

Bristol Schools Forum
Early Years SEND Panel

Date of meeting:	12 July 2023
Time of meeting:	5.00 pm
Venue:	Virtual/City Hall
Officer Presenting Report	Reena Bhogal-Welsh

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform and update the School's Forum on the progress of the Early Years SEND Panel

2. Recommendation

School's Forum is invited to:

- 2.1 Review the progress to date of the Panel.**

3. Background – Early Years

In 2017 with the introduction of the Early Years National Funding Formula all Local Authorities were required to have a Special Education Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) to support children with emerging special educational needs in their early years settings within their Local Authority

- 3.1 The statutory guidance: Early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2023 to 2024 states that: 'Local authorities should target SENIFs at children with lower level or emerging SEN. Children with more complex needs and those in receipt of an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) continue to be eligible to receive funding via the high needs block of the DSG'. It also states in sources of funding that: 'Local authorities should establish their SENIFs using funding from the early years block and/or the high needs block of their DSG allocation'.
- 3.2 In Bristol the Early Years Service has identified a budget to support children with SEND in their early years settings, this is a long standing budget and has been in place since the early 2000's and is known as the

Early Years SEN Panel. This budget is allocated only from the DSG Early Years Block and forms part of the 95% 'pass through' that LA's must give out to providers. There is currently no contribution from the High Needs Block. The amount of budget allocated since 2017 is: £1,274,720

- 3.3 The Early Years SEN Panel currently allocates funding to all of those children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who attend an early years setting. This is to avoid early years providers having to claim funding from different systems, as the funding for EHCP's is the responsibility of the High Needs Block. The SEN Team will issue an EHCP and rather than pay the setting direct the Early Years SEN Panel will provide the funding. This ensures all funding that is paid to early years settings for SEND support is paid at a consistent rate. This does provide a cost saving to the SEN Team, who allocate funding for children in schools with an EHCP at a higher rate than the Early Years SEN Panel funds. The Early Years Service then re-claims the funding from the High Needs Block usually twice a year, in September and March.
- 3.4 The system used to allocate funding to support children with SEND is the Early Years SEN Panel. This is a multi-agency meeting that takes place monthly and uses the Early Years Bristol Universal Descriptors (BUD's) to make decisions on the levels of funding to be allocated. The early years BUD's were originally designed to align with those in the school age Top Up process to support transition from early years to school. In May/June each year the Early Years Service provides a list of all children who will be starting at Reception to the SEN Team who then arrange for the band level to transfer to the receiving primary school.
- 3.5 The aim of this funding is to enhance the staffing ratios within the environment to increase the capacity of the child's Key Person. The hours that will be funded in any week will be in line with the child's free early education entitlement plus any additional hours of paid childcare recorded on the application.
- 3.6 Funding is allocated for a specific length of time usually around 6 months, at which time the early years setting is asked to provide a review so the panel can monitor the use of the funding.
- 3.7 The budget also funds other services to support children with SEND in early years settings:

Service	Description	Funding
Early Years Specialist Equipment	This funding is a contribution to a pooled budget with Health and Social care to provide specialist equipment for children in their early years setting.	£25,000
Bristol Autism Team	The Bristol Autism Team allocate specific staff to support children with a formal diagnosis of autism and those on the pathway to a diagnosis in early years settings.	£60,490
Specialist Children's Centre Inclusion Practitioner (SCCIP)	Experienced early years practitioners who work with the Early Years Portage and Inclusion Team and provide the following three areas of support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Intervention Package - a block of up to 6 visits to model and support the implementation of strategies in an <u>early years</u> setting ➤ Rainbow Stay and Play groups - a weekly drop-in group specifically for parent/carers with a child who has special educational needs or disabilities ➤ Dedicated SEND support for Childminders 	£72,000
Early Support Practitioners	These posts are jointly funded by Health and Early Years which support pre-school children with disabilities and their families. The primary role is to empower parents and carers by providing them with support, resources, and information to meet their individual needs.	£41,250
Educational Psychology Support	The Bristol Educational Psychology Service provide support to children in early years settings.	£35,086

4. Pressures

4.1 The Increasing numbers of children: the table below shows the actual amount of funding provided to early years settings via the Early Years SEN Panel and the increasing number of children it has supported year on year.

Year 2018 - 2019	Year 2019 - 2020	Year 2020 – 2021 (COVID impact)	Year 2021 - 2022	Year 2022 -2023
£919,205	£1,482,006	£1,200,093	£1,741,303	£2,145,882
312 children	498 children	425 children	575 children	637 children

4.2 Children deferring and delaying entry to school: the table below shows the impact on the funding from those children that delay their entry to school and remain in their early years setting.

Year 2019 - 2020	Year 2020 – 2021 (COVID impact)	Year 2021 - 2022	Year 2022 -2023
£144,000	£124,000	£124,000	£190,800
36 children	31 children	31 children	47 children

4.3 Funding Stream: The Early Years SEN Panel budget does not currently receive any contribution from the High Needs Block. This differs from other LA's who do contribute HNB funding to the early years budget.

- 4.4 Children supported: The requirement within the Statutory Guidance is for funding to be available to support identified 3&4 years olds who are accessing their Free Early Education Entitlement hours.
- 4.5 In Bristol we provide funding to support all children under statutory school age and in an early years setting for all of the hours they attend both with emerging and complex needs. This is to ensure early intervention; support is provided to all children identified with SEND without the need for an Education Health and Care Needs Assessment.

5. Early Years SEND Project Plan

The Schools Forum agreed to provide £250,000 with an aim to reduce the annual overspend on the Early Years SEN Panel. The table below shows the projects this funding will provide:

Project	Description	Cost
Early Years SEND Audit	To audit 50 early years settings (30% of all settings and includes a range of each type, Nursery Class, Nursery School, Private, Voluntary an Independent) to establish how Early Years SEN Panel funding that they have been allocated is meeting the needs of children with SEND. Design appropriate paperwork to be used. The audits will be carried out by Early Years SENCO's currently working in settings who have expressed an interest in completing them ; in the model of peer review. A briefing was provided to ensure a consistent model was implemented.	Design: £1,000 Cost: £600 per audit = £30,000
SEND Continuing Professional Development Programme (CPD) for Early Years Settings	To design and deliver a 12 hour CPD Programme to be offered to whole settings to meet the areas of need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Social Communication ➢ Social, Emotional and Mental Health / Personal, Social, Emotional. Training to be delivered as a twilight set of sessions or over In-set Days. Funding to be provided to those settings participating to enable all practitioners to be paid for their attendance.	Design of course £4,000 Cost per course: £5,000 to be delivered to 32 early years settings. Cost: £160,000
SEND Self Help Sheets	To develop self-help sheets outlining strategies for supporting specific areas of needs.	Cost: £10,000
Training Course	Developing a Neuro diverse early years environment and curriculum. Plan to deliver 3 courses for 40 practitioners at each event.	Cost: £30,000
Early Years SEN Panel	To review and re-design the Early Years SEN Panel process.	Cost: £15,000

6. Spend to date

Project	Spend
Early Years SEND Audits	£24,600
SEND CPD Programme for Early Years	£20,534
SEND Self Help Sheets	£600
Training Course	£0
Early Years SEN Panel	£511
Total:	£46,245

- 6.1 The nominated Early Years SENCO's have to date audited 37 early years settings:
- Maintained Nursery Schools - 9
 - Nursery Classes - 11
 - LA Managed Children's Centres - 2
 - Private, Voluntary and Independent – 15
- 6.2 There were 7 settings that were allocated to SENCO's who were then unable to carry them out due to their capacity.
- 6.3 The audit comprised of an observation within the childcare environments, a discussion with members of the senior leadership team and SENCO, with the visits being documented on standardised paperwork.

7. Impact from the SEND Audits

- 7.1 We now have a more accurate understanding of how the funding allocated from the Early Years SEN Panel is being used in settings. This evidence base is helpful in generating clear lines of enquiry for future school/setting visits, and for training purposes. Key areas of focus to include embedding Ordinarily Available Provision and structured approaches to play for neurodiverse learners.
- 7.2 Further insight gained into the role of SENCO – most SENCOs are knowledgeable, but further dissemination of knowledge base is often needed across other staff. Further exploration and promotion of the role of 'expert' teacher/practitioner leading on SEND now required, including impact analysis of reducing SENCO capacity/costs and sharing roles across schools and settings.
- 7.3 Some nursery chains have SENCOs with multiple roles, limited time and little SEND knowledge. If a senior member of the team in the school/setting is the SENCO, high expectations are embedded in practice. The valuing of SEND at the 'top' creates a positive culture throughout the school/setting and this needs promotion.

- 7.4 Scrutiny, processes and accountability - we identified that early years settings would welcome a reduction in the initial process of referral with pre-populated drop down lists to choose from, and with more added scrutiny around the review phase. There is a general feeling of a lack of accountability of how funding is being used – very heavy loaded to get the funding and then no follow up. Schools and settings welcome more robust systems of monitoring of expenditure – through self-evaluation/externally.
- 7.5 There is a trend that nursery classes in primary schools tend to not apply for funding in early years. There are instances of the SENCO being a Key Stage 2 teacher and unfamiliar with early years practice. Ongoing review of central team deployment and monitoring of school SENCO attendance at Early Years SENCO network meetings needed to provide support and challenge.
- 7.6 Sufficiency – settings are managing their intake, so are not always offering places to children with SEND. Maintained settings always offer places to children with SEND, but this is impacting on deficit budgets. Settings get a reputation re: SEND and professionals direct parents to them and this can result in numbers of children with SEND becoming too high – tipping the balance. Staff recruitment and retention is a significant challenge, particularly in relation to part-time, temporary staff which schools/settings need to operate within funding envelopes. Difficult to build expertise needed. These sufficiency concerns remain key considerations, included as part of the Maintained Nursery School transformation programme, and subject to further monitoring across the wider sector.
- 7.7 Reduced Family Support - children’s behaviour is being seen as SEND but is possibly due to trauma (heightened by the pandemic) and lack of parenting skills. Further exploration of therapeutic approaches and ‘nurture spaces’ required to prevent misdiagnosis. More robust family support needed. Greater promotion of Disability Access Fund (DAF which is £828 a year) is needed– some settings unaware, parents not applying for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) as no family support for them to make the application.
- 7.8 Practice exemplars - we have identified that the different types of settings within the early years sector manage the needs of children with SEND in different ways. A continued focus on best practice, exemplifying how high quality SEND provision can be managed within the allocated funding envelope remains a priority. There has been sharing of good practice through the audit process itself, where the SENCO completing the audit has implemented some practices they have observed into their own setting. The settings that have been audited have implemented some of the recommendations from the SENCO doing the audit.

8. Reflection / Summary – Where we are now...

- 8.1 There is an established Early Years SEND Forum that meets on a regular basis and has representatives from across the early years sector, schools, LA Education services, Health and Social Care. Members of this forum have joined a Task and Finish Group which will be responsible for reviewing the audits which will then inform the re-design of the Early Years SEN Panel process.
- 8.2 The SEND CPD Programme has been piloted and a criteria has been developed to enable us to target 30 early years settings and offer them the training from August 2023.
- 8.3 All elements of the Early Years SEND Project Plan are incorporated and will be monitored through the SEND Strategic Partnership Plan.
- 8.4 Bristol is working with Dingley's Promise to support the delivery of their Early Years Inclusion Programme in Bristol. 'This programme is a series of ten courses over five years aimed at empowering early years practitioners to deliver inclusive practices by upskilling them through training and shared information/learning resources. It is expected that the training will increase learners' awareness of the needs of all children, especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and their confidence in supporting the learning and well-being of all children.' This programme has been advertised to all early years practitioners, Social Care and Health colleagues. To date 161 practitioners have registered to complete this training.
- 8.5 The Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) document was released in 2021. It has been shared with early years settings but the general feeling is that it does not fully reflect an early years environment so needs to be reviewed.
- 8.6 The Early Years SEN Panel allocates funding to early years settings to enable them to support children, currently the descriptors used to make decisions are based on the percentage of time the child requires 1:1 support. This directly conflicts with our aim for settings to enhance their ratios to meet the needs of children with SEND, so in any re-design of the panel this will be addressed.

9. Next Steps

- 9.1 A Task and Finish Group has been set up and the first meeting is July 7th.
- 9.2 To undertake a review of all current contracts that are in place to provide support for children with SEND to assess value for money and effectiveness.

- 9.3 To review the Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) to ensure appropriate for early years.
- 9.4 To roll out the SEND CPD Programme to 30 targeted early years settings, with the aim to embed Ordinarily Available Provision.
- 9.5 To promote the training offer that will be available from Dingley's Promise to support early years providers in business planning, ensuring they are managing their budgets to be able to meet the needs of children with SEND.