

Agenda Item 02 – Appendix A

Mr James Birkett
Head Teacher /Chair of North Northants School Forum
Wollaston School
Northamptonshire
11 Jan 2022

Dear Mr Birkett

I am concerned that the consultation to not fund the Local Authority services for children with disabilities was ill informed to schools as discussed at a recent School Forum for the North. I had not realised from the consultation that this would affect the Specialist Support Service (providing the autism specialists, teachers of the deaf (TOD) and QTVI s and the early years disability team, Portage). They not only offer specialist advice to schools and settings, but to parents to help with home life - which has a knock-on effect to school life. They are extremely well thought of and are incredibly well-used, supporting students to enable them to be ready to learn in school. They provide workshops for parents on puberty, food issues, toileting (for younger children) anger management, and overviews to Autism. Paediatricians within Health Care suggest parents refer themselves to SSS for specialist support.

The Sensory Impairment Service provide the specialist teaching staff and technical support and equipment for our deaf children and those children with visual impairments. These staff are qualified in Braille and BSL. For busy school staff, finding staff qualified at this level, for the salary available, potentially unplanned if the student moved in from another school or county, would be an immense challenge. Having the support of the specialist LA staff is not something to lightly dispose of.

There was some discussion at the School Forum around the effectiveness of the consultation process for this agenda item, and I am concerned that 30+ responses out of 135 schools is not a balanced representation of schools' decisions. I think the impact of choosing not to transfer the funds from the DSG to the LA was not made clear to busy Heads and I wonder if asking if they wanted the % increase or finding their own support services would have given a different reply.

I also think that it would be prudent to have a robust alternative in place before ending the service with the LA for the benefit of those disabled students. Their lives are already disadvantaged. There is always a need to look for innovative ways to move forward but there should be something ready to use before permanently ending an existing route of support.

I do not think the Forum had been fully informed of the impact of this decision and I feel uncomfortable about the number of schools who responded to the difficult to access a consultation which did not make clear the impact this decision would have on the services they use.

I have sent this with every best intention for the disabled children and young people of North Northants.

With kind regards,