



Broadening the approach to specialist teaching: consultation outcome report

Education Directorate, Children's Services

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Introduction

We want all pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to receive high-quality education and ensure they can achieve the best possible outcomes. Specialist teachers play in part in achieving this aspiration. In Buckinghamshire Council these teachers are part of our Integrated SEND Service. They offer support and specialist knowledge so that children and young people with SEND are able to learn and achieve their personal best in education. Specialist teachers work with schools, parents, and other agencies to support children.

In 2021 we identified the need to modernise the way in which we provide specialist teaching across Buckinghamshire to ensure we are making best use of the resource and are able to meet the educational needs of as many children with SEND as possible. We consulted on a proposal designed to ensure we apply the skills and knowledge of our specialist teachers in the most effective way. The proposal covered specialist teaching for children and young people with:

- Autism and language needs
- Difficulties with understanding, including Down Syndrome and specific learning difficulties
- Physical difficulties

Reasons for proposing change

The rationale underpinning the proposal for the teaching provision in scope is focused on 3 key areas:

- The need to reach more children and young people with SEND, making best use of the resource available. Currently, only those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) receive specialist teaching support (with the exception of those children with a physical disability). This means that many children and young people are not able to access the Council's specialist teaching resource, and opportunities for early intervention are lost.
- The desire to introduce a new and improved approach based on research and best practice seen elsewhere and internally in other Council services such as Early Years support, and research findings.

Purpose of report

This report will:

- detail the specialist teaching consultation process and outputs
- outline response numbers, types and key themes

- identify next steps.

Consultation process

In carrying out this consultation, the Council's corporate consultation process was followed. The project had four distinct stages:

- I. Planning and research to inform the engagement
- II. Pre-engagement work
- III. Public consultation
- IV. Consultation close and report.

Methodology

Planning and research to inform the engagement

Research was conducted to inform the proposal. This centred around the evidence relating to early intervention, as well as the various reviews relating to SEND pupils, conducted by government offices. In addition, models of specialist teaching provision in other local authorities were explored via survey, desktop research, regional conversations, and discussion with specific areas. The approach used internally by early years colleagues to support children with SEND was also reviewed to understand how practice could apply to the older age ranges and schools/other educational settings.

Pre-engagement

Pre-engagement included:

- Dialogue with FACT Bucks, the parent/carer forum to understand the experience of children and families in Buckinghamshire. This was informed by the ongoing dialogue with parents through meetings and support group social media conversations; feedback from SENDIAS service users; as well as specific surveys conducted by FACT Bucks in partnership with SENDIAS.
- Pre-engagement activity with the wider Specialist Teacher management team, sharing ideas about what works and where improvements could be achieved.

Public consultation

Public consultation was conducted through the Council's consultation hub. An online survey was produced. The survey design collected demographic data to allow analysis of the results by different groups of stakeholders. The survey was designed to allow stakeholders to be able to fully explain their responses and give in-depth feedback on the consultation. Some respondents who were unable to access the online survey received a printed questionnaire or submitted an email response.

Opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the proposals directly with the Head of Integrated SEND, Head of Improvement and Transformation, and the Chair of FACT Bucks were provided. 3 online sessions were held. The feedback from these meetings has been considered alongside the formal consultation responses.

The Council set a 30-day period to hold the consultation, starting on 8 November and closing on 19 December 2021. This period was extended over the Christmas break until 9 January 2022 to give families further opportunities to contribute. A late submission was also accepted on 11 January 2022 and has been included for consideration.

Communications

The Council wanted to hear from as many stakeholders as possible and the following methods were used to promote the consultation:

- Dedicated consultation hub webpage
- Link to webpage shared via FACT Bucks and SENDIAS mailing lists
- Link to webpage shared via Primary Executive Board (PEB), Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Heads (BASH), and via the Special School Headteachers Group
- Specific emails sent to key stakeholders to ensure all relevant parties were directly informed and invited to comment.
- Publication on the SEND Local Offer and Schools Bulletin
- Promotion via the Council's and Bucks Family Information Service's social media platforms
- Publication on the Buckinghamshire Association of School Governors website and via Governor Times.

Summary of consultation responses

Profile of respondents

121 online survey responses were submitted, and 4 printed questionnaires were returned and have been included for consideration.

54 responses were from parents and carers of which 37 had one or more children with an EHCP and 14 had one or more children receiving SEN Support. Responses were submitted by families with children aged 0-25, with the majority of responses coming from those with primary and secondary age children up to the age of 18.

Ages of children and young people	Total
Early Years (0-4 years)	1
Reception (4-5 years) and Primary Years 1- 6 (aged 5 -11)	30
Years 7 -11 (Secondary aged 11- 16)	27

Years 12-13 (Post-16 aged 16 -18)	4
Year 14 (aged 19 to 25)	6
Total	68*

*respondents could select more than 1 category

The majority of parents/carers responding have children attending mainstream schools.

Education setting	Total
Mainstream school	47
Mainstream school with Additionally resourced provision	4
Special School	8
College	2
Not in education	2
Other	4
Total	67*

*respondents could select more than 1 category

47 responses were received from professionals who work with children and young people. All but 9 of these were professionals from schools. A further 14 responses were received from official representatives of schools. Overall, 40 different schools submitted feedback, including 2 Special Schools.

10 responses were received from other interested parties, of which 6 were school governors and 1 was a young person with SEND.

In addition to the survey responses, a further 2 email responses were received and as such these are not included in the tables but their content was considered as part of the free text consultation feedback.

Headline data

The majority of respondents (72%) felt there is a need to change the way specialist teaching is delivered. This included 61% of the parents/carers who responded and, 80% of all other respondents combined (schools, professionals and "other").

Do you think there is a need to change the way we provide specialist teaching?						
	Parents/ Carers	Schools/ Settings	Professionals	"Other"	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	33	11	41	5	90	72%
Unsure	5	1	2	3	11	9%
No	16	2	4	2	24	19%
Total	54	14	47	10	125	100%

44% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals, while 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The proportion of respondents disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with the

proposals was higher (52%) in the parent/carer group than in all the other groups (schools, professionals and “other”) combined, where more respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal (55%). (31% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing). 30% of parents/carers agreed or strongly agreed.

Where respondents in the combined group indicated they were from a school, results indicated 60% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals, 27% disagreed, and 12 % neither agreed nor disagreed.

To what extent do you agree with the proposal?						
	Parents/ Carers	Schools/ Settings	Professionals	“Other”	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	%
Strongly agree	5	2	6	0	13	10%
Agree	11	7	21	3	42	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	10	0	6	4	20	16%
Disagree	14	0	10	0	24	19%
Strongly disagree	14	5	4	3	26	21%
Total	54	14	47	10	125	100%

More (64%) parent/carers with children receiving SEN Support agreed with the proposal than those with children with EHCPs (19%).

	SEN Support		EHCP	
	Number	%	Number	%
Strongly agree or agree	9	64.3%	7	18.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	2	14.3%	6	16.2%
Strongly disagree or disagree	3	21.4%	24	64.9%
Total	14	100%	37	100%

63% of all respondents felt that the proposal would help or partly help schools and education settings to better support pupils with SEND. This included 56% of parents/carers and 69% of all other respondents combined (schools, professionals and “other”).

Do you think the proposal would help schools and other places of education better support all pupils with SEND?						
	Parents/ Carers	Schools/ Settings	Professionals	“Other”	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	14	8	18	2	42	33.6%
Partly	16	1	17	3	37	29.6%
Unsure	1	0	2	2	5	4%
No	23	5	10	3	41	32.8%
Total	54	14	47	10	125	100%

42% of all respondents felt they would make use of a telephone support line and a further 26% were unsure. Parents/carers were relatively equally split, whereas almost twice as many schools, professionals and “other” said they would use it than wouldn’t.

Would you make use of a telephone support line?						
	Parents/ Carers	Schools/ Settings	Professionals	“Other”	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	20	6	23	4	53	42.4%
Unsure	11	4	15	2	32	25.6%
No	23	4	9	4	40	32%
Total	52	14	47	10	125	100%

Qualitative feedback

Some comments from parents/carers relating to the proposal suggested that reaching more children earlier was welcomed as well as increased flexibility.

“Being more flexible and having greater reach is a good thing...”

“...it’s only fair to reach as many children as possible.”

Some comments however suggested the specialist teaching resource should continue to only focus on those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) catering for the needs of other children.

“Provide specialist teaching services to those children who have EHCPs and let your OAP deal with those that do not have diagnoses and defined needs.”

Where concerns were expressed these were largely related to:

- Fears around a lack of capacity/funding to support more children

“I agree that more pupils should be able to access the STS, in our case I truly believe earlier intervention would have put us on a completely different pathway and perhaps helped to keep my son in a mainstream school. However, ...unless more specialist teachers are recruited I struggle to see how this does not dilute their support further”

“...It would surely make more sense to introduce a separate initiative for 'early intervention' while improving the current specialist teaching provision with better training and a more inclusive vision.”

“More funding, more expertly qualified specialist staff, more direct intervention delivered by experts, is necessary. Not less!”

- The perception that EHCPs would not be sufficiently specific about the intervention

“The need for early intervention is not disputed but that does not make it acceptable, or lawful, to remove ‘detailed and specific’ provision from specialist teaching from session F.”

- A lack of confidence that remote support would benefit, coupled with a perception that schools would be over-burdened

“Specialist teachers need to be based in schools to work inclusively with staff parents and pupils”

“In our experience there is no substitute for regular personalised direct work with a professional who has expertise in teaching methods specific to our children’s special educational needs.”

“I fear that adding burdens to already over-stretched schools is an unrealistic approach and poses significant risk to a lack of consistent approach for all children across Bucks.”

“...specialist teachers will not know students in the same way and what their specific individual needs are.”

- Concerns about continuity of provision

“Children with additional needs like continuity and consistency, they don’t adapt well to change.”

- Concerns that the training provided to schools would be insufficient

“Unless the SEN training provided is extensive, mandatory and free of charge to schools, there is no assurance that school staff will be adequately trained to be able to meet the needs of autistic pupils... a few hours of learning cannot substitute for the years of experience a Specialist Teacher can offer.”

Qualitative feedback from all other respondents (predominantly schools) relating to the proposal was also varied. Where the proposals were welcomed comments focused on:

- Best use of resource

“Sounds like a sensible balance and use of resources”

- Increased reach

“I think it makes far more sense to make use of the limited resource by offering to a wider group and takes away to some extent the incentive to have an EHCP in order to gain access to the specialism.”

“We need to provide support for children with an EHCP but also those children that do not fit into that very narrow group but have need.”

“I think it is admirable that you want to extend provision beyond children with EHCPs. Thank you. This can only be a positive move.”

- Improved/more meaningful specificity in EHCPs

Being specific about what is required in section F is far better for the child than simply stating x number of hours of input.”

- Improved service flexibility to meet needs

“I feel that the current 'Tiered Approach' has meant that we are stuck between two systems, neither of which work well e.g. hours and tiers. The new proposal will offer flexibility and allow the specialist teachers to support in a more effective and timely fashion to the needs of students/schools.”

- Greater opportunities to train and upskill school staff

“I feel that there needs to be more training and support for schools to learn how to identify and support the needs of their students as opposed to someone coming and working directly with students; although there are situations where this is necessary - it is rare!”

“Schools need to be supported to be able to provide more support in-house.”

"I think having a service where [schools] can access advice more easily is essential. I also think the best provision comes from specialists upskilling the in-school staff as these are the people who work most closely with the children."

"...there is definitely a need for more CPD training for all staff relating to SEN awareness and provision, which it is good to see mentioned in the proposal."

- Improved support for families

"Providing families with direct access to the specialist teaching service will be a vital tool, as currently much of the advice has to be relayed via the school which leads to additional time constraints, and means that family's questions can remain unanswered"

Where concerns were expressed these largely reflected the following areas:

- Lack of resources/capacity in schools

"There needs to be more about SEN teaching meshing in with other teaching, to create an environment where all children get the best outcomes. Schools need more resources to cover this requirement - the 16 hours funded by school first forces schools to divert resource away from the wider cohort, so funding needs to be available to schools for every hour of specialist support."

"I fear...that because you are so overstretched, even more expectation will be put on settings to provide provision by way of interventions. We are already overstretched and struggling to fit everything in."

- The need for direct input/expertise from a specialist teacher when required

"Whilst I understand the phone consultation as a first port of call, for education settings who have already implemented support based on prior training and knowledge, a fast move to a visit and child specific advice would be more beneficial to the child."

"...these proposals would mean that young people with the most complex needs have less access to specialists than they currently do, which is a reduction on previous services. It would seem that whilst a review is appropriate, maybe increasing the size of the teams to enable earlier support for young people, along with more direct work would be the best approach."

"...Despite good quality training, schools are not able to replicate the expertise specialist teachers have and just as it would be wrong for LSAs to teach our most vulnerable learners, leaving them limited access to subject specialist qualified

teachers, it is wrong to expect schools to be able to provide the support and teaching that specialists are able to.”

“The proposal is to replace or reduce the specialist teacher work direct with children which I think is a very bad decision. Specialist teachers are trained to work with children with SEND needs, unless you have highly qualified teachers who understand SEND etc how can the same level of service/ expertise be expected to be delivered.”

- The need to support children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Needs

“Although the principle of supporting the students you have highlighted is good, there is a clear oversight for not supporting the SEN needs of those children with an SEMH need. These children need advocacy and support, just like all students with SEN.”

It was also identified that specialist teachers for physical disability already operate a flexible advisory model that enables children without an EHCP to be supported.

Proposed telephone support line

As part of the consultation specific feedback was requested on the proposed telephone support line. Respondents indicating that they would use this telephone line felt it would be a good and efficient way of seeking advice and support at all stages. 1 respondent commented *“it’s extremely difficult to find answers to questions in terms of what is best for my child. If there was a telephone advice line available, it would provide a lifeline.”*

Respondents felt the telephone line would provide an easy route to discuss children without recourse to forms or email and would provide an instant response.

While welcomed by many, some comments about the telephone line related to the need for the telephone line to be adequately resourced to ensure calls would be answered, and the importance of having the right person *“on the other end of the line who can provide valid valuable advice.”* There were also concerns that the advice would be too generic, would not be helpful if the person giving it did not know the child, and a feeling that face to face would be better: *“My child is highly complex. ASD, ADHD with significant attachment difficulties. He must be met and got to know to be understood.”* Some respondents feared the telephone would replace observations by specialist teachers.

1 respondent suggested a Teams call could be helpful and another suggested a good online resource to read would be better. Some respondents were concerned that their child would not engage virtually and needed to be seen face to face for suitable advice to be given.

Further considerations

In addition to the comments made about the proposals, respondents made a number of other suggestions. These included:

- consider relocating specialist teachers and basing them in schools where they can be reached more easily
- a request for Dyslexia testing and support
- employ more specialist teachers, assistants and support staff to improve efficiency and meet the workload demands
- set up a separate team to work with SEN Support and to provide more generic support
- have a greater focus on those children who receive a late diagnosis
- make use of INSET days to train, support and monitor staff in schools
- join up specialist teachers with special schools to help share expertise
- make it easier for families to feedback about the service and have a point of contact
- ask students about what has worked for them
- continue to include specialist teachers in Annual Reviews
- provide written dated feedback forms/meeting minutes for children's' records
- include training and input from neurodiverse adults, advocates, parents.
- more emphasis on training for teachers and parents
- alter the curriculum “so that it is directly SEND friendly [to]... assist all children to achieve learning levels sooner without singling out SEND children”
- more joint working with other teams i.e. SALT, social care, early years
- provide specialist teacher support and advice for post 16 students
- improve specialist teaching pages on the website to include more signposting to resources and training
- offer specialist teacher support to all children who have been accepted into the neuro-developmental pathway
- allow parents of flexi schooled children to contact specialist teachers for advice
- allow independent schools to access specialist teachers (with a financial contribution)
- consider grouping schools together for support in line with their needs/wants as opposed to geographical location
- more support for how teachers can integrate specialist teaching techniques into their ordinarily available provision
- stop delaying assessment by specialist teachers until after an EHCP is issued.

Conclusion and next steps

Discussions have taken place with all relevant parties including FACT Bucks, the parent/carer forum and the consultation feedback has been carefully considered. As a result the decision has been taken to complete some further exploratory work with key stakeholders to further develop and refine the proposal in the light of the feedback received. This aims to ensure

the resulting approach meets the needs of children and families as well as schools/settings. No changes will therefore be made to the current approach until September 2023.