

## **Q & A event 21 November 2018**

It was agreed that due to time constraints, and the large number of questions that had been submitted, those questions not addressed would be answered by the panel after the event. It has unfortunately not been possible to capture all contributions made on the day.

### **Education**

David Butler, Director of Education

Alison Farmer, Head of SEN

### **SEND provision in schools**

#### **Why are so few schools outstanding in SEND provision?**

Currently the Ofsted judgement on SEND provision in schools is not a standalone one, instead it is included in overall judgements.

The reporting under the proposed new Ofsted Framework (September 2019) will hold schools accountable for their SEN provision and related outcomes.

David explained that some teachers do not have, or only have limited, training in SEN in their initial teacher training. A lot of training is now on the job.

The LA are currently involved in a project that aims to improve the quality of SEN provision.

The project involves professionals from different types of settings and will be looking at meeting the inclusion needs in a locality – this will mean that schools will share their resources, expertise etc. The LA will provide financial support. The hope is that this collaboration will improve the inclusion offer in mainstream schools.

In response to a question from a parent re: pupils being moved to PRUs to manipulate schools reported data, David advised that schools needed to go through the proper procedures for this to happen. It was acknowledged that the LA were aware of these issues. David Butler has termly meetings with the Regional Schools Commissioner looking at the performance of academies and academy trusts. Any causes for concern (exclusions etc) are raised at those meetings. Similarly, specific issues are raised by David and his team with the headteacher of schools in question.

#### **What is Croydon doing to improve its ability to recruit and retain motivated, trained professionals in its SEND team?**

David explained that he assumed responsibility for this team in January 2018. At this time Alison and David both felt that the structure and processes in the SEND department were in need of improvement. It was evident that at transition points children were being allocated to new people, which was proving particularly problematic.

The re-structure has meant the recruitment of additional staff and parent representatives have been involved in the recruitment process. The team now includes more specialist positions and includes staff who have experience of SEN.

The child: staff ratio is less now and professionals can spend more time working with families.

Overall the re-structure should mean more engagement and a smoother journey for young people.

The consultation on the new OFSTED framework will start in January 2019 and PIP will be asked to facilitate that consultation with families.

A parent explained that her child's school had stated that they had been advised at a meeting with Alison Farmer that too many EHCPs are being issued and there weren't the financial resources for SALT etc. Alison explained that at the meeting referred to, the emphasis was on schools giving the right support at the right time. Alison explained that schools are given a notional SEN budget which is to be used to provide the support needed (when an EHCP hasn't been issued and for children for whom schools are expected to take responsibility). It was recognised that resources are a challenge for schools. A document has been compiled setting out the expectations for SEN support in mainstream schools. Please see attached.

What kind of training is available for teachers in mainstream settings?

In his role, David is doing what he can to push for compulsory SEND training as a part of all teacher training courses.

What is being done to address the shortfall of OT and SALT support for mainstream schools?

These are jointly commissioned with the CCG. If parents are aware that these services are not being delivered at school, they need to let the LA know.

The current contract is coming to an end and the LA are aware that the demand is high and they will take this into account in the new negotiations.

It has been suggested that parents and carers take the opportunity of feeding back experiences and/or thoughts about therapy provision during the period of consultation on the SEND strategy.

How is the Local Authority ensuring that SEND funding is making a difference to those it is aimed at and not just going towards the general school budget?

The LA are clear about the expenditure of the notional SEN budget in schools.

Within mainstream schools, an effective use of the budget is for staff to be trained to deliver programmes of support (e.g. SALT).

In response to a parent asking if these fragmented sessions may not be beneficial for children, it was explained that if their knowledge/skills are shared with other members of staff, the support can be more comprehensive.

A parent explained that it had taken 3 attempts for her child's EHCP to be accepted. Alison acknowledged that the LA had realised that schools needed further information about what needed to be submitted in EHCPs and this information has now been circulated.

## **Early Years**

What brought about changes to the Early Years SEND team? What's the current offer of that team? When is it expected to be out of its transitional period?

One of the aims of the restructure in the Early Years SEND team was to focus on early intervention and inclusion. The Early Years SEN Team is led by the Early Years Area SENCo, Pam Sokhi. There are three groups of practitioners within this team – Portage (providing home-based learning); SEN Inclusion and Intervention Practitioners (providing support for early years settings to assess and ensure the needs of children with more complex SEN are met) and Inclusion Co-ordinators (supporting EY settings in co-ordinating support and developing inclusive practice).

LA has established a panel to allocate inclusion funding in Early Years, targeted for a short period or personalised to meet the needs of children with more complex SEN. The aim is to provide continuation of personalised funding into reception class to support a smoother transition into school.

One of the attendees from an EY setting explained that they had applied for targeted funding but had not heard back. She highlighted how delays in provision of funding put huge pressure on staff and many are leaving. Alison invited her to join the panel to see how decisions are made.

### **Special schools**

A lot has been invested in autism but what about others without autism? Places for children with 'moderate special needs' are scarce and mainstream, especially in secondary, is not always the right answer.

Over the next 5 years there will be an expansion in the number of special school places. For example, St Nicholas school and Bensham Manor are expanding. There will be 244 more places provided over the next 5 years.

The LA is working with Croydon College with regards to the development of a specialist centre for 75 young people with severe LD.

Is the new free school going to offer its services to the wider ASD community, to improve wrap around care for working parents?

No it isn't. However, the school is expecting to offer the premises for use by the community. The LA also expect them to share their expertise.

A parent asked why it had taken so long to open an autism-specific school.

It was explained that previously children with autism had been supported in mainstream schools. In addition to this, over the past few years the LA had not been able to open any new schools – it was only recently that the government had agreed to fund the building of free specialist schools.

Could you clarify the process around appointing Orchard Hill Trust as the provider of that new free school?

The process for selection of the new free special school provider was set by the DfE (Department for Education). The framework for selection criteria was set, as was the process for joint moderation of applications for shortlisting and the joint interviewing of those applicants who were successfully shortlisted.

In Croydon we introduced a parent interview panel, which ran alongside the DfE and Local Authority panel. Both interview panels, in this case, arrived at the same outcome.

When will Croydon improve provision for children and young people with 'high functioning autism' who continue to fall through the gaps?

It is hoped that the increase in the number of special school places will go some way to filling these gaps.

### **Preparing for adulthood**

Post-16 provision needs overhauling. As it stands it does not give our young people the futures they seek. How will this be done? By when? And by whom?

The LA are about to consult on the post-16 strategy. A key area will be 'where are you going in life?' The aim is to develop what is available locally and the LA want to invite parents to the consultation.

The LA have piloted a programme to improve access to community services, employment etc. The council have sponsored 8 Internships with 6 of these young people securing employment.

There is a need to work with committed employers to extend such opportunities (possibly Fairfield and Westfield

What is being done to address the gap in commissioned services such as OT for the post-16 age group?

We acknowledge that this is a gap currently. Through the implementation of the three year SEND Strategy we will develop our analysis of need and the joint commissioning of services to meet needs. This will include a focus on Post 16 provision.

### **Tribunals/EHCPs**

How much public money is spent per year on SEN tribunals? What % of tribunals are judged in favour of the Local Authority?

Approximately £30K is spent on legal advice.

55% of Tribunal Appeals were found in favour of the Local Authority.

How do you respond to parents' concerns that the spend on tribunals is not a cost-effective way of protecting the high needs budget?

A key issue is the efficient use of resources when considering placement. This year the appeals found in favour of the LA in regard to placement have meant that placement costs were more efficient to the value of approximately £300,000 than they would have been had these appeals been conceded or lost.

Are tribunal outcomes fed back to the panels who decide whether to carry out EHCP assessments/issue plans?

Yes, there are regular updates to the Local Authority delegated officers who make decisions. The outcomes of tribunals are shared and lessons learned.

Would the LA allow a parent representative to sit on the panel?

Yes. This is something we would like to take forward during 2019 as part of our review of decision making. These developments will be taken forward from the new year and once all SEN managers are in post.

What are you doing to reduce the incidence of misinformation and application of blanket policy when it comes to EHCPs?

We have put information on the Local Offer website; there are regular SENCO forums and head teacher briefings. The Local Authority works hard to apply statutory SEN regulations fairly and equitably considering each case individually.

### **Local Offer**

How's the Local Offer working for the LA? What lessons have been learned since the soft launch in June?

The Local Offer (LO) is much better than it had been previously with information about 'What's on' being up to date. The old LO has been taken down. It was acknowledged that

the LO is difficult to manage and maintain. The contract is currently with Open Objects and the LA need to consider the future of managing the LO.

A parent explained that leaflets were needed for those parents who don't access the internet. Another expressed concern that the new LO is not fit for purpose with many gaps in content and lack of up to date information.

### **Voice of young people**

#### **How will you ensure that the voices of children and young people with additional needs and disabilities are truly heard in Croydon?**

The LA want feedback from both young people & their parents on the SEND strategy. The strategy will be circulated to all schools. There will be an easy-read version. Meetings will be set up to capture this feedback.

The period of consultation will run from 3<sup>rd</sup> December – 31<sup>st</sup> January.

A parent expressed concerns about those young people who are unable to express themselves and who needed continued support to be able to access opportunities to make sure their voices are heard.

David outlined the 4 SEND priorities:

- Ensure good quality Early Intervention
- Improve inclusion in schools
- Increase in-borough provision
- Improve the post-16 offer (in-borough with planned pathways into adulthood).

The priorities have been in response to parental feedback. It is a 3-year strategy which can be measured and challenged.