DSG-Task and Finish Group Report

Mainstream ARPs and School-funded Hubs

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Task and Finish Group participants
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There have been two face to face meetings of the working group and a final online consultation to agree the following report and recommendations. To support the process, information was shared by the LA commissioning officer as requested by the group.

Context:
The local authority is facing continuing rising numbers of pupils with complex and high needs in mainstream schools, with pressure being put on special school places, as well as an accumulative deficit of upward of £27m in the high needs block. Several ARPs were already in existence for Dyslexia, Physical Development and Speech and Language, but in 2017 the Local Authority began investing in capital projects to create additional primary and secondary ARPs to meet the needs of complex needs children with a diagnosis of autism, as there was no provision in borough. These provisions were designed to provide specialist and targeted support within a mainstream setting and are additionally funded by the local authority offering places for up to 14 pupils in a primary ARP and up to 40 places in a secondary ARP. With this increased capacity, there are now two primary ARPs for children with autism, one primary ARC for pupils, with a diagnosis of autism, who are unable to access any mainstream education, one secondary ARP for autism, one secondary dyslexia unit and physical disabilities unit, and two primary speech and language ARPs.   More recently, we have seen a growing number of mainstream schools begin to create their own school funded 'hubs' for groups of pupils with high and complex needs in response to: schools having limited financial resources to provide classroom support staff, limited special school places and long waiting times for children to find an appropriate special school, parental choice that children with complex needs should stay in a mainstream setting, slow and often inadequate support from external agencies in being able to do direct work with children, as well as challenges within the statutory assessment process, where we have to provide costed evidence of how much the school is spending on employing additional support staff.   There is an obvious tension within the local authority between delivering their statutory duties to ensure that we have the right provision for pupils with complex needs in our school system, and in achieving best value financially. Ultimately, the Local Authority needs to find solutions to address the continual over spend in the High Needs Block; the following questions have framed our thinking, as a starting point for exploring these issues in relation to future developments of ARPs and of school-based hub models, in Solihull.

Questions to consider in relation to ARPs and school-funded hubs:
1. What needs are being met within the current ARPs and school-based hubs? Does this match the identified need within the local authority?
2. How are ARPs funded? Is this model working?
3. What governance arrangements are in place to quality assure provision? Is this the right level of scrutiny?
4. Are all ARP spaces being used? If not, why not?
5. What further opportunities could we explore for using the expertise within our schools?
6. How have schools set up their own internal hub provision? What questions does this raise for consideration?

Outcomes from the exploration

An initial survey was sent out to the participating schools in the work group, to explore some of the questions raised. The outcomes were as follows:

1. LA funded ARPs are not all funded in the same way with per pupil funding ranging from approximately £10K to £31K
2. 3 out of 8 ARPs report being very under-funded by the LA and are not able to sustainably meet the cohort needs of their children within the existing model. This means that money is being taken out of mainstream budgets impacting on outcomes for other pupils.
3. All ARPs have different staffing models depending on cohort needs and intended outcomes of the provision-this is not fit for purpose, with staff being deployed from mainstream classrooms to plug the gap.
4. 71% (6 out of 8 ARPs) report having vacant spaces due to the wrong profile of pupil being referred and placed
5. 71% (6 out of 8 ARPs) report having children on PT timetables, due to SEMH needs
6. In the 7 ARPs for children in mainstream settings, most children access some element of mainstream provision up to and over 50% of their time in school
7. Overall attendance for pupils is good or better in most cases, although there are examples of poor attendance and punctuality due to high levels of anxiety
8. 71% (6 out of 8 ARPs) report that not all children currently on roll are right for the provision and need a change of placement

In summary, we can see that where the right pupils have been placed in the right ARP provision, pupils attend school, participate in some mainstream lessons, make progress in their personal development, make small step progress to achieve academic outcomes, learn strategies to manage their needs, belong and feel part of a community.

Where pupils are wrongly placed within the provision, we see the following effects: pressure is placed on staffing, finance and resourcing, progress and development of pupils, who are appropriately placed, is interrupted and hindered and ARPs are not able to operate at full capacity.

With an inflexible funding model, ARPs cannot respond to pupil need and there is no current agreement with the local authority about a process for reviewing the funding model, despite the best efforts of schools to have these professional conversations. There are also issues over the speed and access to support services that ARPs have, and challenges with professional disputes with the EHCP team, when there is a need for emergency reviews, or a change of placement. These additional pressures for schools

have negatively impacted on the positive culture of partnership and collaboration that we want to achieve.

Governance arrangements are very unclear and over loaded and SLAs are not routinely reviewed. Although places in the ARPs are commissioned by the LA, it feels as though SISS have taken the responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation processes. This creates obvious tensions, as SISS are currently employed as a support and advisory service, not as a governance and scrutiny body. ARPs have also had further monitoring visits by school improvement advisors and commissioning officers and Special School Cohort Review Co-ordinators, which has increased workload and creates a perception from ARP professionals that schools are not trusted, valued, or respected for the work that they are doing.

The rhetoric that: Solihull Schools are not inclusive, coming from a few parents, is not a true reflection of the inclusive practice that exists within our schools, which is both validated through external scrutiny by OFSTED, individual school data from parent/carer surveys, as well as through the LA SEND audits. Many schools, without any, or insufficient additional funding from the LA are undertaking physical adjustments to spaces within school buildings, as well as re-deploying, or recruiting staff, in order to create school-based hubs for high needs children, who are on roll in a mainstream setting. Varying models of provision exist such as:

- HLTAs and TAs running the provision, under the direction of SENDco/Inclusion leads
- Lead teacher employed to run the provision
- Vertical grouping of all ages of children working in the same room with differing areas of complex needs
- Separate units for specialist teaching targeted at the needs of children e.g dyslexia, or total communication approach

Currently there are no agreed, or shared principles of intent around schools setting up their own hub, which could lead to inconsistency of practice between schools, confusion for parents and raise challenges for quality assurance, particularly when children with significant varying needs are working together as a result of the financial constraints of the school. Typically, the profile of children in school-based hubs are those who are not accessing mainstream education alongside their peers and who are likely to need to change of placement, or are waiting for transfer to specialist provision. There is a danger therefore, that these hubs may become 'waiting rooms' for children, in an already over loaded system.

The answer to the question about whether continued investment by the local authority into ARPs is the right thing to do is **yes**. There is a definite need and requirement for ARPs in mainstream schools, as they provide an essential element of the graduated pathway for children with complex needs. The LA data continues to show that ASD, SEMH and Speech, Language and Communication are a high priority and so there is a need for continual investment into school ARPs, particularly for SEMH needs, as well as further support needed in mainstream settings to enhance provision for the growing numbers of complex needs pupils. The group believes that ARPs offer best value, as a model, with a total spend for running the ARPs at approximately 8.3% of the £43 million in the High Needs Block for 2024-2025. There is the potential therefore to mitigate some of the forecast increases in

the High Needs Block, but there will need to be further investment from the local authority, in order to address some of the problems and issues that schools are acing.

Problems and issues to be explored and resolved

1. Lack of understanding and clarity in the EHCP team about the profile of pupils that should be placed within each of the ARPs
2. Differences in the way that schools are managing the referral process into ARPs
3. Schools are not involved in panel decisions that are being made about placing children in ARPs and the wrong children are being placed
4. Entrance criteria for working with children in the ARP can sometime prohibit schools working with children who are on a long waiting list for ASD diagnosis
5. Inequality in funding with no system for review, or request for additional funding as changes occur in each provision
6. No consistency, or equality in leadership time been funded as part of the model, along with a lack of understanding around leadership requirements for ARPs-big impact on school leadership capacity to be a host school for an ARP
7. High cost of accessing services to support children on roll in the ARP, e.g OT, Eps, Speech and Language. This puts added financial pressure on a limited budget, with some families paying privately for services, thus creating inequality in the system.
8. In some cases, where an ARP has reached the point where a request for a change of placement is needed, their professional opinion is not accepted, or acknowledged. This creates the perception that the views of the qualified and competent ARP staff are not valued by SISS or by the EHCP team.
9. Inadequate support and provision for pupils with complex SEMH needs, particularly in secondary education.
10. Is the right curriculum offer in place for children who are in mainstream school-funded hubs? What does their provision look like?

Opportunities/solutions/recommendations	Benefits	Dependencies
1. Funding models should be agreed in consultation with ARP providers, so that there is a shared understanding of need and a degree of flexibility to respond to cohort changes	The LA and ARPs will be working in partnership with a shared understanding of need. This will help build bridges and strengthen relationships	Both LA and schools need to have a better understanding of the 'big picture' and limitations. A change of process is needed
2. All ARP providers should have an adequate and suitable element of funding given to the school to compensate for the impact on senior leadership time	School leaders would feel acknowledged and valued for their commitment to the shared ownership of meeting the needs of our most vulnerable children. Other schools would be encouraged to consider developing commissioned ARPs	The LA needs to re-think the way the HN block is spent, in order to release additional funds for ARPs

		within their school setting	
3.	There should be a clear SLA that includes a process for annual review of the funding model, so that it reflects the context of the ARP and is not just driven by a formula	LA and schools can continue to work together to achieve best value. Transparency means that everyone is clear about processes Unnecessary tensions between school leaders and the LA can be avoided. Funding allocation would be driven by need, not by a spreadsheet formula	A change of process is needed and a commitment to investing in ARPs
4.	SLAs between LA and ARPs should include free, or reduced cost access to services to support children e.g OT, speech and language, EPs	ARPs would be able to plan for regular reviews and support children, parents and families better. Children and young people would make increased progress towards personal goals	We need increased capacity and improved commissioning strategies with Health professionals. The LA also needs to understand what services ARPs need to deliver the right provision for children and have a strategy/plan in place to achieve this
5.	Increased involvement of ARP professionals in panel meetings and offer of placements-this needs a thorough review	ARPs and schools know children and families best of all. We are in danger of seeing children as numbers and places, rather than having a true person centred approach	This depends on the LA valuing and trusting the professional opinions of schools. There needs to be a big cultural shift here

6. Entrance criteria for ARPs should be reviewed to consider how we can support children on a waiting list for an ASD diagnosis	ARPs can do more direct work with schools and those children and families on long waiting lists will be better supported. This will ultimately achieve best outcomes for children and young people and reduce the potential risk of school refusal, or relationships breaking down	Increased funding would be needed to increase capacity within ARPs to do this work. There would also need to be an agreed change in commissioning brief
7. Opportunities for ARPs to offer assessment places, to support the 'home schools' where a child is on roll, as well as families, to understand the needs of the child, or young person in greater depth. Could this be dual registration, for an agreed period of time?	ARPs can do more direct work with schools and those children and families on long waiting lists will be better supported. This will ultimately achieve best outcomes for children and young people and reduce the potential risk of school refusal, or relationships breaking down	Increased funding would be needed to increase capacity within ARPs to do this work. There would also need to be an agreed change in commissioning brief
8. Opportunities for ARPs to offer CPD and out-reach work to other mainstream settings so that expert practitioners are providing effective peer to peer support	This would increase confidence of schools and up-skill staff to meet the needs of complex needs children in their setting. Serving practitioners, who work with the same profile of children each day, have a stronger credibility. Learning from each other promotes unity, collaboration and a shared responsibility for doing our best for SEND pupils	Increased funding would be needed to increase capacity within ARPs to do this work. There would also need to be an agreed change in commissioning brief
9. Potentially include the review of ARP provision as part of the SIP monitoring cycle, or identify one professional body to carry this out, rather than several.	This would reduce workload and build more positive relationships between schools and the LA	This depends on knowledge of SIPs and capacity within the team. Could there be a

		reallocation of SIP advisors matched to the profile of the school?
10. Start-up funds allocated to those schools who have identified that they have an appropriate space to develop a school-based hub	This would encourage more schools to commit to this agenda and demonstrate that we are one team: schools and Las working together to support children, young people and families	The LA needs to re-think the way the HN block is spent, in order to release additional funds, or consider how capital funds are allocated and spent
11. Local authority investment into developing alternative curriculum packages and resources based around 'life ready' skills and personal development, that schools can access to support those children who are not accessing mainstream education, but are in mainstream schools	Solihull would have an alternative curriculum offer that would be clear in intent, implementation and intended outcomes, linked to children and young people being ready for the next steps in their life. There are opportunities here to link to business and the world of work, as well as other community resources and assets	This needs funding as well as strategic co-ordination and development. There would have to be a sustained commitment from the LA that this work was important and mattered to our children and young people and the overall vision that 'every child matters and matters equally'
12. Local authority investment, or reallocation of funds into SEMH ARP provision	Reduce the number of suspensions, exclusions. Improve attendance of children and young people with complex SEMH	This depends on schools being open to supporting this initiative as a host school for SEMH ARPs. It will need a clear service level agreement and clarity of purpose of the provision.