

## Report on Special Educational Needs Conference

The DAGB SEN conference was held at Hillcrest School on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017. There were 31 governors in attendance.

The DAGB Chair, Brian Patterson, explained that the Association had organised the evening to give schools an opportunity to “tune in” to SEND and the issues faced by all schools in this area of work.

The presenter for the evening was Lorraine Stephen, Interim Lead for SEND and Special Schools in Dudley. Lorraine gave brief details of her professional and personal background, all of which had been biased towards young people with special needs. The session had been based around questions previously posed by governors via the Association.

The purpose of the meeting was to give governors a greater insight into the profile of the SEND population in Dudley, the range of specialist provision in Dudley, the basics of SEN funding, facts and figures and the Authority’s consideration of these, the forthcoming SEN peer review and local area inspections of SEND.

The percentage of pupils with SEN support in all schools had remained fairly static since 2014; however Dudley have a higher number of pupils in this category compared with both national and regional data. IN 2016/17 there were 6,738 children (14.3% of the Dudley school population) in receipt of SEN support. ***Governors were advised to ask questions around how children were identified in schools, whether there are too many/too few and what was done to address their needs.*** The percentage of pupils with a statement or EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) had been fairly static for two years; approximately 1,400 pupils (2.6%) in Dudley had plans in place. This was the lowest percentage compared with regional and national data. Lorraine felt that this may represent the valuable work undertaken in Dudley schools which meant that young people did not have to progress on to EHCP.

In mainstream primary schools the most common issue was speech, language and communication; The number of Dudley pupils exceeded regional and national averages in this area. Information had been collated from the school census returns regarding SEND, so data accurately reflected the needs in schools. The data would also be used to procure services for the pupils. It was surprising to see that there were as many as seven children in mainstream primary schools who had been diagnosed as having profound and multiple learning difficulties.

In mainstream secondary schools the number of pupils reported as having speech, language and communication needs dropped dramatically. The shift was towards social, emotional and mental health issues and specific learning difficulties.

The Authority intended to look very closely at the numbers of pupils with moderate learning difficulties placed in a special school, which did not reflect the national picture. Consideration would have to be given to the complexity of their needs and whether these could be met with high quality teaching in mainstream schools.

The numbers of places (PAN) in special schools was detailed, and governors from two schools pointed out that these had been exceeded to meet actual needs. An explanation of other specialist provision was also given, and how this concentrated on specific needs. In addition, there were specialist services such as Area SENCos (part of the Early Years Advisory Team). Area SENCos are not a statutory requirement but it was recognised that schools should have access to this support at the

earliest stage. The specialist inclusion services comprises a range of teams working with children from birth; the core service is free to schools. The Learning Support Service is a traded service for schools, and offered intensive learning for KS2 and peripatetic teaching. The service also offered accredited training, bespoke where needed, and facilitated SENCo meetings. The Education Psychology Service is part traded, in order to be able to best meet school needs. The SEN team were the key team to work with all relevant parties who need to contribute to the development of an EHCP plan and to provide a point of contact for families. Statutory deadlines had to be met – 20 weeks for its issue from an initial request for an EHCP.

SEND funding was provided via the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant), and this was made up of three elements. Element 1 is the core funding (basic per pupil funding) and it was expected that the majority of funding for SEND provision, including the employment of a SENCo (statutory requirement) and resources, would come from this element. Element 2 is additional funding (“notional SEND funding”), and schools should provide up to the first £6,000 of additional support for children who need it, including those with an EHCP. Not all children would need the full £6,000. This funding was not transferable, as it is not ear-marked for a specific child. Element 3 is the high needs block funding (“top up” funding) managed by the LA’s SEN panel. Schools seeking this contribution are required to provide evidence that progress rates have not improved and gaps have not been closed by other methods. This funding would be ear-marked for the child, in addition to any funding allocated via elements 1 and 2. The high needs funding could be allocated to pre-school children or up to 25 year olds with an EHCP. There is £30 million allocated to this budget, which is already overspent.

In September 2017, 352 out of 1576 pupils with an EHCP or statements were in out-of-Borough schools or other types of provision (e.g colleges). Some had very complex needs and the cost to provide for them in-Borough would be prohibitive; other needs could be met locally if places were available. Current out-of-Borough Independent SEN provision was £2.2 million. In order to address this Lorraine was preparing a SEND strategy, and there would be consultation on this in due course.

The Authority has given consideration to local needs and would be looking closely at what provision could be procured locally; a review of the funding allocation with an holistic approach to the whole needs of the child, to ensure that all children are in the correct type of provision, and that their needs have been properly designated. They would be looking at the school estate and whether there is capacity to expand provision, the use of expert commissioners to ensure best value, giving mainstream schools more confidence to meet needs of children (MLD) and a peer review. The peer review will be held during the week of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2018; this will not be an inspection but will provide a level of assurance as to whether Dudley’s self-evaluation in this area of work is correct.

There is no indication at the present time as to when the Local Area inspection would be undertaken. The focus of the inspection would be to ascertain the effectiveness in the local area in implementing the SEND reforms and meeting statutory duties. The local area is not just the local authority – it includes the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other partners. The inspection team will speak to a wide range of people including officers from education, health and social care, schools, parents/carers and children. They will also review childrens’ records to evaluate the effectiveness of multi-agency support. ***Governors were advised to ask what a vulnerable child’s file would look like; are there any gaps; is there evidence of improved outcomes?*** There would be no judgement on the quality of provision from an individual school (except for any safeguarding concerns which have to be acted upon).

OfSTED had released details of what they had learned so far through the inspection process. Of particular relevance to schools were children who have not benefitted enough from the implementation of the new Code of Practice. Unofficial 'exclusions' which had been used too readily as a way of coping with children with SEND have been identified and they have ascertained that needs are well identified in the early years, particularly those for individuals with complex needs. Nevertheless a large proportion of parents lack confidence in the ability of mainstream schools to meet their child's needs.

*Q. What pressure can be put on Health to engage more and provide more funding?* A. This has been the focus of discussions, particular in respect of the local area inspection. There has been some work undertaken in respect of joint commissioning.

*Q. Could an academy be asked to participate in the inspection process?* A. Yes. Their legal requirements are the same as any other school.

*Q. Do all schools publish their SEN report on their website?* A. No but this is a statutory requirement.

*Q. When will the value of the element 3 high needs funding be known?* A. This has not yet started.

*Q. What happens if the outcome of the local area inspection is not good?* A. There is no pass or fail. There will be a letter detailing the identified strengths and weaknesses, but if there are major concerns there will be a requirement to produce a 'written statement of action' about what will be done to address them. If the concern related to a partner, then they would be responsible for taking the necessary action. There will be some form of monitoring of progress towards completion of actions.

*Q. What is the Authority doing about permanently excluded children who are not in education?* A. The first stage is to try to reduce the number of exclusions, and a strategy is being written in respect of this. The next stage is to try to "pull out all the stops" to get the children back into school. It is recognised that there is not enough primary PRU provision. There is a reluctance on schools' behalves to take on a child who has been excluded. There is also a need for the parent to be happy for their child to attend the school once one has been identified.

*Q. Would there be a possibility of schools working together to avoid exclusions (eg mainstream and special schools)? There is also specialist provision in Borough (the Glass House) so why are their specialisms not utilised? Could this not be used with younger children to try to avoid future growth of needs?* A. All possibilities need to be explored.

*Q. Private providers will want to make a profit. Appreciating the need for space, why can internal provisions not be expanded?* A. This would be ideal, but there are budgetary restraints that prevent this.

Lorraine was thanked for her presentation and it was agreed that there was a real need for the Local Authority to include training of this kind in their own programme for governors, possibly one course being for governors in mainstream schools and a different course for those in Special schools. The Chair added that copies of Lorraine's slides would be sent out to delegates in due course.

*{Ed: We are indebted to Jill Snow, our own DAGB Executive Clerk and herself a governor at both Sledmere and Kates Hill, for producing this report}*