

## **Education and Lifelong Learning Committee**

### **Policy Review – Special Educational Needs**

#### **Caerphilly Children's Centre**

The Caerphilly Children's Centre opened in 1990 following some four years of planning and persuasion. It is a partnership between Caerphilly Parents' Council; Caerphilly Local Health Board; Caerphilly Social Services Department; Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust; NCH Cymru and SCOPE Cwmpas Cymru.

The Project offers a range of services to families when they first discover their child has a disability and supports them as they grow. This includes an assessment nursery, medical, therapy, family support, an information service and play facilities. It provides services to over 800 families living in the Caerphilly Borough area. The Project is managed by NCH

Two "Transition Issues" dominate the early years of a disabled child's life.

- First, the need for families to "come to terms" with the nature of the child's difficulties and to understand what they can do with the help of others to maximise their child's potential.
- Second and linked to this is the choice of "school / education pathway" their child will take again to achieve their full potential.

In regard to the help families need, the first issue lies very much in the hands of Health Professionals, the second with Education.

We recognised this in the original design of the Children's Centre by wanting an Educational Psychologist/Advisory Teacher to be based at the Centre to provide the link between Health and Education for the families.

Unfortunately, and even though they were involved throughout the whole of the planning process, the then Mid-Glamorgan Education Department withdrew from the Project at the point at which the other partners signed up.

This decision caused great difficulty for the families, as the Education processes remained very separate from the other agencies involved in the Project. This caused unnecessary confusion for the families and tensions between the professional involved.

This situation only improved in 1996 when Caerphilly County Borough was created and a new Senior Educational Psychologist, Katrin Lewis, decided to work more closely with us and provide a link into the Education system.

The Children's Centre now manages a Child Development Team process linked to Care Co-ordination. This means that all children with significant special needs in Caerphilly are identified early, through one referral route.

This enables us, with parental permission, to involve the Educational Psychologist with those children who are likely to have particular needs in the year before they start school or as early as we can do.

The Assessment Nursery also works very closely with PPA and MYM to ensure that wherever possible, children attend their local playgroups, which is also helpful for parents in making their school choice.

The Psychologist, and where known, the Teachers and Heads of school which the child will attend, are invited to the review held on individual pre-school children; which is incredibly helpful to parents.

The information prepared by the Children's Centre staff for parents is also included in the child's Statement of Special Educational Needs.

The joint training which has taken place between Education and Children's Centre staff has been invaluable and the role of Cymorth funding and the Early Years Development Partnerships has greatly helped widen all of our horizons.

However, we are still aware that children continue to be assessed separately by Health, Education and Social Services professionals when it would make a lot more sense for there to be an unified assessment process which would be less stressful for both parent and child.