

Expanding Specialist Placements

Thursday 11th April 2019



Over 30 parents and carers joined Jeannette Essex, Head of SEND and Specialist Services at the Local Authority, to discuss the expansion of specialist provision in the city. This was in response to the release of additional funding from the DfE called the “Special Provision Capital Fund”. [Details of the fund can be found here](#). Jeannette emphasised that the Council is committed to working with parents to agree together ‘co-produce’ the best way of spending this money to meet our children’s special educational needs within the City to meet .

With the increase in demand for specialist placements for young people with SEND both locally and nationally, the event provided an opportunity for parents to put forward suggestions on what is missing in [Coventry’s “Local Offer”](#) to children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans and share their experience on what works and what doesn’t.



Jeannette Essex first outlined some of the basic information, which was set out in some slides. This described the current position, including the steep rise in the numbers of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and the current offer for specialist provision in the city. Whilst there are high numbers of special school places in the city in comparison to other local authorities, this is balanced by the fact there are very low numbers of pupils who are placed out of the city – something which the city takes pride in. Local provision is also highly rated by Ofsted, whereas some of the offers in the independent sector (which are often more costly to fund) have been found to be of poorer quality.

It was also explained that there are plans in place to move the Primary and Secondary sites of Woodfield school to the old Woodlands school site for September 2021, which has already been agreed. This was necessary because of the increase in youngsters with social emotional and well-being needs in the city, including those youngsters who are permanently excluded from school, needing this type of provision.

In total Coventry have been awarded close to £4m capital funding, which Jeannette explained would not go far – in response to a question from a parent, it is estimated that up to 60 additional places might be made available based on these figures.

Parents raised a number of suggestions, including those sent in through social media prior to/during the event, of areas which would need to be considered;

- The limited choice for youngsters attending a broad spectrum school catering for all age groups. Currently only Sherbourne Fields offers this – would it not be possible to have another setting offering this continuum for youngsters, particularly those who find change very difficult.
- The lack of discussion around dual registered/split placements for youngsters, particularly those that can access some of the mainstream curriculum. Jeanette

advised that this is something that could be considered for young people, regardless of the new funding.

- Provision for youngsters with social communication difficulties/ASD is limited particularly in primary school. When entering secondary, Corley seems only to be accessible to youngsters with higher academic levels, but the broad spectrum alternative may not be suitable either. Jeanette agreed that initial talks with Corley Centre to consider extending their age range would be an appropriate project for this fund beginning with an extension to Year 6 pupils.
- There was also a suggestion from those parents whose youngsters found it difficult to achieve their potential in a secondary aged environment, but don't see themselves as needing a specialist provision. There was strong agreement on ASD units being established on Secondary school sites, but only where the level of specialism of the staffing was guaranteed.
- Nursery provision was also discussed, as a number of parents felt that despite the support they received from services like portage, many settings did not always know how to cater for those youngsters with SEND, particularly the more complex. Why is there no provision in special schools, particularly where schools say they cater for children between 2-4? Jeannette explained that one of the difficulties with early years independent settings is that there is high turnover of staff, so training that is offered through the SEND Early Years team can often be lost when staff leave, and that many staff have limited experience of SEND.
- One parent discussed her experience of her child having been placed in an enhanced nursery provision in early years and felt it was a hugely positive for her child when starting school. Jeannette agreed that the Council could consider re-establishing a specialist nursery if that is what parents want and felt would work.
- Post-16 provision was also discussed. Whilst experience of this in the room was limited, those parents that did raise this felt that Hereward college seemed like the only option available to school leavers. Jeanette talked about the increase in options, particularly around supported internships for youngsters, and these being offered by the special schools. She also said that Councillors were very supportive of internships and that it was hoped that the City Council might be one of several new employers to support the programme building on University Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital and Warwick University. It was planned to offer supported internships in some of our secondary special schools to extend the range of employment opportunities it offers.

Parents were also asked to complete a form to highlight what they thought of current provision and where they thought gaps existed. This reflected the comments throughout the discussion, but also highlighted the need for more to be done by mainstream schools in their offer for youngsters with SEND. There was also recognition that there were lots of areas that needed developing which, given the funding Coventry has, would not be realised.

Such was the discussion generated, it was felt that these sort of events were a good opportunity for parents to discuss their views with the Local Authority, and a number of suggestions were made for the future; a drop-in where parents could meet with the Local Authority seemed a popular suggestion.

Jeannette thanked parents for their very valuable contribution and committed to continue to use the 'Ask the Experts' (Ask the Parents) model of working together on a regular basis. Parents were invited to suggest areas of 'co-production' they would be interested in looking at. Therapy provisions (speech and language and occupational therapy) is an area that the Council and Health partners would welcome support with; dates to follow shortly.

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