

<b>MAYOR AND CABINET</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Matters referred by the Children and Young People Select Committee – 20 September	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	Item No. 4 (addendum)
<b>Ward</b>	All	
<b>Contributors</b>	Children & Young People Select Committee	
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date: 3 October 2007

## 1. Summary

This report informs the Mayor and Cabinet of the comments/views of the Children and Young People Select Committee arising from discussions on the outcome of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) consultation and proposals for the future organisation and provision for children with SEN in mainstream and special schools and services needed to support them. These are set out in section 3 below.

## 2. Recommendations

The Mayor is recommended to:

- (i) note the views of the Children and Young People Select Committee as set out in section 3; and
- (ii) agree that the Executive Director for Children & Young People be asked to comment and provide advice on the views and recommendations of the select committee.

## 3. Children and Young People Select Committee Views

3.1 On 20 September the Select Committee considered the SEN report. In order to help to formulate its comments/views, the select committee received evidence from various groups and individuals.

3.2 The Select Committee supports the general view that there needs to be a change in SEN provision in the borough, particularly to reduce the number of out of borough placements, provide more outreach services and training in mainstream schools and improve the assessment process. The Committee supports the establishment of a new Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) school. However there are a number of concerns, particularly in relation to changes to existing special schools.

- 3.3 Many children likely to be affected by the proposals, including those on the autistic spectrum, react badly to change. Any disruption caused by the changes would have to be kept to a minimum and handled very sensitively.

Some issues that need to be addressed are detailed below:

### **3.4 A new ASD School**

- 3.4.1 The proposal outlined in the report calls for the establishment of a new ASD school on the Pendragon School site and for a commencement to the statutory process for the associated closure of Meadowgate and Pendragon special schools.

- 3.4.2 The following concerns and questions were raised in relation to the proposed new school:

- Whether the new school would be big enough to provide adequate indoor and outdoor space and the provision of a full range of different therapies to meet the needs of the wide range of autistic children.
- The 'all through' nature of the school presents challenges. Officers used Robert Ogden School as an example of an 'all through' model for 120 children. However, this is not quite the same as it runs from 8-19 with a residential facility and a full-time educational psychologist and speech and language therapist.
- It is not yet clear how the school would meet the full range of needs.
- Design issues would be critical. It would be important to allow for a separation of the different stages. Senior staff with considerable experience of ASD should be consulted at the design stage.
- A new media centre was opened at Pendragon School this year. It would be beneficial to retain this centre.
- It is likely that the on-site building work would cause difficulties for children with ASD.

### **3.5 Brent Knoll**

- 3.5.1 The proposal outlines a change in the location of Brent Knoll School to Leahurst Road on the site of the old Ennersdale School and to phase out primary specialist provision and replace it with specialist resource bases in mainstream schools (11.42-11.43 and 12.15).

- 3.5.2 The proposal to relocate Brent Knoll to Leahurst Road did not originally feature in the consultation and the committee urges the Mayor to ensure that full consultation is carried out on this proposal.

- 3.5.3 The committee noted the following issues:

- Brent Knoll is a centre of excellence with staff who are experts in their fields.
- The Brent Knoll site is not fit for purpose. To adapt it to meet the current needs would be expensive and it is not possible to reconfigure.
- The school provides for a mix of different children with sometimes conflicting needs.
- Brent Knoll parents expressed objections to the phasing out of primary provision in SEN schools and its transferral to mainstream schools.
- There was concern about the impact on staffing levels.
- The committee noted that the site seemed large for the education of 84 children and clarification is needed as to what additional use may be proposed for the accommodation.

### **3.6 Increasing Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools**

- 3.6.1 The proposals require 5 primary and 3 secondary schools to provide new resource bases with specialist staff for children with SEN.
- 3.6.2 The committee felt that the training provisions outlined in the document were lacking in detail. The committee wishes to know how the SEN Training Plan will be strengthened and would like a report from officers.
- 3.6.3 To enable inclusion to work, there would need to be a strong sense of partnership working between staff, pupils and parents.
- 3.6.4 There are concerns about the impact that the national shortage of speech and language therapists and occupational therapists would have on the implementation of the proposals.
- 3.6.5 There are concerns about class sizes in mainstream schools. Reduced class sizes, particularly in primary settings, would help to ensure that all children's needs are met.
- 3.6.6 There are concerns that the proposed reduction in statementing for low level needs could result in the inappropriate placement of some students in mainstream classes without adequate support and resources.
- 3.6.7 Concerns were raised as to whether the proposed resource units could support children with more than one need to the same standard as a special school.
- 3.6.8 The Committee commented that flexibility in the system is necessary so that children and young people can switch between specialist and mainstream schools as their needs change. Where a child's needs demand it placement at out of borough establishments should

continue. As far as possible there should be room for individual pupil and parental choice within the system.

- 3.6.9 Timescales are important. Any changes should not be rushed but introduced in a planned and incremental way.

### **3.7 Financial Aspects**

- 3.7.1 Although the officers stated that the financial plans are clearly set out in the report, the committee felt that the information lacked detail. In particular an element of double funding would be required whilst additional training for teachers in mainstream schools and the provision of specialist professional services was initially put in place.
- 3.7.2 The committee regrets the lack of financial details with respect to the capital programme and the future plans for the Meadowgate and Brent Knoll sites.
- 3.7.3 The committee would like some monitoring work to be undertaken to clarify whether the delegation of funding to schools is proving to guarantee sufficient funds to meet pupil needs.

### **3.8 General Comments**

Members would have preferred to have more detail in the report on some of the important aspects of the proposals. Members felt that the consultation process, which only received 182 replies, needs to be questioned and evaluated. If these changes are to be adopted, there would need to be regular monitoring and review of how they are working.

The Committee would like to thank Sally Fricker of SIGNAL, Debbie Lester of Brent Knoll, Jackie Paschoud, Chair of Governors of Meadowgate, Mark Elms, Headteacher of Tidemill Primary School and Emine Aktu of Pendragon School for their contributions at the meeting.

## **4. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report, however, the committee is calling for detailed information on the funding.

## **5. Legal Implications**

The Constitution provides for the Select Committees to report to the Mayor and Cabinet and for the Executive to consider the report within one month of receiving it.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Strengthening Specialist Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs.

If you have any queries on this report, please contact James Jennings, Policy and Research Officer, extension 49952 or Kevin Flaherty, Head of Business, & Committee, extension 49327.