable lighting and sound systems, hoists, suitable areas for intimate care, hydrotherapy opportunities, access to IT facilities and meeting rooms, including for parents*
 - *Agree who holds budget and overall management responsibility of expensive equipment, including for its inventory and maintenance*
 - *Agree the nature of partnership with all relevant Health staff*
 - *Improve post-school transition processes and opportunities for all young people with complex needs*
 - *Fully engage with parents and other partners throughout the process of the build and transition to the new premises*
13. Take account of the views of parents and young people in relation to:
- Earlier identification of needs
 - Improved approaches to identification, diagnosis and pathways for Autistic Spectrum Disorder
 - Development of a parent support group which focuses on the needs of children with ASD
 - Development of policy and guidance for improving approaches to gifted and talented children
 - Implementation of simple solutions which can support dyslexic pupils
 - More localised placements to reduce travel time for children

- Increased respite opportunities for children with complex needs
- Development of Authority guidance to schools about the timing of reviews, particularly transition reviews
- Improved partnership from schools with visiting specialist teachers, such as the sensory services
- Increased suitable post-school placements for children with complex needs
- Timeous communication about placements

14. Undertake an audit of staff skills, qualifications and training needs in order to develop a comprehensive training programme, for **all** managers and practitioners across Education and Children's Services, and their partners, to ensure high quality inclusive practice which effectively meets the needs of all. This includes dissemination of the electronic Support Manual, customised in line with Aberdeen's policies and procedures, to be updated in line with these recommendations, along with a collation of best practice.

15. Ensure robust succession work force planning, particularly in light of Aberdeen's difficulty in recruitment. Review the relative size of services and consider more equitable allocation of management roles across all support services.

16. In light of significant changes to systems, structures, procedures and practice as a result of this review, improve data management and develop a specific area on Aberdeen City's website which describes Aberdeen's approaches to inclusive practice for **ALL ABERDEEN'S CHILDREN**.

The recommendations require careful planning. An action plan will be shaped in collaboration with colleagues and linked with the aims within the working draft of inclusion. The aims are as follows:-

- *Effectively audit additional support needs in all schools and services to ensure a consistent and proportionate allocation of resources*
- *Organise structures and provision in a way which allows smooth transitions and flexible access to additional support when required*
- *Promote early identification and removal of barriers to learning through proactive strategies, support and reasonable adjustments*
- *Support schools and services to develop a range of suitably broad, innovative, flexible and personalised curriculum pathways which meet the needs of all, including the most able and the most vulnerable*
- *Ensure that all Aberdeen's children and young people are able to access and participate in positive and challenging learning experiences, which meet their needs and promote attainment and achievement, in their local community wherever possible*
- *Support schools and services to develop pedagogy which meets individual learner's changing needs in keeping with our Learning and Teaching policy*
- *Work in close and meaningful collaboration with all partners, including parents and third sector partners to maximise all pupils' life chances*

We look forward to collaborating with internal and external colleagues to take these recommendations forward together.