

Statutory Consultation on the proposal to close the Resource Base for Pupils with Hearing Impairment and Specific Learning Difficulties at Westfield Primary School.

Wednesday, 28th September 2016 at 3.30pm

Parents/Carers and Public Consultation

In attendance:

Ann McIntyre	Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision (HBC)
Anita Parkinson	Divisional Manager – Inclusion (HBC)
Julie Metcalf	Lead Teacher for Hearing Impairment (HBC)
Lyndsey Hignett	Teacher for Hearing Impairment (HBC)
Catrina Gallimore	Capital Programme Planner – Education, Inclusion and Provision (HBC) (note taker)
Claire Dawes	Head teacher Westfield Primary School
James Parker	Assistant Head teacher Westfield Primary School
Joyce Docherty	Governor Westfield Primary
Chris Harvard	Westfield Primary
Hazel Badjie	National Deaf Children Society
Sally Etchelis	National Deaf Children Society
N Magdy	Parent

Ann McIntyre welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Purpose of the Meeting

It was explained that the purpose of the meeting was to allow questions to be raised regarding the second stage of the process (Statutory Consultation) on the Local Authority's (LA) proposal to close the Resource Base for pupils with Hearing Impairment (HI) and Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) at Westfield Primary School. The rationale behind the proposal would be explained and there would be the opportunity for questions.

A four week pre-statutory consultation took place between 22nd June and 20th July 2016. On the 15th September 2016, the Executive Board was provided with a report, notes of the previous consultation meetings and a summary of the responses received. Progression to the next stage was approved – this is known as a Statutory Consultation.

The Statutory Consultation is for four weeks from the 21st September until 19th October 2016. The LA does not respond to individual responses to a consultation. All responses will be summarised and the LA will provide a written response to queries/comments raised and submit this to the Executive Board as part of the report which will be tabled on the 17th November 2016. Executive Board will then determine whether the Resource Base will close on the 31st December 2016.

The notice was summarised by Ann McIntyre and it was explained that the demand has reduced for the Resource Base but that there is an increasing demand for support for children and young people with a hearing impairment in mainstream schools. There are no savings to be made as funding will be ring fenced to continue to support the three children that currently attend the Resource Base at Westfield Primary until they finish Primary School. Halton will also reinvest the funding in order to provide Peripatetic support across Halton and should it be necessary commission specialist placements from another local authority.

If the proposal is agreed, from the 31st December 2016 Halton will cease to admit any pupils to the base and will begin recruitment for a specialist Peripatetic Teacher.

The current pupils that attend the base will continue to be supported until they leave Primary School, in exactly the same way as they are now, with a signer, a Teaching Assistant and support from one of the Specialist Teacher,

All those that attended the meeting were advised to comment again as this is a separate consultation to the pre-statutory consultation which took place in June. The deadline for response is the 19th October 2016. Paper copies of the feedback form were offered, and they were also advised that responses can be made via an online form by following the link www.halton.gov.uk/westfield.

Questions/Comments

1) I am a parent of a pupil that is in the base and I think it's a travesty that you are closing the base and penny pinching. The base is the best place for HI children to learn.

Halton have an Early Years Team who supports the HI children and their families, and a Teaching Assistant does Speech and Language work with them.

There are 14 children in Halton who are profoundly deaf, 3 attend Westfield Primary and the remaining 11 are in mainstream school. All 14 children are doing well with the Peripatetic support they are provided with.

This is not about penny pinching. There are a lot of children in mainstream schools who require support. This is not a disinvestment; it is about targeting the funding to need. Removing the Resource Base will allow this funding to be invested into increasing the level of peripatetic specialist teaching and non-teaching available across Halton, so that the needs of those children educated in a mainstream setting that require additional support can best be met.

2) What about the future?

We will be putting investment into strengthening the support for HI pupil's mainstream schools.

Based on information available and conversations with parents of HI children, they are opting for mainstream schools, therefore there is not the demand for a Resource Base.

3) Hazel from National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) thanked Halton for keeping them involved and praise was given for how well the process has been communicated at each stage.

The NDCS have noticed a change across all LAs and are seeing two main routes either to 'mothball' the bases or reinvest into a Peripatetic service. They do not want the outcome for deaf children to change. An 'outcome' driven decision is more palatable to a 'financial' driven decision.

It was confirmed that the outcome of this proposal will allow children to stay in schools within their local community.

4) Hazel commented that parents need to know that although the base will close, parents still have a choice.

She also advised that acoustic investment is important in schools and capital investment should be made.

The LA stated that the money saved during the recruitment exercise can be reinvested into any capital improvements required.

The authority also has a capital fund that schools can bid for to address accessibility issues.

5) Hazel also recommended in the Equality Impact Assessment that the LA has completed, reference could be made to the steps that will be taken to retain the member of staff who is a Level 6 in Sign Language. Everything should be done to retain these skills.

This was acknowledged by the LA.