

## **Children and Young People Select Committee**

### **Evidence Session - Notes**

**16 April 2018**

#### **Attendance**

Committee: Cllrs Clark, Inman, Hewitt, Watson, Hampton, Walmsley, Peter Snowden

Officers: Diane McConnell, Joanne Mills, Peter Mennear

In attendance: Cath Hitchen, Professional Adviser for SEND, Department for Education

#### **Apologies**

Cllr Cunningham

#### **Notes**

The informal session of the Committee had been arranged in order to discuss the Review of Inclusion with Cath Hitchen, SEN and Disability Professional Adviser, at the 0-25 SEN and Disability Unit, Department of Education.

Cath Hitchen is one of seven Professional Advisers for SEND appointed to advise the Department for Education. The Advisers are not Civil Servants and have a specialised role in advising the Department, using their experience, taken mainly from their roles in Local Authorities. Cath had worked in a number of school settings, including alternative education prior to her role as an Assistant Director in a Children's Services Department.

It was noted that many pupils with challenging behaviours may have unidentified SEND needs, and if so this would affect their experience of the school system. Pupils with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities will have access to a formal system of assessment and planning but, where a pupil's behaviour has not been previously identified as being linked to SEND, this would be addressed in a different fashion, through behaviour policies. Often in a 'crisis management' manner rather than a planned response in line with SEND practice.

Schools are potentially open to challenge under disability discrimination legislation if all issues related to SEND are not considered during the exclusion process. Are Governors fully aware of this? What does their training cover?

This impact of unmet needs was highlighted, particularly in relation to Speech and Language Therapy (SLT). Pupils unable to express their thoughts and effectively outline their point of view as to what happened during specific incidents are more likely to be marked down as being poorly behaved, potentially from an early age. There are similar trends into risky behaviour, and youth offending over the long term.

Research has suggested improved screening of SLT needs within school can lead to improved outcomes, and greater insight into what is driving behaviours. In one local authority, Reception teachers had been trained to spot if children had reached the level of language development

needed to effectively access the primary curriculum. This had led to better quality referrals, and enabled the council to identify the backgrounds of the children that were referred.

In the Adviser's opinion, the mark of a good school when supporting their most challenging pupils included:

- Whether an analysis of the cohort of challenging pupils was undertaken;
- If this included an assessment of when pupils displayed behaviours, which lessons/out of lesson periods, and which teachers.

This approach can be challenging for schools but can lead to greater insight and enable an assessment of whether pupils are accessing the curriculum.

Raising standards and a particularly restrictive approach to behaviour do not necessarily need to go together. A focus on minor issues can also conflict with the need for young people to develop as individuals, and strict policies do not always allow for children to atone for individual situations using a restorative approach.

It is conceivable that schools may focus on strict behaviour policies in response to the Ofsted inspection regime. However, Members were informed that Ofsted focus particularly on whether a school knows its pupils well enough to identify who is making progress. This can only be done well if pupils are able to access the curriculum.

Teachers need to be supported to be able to deal with challenging behaviour in class in a positive manner.

It was noted that parents may not always feel able to challenge schools and be aware of their rights.

It was crucial that schools accessed locally available support in a timely manner, particularly Early Help and SEND, and this did not always happen.

The importance of schools working closely with their local family of schools and their local authority was particularly highlighted.

A key suggestion for the Committee's review was to flag up examples of effective joint working so that all schools were aware of the support that is available and the good outcomes that can be achieved.