

EVERY SPECIAL SCHOOL MATTERS

A REPORT INTO THE IMPLICATIONS OF DELIVERING THE EXTENDED SERVICES AGENDA IN AND AROUND SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN HAMPSHIRE

When we say that every child matters, we mean every disabled child too. Delivering on our vision is a further sign of that commitment across government.

Disabled children have to be considered as a priority: a local priority for local agencies and services, and a national priority for central government.

Ed Balls MP May 2007.



Phil Dickinson and Ian Fordham

Introduction

This report summarises the findings of research into the strategic development of the Extended services agenda in and around special schools in Hampshire. The project was commissioned by special school headteachers with funding from Hampshire County Council and took place between December 2006 and June 2007. It is one of a number of documents arising from the study, including a personalised position statement for each school, an extended services toolkit for special schools and a summary report for headteachers.

The research project was wide ranging and had a particular focus on improving outcomes for disabled children, young people and their families. It aimed to explore how special school headteachers in one local authority could respond to this important government agenda. It consisted of a detailed audit of existing provision, the production of a map of potential partners in the voluntary, community and statutory sector and an identification of challenges but also solutions to the delivery of extended services in and around special schools. The project was unique in that it also sought sustainable funding to take forward its key messages and was successful in helping the headteachers to secure funds to appoint a new extended services partnership manager, with a specific responsibility to work with schools and cluster managers across the county to deliver a range of new services for children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities and their families.

After an extensive period of consultation with all 26 special schools and a range of stakeholders including staff, parents, children and young people, this report highlights some of the key findings of the project and was launched at the Every Special School Matters event on 10 July 2007.

We anticipate that the report will be of relevance to schools, voluntary and community sector organisations, local authorities, policy makers and government in providing more accessible, relevant and personalised services to some of the most vulnerable groups in society.



National Policy

The Government wants all children to have the best start in life but the reality is sometimes starkly different. Disabled children are more likely to be brought up in poorer socio-economic households, are less likely to achieve at school and experience poorer rates of employment on reaching adulthood, even when the comparison is only with those disabled children with non-cognitive impairments. Furthermore, a recent Social Exclusion Task Force Report identifies that mothers of disabled children are less likely to be employed than their peers and that many parents experience high levels of stress, leading to a disproportionate level of relationship problems and marital breakdown.

The Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda, launched in 2003, aimed to provide a more 'joined up' approach across a range of services including education, social care and health, to make services and support more accessible and target the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. The Extended services agenda is one of the many highly visible mechanisms for delivering the 5 ECM outcomes, by encouraging schools to provide access to a range of services, in and around the school. It is widely acknowledged, however, that delivering the Extended services 'core offer' presents major challenges for special schools, in providing accessible activities and services to parents and children who most need them, around the school and in their own area. It is also a challenge for schools to balance the requirements of the ECM agenda with the seemingly conflicting messages about school improvement and raising standards.

In recent months, a more holistic set of policies and priorities are starting to emerge. A new government mantra of 'no school standards without ECM, no ECM without school standards' is being promoted and all schools are increasingly recognising that the pursuit of improvement cannot be delivered exclusively from within one school, separate from its neighbouring schools and from the wider community. The recent HM Treasury report *Aiming High for Disabled Children* argues that much more help is needed and recently committed £340 million of investment to improve outcomes for disabled children towards:

- improving access and empowerment of families and young people
- responsive services and timely support when it is needed the most; and
- improving quality and capacity of support including more accessible childcare and short breaks

plus a new national indicator on services for disabled children, and a 'core offer' for families to help end the variation in services between areas.

But national initiatives and short term funding can only achieve so much. Parents and local communities are now being empowered by government to take greater control over the planning and delivery of local services, including a responsibility to meet the needs of all children. The next wave of policy is to take this level of transformation into schools, to act as hubs of health, social care and respite services as well as learning for the whole community. This change requires a renewed level of support and investment in school leaders, but also a recognition that they cannot deliver this complex agenda alone. As Steve Munby, the Chief Executive of the National College for School Leadership recently stated:

We have to challenge our fundamental concept of the headteacher as the person who is accountable for everything... One of the crucial things that needs to change - and it still hasn't happened sufficiently in every school is for leaders to delegate strategic responsibility and accountability as well as management and operational responsibility. Increasingly now, heads are choosing which bits they are going to lead and be accountable for and which bits others in the team are going to lead and be accountable for and, indeed, which bits others will report upon directly to governors

At the time of writing, we have a new prime minister and a clear statement to link children, schools and families in policy and practice. There has arguably never been a better time for organisations at all levels of the system to work more closely together to improve the life chances of disabled children and their families.

Key Findings

Reflections on current practice: the core offer of extended services

Parenting support

There is considerable evidence of highly effective home school liaison and parenting support in most special schools. Parents and carers commented frequently about the schools being the first and sometimes main point of contact for support, not only with their child's learning but with wider family issues and concerns. Parenting support needs to be seen, not as a separate initiative, but as part of the core business of the school in raising achievement and improving children's well being. As a number of headteachers pointed out in the study, the learning needs of children and young people can no longer be seen in isolation from their family and community context.

Varied menu of activities and childcare

It is clear that whilst clubs and activities do take place in most special schools during the school day, out of school hours learning opportunities after school, and childcare provision, are not accessible to the majority of children and families. In addition, there are few examples of inclusive provision in mainstream schools and community settings that can be accessed by children with SEN and disabilities. In our view, this area of the core offer has the greatest potential to transform the quality of life of children and young people and their families, but cannot be delivered by special schools alone.

Swift and easy access to targeted and specialist services

All special schools have highly effective arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people and reviewing and monitoring progress, enabling early identification of emerging difficulties. Many schools have developed their own multi agency teams, drawn from health, social care, education psychology and therapy services. The strength of this work is in the quality of relationships and the trust developed between local practitioners that allows ongoing dialogue and inter-professional collaboration. The exemplary multi-agency work embedded in the majority of special schools should be used to inform mainstream school practice across Hampshire. Special schools have the potential to become 'Centres of Excellence' for inclusive, multi agency working and act as professional development centres for the wider children's workforce.

Community access

The opportunities for special schools to share their facilities with the wider community are often limited because of a lack of available space suitable for community use. However, where there are specialist facilities, a number of schools ensure that the community does have access. In many special schools the key resource that can be offered to the local community is not the built environment but their intellectual capital, in particular their knowledge, expertise and commitment to meeting the needs of all children. Through their outreach work, resource development and training, special schools are already supporting many children and young people in mainstream schools and the wider community and thereby building social capital. The schools are responding to a 'community of need' as much as to their local geographically defined community.

Making it happen in schools

Buy in and support for the extended services agenda

All Hampshire special schools have been identified by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OfSTED) as good or outstanding and delivering a quality service for their pupils. The extent of buy in and support for the extended services agenda varied across the schools, ranging from a perception of it as 'just another initiative' and 'a distraction from the core business of the school' to a view of it being 'the model of future schooling' and 'a real opportunity to put the needs of parents and the community at the centre of our work'. Whilst schools' starting points to this agenda are undoubtedly different, there is a genuine shared vision amongst special school headteachers for a holistic approach to the child or young person's education, learning and social development that reflects the principles underlying extended services. An area of challenge for school leaders, governors, school improvement partners and OfSTED is seeing the positive potential of this agenda to meet whole school targets and priorities, and identifying the best way of putting parents, families and the community in a more prominent role in shaping the future direction of the school.

Tackling challenges and removing barriers

There are significant challenges to meet and many barriers to overcome in the delivery of extended services to children and young people with SEN and disabilities. The answers are not 'out there', but will instead be found locally and special schools will be critical to their discovery and implementation. There are many good examples of special schools responding to the

challenges and identifying ways to overcome the barriers - through collaborative working between schools; through outreach and professional development work to build understanding, skills and capacity within the wider community; through acquiring specialist status and developing a community plan with other partners; through workforce remodelling, developing new roles and responsibilities and restructuring leadership teams as extended services become more embedded in the core business and staffing structure. Special schools are pivotal to the success of securing inclusive extended services across local communities, building the skills and understanding not only of staff in mainstream schools but in the wider children's workforce, in the public, private and community and voluntary sectors.

Children and young people's voice

In Hampshire, the rights, respect and responsibilities agenda has led to an increased recognition that children and young people need to play a more active role in the development of the life of all schools. In the special schools there are many positive examples of participation, including student councils, local young people's forums, consultation with young people in projects such as 'Hear by Right' developed with local agencies such as Connexions. Disabled children and young people must be empowered to shape and direct services at a local level, including those provided by schools. This move is welcomed by most headteachers as an extension to the positive and inclusive ethos of the school, but can also present practical challenges including appropriate methods of engagement, capacity and time and the avoidance of tokenistic approaches to participation. There is a need to investigate appropriate methods of consultation and engagement to be shared across all schools and appropriate training identified to support staff to utilise these tools.

Parental engagement and partnership

Building a genuine partnership with parents leads to a significant re-think of the relationship between home and school. Services which involve users in their design and implementation are more likely to succeed with those they are trying to help. All schools, through their planning cycle, need to evaluate the extent to which parental engagement is embedded in school improvement planning and what is done to consult and involve parents in service delivery. Home school partnership work, in its varied guises and job titles, is an extended service that needs to be an integral element in the staffing structure, not an added extra that is dependent on ear marked delegated funding.

Collaboration between schools

Traditionally, many special schools have been relatively isolated from the wider community of schools and one of the main criticisms of separate special schooling is that it can reinforce barriers to a more equitable society, taking children and young people away from their home community and removing the responsibility from mainstream schools to be truly inclusive. Hampshire's extended services strategy, creating geographically based extended school clusters across the county and funding cluster coordination and management posts, will provide opportunities for targeted collaboration, and special schools are pivotal in ensuring that the needs of children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their families are understood and met. The additional resources that the Special School Headteachers' Conference successfully bid for will also add capacity to the local authority's commitment to delivering access to the core offer to all children, young people and families by 2010. The learning, social and health needs of children and young people cannot be delivered by schools working in isolation, and the extended services agenda reinforces the need to work in partnership with other schools

Relationships and trust with other agencies

As locality based multi agency teams and more integrated services develop across the local authority through the Change for Children agenda, the existing multi agency working nurtured over many years by the special schools could be unpicked as agencies withdraw staff from such informal arrangements and deploy them through the new structures. Relationships take time to develop; trust has to be earned. A significant determinant for future success in the extended services agenda in delivering the ECM outcomes for children and young people will be the way in which school leaders and partner organisations approach their interdependency and recognise the importance of investing in building the trust essential to effective partnership working.

QUOTES...

“ We have an after school club and we do dancing and have a snack and watch TV and have a special t-shirt ”

“ Building sandcastles that are immediately kicked over - you can never get to where you want to be ”

“ I like being with my friends ”

I'd like more clubs at lunch time. I get tired at the end of the day

“ Fishing is good. I'd like to go fishing ”

“ I like doing sport best. And making food ”

“ I like playing what time is it Mr Wolf ”

“ I LIKE PLAYING WITH MY BABY BROTHER...AND MY DOG ”

“ People always look at the negative - what she can't do. I want more opportunities for people to see what she can do because she's brilliant ”

“ The people who have the skills and understanding that mean that my son can join in with other kids and have a good time are priceless. And yet they are undervalued and badly paid, if paid at all. That needs to be turned on its head ”



Recommendations

For mainstream schools

- To be much more proactive in their joint working and engagement with special schools, including identifying opportunities for joint delivery, planning, co-location of activities and services and the exchange of resources and expertise.
- To be inclusive in cluster, federations and collaborative arrangements, to ensure special schools are equal partners in the delivery of the extended services agenda.
- To work with special schools and the local authority to identify the children and young people with disabilities living in their catchment area, but attending schools outside the locality, and provide access for them and for their families to services and facilities in their home community.

For voluntary and community organisations

- To share information about locally delivered services, networks and practical support in delivering services for children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their families.
- To develop partnership agreements and arrangements with special schools that add capacity to both parties and lead to joint bids and sustainable development for both organisations.
- To work with special schools to meet the needs of those children and young people with learning, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties who experience exclusion and rejection from the wider community and whose disability attracts blame rather than empathy.

For local authorities

- To sign up to the Every Disabled Child Matters Charter and review their extended services strategy and related policies to ensure that the needs and aspirations of children and young

people with SEN and disabilities are addressed. Practical issues, such as home to school transport arrangements, must facilitate rather than act as barriers to participation in extended services.

- To work with Primary Care Trusts, schools and other agencies to engage children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their families in the design and delivery of extended services appropriate to their needs.
- To invest in the concept of special schools becoming 'Centres of excellence' in inclusive, multi agency working, supporting the delivery of local authority strategic priorities, and the development of a children's workforce equipped and committed to inclusive services and facilities.
- To 'join up' agendas - extended services, locality teams, children's centres; special school outreach; school improvement; respite and childcare - thus strengthening the continuum of both school and community provision.

For national government

- To recognise the significant challenges associated with delivering the extended services agenda in special schools and provide appropriate specialist support, guidance and funding to enable school leaders to meet the extended services core offer target by 2010.
- To align national work on the future role of special schools more explicitly with the extended schools agenda. Special school outreach work, their training and professional development expertise and their designation as specialist schools could provide the wider community access to the knowledge and training essential to the delivery of inclusive provision.
- For the new Minister of Children, Schools and Families to put in place practical strategies and policies across the department, and across government, that deliver his long term goal of 'transforming the lives of disabled children and their families'.



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About the authors

Phil Dickinson

Phil is a leading extended services consultant with considerable experience in teaching and in senior local authority roles in Special Educational Needs, Pupil Services and School Improvement in Dorset, Portsmouth, Richmond and Hampshire. He is currently the South East England Development Manager for the Extended Schools Support Service, working with 19 local authorities and many schools across the region in developing Extended services. He has managed and led major school and community consultation exercises in, Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth and Oxfordshire.

Ian Fordham

Ian is Director of Big Picture, a leading education and children's services consultancy specialising in strategic research, policy and resource development in the areas of Extended services, Every Child Matters (ECM) and Future Schooling. With ten years experience in teaching and the voluntary sector, he was most recently Head of Policy at the national charity ContinYou and Director of Learning and Development at a leading educational think tank. He is currently managing a major research project into the leadership and career development implications of the ECM agenda for the National College for School Leadership, alongside consultancy work with local authorities and government across the UK.

