

**A strategic approach to developing a Birmingham early years workforce confident and competent to deliver an inclusive Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) meeting the requirements of current SEND legislation**

**Background**

There are 400 Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) early years settings in Birmingham registered to deliver the early educational entitlement. Settings have been supported by the Birmingham Area SENCO team (AST) since 2001.

The AST offers:

- Central core training to setting based SENCO's around their role and responsibilities in line with the Equalities Act 2010 and the Graduated Approach of the SEND Code of Practice 2015.
- District based training to identified staff to develop their skills and knowledge around inclusive practice.
- Bespoke training to individual settings for all staff around meeting the needs of individual children.

The AST has historically visited PVI settings around supporting the professional development of staff to include identified individual children with SEND.

**Aspect of SEND Inclusive practice being developed**

The AST seeks to build capacity within mainstream PVI early education settings to support young children with SEND to:

- Access their early education entitlement.
- Make progress in relation to the EYFS.

**Action/activity to change /influence practice**

Service delivery model

Changes were made to the model of service delivery to challenge dependency and to maximise the impact of specialist support on upskilling the early years workforce. The new model included a combination of training, surgery consultations, delivery of direct packages of support and access to additional funding via Inclusion Support in Early Years (ISEY), which is being developed as Birmingham's Inclusion Fund.

All managers and proprietors were invited to a session where the role of the SENCO was explored and managers and proprietors of settings were encouraged to:

- carefully consider who to appoint to the role with a view to suitability and retention
- have at least 2 trained SENCOs in the setting (mitigating against turnover and inconsistency)
- value the role of the SENCO by committing to both release the SENCO for off-site appointments and release relevant from ratio to work alongside the Area SENCO at specific times.

From September 2016 all PVI settings were required to have a trained setting-based SENCO in order to be eligible for the full range of AST support.

### Delivery of training

The team increased the number of courses delivered and offered these free of charge until the end of the financial year. Feedback from PVI owners and managers identified difficulties releasing staff during term time. Thereafter core courses were offered during school holidays as well as school term time and these have consistently been full.

From April 2017 a small charge was introduced for training. Feedback suggests managers/owners now more carefully consider how to retain staff once investing in training for the SENCO role. The premise for the core training requirement is that staff will have the basis of knowledge and skills required to then implement any further support and advice given more directly through consultation, packages of support and additional funding.

### Surgery sessions

The AST Introduced weekly surgery sessions in the 10 districts of the city to enable the settings to access local, timely support from the Area SENCO with knowledge of that district. Setting SENCOs are required to attend a surgery session for all support which does not require a child to be observed. There is an expectation that they will bring all relevant records to evidence what has been implemented to date.

68% of settings accessed one or more surgery session in the first year of delivery 2016/17 (475 appointments) and by December 2017, 173 settings had accessed one or more surgery sessions (190 appointments).

Attendance at surgery sessions provides the opportunity for Area SENCOs to identify with the SENCO the need for any whole staff training and the need for any of the direct packages of support developed by the team.

### Packages of support

- Packages of support involve setting staff being released to work directly with the Area SENCO team. The package might include Area SENCO support to make an assessment of need, identify outcomes with parents, develop the child's story and individual plan, implement appropriate strategies by modelling, monitor and review progress, make referrals, work in partnership with other agencies and plan for transition. Staff are required to evaluate their practice before and after Area SENCO involvement and required to take increasing responsibility for coordinating support for the child. Following a package of support, future allocation of support would take account of the staff development achieved through previous packages with an expectation that settings become increasingly independent.

### **Impact**

- Increase from 78% of settings with trained SENCO in July 2016 to 95% in July 2017 and 96% in December 2017.
- Surgery evaluations indicate 100% agreement that attendance at a surgery had a positive impact on staff practice. Individual support allowed SENCOs to ask questions, rehearse skills and complete tasks related to their own setting or a particular child thus extending theory gained during a training course into practice in a meaningful context. One setting stated that an OFSTED inspector was very impressed with the SENCO's knowledge and the quality of the

SEN paperwork which the SENCO attributed to support from the Area SENCO through surgeries.

- Many SENCOs reported that whilst initially reluctant to leave the setting for a surgery appointment they found that being off site gave credence to their role and that dedicated time facilitated greater learning.
- When a whole staff group is trained by an external specialist the setting-SENCO then has the confidence to continue to support staff and to challenge practice as needed.
- Packages of Support increase staff confidence and skills to implement the Graduated Approach. This is evidenced by SENCOs requiring less direct support from their Area SENCO when replicating a Package of Support.
- Setting and parental evaluations strongly agree that following a Package of Support children make progress in relation to individual outcomes and targets, which reflect learning and development progress in relation to the EYFS.

#### **Challenges**

- Early Years workforce with early years and childcare qualifications with very little or no SEND content.
- High staff turnover in the PVI sector.
- Increasing numbers of children raised to the AST.
- Number of requests for setting visits outweighing the AST team capacity.
- Logistics of travelling around a large, often congested, city.
- Requests for visits which did not necessarily require the specialist teacher on site.

#### **How challenges were over come and lessons learned**

- Defining expectations supports workforce development.
- Realistic charging for courses does not impact upon take up of places long-term and increases the value placed upon it by more careful consideration of who is appointed as the Setting based SENCO.
- Attendance at training both increases knowledge and skills and enables participants to identify what they need further support with.
- Trained setting based SENCOs can be supported to in turn identify the wider professional development needs within their setting and recognise the benefit to children when all staff are trained.
- Whole staff training has a greater impact than just training the SENCO by achieving consistency of approach to meeting the needs of children with SEND.
- Setting based SENCO's and proprietors value face-to-face contact with specialist support teams enough to travel off-site to receive it.
- Specialist setting-based support alongside setting staff continues to be the most effective way of ensuring theory translates into practice.

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