

REPORT TO: Children and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 28 October 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Children Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Scrutiny Topic – Independent Living Skills

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

1.1 To provide an update to the Board on the work undertaken on the scrutiny board to date.

2.0 Recommended that:

2.1 Board notes the update

2.2 Approves the recommendations proposed to date

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 A scrutiny group was established to undertake a review of how to further develop the effectiveness of the independent living skills taught to children and young people with ASD in Halton schools. The aim of the scrutiny group is to:

- Collect information on the experience of staff, children and young people;
- Identify good practice in the delivery of independent Living Skills in a variety of settings;
- Identify further opportunities to develop effective independent living skills for children and young people with ASD in schools utilising the existing skills and resources available.

3.2

The group have agreed that they need to adopt an approach that focuses attention on what is valued most in the existing system and generate curiosity as to what the future may look like if these values

are further developed. It is also aimed to highlight the schools and settings best attributes for staff and pupils so that positive practice can be shared and encouraged. Finally the group intends to explore how the acquisition of independent life skills could be improved for children and young people with social communication and autism.

4.0 **Progress to date**

4.1 The Group consists of number of elected members with a particular interest in supporting outcomes for children and young people with complex needs and Autism. The first meeting established the scope of the task and agreed an outline of plans of visit to a variety of settings, both in and outside of the Borough. The purpose of the visits was to understand the current practice and provision and listen to the views and feelings of both staff and children and young people.

4.2 Visits have already been undertaken to a number of settings. A summary of each visit is provided below.

Ashley School

Ashley school is now a fully accredited school designated to meet the needs of vulnerable higher functioning pupils with a diagnosis of ASC and those with identified Social communication difficulties. Aged 11-19.

The visit highlighted the impressive environment and knowledge and understanding of staff regarding their role in developing independence, confidence and social interaction in these pupils alongside progress in other curriculum areas.

The staff demonstrated huge enthusiasm for their work and pupils were extremely eager to talk about their role as well as their enjoyment in attending the provision. There was extensive use of environmental learning and development of independence skills. There was also significant emphasis upon the voice of the child and pupil views as well as strategic use of the School Council which is led by pupils. Pupils were confident in their communication with Councillors and happy to share their views and recommendations.

Brookfields School

Brookfields school is a Primary Special school catering for the needs of children with Complex need and Autism from nursery age to the end of key stage 2

There have been two visits to Brookfields School to date. The visits were undertaken by two groups of Councillors. The school is fully accredited as a National Autistic Specific provision and has held and

maintained this accreditation for a number of years. The development of independence begins early in this setting and parent classes are held to share good practice with staff. Staff is responsive to parents and work to support parents in developing appropriate structures at home.

The pupils engage in environmental learning programmes and develop independence skills to equip them for enjoying social activities both at home and school.

The provision is acknowledged as outstanding and significant use of Pupil Council is also evident here. Pupils make known their requests for social and interactive activities and support local charities.

Wargrave House

Wargrave House is an Independent out of Borough Provision designated and accredited School for Children and young people with Autism.

The Head teacher conducted the visit and there was no interaction with pupils .It is intended that a further visit is undertaken at Wargrave .

Cavendish School

Cavendish School is currently a Local Authority Day Special School. It is however looking to convert to academy status on 1st January 2014. It is designated to meet the needs of pupils with complex needs autism. The school has National Autistic Society Accreditation and meets a range of needs both physical and sensory from 11yrs.to 19yrs.

The visit was undertaken by Elected members and officers. The staff demonstrated enthusiasm for their work and pupils were eager to communicate about their interests as well as their enjoyment in attending the provision. There was extensive use of environmental learning and development of independence skills.

There was also significant emphasis upon the voice of the child and pupil views as well as strategic use of the School Council which is led by pupils. Pupils were confident in their communication with Councillors and happy to share their views and recommendations.

Independent travel instruction was in process and discussions with the tutor and pupils indicated the value, worth and enjoyment in this

activity. Pupils were developing the skills to equip them to be able to engage in walks and travel on transport independently. The pleasure and pride experienced by these young people was infectious.

Inglefield

The purpose of the visit to Inglefield was to view a unit in this provision that could extend provision and opportunities for further life skills teaching as well as overnight stays for pupils from Halton Settings. Councillors and officers and a Headteacher visited the provision and were extremely impressed with the possibility of providing support using this purpose built resource base. It is proposed that the possibility of this resource being commissioned by the school to provide extended experiences for young people as well as some element of respite for parents could be explored.

Simms Cross Primary School (ASC Resourced)

The visit to Simms Cross was undertaken by a range of Councillors as well as LA staff and Special School representatives. The group was encouraged to observe pupils with ASC and supported by the base, Integrate into mainstream class lessons with their chronological peers. They were well supported by additional staffing ratios, but encouraged to be as independent as their peers, The Inclusion and encouragement towards independence, in a safe environment was impressive and the pupils clearly enjoyed the process. Any concern or anxiety was dealt with swiftly and pupils were clearly happy and safe.

The visiting group was also able to meet with the pupils in a smaller group and encouraged to engage with the children in order to understand pupil's voice. The guidance sheets prepared by the school enable the visitors to approach the pupils with some understanding of their likes and dislikes. This was helpful as it ensured that the visitors were aware of pupil sensitivities. This is essential to know when dealing with pupils having this category of need. Pupils were happy to engage and wanted to illustrate to the visitors things that they felt they enjoyed and how they felt more

confident and able to do more for themselves.

- 5.0 The group of visitors then had the opportunity to meet with a parent of a current pupil and hear how attendance at the school had not only had a significant impact on his child's progress but had improved home life and confidence of both himself and his wife. It was a memorable and impressive visit.

The visiting group took suggestions and recommendations of ways in which the resource could be further developed to provide additional support for Independent Learning.

Next Steps

- 5.1 The opportunities for:

- Residential experienced for pupils that could offer life skills training in a more domestic environment was a suggestion that occurred through many of the settings visited.
- Advantages gained from continuing with the Local Authorities Strategy of provide resources, as far as possible to both Widnes and Runcorn based pupils.
- Extended use of Independent travel training.
- Extended use of technology, particularly in form of iPads.
- Extended use of mobility training.

The above were recurring themes raised during the visits. Recommendations to date:

- To provide opportunities for children and young people with ASC and social communication difficulties to access extended independence opportunities close to their homes in both Runcorn and Widnes.
- To investigate the possibility of commissioning the Independent Living Unit at Inglefield, in order to provide opportunities for residential training and experience for pupils Key Stages 2,3,4 & post 16
- To investigate the opportunity to commission existing available residential resource that may be immediately available within our current special school provision, in the

Widnes area.

Undertake further visits to mainstream resourced provision in Halton and compare with provision that may include residential provision in:

- Halton Provision in both Widnes and Runcorn
(See attached Provision Map for location of provision in Halton)
- Other neighbouring Authorities

5.2 The available data needs analysis in order to better understand the factors involved. Current service provision needs to be further developed to meet the needs of children and young people. There needs to be an agreed definition and understanding of Independent Living Skills and create a vision based on reflecting on what has already been successful and resulted in positive experiences for the children and young people. Need to identify how we can take into consideration the wishes of young people to acquire independent life skills particularly those young people with social communication and autism. Finally consideration needs to be made as to how the regional offer could be improved.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children and Young People**

Ensuring provision meets need within the Borough as well as the locality.

Supporting Local Offer Requirements set out in Section 3 Children & Families Bill 2013

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

To ensure that young people with Autism and Social Communication difficulties have every opportunity to develop independence skills.

To enable them to access employment wherever possible

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

To ensure that all young people in Halton have improved outcomes in particular Mental Health and well being

To ensure that these particular young people develop skills to understand how to look after their own needs wherever possible

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

To ensure that vulnerable young people have the skills to travel safely.

To encourage increased independence wherever possible

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
None

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Need to maintain, extend and further develop current provision to address increasing transport costs as well costs related to Out of Borough Provision.

7.2 Duty to respond to pupil and parent voice to ensure that young people are given the opportunity to remain in their local community. Need to improve outcomes for Children and young people with Autistic Spectrum condition and Autism

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Ensure that Children and young people with Special Educational Needs have their needs met locally

8.2 Providing Equal Opportunities having regard to the Equality Act 2010

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Equality Act 2010	Rutland House	Jennifer John
The Green Paper 2011		
Children & Families Bill 2013		
Draft Code Of Practice for Special Educational Needs October 2013		