

Education and Culture Committee

Inquiry on attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment

Fact-finding visit to Craigie High School, 18 May 2015

Introduction

The Committee visited Craigie High School and met specialist staff from Dundee Multi Sensory Service (MSS), as well as pupils, parents and local service delivery partners.

Background on MSS is included in the Annexe.

This paper summarises the main points to have emerged from the discussions during the visit. This paper will be published once confirmation has been received from MSS.

Key topics of discussion

Recognising the individuals needs of each pupil—

- MSS and Craigie High School's approach is to adapt to meet the needs of individual pupils, recognising that specific resources are often required for each child.
- Teachers are expected to provide assistance where necessary. This has included learning the BSL signs for terminology in advanced subjects such as chemistry Higher, and being able to communicate with children who use other languages including Latvian Sign Language.
- The Resource base in Craigie HS allows for additional tutorial time, where the curriculum does not meet the needs of a pupil (taking account of the fact that learning English can be more difficult for a child with a hearing impairment and so additional literacy tutoring may be necessary).
- Experienced staff and good planning is critical to ensuring the needs of pupils are being met (e.g. the setup of exams must allow pupils to access the information and resources, such as the suitability of the font sizes)
- It is recognised that pupils with a sensory impairment often feel isolated and so there is an emphasis on building their confidence and helping them to feel empowered.
- Teaching also includes development of life skills to build up confidence in social situations, for example, MSS staff arrange specialist trips and events for VI and HI pupils including visits to Stirling Castle and Easter/Christmas activity afternoons.

Providing support to parents and families—

- It can be daunting for parents when their child is diagnosed with a sensory impairment and so there is recognition that support and advice must be provided sensitively.

- Some parents and families need different levels of support and so MSS staff work collaboratively with the families to agree the appropriate level of interaction.
- However, some parents can be reluctant to accept their child needs specialist support, which can be difficult where healthcare and education professionals want to ensure the child receives certain support, such as a hearing aid. Such situations can mean balancing the rights of the child with those of the parent.
- MSS staff visit families at home to provide advice on using communication methods with their child, and also run initiatives to engage and inform parents such as Wee Chat, Play Pals.
- MSS support and advice is often required for parents when a child begins to be more independent and at key transition points, such as nursery to school.
- There can sometimes be a tension in that parents may prefer their child to go to a local school to keep them together with their friends rather than send them to a school with enhanced provision, such as Craigie High School. However, it was recognised that it would not be suitable for children to travel long distances.

Multi-agency working—

- The GIRFEC approach has been adopted by the three councils in the Tayside region (City of Dundee, Perth and Kinross and Angus). The resulting strong inter-relationship between local partners was seen as critical to providing co-ordinated and effective services to children and their families. Specifically, the role of a named person and development of child's plan under the GIRFEC model helps to co-ordinate support for the child and their family.
- MSS works closely with professionals in the local area, including family nurse practitioners, specialist services in the Council, nurseries (private and local authority), primary and secondary schools, colleges, and university disabled students' services.
- Close working relationships are important in ensuring early notification when a child with a sensory impairment moves into the local area.

Support and advice during transition to college—

- It was suggested the transition from school to college can often be difficult and further work is required to ensure lecturers are deaf-aware.
- It was also emphasised that students felt less isolated when Communication Support Workers provided additional support out of class, for example, during breaks and lunchtimes.
- There was a call for a greater emphasis on providing support for sensory impaired students through the CPD process at colleges.

Key areas for improvement—

- There is a mixed approach to providing services across local authorities; support is provided in different ways and by different bodies/ departments.

- Good practice, such as that which exists in Dundee and Falkirk, must be shared among other local authority and health board areas.
- There needs to be greater awareness of the needs of students with VI/HI in the FE/HE sectors.
- BSL should be a language option in schools, which could be promoted under the 1+2 language policy.
- A common suggestion was for teachers' minimum qualification in BSL to be raised from level 1 to at least level 3.
- There is a lack of qualified teachers of the deaf (1.8 in Perth and Kinross) and Educational Audiologists (four for the whole of Scotland).
- There was a call for a system to be put in place for training families in BSL.

Clerk to the Committee
May 2015

Dundee Multi Sensory Service

The Multi Sensory Service (MSS) provides support for children and young people with a visual and/or a hearing impairment across the city of Dundee. The primary aim of MSS is to support each child to achieve inclusion.

Currently, MSS provides support to children/young people—

- 97 with a visual impairment (VI)
- 133 with a hearing impairment (HI)

The service is provided by 27 full time equivalent members of staff—

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|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| • Educational Audiologist/Team Leader | 1 |
| • Teacher of the deaf | 9 |
| • Teacher of the visually impaired | 6 |
| • Support staff (HI) | 5 |
| • Support staff (VI) | 6 |
| • Total | 27 |

MSS offers support to children with a wide range of sensory loss, from the mildest to the most profound. Staff work with babies and children (and their families) from the time of identification of their sensory loss until they leave school to enter employment or continue their education.

MSS also staffs two schools with enhanced provision (EP), at Craigiebarns Primary School for pupils with a significant VI (4 pupils) and at Craigie High School, for young people with HI (6) and VI (2).

The work of specialist teaching and support assistant staff is enhanced by several posts within the service which offer particular expertise. For example, within the VI sector, the Mobility and Habilitation worker came from Guide Dogs for the Blind, where she was qualified and experienced in delivering habilitation and mobility skills to adults and children. On the HI side of the service, the Education Communication Support Worker post is shared by a member of staff who is a trained and registered BSL interpreter and another who has also completed the Graduate Diploma at Heriot Watt University. Also, Dundee has one of only 4 Educational Audiologists working within a local authority in Scotland.

Families are offered help in the use of audiological and low vision equipment, and are also given support to understand the nature and implications of their child's sensory loss. In nursery and school, children and young people are offered specialist resources, programmes of work and tutorial support to enable them to access the work of their class.

MSS staff are part of the TayCAST (Tayside Children's Audiological Services Team) and CVISTA (Children's Visual Impairment Services Tayside Agencies) groups,

working with a variety of professionals within health, social work and voluntary agencies. Having been set up before GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) was introduced by the Scottish Government, both groups work to ensure that the needs of the child and family are addressed in a holistic and integrated manner, with the child at the centre. Both TayCAST and CVISTA operate across NHS Tayside, so there is close working with colleagues in sensory services in both Angus and Perth & Kinross.