

# **Bristol Sensory Support Service**

## **Review**

**Wednesday 27 November 2013**

### **Context**

The Strategic Development Group for the Sensory Support Service decided that an external inspection of the service should be carried out and the Head of the Sensory Support Service, Joao Roe, requested an evaluation by Roger Thurlbeck, Senior Advisory Teacher of the Deaf, Hearing Support Team, Swindon and Registered Ofsted Inspector, and Julie Jennings, Manager: children, young people and families with Evidence and Service Impact, RNIB. The programme for the day is attached as Appendix A.

### **Summary**

The reviewers were able to corroborate the statements made in the service self-evaluation using two frameworks

- the SEN and Outreach Quality Standards: 1 of the standards was judged outstanding, 11 good and 4 satisfactory;
- the Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services: 41 of the standards were judged fully in place/level 1 for the whole SI service, 7 for HI only; 17 mostly in place/level 2 for SI, 1 HI only and 2 VI only, and 4 partly in place/level 3 for SI, 4 VI only, and 1 not in place for VI. One standard was not applicable.

The Bristol service is an example of effective provision with an ethos of reflective practice, promoting good partnership working with a focus on independence which is empowering for children and young people, families and settings.

You are a good service and we recommend the following actions to support your continued service improvement.

## **Suggested areas for development**

1. The self-evaluation was accurate and informed the developments outlined in the Service Improvement Plan 2013-14. These now need to be implemented.
2. The service has an embedded evaluative culture. The development of the team's capacity to capture views from parents and older pupils to improve transition arrangements would further support improvement in practice.
3. The Hearing Support Team has begun to share and develop its expertise between the early years and school based teams and the growth in this partnership working, perhaps by further sharing examples of intervention and shadowing sessions, would also contribute to effective transition for children and young people.
4. The Hearing Support Team has a Transition Coordinator and with the potential need to further develop support for the post 16 age group, this initiative and the post-holder's expertise could be used to support the Vision Support Team as Transition/Beyond School is an area which needs strengthening in VI.
5. The Head of Service has not received effective performance management for two years. For a service that has a strong culture of support and supervision this should be addressed as a matter of urgency.
6. A strong theme that came across at different points in the day from team members, family and professional colleagues centred on the potential impact of restructuring the service and its relocation. This will have a significant impact on the very strong early years support provided by the service's specialist pre-school settings. Any relocation needs to consider how this strength of the service can be maintained. Early decisions about restructuring and the extension of the current joint arrangement will allow the Service to focus on further strengthening support for individual pupils, instead of concerning itself with uncertainty.

7. Further work on developing the confidence of all specialist teachers to challenge in difficult circumstances, whether this is in support of an individual pupil or working in under performing schools or academy settings. The development of a toolkit to support challenge which includes elements of; coaching, developing a shared language with schools, structured conversation training and teacher confidence in the use of progress data would help in developing this practice.
8. Finally, for the Service to celebrate the embedded good practice that they already have and to ensure they continue to publicise this effectively in challenging times.

## **Evidence**

A range of evidence sources were provided and reviewed.

This included

- Service self-evaluation schedule and contextual information, using the Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services (Yorkshire and Humberside validated Charter Mark) and SEN and Outreach Quality Standards (DfE) as a framework.
- Supporting documentation to evidence the self-evaluation, including Service Report 2013 and Service Improvement Plan 2013-14
- Review of four filmed intervention sessions
- Observation of specialist early years setting for deaf children
- Visit to secondary school for observation and discussion with SENCO
- Visit to primary special school for observation and discussion with head and MSI teacher
- Meeting with parents, health professionals (audiologist and orthoptist) and Parent Partnership Service.
- Meetings with HOS
- Discussion with service staff.

## **Key themes to emerge from the review**

- 1. The team provides highly effective intervention for pupils. The range of questioning, the pace of intervention and the**

**highly engaging resources used provide good teaching and learning experiences for individual pupils.**

### ***Observations of interventions***

*The service provided the opportunity to observe four filmed intervention sessions with different specialist teachers from across the VI and HI services working with school-aged children from Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 4. The observations were carried out by a practicing Inspector for Ofsted with a range of team members in attendance. Comprehensive contexts were provided before each observation.*

*The overall strengths from interventions included:*

- *A strong focus on assessment through observation and clear and precise questioning to identify learning points.*
- *The pace of each session was moved on quickly and appropriately which supported long-term engagement from children who often had difficulties with concentration and focus.*
- *Engagement was further supported by the range of exciting and appropriate learning resources that team members used.*
- *Highly positive and warm relationships between staff and children were a consistent theme through all observations.*
- *Specialist Teachers were not afraid to use their experience and skills to adapt activities to recapture and maintain a pupil's engagement in learning.*
- *The Staff are excellent communicators and clearly modelled key language.*
- *Team members used the intervention sessions to provide input and support for the pupils' teaching assistants.*

*Areas from the observation that we thought would be useful for development included:*

- *Being more explicit in the learning expectation at the beginning of sessions.*
- *Providing further challenge for pupils to understand more complex instructions.*

- *Using relevant subject based documents to practice IT skills at an earlier stage in one to one sessions.*
- *Further enhancing assessment questioning to demonstrate progress to the pupils throughout the session.*

*These observation sessions provided stimulating discussion which highlighted the team's trust in each other and their commitment to ensure pupils make the best progress they can. The use of film clips could provide a platform for further sharing of each other's practice in the future.*

- 2. The service is very well regarded and valued and as exemplified by one parent who stated 'the service provides a lifeline for our family'.**

### ***Evidence from discussions and observations throughout the day***

#### *Parents*

*Support from the team is sensitive and spot-on in moving families forward. Staff members have a positive outlook and provide a step-by-step approach to help the family help their child. There was a slight feeling that the Hearing Support Team is perhaps a little too focused on developing sign support rather than other communication approaches.*

*One parent of a child with VI commented that her daughter really felt that the team 'understood' her. The parent felt that there had been a consistency of approach, with VI staff taking the lead from the child, particularly in relation to choice of literacy medium. She emphasized just how important early support had been for them as a whole family when their daughter was first identified with a vision impairment.*

#### *Sign Language Advisors/Transition Coordinator*

*This is a strong team with lots of skills working well for the benefit of children. Team members appreciate the strong professional support provided even though they are spread over a large area. Managers have strong interpersonal skills which support the empowerment of everybody. Assessment is a clear focus for the team at all levels and*

*contributes to the development of individual pupils. Restructuring and change is the pressure.*

#### *Identification and Assessment Co-ordinator*

*This is an innovative development within the service. An assessment policy is in place with a focus on statistics, functional vision assessment and developmental assessment. The aim is to build capacity across the whole service supporting the development of assessment practice, such as improving the quality of assessment report writing. The work also contributes to data collection and links to CYP understanding the impact of their eye condition. The Co-ordinator line manages the mobility officer, whose work is informed by MISE and Habilitation standards, and the technician for ICT assessments. She has a QA role across the service. It would be useful to share developments in this role with the SI sector.*

#### *Other Professionals*

*The team is dedicated, caring and provides excellent intervention. The service provides fifty two week cover and Hearing Support Team is always graded good in external NHSP quality assurance review. The team has strong relationships with health professionals including Audiology, Paediatricians and Eye Specialists, and Parent Partnership. Multi-sensory impairment support is a strong feature of the service. The opportunity for families to have earmould impressions taken at Acorns, the specialist early years setting, is very beneficial. The issue of restructuring and expanding caseloads is a potential pressure for the service.*

#### *School support*

*Two school visits were made.*

*In the primary special school, a clear Partnership agreement is in place for 2013-14. Optometrist and orthoptist visit for on site assessments and 62% of learners have been identified with VI. Discussion with the HT and school MSI teacher showed that the support from the service MSI teacher was hugely valued in 'waving the flag for vision and hearing'. Particular mention was made of innovation in school practice, such as making phonics meaningful, and building understanding in teachers and support staff. Assessments were informal, based on observation and careful*

*questioning of key staff and translated into planning for future sessions. The MSI teacher is also able to transfer knowledge to the new teacher when a child moves class, or when moving from the primary to the secondary site. She also brings information into the school when a child first enters the school as she has previous knowledge of the family. The HT confirmed that parents valued this 'whole life approach'. The MSI teacher sits in the therapy team which has 'solution focussed clinics'. The class teacher (also MSI trained) valued the 'hands on' approach and being kept up to date with new developments.*

*The second visit was to a Catholic secondary school where 2 pupils with VI were based and one with HI. It was in a deprived area and learners had a range of challenges. A high level of support was being offered. Discussion with the SENCO confirmed that the school had a long history of support from the HI service, but found their first pupil with a cochlear implant more complex. Experience in VI was less well established in the school, but there had been significant improvement in understanding. The mobility officer was described as the 'go to' person and he had assisted the school in completing their Access Plan. The SENCO valued the fact that the service made assessments explicit, translating them into what they mean in practice for the pupils. The pen portraits were considered an important way of information sharing and ensuring consistency in practice across different teachers. Three key staff (SENCO and 2 SI service staff) act as decision makers to manage information sharing.*

*The SENCO reflected on the need for the service to be aware of the different contexts presented by primary and secondary school settings, particularly in relation to IT networks.*

- 3. There are robust systems through performance management and use of attainment and progress data at an individual level to support schools and settings. Service staff know that they are held to account to support pupil's academic progress.**

## ***Progress and Attainment***

*Performance management arrangements ensure that at least one objective for every team member focuses on the attainment and progress of the pupils they support with an expectation that 80% of*

*high-level needs pupils will make expected progress.*

*Service Leaders and Coordinators now have responsibility for supporting the progress and attainment of pupils through in year opportunities to discuss individuals at support and supervision meetings.*

*The Service has robust systems to monitor its performance against NATSIP benchmarking data. The developing work for the senior leadership team and individual teachers has led to the benchmarking data being used to develop targeted resources and research projects. The service includes all children in its data collection of progress and all pupils have a yearly support plan. These are created in partnership with families and professionals.*

*The Service annual report includes evidence of end of key stage data but as yet does not include national figures as provided by the NATSIP Benchmarking group. If included this would highlight the effective contribution the team makes to the progress of pupils across the joint arrangement.*

**4. There was evidence of very strong and effective multiagency working which came across from discussions with a wide range of professionals and family members.**

*Discussion with the Head Orthoptist from Bristol Eye Hospital confirmed excellent interagency working in relation to specialist vision assessment. Assessments take place monthly, mainly for babies under one year, in a relaxed play based setting at SI centres. The core team consists of paediatrician with overview of children with vision impairment, head orthoptist and Vision Support Teacher. OT and Physio can be involved as needed. The head orthoptist acts as a link person for the hospitals, linking in to paediatric ophthalmologist and paediatric optometrist when issues arise. Concerns on development or vision are followed up. The assessment is in addition to vision screening at 4/5 years old in schools, including special schools, and neurological referrals by the paediatrician which are both working well.*

*Parents appreciate this aspect of the service, leaving with summary information which supports their understanding of their child's development and their eye condition and knowing who to contact*



*with any further queries. A further report contains recommendations for the parent and is circulated to relevant professionals, with parents' permission.*

*Currently the ECLO role is mainly with adults, but the hospital is exploring whether a paediatric nurse could develop the role in relation to children.*

*This is an example of effective multiagency working which is a good basis for building future work on EHC assessments and plans required in the proposed legislation.*

**5. The service is a reflective organisation with children and families at the centre.**

*A feature of the team is their ability to reflect on their own practice. Senior managers retain a case load to keep in touch with practice. Relationships with others are at the heart of effective working for the SI service and a culture of shared learning is encouraged, based on effective questioning.*

**Continuing Professional Development**

*There is a very strong culture of learning and development across the team and in-house skills are promoted and disseminated effectively. Senior leaders have developed their skills as coaches and this is an effective process that is used widely across the service as staff feel very well supported.*

*It is of concern that the Head of Service has not received a similar level of performance management for two years. The shared staff area on the website with its developing blogs and forums has good potential to further develop a shared knowledge base and support of the whole team.*

*The service is also proactive in giving of its expertise for example the support it provides to the QTVI training course at Birmingham University.*

**6. There are opportunities for families to shape the organisation not just for their own children but also at a planning level.**

*The service has a strong focus on partnership with parents. It invested in Early Support training in Working with Parents which is being cascaded. A Parent Partnership Strategy is in place with a virtual PTA and parents are involved in strategic planning.*

*The service is reviewing how to develop a more meaningful way of engaging with parents, particularly in terms of exit evaluation: how much do they know what is happening?*

- 7. The joint arrangement across four local authorities is seen as a strength by the team and they make good use of the specialisms and expertise they hold as a service to drive forward improvements.**

*The service is able to analyse trends in populations to anticipate future staffing need, such as the increasing numbers of children with vision impairment and CVI in particular, and deaf children with ASD.*

### **Acorns Specialist Early Years Setting for Deaf Children**

*This is a highly regarded and well used setting for families from across the four local authorities. There are experienced and skilled individuals supporting a well-planned programme of intervention for youngsters and family group members. Parents have a strong voice in developing their communication support sessions. The range and number of deaf and hearing volunteers within the setting is a very strong feature, as is having the ability to make earmoulds onsite, which is a much appreciated service with a quick turnaround. All of this leads to a very well used and vibrant early years' environment.*

### **Service comments on the review process**

The SI team were apprehensive before the visit, but found it a positive experience because of the manner in which it was conducted. They welcomed the emphasis on improvement and particularly valued the video experience as a tool for whole service development. Given that most staff work in isolation, it was seen as a good way of sharing practice and could be used to help other services also to reflect on their practice.

With our thanks to the Bristol Sensory Support Service for their hard work in making available the evidence on which to base this report, and for their openness in discussion and questioning.

**Roger Thurlbeck**  
**Senior Advisory Teacher of the Deaf, Hearing Support Team,**  
**Swindon and Registered Ofsted Inspector**

**Julie Jennings**  
**Manager: children, young people and families**  
**Evidence and Service Impact, RNIB**

**Friday 13 December 2013**

# Appendix A

## *Joint Authority Support for Children, Families and Schools*

### **Inspection of Sensory Support Service 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

#### **Timetable**

Inspection carried out by Roger Thurlbeck and Julie Jennings

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Who needs to be present?</b>
9.30 – 10.15	Introduction and time for inspectors to discuss final arrangements based on information sent This is time for Roger and Julie to discuss amongst themselves but they may have questions to ask SLT	HoS and some members of STL
10.30 – 11.40	Roger – video - lesson observation VI	QTVIs
	Julie – visit to Claremont Primary School	Kate Sullivan
11.40 – 12.00	Roger – brief observation of Acorns session	
	Julie – opportunity to meet staff	Service staff – opportunity to meet inspector
12.00 – 1.30	Lunch – meeting parents and service staff Other professionals joining in from 12.30	Some parents / professionals – through invitation Service staff as above
1.30 – 2.45	Roger – lesson observation HI	ToD / MSI teacher could join
	Julie – visit to St Bede's Secondary	Clare Gordon
2.45 – 3.00	Break	
3.00 – 4.00	Analysis / discussion between inspectors	HoS available
4.00 – 4.30	Feedback to staff	Service staff – we want a good representation here – you will hear what they found out