To: Education Committee

From: Director of Education

Date: 23 May 2000

Ref: m MON/RM/RM

Subject Informal Consultation on Inclusion and pupils with moderate learning difficulties

Purpose of Report

This report raises for members a number of issues regarding the inclusion with pupils with moderate learning difficulties in the context of the authority’s recently adopted policy Looking Forward and in the light of government’s proposed presumption of inclusive education in the forthcoming Education Bill.

Recommendations

The education committee is asked to:

(i) note the contents of the report

(ii) agree to a period of informal consultation with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community regarding inclusion in the context of pupils with moderate learning difficulties.

(iii) instruct the director of education to report back to committee early in 2001 with the outcomes of the informal consultation and proposals for a subsequent formal consultation subject to committee approval.

(iv) refer the report to the social inclusion committee for information

Michael O’Neill, Director of Education on 01236-812336
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Inclusion and Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Report by Director

1 Introduction

1.1 In December 1999, the Education Committee approved a new policy paper, *Looking Forward: Responding to Children's Rights and Individual Educational Needs*. This policy replaced the previous policy *Every Child is Special* and focused on providing appropriate support to meet the learning needs of all children, particularly 'children in need' who may have special educational needs. The overall aim of this new policy is to bring North Lanarkshire up to date with recent legislation by placing a clear emphasis on the rights of children and the need to create opportunities for all children to meet their full potential, including children who have particular support needs.

1.2 The *Looking Forward* policy relates to the overarching Education Department policy, *Aiming Higher: Raising Achievement for All*. If a child with particular support needs is not achieving his or her full potential, then it is a challenge to the service providers and not a problem in the child. The policy sets out general principles for guiding practice and identifies a number of targets to be achieved over a four to five year timescale in order to improve the quality of services for children with particular support needs.

1.3 One of the aims in the *Looking Forward* policy states that the authority will:

   'Ensure that the first consideration in the placement of every child is to maintain the child within the local community in contact with his/her peers'.

   Another aim emphasises:

   'the responsibility of all members of the community to be involved in the evaluation of services provided for individual learning needs and in decision-making about improvements'.

1.4 The *Looking Forward* policy was the subject of a further paper to the Education Committee in February 2000 which identified a number of tasks and set timescales for them to be undertaken in order to take forward implementation of the new policy. One of these tasks was:

   'Commission research on a strategy to improve inclusion experiences for the 450+ pupils attending special schools originally designated as provision for children with 'mild or moderate learning difficulties'.

   The timescale for this task was to report back in June 2000 and this paper provides that report.
2. **Key features of inclusive schooling**

2.1 The focus of much of the research activity to date has been to explore the concept of inclusion, what it means and how it features in recent international, European and Scottish legislation, all of which have an impact on the provision of services in North Lanarkshire. International perspectives are based on the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the UNESCO Salamanca statement of 1994, which says: ‘regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all: moreover, they provide an effective education for the majority of children’

2.2 The Council’s Children’s Services Plan, which implements the Children (Scotland) Act of 1995, explains the duties on authorities to meet the rights of children for services to support their needs. From its inception the Scottish Parliament has taken a great interest in special educational needs. The Education Bill presently being considered by the Scottish Parliament is the first education legislation which states the right of every child to education. The Scottish Executive has also indicated that it intends to include in the final legislation a presumption that all children should be educated in mainstream schools. The implications of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) for education authorities will be that they must provide services for people with mental and physical disabilities which do not discriminate between them and the rest of the population.

2.3 Inclusive schooling is about meeting children’s rights to education with their peers. There are significant international and national pressures on authorities to improve the inclusive nature of their educational provision. In 1999, the then Scottish Office published a ‘Manual of Good Practice in Special Educational Needs’. This document describes ‘Features of Good Practice’ in inclusive education and it is intended to be used by schools to evaluate their progress towards becoming inclusive. It is also being used by HMI as a basis for making judgements during school inspections.

2.4 The Looking Forward policy made a clear commitment to inclusive schooling. However North Lanarkshire wishes to meet key quality criteria in moving forward. All inclusive provision must show that it can meet the learning needs of all its children and result in positive educational outcomes for all children. Ensuring positive educational outcomes for each child should be more important than arbitrary decisions about the place in which education will be undertaken without any regard for outcomes. Using recent research and publications as sources, the Education Department has drawn up a set of proposed key features of inclusive schooling.
2.5 It is proposed that these key features will be used as a basis for assessing the inclusive status of North Lanarkshire schools and measuring progress towards becoming fully inclusive. The key features are that the school:

- values all children and young people equally, regardless of their support needs
- promotes positive attitudes amongst staff and values diversity
- provides education for children and young people in their local community
- is a focus for lifelong learning in the local community
- educates children and young people with their peers
- works in effective partnership with parents and support agencies
- offers the same minimum length of education day as all other schools
- provides an age-appropriate environment and educational experiences
- emphasises personal and social development as well as academic achievement
- offers effective guidance and support for pupils at points of transition
- aims to achieve positive educational outcomes for all pupils
- seeks to educate each child or young person to her/his full potential

2.6 This statement of proposed key features of inclusive schooling should be the subject of consultation with staff, pupils, parents and the wider community, so that a generally agreed set of key features of inclusive schools in North Lanarkshire can be established.

3. Promoting inclusive schooling in North Lanarkshire

3.1 Using the key features outlined in paragraph 2.5 as a basis for judging progress, it is clear that significant progress towards creating inclusive schools has already been made in North Lanarkshire. A number of primary and secondary schools are now physically inclusive and a planned programme is being developed to ensure that there is at least one physically inclusive primary and secondary school in each local area. More children with Records of Special Educational Needs are attending mainstream primary schools than ever before. In turn secondary schools have been developing support for learning approaches to enable more children with significant support needs to make the transfer from primary to mainstream secondary school.

3.2 The authority now has a range of units in mainstream schools to provide support for pupils with particular support needs such as autism and speech and language units. Children with sensory impairments are included in mainstream provision with specialist support. A very successful initiative has been undertaken to establish Bothwellpark and Clydeview schools on the campuses of mainstream schools, to allow opportunities for daily inclusion experiences to be developed.

3.3 Children and young people who attend the three large ‘moderate learning difficulties’ schools in North Lanarkshire, Glencryan, Firpark and Drumpark receive high quality education and support in a special school setting. Each of these schools is located on its own campus, separate from mainstream schools. The education provided in these schools meets many of the key features of
inclusive schooling listed in paragraph 2.5. However there are several features which are problematic for these schools in their present settings.

3.4 All three schools provide for children from pre-school age to their nineteenth birthday in one establishment. It is now generally accepted that children and young people have the right to receive age-appropriate education in separate primary and secondary school settings. Moreover, the weight of current legislation emphasises the right of children to be educated alongside their peers. The education day in these three schools, and in the authority’s other special schools is shorter than that in mainstream schools. Whilst it can be argued that a longer school day would be very tiring for children with significant and complex support needs, the great majority of children attending Glencryan, Firpark and Drumpark do not have significant and complex needs.

3.5 There is a shortage of comprehensive research in Britain on the benefits of education in special school compared with mainstream school for children with ‘moderate learning difficulties’. However, the research evidence that is available indicates that, on balance, mainstream education is more likely to offer positive education outcomes and increased adult life opportunities for such children. In considering how to offer more inclusive education to the pupils at these three schools, North Lanarkshire Council would require to be satisfied that any new developments would produce, at the very least, the same positive outcomes of education presently offered by the three moderate learning difficulties schools.

4. **Increasing inclusion for pupils with moderate learning difficulties**

4.1 There is not one answer that immediately comes to mind in seeking to create more inclusive provision for children and young people with support needs often described as moderate learning difficulties. Accordingly, the authority does not wish to come forward with any development proposals until the opportunity has been taken to conduct further research into potential options and to consult staff, parents, pupils and the wider community about what they consider to be preferred options for future developments.

4.2 It is therefore proposed that the authority undertakes a wide-ranging informal consultation activity between September and December 2000, in order to discuss with all sections of the community, and other support services, the nature and quality of inclusive education which would be desirable for pupils attending the authority’s three schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. At the end of that period of consultation the authority would make a decision as to what, if any, proposals to present to committee for formal consultation.
5. The consultation process and timescales

5.1 It is proposed that the informal consultation process should begin in early September 2000 and that it should run for a period of three months, finishing in early December 2000. Should the consultation result in the preparation of proposals for formal consultation, these will be presented to committee in early 2001.

5.2 The informal consultation timetable would be as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Consultation activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Late June 2000</td>
<td>Informing school boards and staff of proposed informal consultation in autumn 2000</td>
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<td>Early September</td>
<td>First consultation meetings with schools staff and parents</td>
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<td>Arrangements made to allow pupils to give their views</td>
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<td>Briefing of education support service staff</td>
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<td>Mid September</td>
<td>Open meetings in each of the areas, Cumbernauld, Monklands and Motherwell. One meeting in each area for staff and a second meeting for parents and the wider community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late September-early October</td>
<td>Meetings with representatives of other support agencies, including health, Social Work, Community Services, Further Education, careers, Scottish enterprise and voluntary organisations</td>
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<td>Early November</td>
<td>Second consultation meetings with school staff and parents</td>
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6 RECOMMENDATIONS

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(iii) Instruct the director of education to report back to committee early in 2001 with the outcomes of the informal consultation and proposals for a subsequent formal consultation subject to committee approval.

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