ELL(2) 06-03(p.2)

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Department for Training and Education - Issues Paper

Title: **Special Educational Needs – Early Identification and Intervention**

Purpose

1.1 At the meeting on 18th June 2003 the Committee agreed to undertake a policy review of special educational needs (SEN), starting in the autumn term. The Committee further identified four policy topics within the broad field of SEN.

- Early identification and intervention;

- Audit Commission report, 'Statutory Assessment and Statements of SEN: In need of review?'
- Welsh-medium provision;
- Transition from primary to secondary school.

1.2 At the meeting on 9th July 2003 the Committee agreed that early identification and intervention would be the first policy topic that should be reviewed. The purpose of this paper is to set out current issues and background information relevant to this topic area.

Summary

2.1 All children have a right to the best possible start in life. Where children and young people have special needs and disabilities, it is important that these are identified at an early stage and that identification leads directly to effective early intervention and support for families and children and young people.

2.2 This report considers the key issues affecting appropriate early identification and intervention for children and young people with SEN. Key issues covered in the report are set against the background of the statutory framework for SEN, which finds its legislative base in the Education Act 1996 and the SEN and Disability Act 2001.

2.3 It considers the development of appropriate and effective identification and intervention in relation to the framework for the development of inclusive education and potential barriers to learning.

2.4 Information is provided on current practice in relation to early identification across a wide range of SEN and Assembly Government policy development in this area. The process of assessment and the difficulties inherent in a multi-agency approach to assessment and intervention is evaluated.

2.5 Intervention is considered in terms of both the early years and school based approaches to supporting children and young people. Also, most importantly how parents/carers and children and young people are actively involved in the process.

2.6 The key issues for consideration are highlighted at the end of this paper, along with a number of key questions that, we would suggest, need to be considered by the Committee as part of their review.

Background

3.1 The Assembly's paving document 'The Learning Country' (2002) sets out a strategy for education in Wales for the next ten years. One of the goals implicit in this document is to ensure "all children and young people have the best possible start in life, and the opportunity to reach their full potential".

3.2 Working from this key axiom, where children and young people have special needs and disabilities, it is important that these are identified at an early stage and that identification leads directly to effective early intervention and support for families and children and young people.

3.3 Early identification and early intervention are key themes in the Welsh Assembly Government's Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2001) and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002). They are central to a number of other Assembly led initiatives including Children First and Cymorth and they should lie at the heart of care provided by all professionals.

3.4 The Welsh Assembly Government's "Shaping the Future for Special Education – An Action Programme for SEN," stressed the importance of early identification and appropriate intervention to improve the prospects of children and young people with SEN, and reduce the need for more expensive intervention later on.

3.5 Perceived barriers to effective early identification and intervention can include, a lack of sensitivity at the time of diagnosis, inconsistent patterns of service provision, lack of co-ordination between multiple service providers and exclusion from some mainstream and community services and facilities.

Terms of Reference

4.1 In recognition of the importance of early identification and intervention for children and young people with SEN, the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee agreed that this topic area be covered as a priority in their review of SEN. At the meeting on 9th July 2003 the Committee agreed the following terms of reference for the review:

- To review what support is provided by local authorities and other agencies to assist parents and teachers in the early identification of SEN;
- To review how local authorities are having regard to the requirement for early identification as set out in the SEN Code of Practice for Wales;
- To identify good practice in multi-agency working in the early identification of SEN and the provision of appropriate intervention strategies, including the supply and training of speech and language therapists;
- To take account of recommendations in the Review of Services for Children with Special Health Needs undertaken by the Assembly's Health and Social Services Committee and the response issued by the Welsh Assembly Government in February 2003;
- To quantify the provision of advice and support through the medium of Welsh for children with SEN, with regard to early identification and intervention;
- To make recommendations to the Assembly Minister on how existing services might be improved so that more children with SEN are identified in sufficient time to enable effective intervention strategies to be developed and implemented.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

5.1 The statutory framework for SEN is outlined in the Education Act 1996 and the SEN and Disability Act 2001. The Education Act 1993 placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to issue a Code of Practice and established the power to revise it from time to time. The first Code of Practice came into effect in 1994. Since then, the rights and duties contained in the 1993 Act have been consolidated into Part IV of the 1996 Education Act.

5.2 The SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002), provides guidance and sets out procedures aimed at enabling children and young people with SEN to reach their full potential, to be included fully in their school communities and make a successful transition to adulthood. It includes new rights and duties introduced by the SEN and Disability Act 2001 and Regulations

Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty, which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.

Children have a learning difficulty if they;

a. have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
b. have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the Local Education Authority (LEA); or
c. are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a); or (b) above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them.

Special education provision means:

a. for children of two or over, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of their age in schools maintained by the LEA, other than special schools in the area
b. for children under two, educational provision of any kind

See Section 312, Education Act 1996

A Graduated Response to Meeting Needs

6.1 The SEN Code of Practice for Wales advises the adoption of a range of strategies that recognise the various complexities of need, the different responsibilities to assess and meet those needs, and the associated range and variations in provision which will best reflect and promote common recognition of the continuum of SEN.

6.2 The graduated response suggests a four-part flexible approach along this continuum to ensure the diverse needs of children and young people are met.

6.3 The SEN of the majority of children and young people, can and should be met effectively at school or early years action and action plus. The graduated response allows for movement along this continuum to reflect a child's needs and progress made.

6.4 The Graduated Response, outlined in the SEN Code of Practice for Wales, recognises this continuum of need through;

- Early Years and School Action;
- Early Years and School Action Plus;
- Requests for Statutory Assessments; and
- Statements of SEN

6.5 Schools and early years' practitioners need to determine which form of action is appropriate for each individual. They also need to assess a pupil's overall progress, their attainments and strengths, in addition to their difficulties and areas for development. This involves assessing the strategies that are currently being used to meet the pupil's SEN and considering how they might be made more effective.

Statutory Assessments and Statements of SEN

7.1 The special educational needs of the great majority of children and young people should be met effectively within mainstream settings through early years or school action or early years and school action plus, without the local education authority needing to make a statutory assessment. In a very small number of cases the LEA will need to make a statutory assessment of SEN and then consider whether or not to issue a statement.

7.2 A statement is a legal document, which sets out in detail the child's specific special educational needs and the provision that the LEA and others must make available to meet those needs.

7.3 The SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002) sets out the procedure for statutory assessments and the steps LEAs and others must follow in considering whether or not to issue a statement of SEN.

7.4 It should be noted that a LEA can make an assessment of a child's SEN prior to the age of two if requested to do so and with the consent of parents and only if they feel the child requires special educational provision. At the other end of the spectrum, some pupils with statements of SEN will remain in school after the age of 16. LEAs remain responsible for such pupils until they are 19.

Inclusive Education

8.1 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to creating an inclusive society, a society where every individual can make a distinctive contribution and has the opportunity to fulfil their own unique potential.

8.2 The Welsh Assembly Government is shortly due to publish a consultation document entitled 'Inclusive Education'. This document provides draft statutory guidance on the practical operation of the statutory framework (sections 316, 316A and Schedule 27) of the Education Act 1996 and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Act 2001. It provides practical examples of the steps schools, LEAs and other providers should consider taking to ensure inclusive education for all children and young people. In addition, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning recently launched the Index for Inclusion in Wales. This document, published by the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE), provides schools and LEAs with guidance in developing practical approaches to fostering an inclusive ethos within and across schools. Copies of the Index, which has recently been translated into Welsh, have been purchased for all schools in Wales.

8.3 The SEN and Disability Act 2001 delivers a strengthened right to a mainstream education for children and young people with SEN. The Act has amended the Education Act 1996 and transformed the statutory framework for inclusion into a positive endorsement of inclusion. The Act seeks to enable more children and young people who have SEN to be included successfully within mainstream education. This clearly signals that where parents or carers want a mainstream education for their child everything possible should be done to provide it. Equally where parents or carers want a special school place their wishes should be listened to and taken into account.

8.4 Within an inclusive framework, the majority of children and young people will attend their local mainstream school. However, special schools continue to play an important role for those children and young people requiring very specialist and specific support. "Shaping the Future for Special Education," (Welsh Assembly Government, 1998), suggested that there is a need for all special schools to be confident outward-looking centres of excellence as part of their evolving role.

8.5 An important element in tackling social exclusion is ensuring that children and young people with SEN have their needs recognised and that these needs are addressed promptly and effectively. Families also need support when seeking help for their children from professionals across a range of services. For some parents it may be the first time they have had such contact. Their reasonable expectation is that agencies will work together closely and flexibly to improve the provision made for their children.

Responding to Diversity

9.1 The needs of children and families will vary along many dimensions. For some children, their difficulties will be apparent from birth or before, whilst for others, the impairments will develop later or become apparent only gradually. A proportion of these children will have complex and multiple disabilities, requiring co-ordinated interventions with the child and family from several professionals. Some children and young people can have high expectations of future development, if appropriate support is available. For other children and young people the prognosis may be one of increasing difficulty and reduced life expectancy. For some families, their need for support will focus on the provision of practical services and ideas to assist their child. For other families, their greatest need may be for emotional support.

9.2 From September 1999, LEAs in Wales have been required to include in their Education Strategic Plan (ESP) their strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN, with the focus on raising levels of attainment for such children and young people. Authorities also have to include information on numbers of SEN pupils; details of action to support pupils with SEN; information about the LEA's policy on inclusion and action to promote it; and arrangements for monitoring standards among pupils identified as having SEN.

Early Identification

10.1 The importance of early identification, assessment and provision for any

child who may have SEN cannot be over-emphasised. The earlier action is taken, the more responsive the child is likely to be, and the more readily can intervention be made.

10.2 As suggested, the special needs of most children and young people with severe difficulties and disabilities will be apparent well before they start school - for example children and young people with physical disabilities, sensory impairments, severe learning difficulties or speech and language impairments. It is particularly important that these children and young people have early access to support from all relevant agencies, and that the input from these agencies is well co-ordinated.

10.3 Some children and young people's special needs - for example, moderate or specific learning difficulties (including dyslexia) - may not emerge until children start school or even later. Often special educational needs are masked by other difficulties such as emotional or behavioural difficulties, disaffection or simply where a child has used their own coping strategies to avoid being ‘different’. It is equally important that the special educational needs of these children and young people are identified as early as possible and that appropriate intervention strategies are put into place.

10.4 If a child’s difficulties prove to be transient, the child will subsequently be able to learn and progress normally. If the child's difficulties prove less responsive to the provision made by the school or within the early years setting, then an early start can be made in considering the additional help the child may need.

10.5 The population of children and families requiring services is changing, and new screening procedures are making it possible for some disabilities to be identified earlier than ever before. For example, with the implementation of Newborn Hearing Screening, to be delivered as a national programme by Newborn Hearing Screening Wales (NBHSW) by March 2004, hearing impaired babies will be able to be identified from the age of 3 months.

10.6 Identification of SEN may be detected through:

- detection by parents and relatives
- detection by midwives, playgroup leaders, nursery nurses, health visitors. teachers and general practitioners
- the neonatal and eight week examinations
- follow up of infants and children who have suffered various forms of trauma or illness affecting the nervous system
- close observation of children and young people with a strong family history of a particular disorder
- teacher observation in the classroom
- early years practitioners in playgroups or pre-school settings
- baseline assessments in the early years
- other forms of standardised assessments such as SATs.

Assessment and the Identification of Individual Needs

11.1 The term assessment is used amongst professionals and parents in slightly different contexts, which may result in some confusion. 'Assessment' may refer to the process of arriving at a diagnosis, to the process of identifying needs, or to both. It is therefore important for professionals to be clear what the expectations are for the assessment at the outset.

11.2 In our view, assessment is a process of gathering information about the health, education and social care needs of a child. Assessment should also identify the disabling social and physical factors which are inhibiting the child's access to a good quality of life and what support agencies can provide to help tackle some of these barriers. For those children and young people with special needs it is important that the process of assessment is supportive of the child and the family. Assessment should begin as soon as possible when a developmental delay or disability is suspected. The earlier action is taken, the more responsive the child is likely to be, and the greater the likelihood of preventing some longer-term difficulties.

11.3 For most families, a clear diagnosis of their child's condition is an important starting point for being able to move forwards. A diagnosis can help families to readjust to their situation, to understand the nature of the condition and its likely impact and to plan for the future. However, a clear diagnosis is not always possible. It may be that further assessments are required before a firm diagnosis is formed, but the lack of a diagnosis should not be used as a barrier to access services.

11.4 Local practitioners have a key role to play in supporting children and young people and their parents, but professionals may wish to seek advice from specialist colleagues. This should be done with the full knowledge and understanding of parents. Parents may also seek a referral to another professional for specialist advice or for a second opinion to gather more information about their child's condition.

11.5 Children and young people with a disability or complex needs are far more likely than non-disabled children and young people to be subject to multiple assessments by health, education and social services. Where assessment arrangements are duplicated and service provision fragmented, the normal routines of family life with a young child may be severely disrupted by multiple appointments outside the home and a string of unconnected visits to the home by professionals representing different agencies. Families may be left with the feeling that the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing.

11.6 The way that professionals work together during the assessment process is crucial. A coordinated approach to gathering information about a child is key if parents are to avoid the frustrating and often distressing experience of having to "tell their story" again and again to different people. A co-ordinated approach will also benefit the professionals allowing them to set the information they have gained in the context of the picture that is evolving about the whole child.

Reviewing Progress

12.1 Assessment should not be regarded as a single event but rather as a continuing process. An early assessment of need, in terms of medical, social and educational needs, is essential to secure and define appropriate service provision. However, the needs of the child and the family will change over time as a result of the child's development, family factors and as an outcome of the support provided. The ongoing assessment process must be flexible and responsive to changing needs.

12.2 Where a child is considered to have SEN and is deemed to be requiring support at early years or school action or action plus they will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP, which should be drawn up in partnership with parents, sets out the child’s needs in detail and the actions that should be taken to ensure progress is made. The IEP will contain targets for the future and show how and when the child’s progress will be reviewed.

12.3 A number of other different types of plans may be required by statute, regulation or Government guidance. For example, where the Social Services Department has lead responsibility a children in need plan, a child protection plan or a care plan for a child looked after may be required (see paragraph 4.33 in the Assessment Framework).

12.4 Where a child has a statement of SEN the statement must be reviewed at least annually. The annual review of a pupil's statement ensures that progress is monitored and whether any amendments need to be made to the description of pupil's needs as outlined within the statement or to the provision specified in the statement. Again, the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002) provides a framework for conducting annual reviews and emphasises the importance of transitional reviews where a child moves from one educational phase to another or onto further education or employment. The annual review in year 9 and any subsequent annual review until the young person leaves school must include drawing up and subsequent review of the Transition Plan. The Transition Plan should draw together information form a range of individuals within and beyond the school in order to plan coherently for the young person's transition to adult life.

Intervention and Support

13.1 The needs of most children and young people will be met within a family setting with the provision of local mainstream education. This should be reflected in an integrated response to child and family need, which is sensitive to differing family cultures and religions. Early intervention should include support for the child, support for the parents and support for the parent-child relationship.

13.2 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to delivering better life chances for disadvantaged and potentially vulnerable children and young people through the earlier identification and understanding of their needs. Delivering services to disabled children and young people is a corporate responsibility and improvements in outcomes for children and young people and their families can only be achieved by close collaboration between parents, professionals and agencies working with children and young people and their families. However, it is health services that tend to be the first point of contact for parents of a young child with disability and is often the lead service in organising multi-agency collaboration.

13.3 In June 2001 the Health and Social Services Committee undertook a policy review of services to children with special health needs. This review highlighted the importance of early diagnosis and intervention for children and young people with special health needs. Further one of the recommendations contained in the report suggests that "where an early diagnosis cannot be made, access to appropriate services should be made far more flexible for parents/carers and their children pending diagnosis."

Intervention in the Early Years

14.1 Agencies and professionals supporting families with very young children with SEN must be able to provide practical help and have relevant knowledge, skills and experience. Positive attitudes to families, to children and to disability are essential.

14.2 A number of initiatives and programmes have been introduced to support families and young children in recent years and these have helped to raise the profile of effective intervention in the early years. Of particular importance for this age group are initiatives such as local Sure Start programmes, Integrated Centres providing wrap around care, Language and Play programmes, Books for Babies and the development of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) and the development of the Foundation Phase.

14.3 The Assembly's core aim of giving every child a flying start as described in the Learning Country [2002] is supported by the development of an appropriate age based, inclusive curriculum. The proposed Foundation Phase for children aged 3-7 will focus on meeting the developmental needs of all children. It will provide a curriculum and specific experiences that will help young children to reach their potential. The phase will support more inclusive practices through practical activities that challenge, motivate and develop children's curiosity as well as developing their knowledge, skills and independence.

14.4 The importance of early identification is further reinforced within the new SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002), which devotes a whole chapter to the early years.

14.5 The Children First programme is increasing the level of family support services to families with disabled children. The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families is designed to identify if a child is in need and ensure that these children and their families are provided with appropriate and timely services. It provides a comprehensive structure for a full consideration of the developmental needs of the child within their family and wider environmental context.

14.6 The Department of Health is developing a Children's National Service Framework (NSF). This will develop new national standards for children across the NHS, social services and interface with education. The Standards set will provide a coherent and integrated approach to providing services for children in need.

14.7 Local Sure Start programmes aim to improve the health and well-being of families and children before and from birth, so children flourish at home and when they go to school. At local level, Sure Start is run by partnerships of voluntary and community organisations, practitioners from health, social services, education, other local government departments and - very importantly - local parents.

Intervention in Schools and Educational Settings

15.1 Most teachers can usually meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of SEN and organise their classroom to maximise potential. The more flexible and responsive teachers are, the more likely pupils are to make progress. Strands of action will to be organised so that progressively more powerful interventions can be used to meet individual needs as and when appropriate.

15.2 When a pupil requires additional help, it will usually be available within the classroom resources and managed by the class or subject teacher. Even if a pupil requires additional support outside the classroom, this should still be in the context of the inclusive curriculum.

15.3 LEA support services can provide advice to teachers (e.g. on teaching techniques and strategies, classroom management and curriculum materials); support for curriculum development; direct teaching or practical support for class teachers; part-time specialist help or access to learning support assistants. Such services include specialist teachers of pupils with hearing, visual, and speech and language impairments, teachers providing more general learning and behaviour support services, counsellors, educational psychologists, and advisers or teachers with knowledge of information technology for children and young people with SEN. Curriculum support and advisory services can also be a resource for advice on specific subject-related teaching techniques and strategies and curriculum materials.

15.4 Meeting the special educational needs of individual children and young people requires flexible working on the part of statutory agencies. They need to communicate and agree policies and protocols that ensure that there is a ‘seamless’ service. Working supportively and in partnership with parents and the children and young people themselves will ensure that everyone involved understands the responses of the professionals concerned, and lead to a better quality of provision.

15.5 Maintained schools must publish information that includes the school's arrangements for working in partnership with LEA support services, health and social services, Careers Wales and any relevant local and national voluntary organisations. Teachers have a great deal of expertise in identifying and meeting the needs of their pupils. External support services can however play an important part in helping schools identify, assess and make provision for pupils with SEN.

Partnerships with parents/carers

16.1 Parents/carers have unique knowledge about their child. They have the right to be respected as the primary carers of their child. Parents/carers have the right to be provided with unbiased, accurate and up to date information in order to be able to make informed and appropriate choices for their child. They also have rights and responsibilities in relation to the development and care of their child. Professionals have a duty to acknowledge and understand the unique role and relationship each parent has with their child.

16.2 Parents are the first and primary educators of their child and the agencies and services supporting them must be able to respond flexibly and positively to the very wide range of families with whom they work. Families can be diverse in terms of their experience, resources and expectations as well as their cultural, religious and linguistic influences.

16.3 Optimum support for a child with SEN will only occur when parents are considered to be valued and equal partners alongside the range of professionals working with them and their child.

16.4 Providing information to families is a key function of service provision. The Health and Social Services Review (2001) received evidence to suggest that there is a real need for comprehensive information services at the time of diagnosis and subsequently throughout a child's development. Good information enables families to remain in control as they take decisions about what to do. Difficulty accessing relevant information is positively dis-empowering in a situation that is often already very stressful. Information provision is central to Welsh Assembly Government policy. Within all agencies there is an increasing emphasis on user involvement in decision-making both at an individual level and service development level.

Parent Partnership Service

17.1 The aim of the PPS is to ensure that parents of children and young people with SEN have access to relevant information, advice and guidance. The service provides an Independent Parental Supporter (IPS) to help parents/carers in their discussions with the school. The PPS can assist parents, schools and LEAs to negotiate through a mediation mechanism if potential problems arise.

17.2 The Education Act 1996 states that LEAs must make arrangements for Parent Partnership Services (PPS). LEAs must inform schools, parents and others about the arrangements they have made to deliver these services and how they can be accessed.

Disagreement Resolution

18.1 The Education Act 1996, the Education (SEN) (Wales) Regulations 2001 and the associated guidance in the SEN Code of Practice for Wales, 2002, provide the statutory framework for the establishment of a disagreement resolution service.

18.2 The SEN and Disability Act, 2001 places a new duty on local education authorities to provide arrangements for the appointment of independent persons to resolve disagreements between local education authorities, schools and parents which might arise with regard to the statutory assessment of a child's SEN.

18.3 SEN disagreement resolution is an entirely voluntary process. It brings people who are in disagreement together with an independent neutral party, who will then help them to reach an agreement. The service is designed to achieve early resolution of differences of opinion between parents and schools or LEAs about the provision being made for their child's SEN. The Service will aim to prevent the long-term breakdown of relationships between parents and schools or LEAs. Accessing the Disagreement Resolution Service will not affect parental rights of appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal. The Association of Directors of Education in Wales are currently considering the possibility of developing an All Wales Disagreement Resolution Service. That is not to say all authorities will be part of the agreement as some will have already made their own arrangements with local providers,

SEN Tribunal for Wales

19.1 The SEN Tribunal for Wales is an independent body, which determines appeals by parents against the decisions of LEAs regarding their child's special educational needs. As from April 2003 Wales has established its own SEN Tribunal for Wales, hearing cases from November 2003 in relation to a child or young person's special educational needs.

19.2 The Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales is an independent body which has been established under section 185 of the Education Act 2002, under the jurisdiction of section 333 of the Education Act 1996, for determining appeals by parents against LEA decisions on assessments and statements. The Tribunal 's decision is binding on both parties to the appeal.

Voice of Pupils

20.1 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to following the United Nations Convention On The Rights of The Child to guide its work with the children and young people of Wales. The Assembly Government sets out its aims in this respect in 'The Dragon's Dialogue – Issues for discussion with Children and Young People in Wales'. Central to the aims of the initiative is the belief that children and young people should have a say in the decisions that affect them. To achieve this, the Assembly Government has introduced a number of initiatives in which children and young people can participate across the range of policy making. These include children and young people's forums in all local authorities, and school councils in primary and secondary schools.

20.2 At national level, the Assembly Government has developed 'Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly' as a representative body for the whole of Wales. Funky Dragon is a Council of representatives from local children and young people's forums and national and local peer-led groups. This body has a direct link with the Minister for Health and Social services, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, and other officials.

20.3 The SEN Code of Practice for Wales highlights the importance of children and young people's participation in all the decisions about their education. Successful inclusion is a key step towards preparing pupils with SEN to become full and contributing members of the community. Service providers must plan and act to design services to achieve inclusive provision for children and young people with SEN.

Multi-agency Working

21.1 As suggested earlier in this report, meeting the special educational needs of individual children and young people requires flexible working on the part of statutory agencies. All services for children and young people with SEN should focus on identifying and addressing the needs of children and young people and enabling them to improve their situation through early identification, continual engagement with the child or young person and their parents/carers, focused intervention and dissemination of effective approaches and techniques.

21.2 The objective should be to provide integrated high quality holistic support focused on the needs of the child. Such provision should be based on a shared perspective and should build wherever possible on mutual understanding and agreement. Services should adopt a flexible child centred approach to service delivery to ensure that the changing needs and priorities of the child and parent/carer can be met at any given time.

21.3 In the early years, the potential for families to receive well integrated, multi-agency support is greatest where different agencies are co-located and can provide a 'one-stop shop'. This is equally true of clinics where families can meet a range of health professionals on one occasion and of Child Development Centres where families can meet psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and social workers in one place.

21.4 Where formal structures are not in place to organise service delivery in this way, informal arrangements for joint appointments and joint assessments by more than one professional at a time can make a big difference.

21.5 However service delivery is structured, it is essential to have flexible and efficient arrangements to share information about the child and the family between all the professionals and agencies involved. Without this, the opportunity to build a cumulative picture of the child's abilities and needs over time is lost and parents are left with the responsibility of bringing every new professional they meet up to speed and up to date.

21.6 Where they do not already exist, efficient systems for sharing paper and electronic information about the child and family between professionals and agencies should be developed as a priority, in compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Systems of this type should be regulated by clear protocols to protect service users.

Welsh Language

23.1 The Welsh Language Act 1993 has clear implications for strategic planning by schools and LEAs and for the delivery of appropriate provision and support for children and young people with SEN across Wales. Welsh Language Schemes approved under the 1993 Act, sections of the new SEN Code of Practice for Wales pertaining to the Welsh language and rights to obtain services in the client’s preferred language provide further statutory foundations to this equality issue.

23.2 Accordingly, equal status must be given to Welsh and English in the provision of inclusive education opportunities, training and support; and where parents or carers opt for Welsh medium or bilingual education for children and young people with SEN, there is also a need for associated services to be available through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

23.3 Concerns have been raised over the availability of provision and support to children and young people with SEN through the medium of Welsh. In 2000, the Welsh Assembly Government and the

Welsh Language Board jointly commissioned research into this area. A comprehensive report entitled "Acknowledging Need" sets out current patterns in provision through the medium of Welsh and makes a number of recommendations to improve services. A sub group of the Welsh Advisory Group for SEN (WAGSEN) is currently considering the implications of this report and the suggested recommendations.

English/Welsh as a Second Language

24.1 The identification of the special educational needs of children and young people whose first language is not English or Welsh requires particular care. It is necessary to consider the child within the context of their home, culture and community. Lack of competence in either English or Welsh must not be equated with learning difficulties as understood by the SEN Code of Practice for Wales. At the same time when children and young people who have English and Welsh as an additional language make slow progress, it should not be assumed that language status is the only reason, they may have some form of learning difficulty.

24.2 Schools should look at all aspects of a child’s performance in different subjects to establish whether the problems they have in the classroom are due to limitations in their command of the language that is used there or arise form SEN. At an early stage a full assessment should be made of the exposure they have had in the past to each of the languages they speak and their proficiency in them. The information about their language skills obtained in this way will form the basis of all further work with them in both assisting their learning difficulties and in planning any additional support that is needed.

Key Issues for Consideration

This report suggests a number of recurring themes that relate to the early identification and assessment of children and young people with special educational needs. The following suggests some key issues for consideration by the Committee as part of their SEN policy review in this area.

25.1 Identification and Assessment (General)

- Are there clear referral pathways once difficulties are suspected?
- What access is there to professional advice and support?
- Are all teachers aware of their duties under the SEN Code of Practice for Wales on the assessment and identification of pupils with special educational needs and are they being applied appropriately and effectively?
- What provision is available for the identification and assessment of pupils through the medium of Welsh?
- Is there effective, regular communication between SEN Co-ordinators, teaching staff and parents?
- Are health professionals, professionals in education and social services aware of the key characteristics of a range of SEN
- Is information on the full range of SEN readily available in schools, social services departments, hospitals and surgeries. Such information would be of relevance to parents and professionals?

- Is on-going training provided for a range of professionals e.g. teachers, health professionals, nursery nurses, playgroup leaders, psychologists, speech and language therapists and social workers for disabilities?
- Is information about the voluntary organisations for SEN and parent support groups easily accessible?

25.3 Working with Parents and Children and Young People

- Are parents and children and young people with SEN given appropriate support during and after assessment?
- That strategies are in place to ensure parents are given appropriate opportunities to share concerns about their child's needs?
- Are parents and children and young people given opportunities to express their views and are they consulted on decisions made in relation to provision and support?
- Do parents, children and young people play an active role in the assessment process as outlined in the Code of Practice (WAG, 2002)?
- What strategies can be put in place to aid parent's understanding of special educational needs and the statutory framework?
- How is the Basic Skills Agency assisting in the early intervention and support for parents of children with SEN?
- What support is available to empower parents to work with their children on appropriate strategies at home thus strengthening early intervention, such as behaviour management speaking and listening, pre-literacy and numeracy skills?
- Are pupils actively involved in the decision making process in relation to their special educational needs?

25.4 Multi- agency Collaboration.

- What will be the effect of newborn hearing screening? Are subsequent intervention and support strategies in place?
- What is the role of health visitors in the identification and support of young children with SEN?
- What is the role of portage workers in supporting young children in the early years?
- Are there local or regional multi-agency teams, which meet on a regular basis to review the identification and management of children and young people with SEN?
- Are all agencies aware of the multi-agency teams and attend as appropriate?
- Is there effective liaison between the agencies, which promote partnerships between the Social Services Department, Health professionals, the LEA, the voluntary sector and parents?
- Are there joint training opportunities?
- Is there adequate access to services such as therapy support and social services provision?
- Do partners have the opportunity to engage in joint research projects?
- Is there a reliable multi-agency database that includes a regular up dating of information?
- Are there procedures for joint funding arrangements and are they clearly set out?

25.5 Transition Mechanisms

- Where a child is identified as having SEN, or where either parents or other professionals have identified associated difficulties, what systems are in place to support their transition from home to early years settings and on to school?
- What consideration of planning mechanisms are there across providers of services?
- Are there appropriate systems to review children and young people's needs and make any necessary amendments to support as a result of any such review?
- Is there effective transition and planning mechanisms across statutory agencies in the support of children and young people with SEN?

Conclusion

26.1 Effective early intervention and support can produce improvements in children and young people's health, social and cognitive development and help tackle some of the many social and physical barriers families of children and young people with special educational needs face to full participation in society. Effective intervention strengthens the ability of families to provide effective support to their children, and improves outcomes for the whole family.

26.2 This report has centred around the key themes that ensure the effective early identification and intervention of children and young people with special educational needs, such as multi-agency working, assessment, working in partnership with parents/carers and children and young people.

26.3 It is recognised throughout this report that early identification does not just relate to those children in their early years as some children and young people's difficulties may not become apparent until later on in their development. Early identification of those children and young people is just as vital if they are to receive appropriate intervention.

26.4 In conclusion this report suggests that there is a need for:

- early diagnosis and a joined up approach to assessment;
- effective co-ordination of service provision that incorporates the sharing of information;
- effective communication between professionals;
- parental involvement at all stages;
- mechanisms to be in place that actively involves pupils and allows them to voice their opinions in relation to the support they need and receive.

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