

TITLE OF REPORT: Special School Provision and Developments

REPORT OF: Strategic Director of Care Wellbeing & Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an annual update relating to the changes and developments to special school provision.

1. Background

Special school provision is constantly changing and evolving because it is affected by changes in mainstream provision, nature and complexities of special educational needs and disabilities, local and national policy. This report will outline the amount of provision available, future needs and new developments across the schools.

2. Current Context

There are 6 special schools in Gateshead, Dryden and Hill Top schools are a hard federation, though they continue to function as separate schools with a single governing body. They have now individual headteachers where previously they had an executive headteacher and heads of school. The previous heads of school have been appointed to headteachers following interviews by the governing body. Dawn Winter is now headteacher of Dryden school and Louise Coulson Hill Top school. Furrowfield and Eslington schools are also a hard federation and the Executive Headteacher is Michelle Richards. Gibside school's headteacher is Judith Donovan and The Cedars headteacher is Martin Flowers.

All of the schools have been rated by Ofsted as at least good with Dryden, Eslington and Gibside schools deemed outstanding schools. This supports the view that Gateshead is maintaining high quality special school provision.

This report acknowledges that the special schools in Gateshead have exceptional governing bodies who bring strong support, challenge and commitment to the schools. Governors have a high level of skill and experience. They include previous senior colleagues in the LA, current councillors, leaders in industry and business and highly committed parents.

3. Current developments

3.1 Hilltop

Hill Top school was inspected June 2018. The findings of the inspection acknowledged that the school prepared pupils for adulthood well. It was evident that the school also promotes independence in pupils well. Although most pupils travel to and from school on school transport, some pupils have learned to travel to school independently. It was also commented that the school provides well-considered accreditation and courses in key stage 4 and post 16 that enables them to develop skills and experience for college and work.

There are 123 pupils in total in school, an increase of 7 pupils on the previous year. The school have projections that numbers will continue to increase particularly for those pupils with autism. The impact of this may be the need for further classroom accommodation as all 19 classrooms are currently used.

Also because of the increase in the number of pupils with autism, school are currently reviewing the curriculum and assessment arrangements for complex autism.

The governing body at this inspection was acknowledged for the good support it gives the school. The school are about to replace their Chair of governors, Alan Sergison who has recently passed away. Ofsted rightly recognised his contribution to the school. *'The work of the experienced chair of the governing body is highly valued and he is ably supported by governors with a wide range of experience.'*

3.2 Gibside

Numbers on roll are currently 163 which supports the council's decision for a new school. The predictions of ongoing increasing numbers have been realised. This new building is due to be opened September 2020. There remains a continued increase in autism for the school. Excitement is palatable in the staff and leaders for the new opportunities the new school will bring and the opportunities it will have situated in central Gateshead. The school are now considering the staffing they will need and the funding required to set the school up for its move.

Gibside school maintained its outstanding Ofsted judgment at its inspection March 2017. Ofsted said, *'Superb relationships between staff and pupils pervade the school's work. Staff work skilfully together to tackle pupils' individual barriers to learning. Pupils benefit from the highly individualised activities provided to meet their needs.'* Current observations of teaching show that this remains the same. There is a broad range of needs from profound multiple learning difficulties to those pupils who have more moderate learning difficulties. The school are focusing on their practice to increase challenge further for those pupils who are more academically able in school. The school has also national involvement with assessment.

Other school priorities cover - embedding a new assessment in school and offering other curriculums that meet individual pupil needs.

3.3 The Cedars Academy

There are currently 182 pupils on roll, an increase of 7 pupils on the previous year. Pupil numbers continue to be high and remain the highest seen in the school's history.

The school has built a new primary provision. The new classrooms are large and well presented. The school has also created other unique areas so that children can experience forest school experiences, a secret garden and outside classrooms. The school is very focused on enrichment activities after school and has regular residential for pupils to develop their social and personal skills.

The school was last inspected September 2017 and received a good rating overall. It achieved an outstanding rating for personal development, behaviour and welfare. The school continues to strengthen particularly in leadership since this inspection. There is an enthusiasm in the leadership team and leaders at all levels are confident in their practice. Leaders have provided valuable contributions to the local authority in assessment, post 16 and sports education.

The school are currently preparing their offer at post 16 in consideration of the future funding they will have available at post 16 and pupil needs they will be able to support.

3.4 Eslington

Eslington Primary School has 66 pupils on roll. In March 2017 it maintained its outstanding judgement. Ofsted said, *'Determined, visionary leadership has sustained the strengths noted at the time of the previous inspection and driven further improvement in all aspects of the school's work. Consequently, pupils thrive and make great progress in their learning, behaviour and in their social and emotional development. Highly analytical and reflective leaders leave no stone unturned in identifying and then tackling things that are not as strong as they should be.'*

The school continues to maintain a high quality of provision for its pupils because of the strong leadership in place and practice that is consistently applied.

The mental health of pupils and staff has been a strong focus for the school. The executive headteacher and Heads of Eslington and Furrowfield schools have strong professional expertise they share beyond the schools.

There are high numbers in the school on child protection plans and/or involvement with social care. This involves a large number of meetings with other professionals and managing the emotions and behaviours of pupils who are experiencing quite challenging circumstances. The staff are excellent in their work in this area.

3.5 Furrowfield

Furrowfield School has 73 pupils and 14 currently in residential provision attending for four nights.

The school is now providing a curriculum which provides a primary nurture approach for those pupils in years 7 and 8 who are academically less ready for a secondary curriculum and need to remain in one class. As the pupils learn academically and socially they develop confidence, become responsive to others, learn self-respect and take pride in behaving well and in achieving.

The school funds a psychotherapist who works with individual pupils. This provides highly specialist provision for the most vulnerable pupils in the school. These pupils may have bizzare behaviours, complex needs or significant mental health needs. Though this is an excellent support to individual pupils the school feel they need greater access to Children and Young People Service (CYPS) to address the needs of many others in school.

The school was inspected February 2017 and judged good. It remains a strong school. It was described as *'a haven of care and support for pupils who have had previous unsatisfactory experiences of school. The management of behaviour and support for pupils' social, emotional and personal development, alongside the development of the skills they will need to be successful adults, stands out in all the school's work.*

Crossfield House, the residential provision was inspected in February 2017 and was judged as 'good' in all areas. A dedicated pastoral team or House Parents support pupils in both the residential and in the school.

Furrowfield, since the last report, has a new Head of school, Rachel Jukes, working with Michelle Richards the executive headteacher. They, and other leaders, continue to drive this school forward very successfully.

Strong governance for Eslington and Furrowfield schools supports them well with an exceptional level of experience brought to the school. Their knowledge of the schools is sound and they have high expectations for the quality of information they receive.

3.6 Dryden

The school currently has 47 pupils on roll. This is made up of 35 in key stage 3 and key stage 4 and 11 pupils in post 16. Although post 16 is full there are fewer pupils in key stage 3 and 4 than previous years. This is 10 pupils less than 2018. This has impacted on a significantly reduced school budget and the need to reduce staffing. There is potential for more pupils in the school which needs to be considered alongside the growing numbers in other special schools.

The school is waiting for an inspection which is overdue. It is currently outstanding and the headteacher and governors have high expectations for the school and that it will remain outstanding.

The school's key priorities are:

- sustain outstanding at the next imminent Ofsted inspection
- sustain numbers and staffing for this specialist provision
- maintain amount and quality of provision needed for medical/ health needs across school

3.8 Current considerations and discussions

- 1 Currently we have 614 pupils in special schools. There are currently 12 children and young people with an EHC Plan with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as their primary need being educated outside of Gateshead. We have 29 pupils across the schools from other local authorities. The highest number is 12 in The Cedars. All but Dryden school are above their commissioned numbers.

Top 5 SEN Categories - Gateshead special school pupils

	2019
Autism Spectrum Disorder	188
Moderate Learning Needs	127
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	88
Speech, Language and Communication Needs	56
Severe Learning Difficulty	47

This is putting pressure on the amount of provision we have available and tension on using provision outside of Gateshead. At this moment we have increased numbers particularly in Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Social Emotional Mental Health. We will have to consider how we continue to accommodate this growth in demand for special school places.

- 2 The local authority has a consultation out on post 16 provision and changes to provision in special schools. The outcome of this consultation will inform the future provision available and curriculum offer schools will be able to make at post 16.

4. Recommendation

It is requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to receive this annual report on Special schools and provision.