

Cumbria Schools' Forum – SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group

Notes of the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group held on Thursday 7 October 2004 at The Westmorland Hotel, Tebay.

Present: Mr A Abernethy (Carlisle Secondary), Mr R Alston (Foundation Secondary), Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools), Mrs S Fearn (representing Mr B Thomas), Ms S Gaston-Parry (Copeland Secondary), Mr S Hetherington (representing Mr C Brooksbank), Mr M Woodburn (South Lakeland Primary), Mr D Johnston (LEA) Mr E Chapman (LEA) and Mrs N Shiels (LEA)

Apologies: Mr C Brooksbank, Mr B Thomas, Mr E Tumelty, Mr M Hrynkow

	Action
<p>1. <u>Appointment of Chair</u></p> <p>In the absence of Mr P Shaw, Mr R Alston was appointed as Chair of the meeting.</p>	
<p>2. <u>Notes of the Meeting held on 13 July 2004</u></p> <p>The notes of the meeting held on 13 July 2004 were agreed as an accurate record.</p>	
<p>3. <u>Matters Arising</u></p> <p>There were no matters arising from the notes.</p>	
<p>4. <u>Special School Funding and Strategic Development</u></p> <p>A lengthy paper that followed up from the meeting of the group held on 13 July was tabled, with apologies, at the meeting. The paper outlined some key facts relating to special school funding and made some recommendations for action during the autumn term.</p> <p>In summary, the paper stated that Cumbria's special schools were not unduly unfairly funded. The paper went on to suggest that the budget of one of the five special schools should be scrutinised and analysed in detail. It was proposed that the school should be James Rennie.</p> <p>The SEN Working Group were very concerned at the length of the paper and, given its late receipt, they felt that it was not possible to give it proper consideration. Furthermore, the special school representative felt very strongly that the five special school heads should have an opportunity to discuss the report and, in particular, the recommendations relating to the analysis of one special school budget. It was suggested that it may be beneficial to extend this exercise to all special schools.</p> <p>The SEN Group therefore agreed that consideration of this item should be deferred</p>	

until the next meeting of the group.

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5. **Social Inclusion**

A report setting out proposals for revising the Authority's priorities for support and behaviour was considered by the group. Over the last 18 months extensive consultation had been undertaken with schools and other partners on the most appropriate funding mechanism and support that the LEA could provide to schools for the support of behaviour. All the views that had been expressed had now been summarised into a final report – Review of Support for Behaviour. This report was now the subject of further consultation with all interested parties and, as part of the process, meetings would be held around the County between 20 October and 17 November. The Sub-Group were asked to note the progress to date and also if they wished to express a view to be put forward to the Schools Forum.

The Sub-Group discussed the report at length and during the discussion several main points emerged:

- There was a feeling that the consultation paper was written in a way that 'led' the reader.
- Inclusive Cumbria, the policy adopted in Cumbria was an expensive option. It also went much further towards mainstreaming than many other authorities and Cumbria was as a national leader. Members were very proud of this policy.
- The general feeling was that behaviour was a worsening problem and the survey undertaken confirmed this – the number of exclusions in primary and secondary schools was increasing and the children being excluded were getting younger.
- There should be a proper analysis of the impact of 1 in 5 over the previous 10 years and perhaps a comparison exercise with another authority that had retained all its special schools to look at whether the number of 0% exam passes were increasing.
- There was a 'dragging down' effect and a 'critical' tipping point. Primary schools had more difficulty including children with behavioural problems as a result of this 'critical' tipping point.
- Learning Support Units were recognised as being very effective resources in the support of children and students but they were very expensive and at least one member of the group reported that the provision of an LSU in their school had contributed towards a large deficit budget.

The comments expressed by the Sub-Group would be fed into the consultation process and members of the Group would also make their individual points strongly at the appropriate consultation meeting.

In summary, the Group were sympathetic towards Inclusive Cumbria but felt very strongly that it required proper funding.

6. **Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant**

The Group received a report that summarised the utilisation of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant and asked the Sub-Group to recommend to the Forum that the LEA continue to retain the funding centrally.

A grant of £17,500 (50%) was received from the DfES through the Standards Fund and was matched by the LEA. The DfES would normally expect that at least 85% of this amount should be allocated and devolved to schools. In Cumbria's case and in recognition of the relatively small incidence of ethnic minority pupils. The DfES supported the view that it was more effective for the grant to continue to be managed centrally.

The Group expressed some concerns about whether or not the use of the grant represented value for money. The sub-group therefore agreed to recommend to the Forum that the LEA continue to retain the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant centrally but that some evaluation of how the grant was spent be established.

7. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Group should meet again on Wednesday 8 December 2004 at 9.30am. The venue would be confirmed.

Items to be discussed at the meeting would include:-

- i) Social Inclusion Funding
- ii) Strategic Facilities

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