

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee ELL (2) 05-04(min)

Minutes

Date: Thursday 1 April 2004

Time: 2.00pm - 4.00pm

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Members

Constituency

Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
Jane Davidson (Minister)	Pontypridd
Leighton Andrews	Rhondda
Jeff Cuthbert	Caerphilly
David Davies	Monmouth
Irene James	Islwyn
Denise Idris Jones	Conwy
David Melding	South West Central (representing Health and Social Services Committee)
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Owen John Thomas	South West Central

Officials

Deryck Jones	Pupil Support Division, Department for Training and Education
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In Attendance:

Andrea Miller	Language Planning Team, Welsh Language Board
Catrin Redknapp	Language Planning Team, Welsh Language Board
Rita Jones	Deputy Director, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin
Ian Spence	Principal Educational Psychologist, Flintshire LEA/ Member of WAGSEN

Committee Secretariat

Chris Reading
Holly Pembridge
Ruth Hatton

Committee Clerk
Deputy Committee Clerk
Committee Support Officer

Item One: Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed Committee Members and also David Melding (Chair of the Health and Social Services Committee) and members of the public.

1.2 The Chair noted an apology from Mark Isherwood, who was unwell. Committee Members extended their best wishes. The Chair noted that Irene James had to leave early and that the Minister would arrive late.

1.3 David Melding declared that he was Chair and a member of the governing body of Meadowbank Special School.

1.4 The Chair asked Members to confirm that they wished to hold an additional meeting on the afternoon of Thursday 13 May, to conclude information gathering for the special educational needs (SEN) policy review. The Committee agreed to hold this additional meeting. The Chair asked the Clerk to obtain approval from Business Committee.

Item Two: Policy Review of Special Educational Needs Papers: ELL(2) 05-04 (p.1 and p.2)

2.1 The Chair welcomed presenters to the meeting. Andrea Miller, Catrin Redknap (Welsh Language Board) and Rita Jones (Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin), Deryck Jones (Pupil Support Division, Assembly Department for Training and Education) and Vice Chair of the Welsh Advisory Group for SEN (WAGSEN) and Ian Spence (Principal Educational Psychologist, Flintshire LEA) and also a member of WAGSEN.

2.2 After the presentations on Welsh medium provision, the Chair invited Members to raise questions and the following issues were raised:

Welsh language and SEN

2.3 David Davies said that some parents and teachers felt that teaching through the medium of Welsh was too demanding for some SEN pupils. Andrea Miller said that teachers had the opportunity to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Deficit in professionals delivering support through the medium of Welsh

2.4 Presenters were asked if the shortage of professionals was more prevalent in the health and social

services sector than in the education sector. Andrea Miller said that the problem existed in both sectors. In Initial Teacher Training (ITT), hardly any SEN modules were taught. Also the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) recommended a ratio of 1:4,000 for Educational Psychologists to pupils. In some counties in Wales, the ratio was just under 1:10,000. Members and presenters agreed that even though some professionals could speak Welsh fluently, this did not mean they felt confident in supporting SEN pupils through the medium of Welsh. Deryck Jones said that the right of professionals to deliver services in the language their of choice should be recognised and respected.

Severe and complex needs

2.5 David Melding felt that it would be difficult to deliver intervention strategies for severe needs through the Welsh medium in the mainstream. Andrea Miller said that separate provision was needed for severe and complex needs. It was a case of sharing practices and skills, as advocated in the report 'Acknowledging Need'. Six local education authorities in North Wales were opening an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) bilingual centre. A beacon centre similar to the Trinity Fields centre would be beneficial to South Wales.

2.6 Deryck Jones added that provision for moderate learning difficulties and severe needs varied across Wales. For example, there were no special schools in Ceredigion; those with severe needs were integrated into mainstream. The Education Act 2002 gave Wales the opportunity to develop provision on a regional basis. The Plas Brondyffryn centre was promoted as a good example to follow.

Training for Welsh-speaking Speech and Language Therapists

2.7 Rita Jones gave the example of her daughter, who had recently graduated in speech and language therapy from Manchester University. Her first language was Welsh but she was unable to deliver professional services through the medium of Welsh, as she had not been given appropriate training. Rita Jones suggested that a module or top-up course should be developed for those speech and language therapists who were able to speak Welsh and wanted to provide professional support in that language.

2.8 Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM) had requested training from speech and language therapists for the leaders of the Cylchoedd Meithrin, whose expertise lay in immersion education. MYM had requested that speech and language therapists advise leaders on carrying out simple daily exercises and games to support children with SEN and also to ease the burden on therapists.

2.9 Deryck Jones stated that the Welsh Assembly Government was developing an e-learning SEN course for mainstream teachers. The course would be free of charge and a valid qualification could be obtained on completion of the course.

2.10 Andrea Miller said that an integrated approach to workforce planning was required and an audit of professionals willing to develop their Welsh medium skills was also needed. A part-vocational / part-

academic training structure for support staff could be developed, easing the burden on therapists. A bilingual training pack could also be developed. There was a need to mix regional training with workforce planning.

Parental Support

2.11 Rita Jones said that MYM's referral schemes involved working closely with parents. The Co-ordinator visited parents regularly to provide support and advice.

Costs

2.12 In response to a question from Owen John Thomas, Andrea Miller said that the Welsh Language Board was unable to provide estimates of the likely cost of developing Welsh medium provision, as it was not a provider. She added that data were available in the 'Acknowledging Need' report and stated that further research would also be beneficial.

Waiting Lists for the 'Law yn Llaw' Scheme

2.13 In response to a question from Janet Ryder, Rita Jones stated that in a typical year all funding to place children on the scheme had been spent after about six months, leaving no funding for the second half of the year. The next year's funding would support the children who had not been placed the previous year. Consequently, the opportunity for children to attend was reduced, with some losing the opportunity to attend pre-school provision all together.

2.14 Rita Jones stated that children attended from the age of two and a half up until the term after their third birthday. The waiting lists for Rhondda Cynon Taff, Bridgend and Caerphilly were significantly larger than in other parts of Wales. The scheme was funded on a county basis and the level of funding was inconsistent between counties.

Marketing SEN Teacher Training

2.15 Denise Idris Jones felt that Welsh medium SEN teaching careers needed to be marketed, especially in sixth forms. Andrea Miller said that a Welsh medium SEN module was incorporated as part of the three year teaching course in Bangor University. The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) undertook the marketing on behalf of Wales at a cost of £3m.

Item Three: Policy Review of Special Educational Needs - WAGSEN Papers: ELL(2) 05-04 (p.3)

3.1 The Chair invited Deryck Jones to give a brief introduction, setting out the history and role of WAGSEN.

3.2 Ian Spence then presented the paper, bringing out the key points:

- The key issue was to include children with SEN in mainstream education;
- The Warnock Report stated that 20% of children would have SEN;
- The medical approach advocated looking at the difficulty within the child. However, this was not appropriate for the educational setting as there were interacting factors: the child in question, the curriculum, other children, the teacher and the teacher's skills and ability to manage behaviour.
- The key factor that could be radically changed was the skill of the teacher: in identifying needs and tailoring the curriculum to suit differing needs;
- A system to guide teachers should be introduced across Wales, regardless of language of provision;
- Wales needed teachers with enquiring minds: trying different approaches until the child in question was able to make progress – but this required that occasional failure would be inevitable and should be tolerated;
- The Code of Practice was a staged approach and provided adequate guidance for teachers but teachers needed to be able to turn to other professionals for support: speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS); and
- Multi-disciplinary action worked well but required appropriate staffing levels.

3.3 The Chair invited questions and the following issues were raised:

Languages other than English or Welsh

3.4 Deryck Jones said that difficulties with children who did not speak English or Welsh were often attributed to linguistic difficulties, which could mask their special educational needs. Andrea Miller said that this also happened frequently to children from Welsh-speaking backgrounds.

Teachers with enquiring minds

3.5 One Member asked if there was a means of identifying those teachers who were more able to identify SEN. Ian Spence said that students undertaking ITT did not receive enough training for managing behaviour and identifying SEN. Deryck Jones said that all teachers were teachers of children with SEN and should be given appropriate training. Andrea Miller added that there were less opportunities for newly qualified teachers to share best practice through the medium of Welsh, despite support from Cydag and the Welsh Joint Education Committee.

Teaching methods

3.6 Ian Spence agreed with the Chair that if teachers were constantly enquiring into difficult and challenging behaviour, then they would be more likely pick up clues to SEN.

Medical Model

3.7 Ian Spence said that the medical model might be more appropriate for those children with severe needs. However, the medical model did not necessarily deal satisfactorily with the way a child was taught.

Statements

3.8 David Melding suggested that statements should be retained but they should be targeted towards children with more complex needs. Ian Spence agreed and said that in order for that system to work, adequate funding needed to be retained centrally. Deryck Jones stated that as statements were statutory documents, they were perceived by parents to provide security. The statement process could take up to six months, which was a significant part of a child's early life. It would be preferable to have the additional support and flexibility available in schools. It was important to reassure parents that their child's needs would be met.

Regional Centres

3.9 David Melding felt that the concepts of mainstreaming and regional centres were contradictory. Ian Spence said that there was some inconsistency within current policy: an inclusive society was desired but special schools were in existence. Many children with severe needs went out of county to receive support. Ideally, they should be educated locally. Regional centres would help ensure that children were supported as locally as possible. There was also some concern that children going into regional centres would be isolated if there was not a more flexible approach. Ian Spence said that if support services were not so scarce, then more children would be educated locally and regional centres would be a pragmatic solution.

3.10 Deryck Jones said that he was aware of one special school that had managed outreach and mainstream provision successfully. The Minister said that she accepted the tension that was inherent within an inclusion agenda and finite resources.

3.11 The Minister advocated inclusion wherever possible and partnerships with special schools and referred to Ysgol Plas Bron Dyffryn developing links with Denbigh High School. The Minister stated that the Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales had been complimentary of special schools in Wales in her recent annual report. The schools were delivering far beyond their required services. The Wales-only powers in the Education Act 2002 would assist in allowing collaborative partnership working.

3.12 Andrea Miller said that there was a deficit in integrated provision for children of Welsh-speaking homes.

3.13 Jeff Cuthbert suggested using regional centres as resource centres for training staff from the mainstream sector.

Parity of access to services across Wales

3.14 Ian Spence said that there was a lack of Welsh-speaking personnel to undertake service delivery through the medium of Welsh. Deryck Jones said that the steering group would be looking at parity of access to services. Minimum standards for service provision would be imposed on provision for hearing-impaired pupils. LEAs would be asked to review their own capacity to deliver. If they were unable to provide appropriate services, they would be encouraged to enter into discussions with neighbouring authorities to develop regional capacity. In response to a question from Owen John Thomas, the Minister confirmed that she would be able to direct LEAs to create regional centres under the provisions included in the Education Act 2002.

Workforce Planning

3.15 Andrea Miller said that there was a need for proactive and not reactive workforce planning, with particular regard to speech and language therapists. The Minister said that the majority of specialists were not trained or employed by LEAs but by health authorities. The Minister suggested that an appropriate official from the National Health Service Workforce Planning Division should appear before the Committee to present evidence on this issue. The Chair asked the Committee Clerk to arrange this, if possible, in May.

Prime and Ultimate Responsibility

3.16 In response to a question from Janet Ryder, the Chair stated that the Committee would address the issue of the ultimate responsibility for provision of SEN services.

In-Service Training

Andrea Miller said that whilst Welsh medium schools could collaborate on Welsh medium SEN training, there was a need for professionally produced literature and other resources. Deryck Jones added that the e-learning tool for teachers mentioned earlier would be a bilingual tool.

Item Four: Minutes of the previous meeting

Paper: ELL(2) 04-04(mins)

4.1 The Committee ratified the minutes of the meeting of 17 March 2004.

Action points arising from this meeting:

- Committee Clerk to invite National Health Service workforce planning officials to appear before

the Committee in relation to the policy review of SEN.

- Committee Clerk to seek approval from Business Committee to hold an additional meeting on 13 May 2004.