

Gillespie School Learning Committee
Support for and progress of children with SEND
Minutes, 7th February 2023

Attendees: Jodie Reed (Chair), Claire Bolderson, Mandy Leatham, Dan Hamilton, Lyn Brett, Mark Owen.

Apologies: Hafsa Abokar, Fin Craig, Bhavini Doyle, Katrina Moses

Introduction

Jodie introduced the meeting and the key questions and areas for discussion, as per agenda circulated in advance. Lyn, in her capacity as SENCo addressed these points sharing a set of detailed slides (see attached), with input from Mark.

System overview

Lyn gave a brief re-cap of systems for supporting children with SEND, including her responsibilities as the SENCo, various outreach teams (EP, SALT - fortnightly, OP), referral process, the traffic lighting of need and EHCPs. She also explained reporting process to borough SEND team and in relation to safeguarding processes.

The type and levels of SEND coming in to Gillespie

There has been an increase over time in the number of children with SEND coming to Gillespie, and the severity and complexity of need. The increase has been especially significant since the pandemic with a notably high number of children with SEND joining reception in September (as has previously noted by governors). A number of children have arrived since the pandemic who were not known to services.

Lyn shared full figures on children with SEND across the school. 46 pupils (20% of the school) are on the SEND register. 27 of these are Wave 1 or monitored for Wave 1 (ie. on the Wave 1 support plan). 8 children are on Wave 2 which involves additional professional plans – this includes 3 looked after children. There are 8 children with an EHCP.

In terms of the types of needs, autism has become increasingly prominent. Islington is a high borough for autism in general and the arrival of 4 very complex needs children in reception this year has put Gillespie on the borough's "autism heat map". Currently there are 15 children with an autism diagnosis, and a further 8 on a pathway toward diagnosis but not yet fully diagnosed. Mark and Lyn felt that some with the most severe diagnosis might have their needs met in specialist provision, but also gave examples of where such children had, over time, thrived in the school. There are 10 children who have moderate learning difficulties, the majority of whom have multiple needs/learning difficulties.

Lyn explained budgets attached to each child, and the fact that some children are still awaiting assessment – in particular there is one child with undiagnosed with very high level needs, requiring support of a full time TA.

Governors asked about the process of assessments and what the school does to ensure prompt diagnosis and get children access to an EHCP where appropriate. Lyn explained that she does all that she can to encourage early referral and explained the steps and documentation required. Assessment times vary by service – currently 2-4 months for SALT, 2 years for autism and ADHD. Early Help, Social Communication Team for EYFS is quicker – 13-14 months. In one instance of a child not previously known to services Lyn notified SCT this was an emergency, and they were seen despite being beyond the age group, but the process still took a year. Once the assessments have been conducted the case is brought together and submitted by Lyn. It should take no more than 20 weeks for Islington to respond, so this part is relatively quick.

Governors asked about the process for admissions of children with SEN. It was explained that applications come from Islington and must be considered in 15 days – Lyn must respond balancing the needs/pressures on the class and needs of applicants. Claire said that she is sometimes party to these exchanges and observes the extensive work that is required to consider each case individually and respond appropriately.

How the learning of children with SEND is supported within the classroom

Lyn shared the schools' statement of curriculum intent in relation to supporting children with SEND and talked through key elements of the supporting documentation. The emphasis of the statement is clearly on adapting the curriculum so that SEND children can access the same provision that others children do. It also makes strong reference to quality first teaching, early identification, partnership working with parents and agencies.

Lyn emphasised that whilst she leads SEND support, a key expectation at Gillespie is that every teacher is a teacher of SEND. Reflecting this, there is a commitment to common principles and approaches which include a focus on emotional wellbeing and supporting children in regulation opportunities across the school day. Lyn listed and explained numerous strategies and techniques which are widely utilised, including wobble cushions, use of social stories to normalise events and "chunking" instructions. In reception Lyn makes task bags and complex daily needs tasks lists.

Governors asked about the extent to which the teaching strategies described by Lyn are equally well understood and implemented by class teachers and TAs across Gillespie. Lyn said that all teachers understand the strategies and techniques mentioned and children have access to them within the classroom – though many are implemented by Lyn herself rather than a teacher. Lyn provides training on different strategies regularly for TAs. Every year group teacher is expected/supported to conduct provision mapping, and has a class overview sheet. Lyn also works regularly with children to establish methods that they can learn to use these independently – she has produced a number of templates to support this (e.g. on 'chunking').

Governors asked about challenges how successfully children with SEND are able to access the same curriculum as they move through the school. Lyn said that sometimes children with highly complex needs find it harder as they progress, especially in year 6 – there are instances where they need to be working on their own ECHP targets, but the approach is always to try to build on content in classroom wherever that is possible, employing parallel teaching.

Mandy noted – and other governors agreed - the astonishing amount of work and the extraordinary dedication of the whole staff and especially the SENCo in supporting SEND children.

Assessing learning progress for SEND pupils -

Lyn explained that, as with other children, SEND children's progress is documented using the target tracker which sets out provision, progress and next steps. However, many with complex needs won't make progress at the same rate and progress can look minimal in terms of national curriculum sub- levels. The focus is therefore on goals set out within the IEPs/EHCPs. The EHCP is reviewed annually.

EHCP goals and outcomes are set by Lyn over two-year period (key stage) and broken down into yearly and termly. This is very much in conversation with the child, family and teacher. There is an expectation document/plan updated year 5 but Lyn usually changes early Y3 in conjunction with parents. Class teachers evaluate how goals are met.

Claire asked where the evidence for how EHCP objectives are met comes – Lyn explained that it comes through the individual learning support plans. The individual plans for each child are crucial and include input and output scores against the goals (professional partners regularly use and refer to this information). The final EHCP annual review includes evidence from child and all parties and goes to borough SEND team.

Gillespie also uses the Autism Trust progression framework – Lyn shared an example of AET individualised plan and how it illustrates progress. She said that Gillespie's experience has been that this has been empowering for parents - "what can my child do?". The Bridge also provides regular support with progress monitoring of autism children. Samuel Rhodes outreach team has also worked with a number of referred pupils over 6-week interventions which has helped validate work within Gillespie.

Reflecting on outcomes of children throughout their journey within the school, it was noted that the 3 children in EHCP in Y6 have made huge strides and had positive experiences. 2 will go to high needs schools.

Support for the well-being of children with SEND and working with their families –

SEND children are fully included in all activities and integral to the life of the school. An example was given of the year 6 field trip. Even where parents have felt children not able to stay over night on their own, all efforts are made to include them through day visits or staying with a parent nearby.

Long meeting with all parents all the time, inside and outside formal review process. It is a real partnership.

Lyn also conducts pastoral check-ins with children across the school identified as being in need of this, including many with SEND. These take place on a one-off or termly basis.

Key challenges/risks and what might be needed to mitigate or address these

In Mark's view the key current challenge/concern is the extended period of time before being able to make progress on getting EHCP. Despite the school's best efforts this is out of Gillespie's hands given timescale assessments.

He also emphasised rate of children coming into the school with SEND, and growing numbers with more complex needs.

As a result, the school is increasingly needing to allocate a high proportion of TA time to provide dedicated support to specific children with highly complex needs. Governors noted this is not a pressure that is likely to abate at least in the short term, but should be kept in mind in finance and resourcing conversations.

The pressures on Lyn's time was also noted by governors. Alongside her SENCo role, Lyn is currently working 2 days a week as a class teacher in reception. Mark said it is a priority for the school to address this and move Lyn out of classroom teaching.

The possibility of being recognised for this focus as a specialist unit was discussed – this has been floated by the borough previously. Mark felt strongly that this would only be possible to achieve with significant additional capital investment. Dan reported back from an Islington governors meeting that not capital investment for this will be forthcoming.

Governors asked about training needs. Lyn reflected back that recent conversations with staff members have highlighted the desire for more training for on understanding the areas of SEND. Some teachers would also welcome more guidance about how we talk to all children about children with SEND. As a parent, Jodie agreed with this, reflecting what a generally positive experience it had been for children growing up with diversity of abilities and needs, but that there is an opportunity to build on the understanding they had acquired through this and ensure they use the right language in reference to SEND. Some relevant work has taken place at the Bridge which Lyn will be tapping in to. She will also be looking to get more books in the library that reflect a diversity of SEND needs.

Next steps

There were no specific action points for the agenda. It will be an area the Learning Committee continues to monitor, especially as the cohort of children with SEN increases.

The next Learning committee meeting will be on the 29th March and governor observations will be scheduled prior to that for the week 20th-24th March.