

BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT TASK AND FINISH REVIEW

15th May, 2006

PRESENT – Councillors Armstrong, Copeland, Francis and Long; Pat Howarth, Head Teacher at Hummersknott School and Allison Carling, Democratic Support Officer.

The following issues were discussed :-

- The Group wanted to ascertain whether the school felt that there was enough support from the LEA and if it was the correct support and accessible enough.
- Mr. Howarth felt that it was a difficult question to answer, but generally did not feel that the school did get enough support, although he did appreciate that there was a high level of demand for the service across the borough.
- Hummersknott School has a high level of fixed term exclusions of 5 per cent (compared to the national rate of 8 per cent) and the school has had 3 permanent exclusions this year and 112 fixed term exclusions (although 63 of the fixed term exclusions are linked to 16 particular students).
- The School creates clear boundaries on what action will result in an immediate exclusion: violence against another person, provocation and foul or abusive language to staff. There is also a clear Code of Conduct, of which the students have had an input, which clearly defines reasonable behaviour.
- There is on-going staff training in behaviour management and the need to ensure consistency of approach from the 120 teachers.
- The school aims to deliver an ethos to develop good behaviour and ultimately good citizens.
- Parents are generally supportive of the school ethos, although there are the minority who will not engage in the children's education.
- The Group discussed the difficulties with Hummersknott School created by the variables of pupils at the school, their residential location and social backgrounds.
- The Group tried to ascertain from Mr. Howarth what additionally he would require from Children's Services and whether this was better to be proactive or reactive.
- At present, the school of 1200 pupils, receives half a day a week Teaching Assistant for anger management, half a day every 2 weeks every other half term from the Outreach Service and EOTAS respite, although presently that service is clogged with the high level of fixed term exclusions.
- There were a number of students at the School who were extremely challenging and there are general low aspirations of children at the school and in Darlington as a whole.

- Non-vocational qualifications and the lack of lower skilled jobs and apprenticeships.
- The availability of the 14-19 curriculum which will give pupils more flexible routes.
- The need for better mechanisms for guidance in Year 9.
- The need to look at Key Stage 3 and stress numeracy and literacy skills particularly in the less able students. Primary pupils currently have STATS and these will also include numerical marks to help define the status of a child. Age 11 pupils will also be tested for reading age.
- The System in place at the School is initially for the subject teacher to take responsibility for behaviour, if further support is needed that would come from the Head of Subject, if further support is needed then the Head of House, along with the form mentor (tutor) would be called, followed by the Leadership Team.
- There is a facility for 'Time Out' in every lesson and a Teaching Assistant to work with behavioural support in isolation and anger management (funding by the school). The Resource Centre is also available.
- The school does not have an isolation classroom due to lack of resources, however a school counsellor is employed (seconded from the Early Intervention Team) to give time and support to individuals and their families.
- The School Counselling Service disclosed that a high proportion of boys referred disclosed domestic violence.
- Mr. Howarth stated that the remits of the different agencies involved were very defined and he felt that a more flexible approach was needed and also that the agencies needed to come together more often. There is also no alternative to a permanent exclusion, McMullen House Referral Unit was full so it was a Catch 22 situation. Mr. Howarth also had concerns with the EOTAS outreach service and felt it would be interesting for the Council to see what other authorities did.
- Mr. Howarth gave his ideas for alternatives to permanent exclusion being Skills Plus at Key Stage 4 and alternatives in Key Stage 3 for flexible care.
- There is no threshold on fixed-term exclusions and no alternative but to either permanently exclude or put up with the behaviour.
- With regard to the move to Children's Services, Mr. Howarth felt that this was an opportunity to re-think and re-model.
- In response to a question being raised with regard to a possible link between discipline and behaviour, Mr. Howarth agreed that there was a link but there are inconsistencies in class and a general lack of clear boundaries which he felt that children needed, and this is a message he continually reminds his staff to deliver.

- The need to celebrate education more and rewarding children for good behaviour, however the school should be there to reinforce good behaviour but not be expected to teach it. Celebrate achievements in other fields also and not just academic.
- The disadvantages of not having a sixth form at the School.
- General problems associated with the design of the school and not being able to bring all 1200 pupils together in one area.
- An 'Audit of Need' to be carried out amongst all Secondary Schools.
- Better provision for permanently excluded pupils.
- Children's Services now focuses on the child as a whole and not just education.
- The need for fresh thinking at all levels and not to be too constrained by what is presently being done.
- The system is presently clogged and at crisis point and therefore not meeting the needs of the schools and ultimately the pupils.

IT WAS AGREED – That a further meeting be arranged to discuss issues arising from today's meeting with Margaret Asquith, Director of Children's Services and Gill Walker, Head of Pupil Support.