

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee Special Educational Needs Policy Review

30th November 2005



WLGA • CLILC

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.

Purpose

3. The purpose of this paper is to provide written evidence to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee Special Educational Needs Policy Review. The WLGA welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Review. The evidence below is based broadly on the headings set out in the consultation response document issued by the Committee.
4. This evidence has been collated following extensive consultation with the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) and the ADEW Inclusion Sub-Group whose membership consists of local authority practitioners in the field of SEN.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Current Assessment Process

5. The current assessment process has a number of advantages. It guarantees a multi-agency assessment of the needs of the individual child to clear timelines that results in the appropriate provision for that child, including an annual review. The system also provides parents and carers with the right of appeal to the SEN Tribunal for Wales and for a judicial review if the statement provision is not made. In addition, the present system provides parents with some sense of security during the process.
6. The system as it stands does not promote a whole school approach to supporting the needs of children with additional learning needs. Schools who are effective in meeting the children's needs before the need for a statutory assessment arises often express concern over the unfairness of the system. Whereas schools that are not as effective as a whole school can sometimes attract more funding than a school which has already met the needs of the children effectively.

7. The cost of the assessment process is an issue for local authorities and all agencies involved. It has been estimated that the cost of one statement is in excess of £2,000. A reduction in the number of statements issued could result in a considerable saving that could be used to support front line SEN provision as part of a whole school approach.

Should the system of statementing be continued?

8. It is the opinion of WLGA, following consultation with the Directors of Education in Wales that statements should be superseded by a record of entitlement for children and young people with complex needs characterised by significant difficulty in at least two areas of need:
 - Severe learning difficulty
 - Communication
 - Physical difficulty
 - Sensory impairment
 - Severe emotional, social and/or behavioural difficulty
9. The records of entitlement should be enhanced by an Individual Education Plan, informed by a multi-disciplinary assessment and resourced by the school, or cluster of schools where the child attends.

Examples of Collaborative Working

10. There are numerous examples of collaborative working between local authorities, and between local authorities other public services and non-governmental organisations in the field of SEN. The continuing development of the Education Consortia in Wales is ensuring that further collaborative initiatives are being developed. For example at the beginning of December 2005 local authorities from the South West are meeting to review regional working arrangements with a view to develop common approaches to assessment and statementing and possible joint commissioning of external placements. Placing a child or young person outside the local authority area is costly, joint commissioning of external placements could represent a significant saving for local authorities. In England a national contract for external placements has been implemented which has driven costs down and although there are no plans to negotiate a national contract in Wales, joint commissioning within the Education Consortia would have the same outcomes.

11. There are also examples of collaborative working across Wales with regards to provision for specific SEN needs. In North Wales the Westwood School ABA Centre serves up to ten significantly autistic children at key stage 1. It is a joint development between Wrexham and Flintshire local authorities. The planning and development was undertaken by the local authorities in partnership with the school and capital funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. More recently the partnership has been extended to involve the Psychology Department of Bangor University who provide a high level of expertise of training for the centre.
12. Across Wales twenty local authorities are currently collaborating on disagreement resolution services (DRS). This collaborative approach attracted praise in the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales Annual Report 2004 – 2005.
13. Many local authorities have protocols for the placement and funding of complex cases with social services departments. Where this has been successful, for example in Torfaen, negotiations are now underway with the NHS to include health services in this agreement. In addition work is currently underway to look at collaboration with social services agencies with regards to the provision of services for looked after children in Wales.

Support for Children and Young People and their Parents/Carers Undergoing the Process of Assessment and Statementing

14. Information regarding independent advocacy is made available to parents and carers of children and young people that are going through the assessment and statementing process via national organisations such as SNAP.
15. It is acknowledged that the process of statutory assessment can be lengthy. The main concern would be in respect of key stage 1 pupils, where too often the bureaucracy of statementing impedes early intervention and prevention. A move away from reliance on statementing could result in interventions in a more timely manner.

Welsh Language Provision

16. It is acknowledged that there are concerns regarding the number of Welsh language education psychologists in Wales. However, local authorities can and do provide assessment in the language of choice of the parents or carers of the child or young person. In the South East, as in other regional areas, there is a Welsh language education psychologist who provides services on a consortia basis.

17. In terms of SEN resource Ysgol Ganrafon Primary in Flintshire admits up to 8 pupils with a wide range of SEN. The resource is attached to one mainstream Welsh Primary but is a resource for five Welsh schools. The centre was planned with the Headteachers from the five schools and each have continued to have deep interest in the management and development of the centre. This level of involvement has helped to create and maintain a sense of ownership between the five schools. The resource provides not only an excellent example of Welsh language provision but also of effective collaboration between schools within a local authority area.

Conclusions

18. The provision of SEN support by local authorities in Wales is continuing to develop, with collaborative working key in that development. However, the current system of assessment and statementing can be a costly and overly bureaucratic process. It is acknowledged that statementing or an equivalent process may be advantageous in some circumstances. However, a reduction in the number of statements could result in resources being used to provide support on a whole school basis. The key to ensuring that this is effective is working with parents and carers to demonstrate that the appropriate support and provision can be made without the need for a statement.

For further information please contact:

Dr Chris Llewelyn
Chris.llewelyn@wlga.gov.uk

Welsh Local Government Association
Local Government House
Drake walk
Cardiff
CF10 4LG

Tel: 029 2046 8600