

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Special School Provision and Developments

**REPORT OF:** Strategic Director Children, Adults and Families

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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

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### **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. Background**

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. Dryden school supports pupils with learning difficulties, particularly those pupils with severe learning difficulties or profound multiple learning difficulties. Hill Top supports moderate learning difficulties and complex autism. Furrowfield and Eslington schools support social, emotional mental health (SEMH) needs. Gibside school is for learning difficulties and autism and The Cedars also supports learning difficulties and autism but for those pupils with less complex needs.

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

### **3. The special school headteacher June 2019 discussion**

#### **3.1 Provision 2019**

In June 2019 the special school headteachers felt numbers of commissioned places may not be representative of the numbers of pupils they had in their schools. They were funded for commissioned numbers which were less than actual numbers in most of the schools over the school year. The additional numbers of pupils were funded, however, after the schools received their annual budgets. The headteachers explained that the additional pupils meant that they were not able to plan for the additional staffing they needed for these increased numbers.

Dryden school has been significantly affected with its funding by losing Year 14s. The headteachers discussed that there are pupils at both the Cedars and Hilltop who could be educated at Dryden. As Dryden and Hill Top are federated there could be more fluidity in provision between the schools to help numbers in Dryden school and improve the budget. There have been previous arrangements where some pupils have benefitted from the provision at Dryden school. Across Hilltop and Dryden schools they support the range of learning difficulties (profound/multiple, severe and moderate) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Eslington is mainly social, emotional and mental health needs though some pupils have autism spectrum disorder and/or anxiety. There are some bulges in some year groups that cause difficulty e.g Year 4 where there were 18 in this year group. The school manages this by adjusting groupings. Furrowfield, also for social, emotional and mental health needs, supports secondary age pupils. It maintains strong provision and works highly effectively with Eslington on transition. This supports pupils settling quickly into Furrowfield.

The Cedars is the only primary through to secondary school. It has primarily moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Many MLD younger pupils are in mainstream schools and not in special schools. The Cedars population is 40% Cognition and Learning, 40% ASD, 20% MLD with SEMH.

Gibside school has primary age pupils predominantly with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties and autism. The school has a highly effective specialist early years provision based at Blaydon Pupils's centre.

#### **3.2 Transition**

Special school headteachers discussed at their June 2019 meeting admissions to schools. There are occasions when parents and carers are given a view that a school can meet needs they are not designated for. Other special schools in Gateshead would have been the appropriate provision to meet the child's needs. The special school headteachers felt they would be able to guide parents and carers to the most appropriate provision. All of the schools provide high quality provision, however, all also have an uniqueness based on specialist expertise. The

headteachers were concerned that admission and transition to their schools needed improvement. To support a better understanding of the experiences pupils will have in their new schools, the schools could provide a DVD of activities. This was suggested as a development across schools so new pupils who are joining school could get a DVD which welcomes the child into the schools.

Other admission issues arise from tribunals. A pupil can be directed to a school from a tribunal when the school is full. There is a lack of guidelines on whether a school's capacity is considered and if a school can refuse. It is also not clear why a tribunal directs a school takes a pupil not designated for the pupil's needs when the appropriate schools that can meet the needs aren't considered.

The headteachers would like the local authority to consider how professionals can be more knowledgeable about their schools so that they give parents and carers well-considered advice. This would include discussions around Out of borough placements into the schools. They commented that SHIP, the special school headteacher group, could work as a partnership of headteachers to recommend the right school. They would like to explore if this was possible.

### **3.3 Class groupings and possible capacity**

Eslington is on two sites, Rose Street and Hazel Road. Rose Street has 5 classes of 7 pupils and Hazel Road also has 5 classes of 7 pupils. There is also a nurture class in the bungalow of 5 pupils. The school has the capacity for 75 pupils. Currently, there are 66 pupils plus 2 exclusion places. Leaders felt they could go up to 73 pupils plus 2 exclusion places.

Furrowfield has about 7 pupils per class plus a nurture group of 5 pupils. This is a total of 75 pupils.

Dryden has currently 40 pupils though commissioned for 46. It has the space to go up to 60 pupils. There are two key stage 3 classes about 6 pupils each, a key stage 4 class of 7, a PMLD class of 6 and 2 Post 16 classes of 8.

Hill Top was commissioned for 105 including Post 16 but have 123 on roll. In the ASD centre there are 4 classes of 7 pupils in each. In the main school there are classes of 10. There are a small number of pupils with additional behavioural needs. The headteacher stated the school has a maximum capacity of 125 places as they do not have the classroom space for more.

Gibside had 160 on roll but is commissioned for 135. The new school will offer 170 places. There is also the Blaydon centre for early years though the school also has a Year 1 class there. There is a PMLD class of 13 pupils with 1 teacher and 7 TAs. Use of therapy areas such as hydrotherapy provides space to manage their needs.

The new school will be open in January 2021. It will be big enough considering the numbers that have come in recently. The new build will have some space for additional extensions in the future if necessary.

The Cedars commissioned places supports Ivy Lane site for 130 and Walker terrace for 15 pupils. The school actually has 165 at Ivy Lane and Walker Terrace has 21. In September 2019 the number expected was 182. The school has even converted a garage as a space for teaching. They have a specialist art room and food technology room but otherwise pupils have to stay in their classrooms as there is no capacity to move around. The school may have to go up to 13 pupils in a class with a teacher and teaching assistants. The school are looking at extending the sports hall area and add changing rooms and showers to improve provision. They are using all available space including changing cupboards as break out areas.

#### **4 The special school headteachers January 2020 meeting**

##### **4.1 Waiting lists**

In January 2020, there were 14 pupils waiting a place at The Cedars and 15 for Gibside school. Hill Top in the next two years will not have capacity for more pupils as there will not be spare classrooms. Furrowfield may be able to increase in numbers and Eslington could expand by another class. However, Dryden is under numbers.

A recent paper by the local authority has shown that 57% of pupils with EHC plans are in special schools. This is an increase from 100 new assessments per year to 220 each year.

The discussion identified that there are about 40 places needed now in special schools. There is some limited capacity in some schools and Dryden is under utilised. The Cedars and Gibside schools are at capacity currently and parental expectations, therefore, will need to be managed.

##### **4.2 Current school provision**

All schools are supporting ASD. In The Cedars 42% have ASD as their primary needs. If they also have behaviour it becomes very difficult for the school. Most of the pupils are funded Band 2 and 3. The school feels it is not able to support band 1 pupils – the highest need (A1 Autism or B1 Behaviour) which need smaller groups and more staffing. This is because class sizes are 12 or 13 in each class with a broad range of needs. 43% of pupils are Cognition and Learning and some are SEMH (Mental health/anxiety). The curriculum covers up to A level for some pupils. However, some pupils would be a better fit for Dryden school because academically and developmentally they have severe learning difficulties.

Dryden has space for another 2 classes. It could accommodate those pupils on The Cedars waiting list or have a more focused emphasis on preparing parents in Y4 for a change to Dryden in Y7 if appropriate.

Dryden could help pupils with learning difficulties in Year 6 who cannot face size and expectations of mainstream secondary schools. It could play a role in offering assessments for vulnerable pupils particularly their curriculum and learning needs. Dryden has skilled teachers experienced in a broad range of learning needs. They

are also very skilled in a wide range of communication needs. Dryden is well placed to expand its remit beyond SLD and PMLD. As ASD pupils hit adolescence, their ASD becomes more prominent rather than the SLD. Pupils need quiet, break out rooms, small classes and ability to segregate and give them space. Dryden has the capacity to support this. This was echoed by The Cedars.

Gibside has 8 Autism specific bases with 7 pupils and 4 staff in each. In mainstream classes there are also ASD but they are able to follow routines. Some classes have up to 12 pupils in each.

Hill Top has 4 classes with Autism between 6 and 8 in each class. All of pupils are banded AS1 or 2 (Autism Bands) as is the case in Gibside bases. A3s and A4s are in the main classes. Structures and routines are mirrored from Gibside. The issue Hill Top has is with those pupils who come from mainstream with ASD who have not managed the transition from primary to secondary. They feel that they have not got the capacity in terms of class space. Some of the pupils with ASD as they get older are more challenging to manage due to size and hormonal changes.

Eslington has a significant number of pupils with ASD who have SEMH as their main need. However, ASD is how that behaviour presents. The school takes advice from Education Psychologists, HINT (High Incidence Needs Team) and Gibside so that the routines and approaches support the pupils with ASD well. There is a similar need for space, breakout areas and the need to really understand how these pupils function. Sensory needs are very high and the school has to prepare for this when planning activities.

Furrowfield is concerned that they do not have the experience to manage the needs of complex ASD with behaviour. The school routines and practices are developed to support SEMH pupils.

Hill Top has issues around how staff respond to those pupils with challenging behaviour. The curriculum is taught by specialist subject teachers. This means that some pupils can be taught by different staff over the week. For some pupils, the range of responses to their behaviour can lead to some pupils being more likely to be disruptive.

### **4.3 Future designation of schools**

At the January 2020 meeting the headteachers had a discussion around the designation of their schools. Some schools cannot expand if they have really tricky pupils that cannot manage in larger classes.

Need to make sure that the local authority and other schools and professionals in Gateshead have a clarity about designations and the needs they can support.

The Cedars is now a large school from key stage 1 to key stage 5. There are large classes and pupils that are complex but can manage in these large classes. Band 1 pupils often tip over the balance of good management and good wellbeing for a class.

Gibside has less MLD and more SLD and ASD pupils. Many of pupils manage really well because they are in the right provision but would not manage in mainstream. The headteacher states the school needs to remain both for learning and ASD needs. They have a really strong PMLD and SLD department. Access to mainstream in partnership with other schools would be beneficial for some pupils unless they are more complex and have very strong ASD needs.

The meeting agreed that one of their most important roles is informing parents and the wider community about what special schools are about and how they work.

## **5 Supporting the future**

### **5.1 Assessment places**

The headteachers asked for a policy on assessment places in the schools. Some schools were offering them but this was not consistent across schools. There have been places at Eslington, Furrowfield and Hilltop. Hill Top said in some cases it impacts on the school roll and attendance figures. Furrowfield said that it can be difficult to move pupils into another school when it is apparent after assessment that they are not appropriate. It was agreed that assessment places should be time limited. The headteachers agreed that there needs to be clarity on their purpose and what assessment is expected from schools. Assessment should have a clear remit for attendance, needs of pupils and provision they will have.

Some pupils could have a detailed assessment at Dryden school. Some parents ask for assessment at Percy Hedley as they have more therapeutic input and health professionals. If Dryden had the resources and some increased finance then they could provide a high-quality assessment service.

Provision for SEMH in Eslington and Furrowfield is changing because some pupils have been admitted with ASD where their needs cannot be met in other special schools. Both of the schools are set up for SEMH and have much outstanding practice for this, however, they are mindful that some more complex pupils with autism or significant learning needs may not integrate as well with others.

### **5.2 Gaps in provision**

The following were identified as areas the LA needs to find additional provision for:

- SEMH secondary
- Anxious and phobic/school refusers, particularly from Year 9
- Significant ASD with behaviour and mental health problems

### **5.2 School designations for the future**

Eslington and Furrowfield remain SEMH, traditionally behaviour. The school can take PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) and some MLD. However, for some ASD the school would need to look at the pupils and the diagnosis to see if they could meet the needs. An assessment place would then be preferable to see if needs can be met.

Dryden remains 11-19 provision for complex learning needs and disabilities and ASD. It could develop assessment provision for those pupils that need health and care needs addressed through specific programmes. It could also provide a specialist unit for school refusers to re-engage in education and to achieve qualifications.

Gibside school remains for age 3-11 years for PMLD, SLD and ASD.

The Cedars is age 3-18 years provision for Cognition and Learning, ASD, SEMH (Anxious and Phobic), Medical. It can meet the needs of a range of pupils but not the more severe pupils within those definitions.

Hill Top is for Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities and ASD.

There could be a partnership of sixth form provision across Dryden, Hill Top and The Cedars schools where curriculum options and shared facilities could be explored to meet individual pupil ambitions.

#### **4. Recommendation**

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

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