

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

### Notes of the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group held on Wednesday 8 December 2004 at The Westmorland Hotel, Tebay.

**Present:** Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools), Mr C Brooksbank (Foundation Primary), Mrs S Fearn (representing Mr B Thomas), Mrs T Macur (representing Mr A Bryant, Cumbria Governors Council), Mr P Shaw (Allerdale Secondary and Chair of the Group), Mr M Woodburn (South Lakeland Primary), Mr D Johnston (LEA), Mrs A Graham (LEA) and Mrs N Shiels (LEA)

**Apologies:** Mr R Alston, Mr A Bryant, Ms S Gaston-Parry, Mr M Hrynkow, Mrs E Moffatt, Mr A Rutter, Mr E Tumelty, Mr M Yearsley

1. **Notes of the Meeting held on 7 October 2004**

The notes of the meeting held on 7 October 2004 were agreed as an accurate record.

2. **Matters Arising**

Any matters arising were covered elsewhere on the agenda.

3. **Special School Funding and Strategic Development**

At the previous meeting of the SEN Working Group a lengthy paper that outlined some key facts relating to special school funding and made some recommendations for action during the autumn term had been tabled. The group had been 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. The special school representative had also felt very strongly that the five special school heads should have an opportunity to discuss the report. The SEN Group had therefore agreed that consideration of this item should be deferred until the next meeting of the group.

Ann Graham, Access and Inclusion, explained that concern had been expressed about how SEN was funded and also the level of the funding. As a result, funding in Cumbria had been compared to that in other authorities and the paper had stated that Cumbria's special schools were adequately funded. There was, however, some disagreement from the special school heads so it had been suggested that there should be some closer scrutiny and analysis of special school budgets to ascertain problems. The Chair also expressed some concern regarding strategic facilities but it was explained the proposals relating to the strategic facilities were currently being re-written.

The special school representative then circulated a letter that set out the special

#### Action

school heads' collective response to the paper. The letter is attached as an appendix.

In presenting the letter to the group, the special school representative shared his view that the review could result in special school budgets being reduced. This view caused some concern to the other members of the group and it was agreed that DJ and AG would investigate fully the background to these concerns.

The letter explained that in view of the funding difficulties experienced by the special school heads, they would accept the suggestion that all five special schools be subject to budget analysis and scrutiny subject to the following conditions :

- budgets were not reduced as a result of the review (their perception was that case law and the discrimination act supported their view)
- there would not be, in light of the above, any clawback
- the problem of individual allowances still owed to Cumbria's special schools, a particular problem in the south of the county, must be resolved.

The special school representative explained that he was seeking the support of the SEN Working Group to take these three points forward as a recommendation to the Schools' Forum.

The group discussed the letter, and in particular these three specific points, at length. There were particular concerns about the first point, which stated that budgets should not be reduced as a result of the review. The point was also made that many schools from all the different sectors faced funding difficulties. During the debate a number of amendments were proposed, the final amendment was that the SEN Working Group expected that the proposed review would result in fair funding for special schools.

The letter also asked that no further action be taken regarding the paper, 'Developing all Cumbria's Special School – Meeting the Special Education Needs of all pupils with Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties', until the following two documents had been discussed by all interested parties including, the Schools' Forum. The documents were :

- The OFSTED Publication – Special Education Needs and Disability Towards Inclusive Schools, November 2004; and
- DfES SEN Removing Barriers to Achievement, the Government strategy for SEN

With regard to inclusion, there was a general feeling from the group that there was a lot of good work going on in the County however, the special schools did have some concerns. The group felt it was important to give proper consideration to these issues and those raised by the OFSTED publication. It was therefore

agreed that this be included as an item for discussion at a future meeting of the group.

In concluding the debate, the Chair summarised that following a lengthy discussion it had not been possible for the group to reach agreement regarding the proposed conditions of the review of special school budgets. The group did however agree that the letter should be included as part of the record of the meeting and that the two documents, as detailed above, should be given proper consideration, as well as being taken into account during the review of special school budgets.

4. **SEN Funding Issues**

Ann Graham circulated a paper that was relevant to previous discussion and a paper that dealt with issues specific to pupils of school leaving age. Advice was sought from the group as to the best way to progress. The group agreed that this item should be discussed properly at the next meeting of the group and that the information circulated today should be copied to the other secondary heads.

5. **Strategic Facilities – Funding**

A report that asked the group to note the proposed allocation for strategic facilities, including an additional £150,000 was considered. At its meeting on 17 November 2004 the Schools' Forum considered all the Council's proposed budgetary changes to the Schools Budget for 2005/06. Included was the proposal to increase spending on strategic facilities by £150,000 in 2005/06 and £220,000 in succeeding years. The Strategic Facilities Development Group had reviewed the current and future requirements and had agreed that all facilities would receive a minimum allocation of £31,000 (net of statements). This would ensure that funding was available for the equivalent of 1 FTE specialist teaching assistant and 5 hours specialist teaching time. Calculation of the additional allocation would be based on figures detailed in the report.

In discussing the report the special school representative expressed concern that this was moving away from equity. The Chair felt that this would be positive step but agreed that it would be useful to have more information available regarding equitable bandings. It was agreed to further consider this item at the next meeting of the group and that it would be helpful if an appropriate officer could be invited to attend to deal with any queries.

6. **Social Inclusion (Consultation Paper – Outcomes)**

The report – Review of Support for Behaviour had recently been the subject of consultation with all interested parties. It was reported that responses to the consultation were still being received and that the analysis was not yet completed. At this stage it was felt that the individual responses from secondary schools might have been better. There seemed, however, to be general support from secondaries

in favour of carrying on with strategic facilities whilst primaries were keen to establish nurture groups. A full report on the outcomes of the consultation exercise would be presented to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum on 14 January 2005.

7. **Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant**

At the meeting on 7 October 2004 the sub-group had 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. The Schools' Forum, at its meeting on 17 November 2004 had asked that any evaluation of the grant be initially considered by the SEN Working Group. A report that evaluated the utilisation of the Ethnic Minority Grant was therefore presented to the sub-group. The group did not however feel that the information presented was that which they had requested.

As a result, the group requested a further report providing information about the quality assurance mechanisms that were in place to monitor outcomes be presented to the next meeting of the group. If members of the group continued to have concerns about the grant then Bob White would be invited to attend a future meeting. The group recorded its thanks for the information provided to date.

8. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Group should meet again on Thursday, 24 February 2005 at 9.30am. The venue would be confirmed.

P&R/NJS  
5 January 2005