



The Educational  
Institute of Scotland

## SCOTTISH BORDERS EIS ADVICE ON RESPONDING TO TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S SERVICES SEPTEMBER 2008

The Executive Committee of the Borders Branch of the EIS have been gathering the views of colleagues from across the Region. Our members have attended the meetings that have been held so far in the consultation process of SBC. We have invited comments and questions from all areas that will be affected by the sweeping changes proposed by the Project Board of TCS. There is a lot of information presented on the SBC website and it is not all easily accessible. What we feel is lacking is evidence that the proposals will deliver the claimed improvements in Children's Services along with the savings that are required in the budget. In this and other leaflets we try to spell out the consequences of the changes for classroom practitioners and the young people in their classrooms. The following points have been made to us by our members and by parents at the consultation meetings. You can make your own judgements from your own professional experience as to their validity.

### **Issues Affecting the Provision of Additional Needs Services**

- The management structure is unclear and uncertainties exist about who can apply for the new posts and what will happen to existing managers. The Recommended Additional Needs Management structure implies that the Additional Needs team will have a Social Work manager. This is of great concern as the manager needs to be someone who knows about the curriculum, teaching and learning.
- Being categorised as the Complex Needs Team, is felt by the team and teachers to be a misleading title. The majority of mainstream Additional Needs pupils cannot not be said to have complex needs. It implies very severe difficulties and will not be acceptable to some parents. It could put them off agreeing to support for their child. Why could the term Additional Needs not be used?
- It is a positive aim to support all pupils in their own locality and set up provisions to minimise the number of pupils who may have previously attended schools outwith the authority. The project recommends the development of specialist support. This will obviously involve extra resources in the localities. Will some of the 22.2% allocation funding distributed to the Locality teams be ring-fenced for Additional Needs pupils?
- How can Additional Needs ICT possibly be integrated into centralised ICT? It is a highly specialised area and is as much about teaching and learning as it is about ICT. The present teacher has in-depth knowledge and a wealth of experience with a wide-range of additional needs pupils of all ages. Given the proposal to develop more specialist provision in the authority, the work of the Additional Needs ICT teacher will be even more in demand. This teacher works closely with some of the other specialist teachers who will be located at the old Earlston High, and surely it is important that he is based there too. It is a role for a highly experienced additional needs teacher who has to be part of the team. There are two main functions of the post. One is to respond to the needs of individual pupils who are referred by their schools (nursery, primary, secondary and special schools) for difficulties including motor difficulties, literacy

problems including dyslexia, sensory impairment as well as severe and complex needs. The second function of the post holder is to support the Additional Support Needs Service by supporting specialist ASN settings and services, providing training for teachers and ANAs, keeping abreast of national developments in ICT support for people with additional needs (mainly through membership of and contact with various organisations), providing an information service within Scottish Borders and maintaining a loan bank of ICT equipment. Taken together, all these facets of this post help the Additional Needs Team to ensure that several pupils with quite severe motor and visual impairment can continue their education within mainstream schools, accessing as full a curriculum as possible.

- What happens if a PT's job no longer exists? An example is PT Deaf and PT Additional Needs. How will their roles change and when will they be informed about this? Will PTs salaries be conserved?
- Promise of support tailored to individual needs sounds ideal. However there are concerns about the specialist support for some additional needs pupils such as those with language difficulties, complex needs or autism who previously benefited from provision at one of the schools with specialist resources. Will there be sufficient trained, specialist staff in all localities? We worry about a dilution of services by splitting the authority into five areas.
- Interagency working is important and it is something that already happens in the Additional Needs department. The Team have close links with health, social work, home-link workers, charities, colleagues from other authorities and researchers at university. The Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) sounds as if it could increase efficiency for accessing information as long as all the other agencies, such as the health service participate.
- Locating so many specialist services, including the psychologists in Earlston High will make liaison with colleagues and sharing resources easier.
- The proposal to develop a new policy for Additional Needs escorts and transport is to be welcomed for looking at efficiencies as well as health and safety of pupils.
- We are presuming that Additional Needs staff will be centrally funded and do not need to be 'bought' in by schools or localities.
- How is the staffing of support services going to be worked out? Will there be flexibility if an area of need suddenly arises in a locality? Recently there has been a rapid increase in the number of bilingual pupils, many of whom are only able to be monitored but not regularly supported by the very stretched EAL service. The ideal would be to have a specialist EAL teacher in every locality.

There are many questions that parents of children with additional needs should ask. Many of them are implied by the comments above and are centred round the big question – Will the Transformation of Children's Services Project deliver an improvement to the Support that is already in place?

Please consider these points when responding to the Consultation on TCS. You do not have to use the official response form. We have been assured that all responses will be taken into account and will be available to elected members before they vote on these proposals in November.

Kay Miller, Secretary, EIS Scottish Borders.