



Doncaster  
Council

Councillor J Kidd  
Chair  
Overview & Scrutiny Management  
Committee  
c/o Floor 2  
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Date: 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Dear Jane

Thank you for your letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019, and for providing me with the Committee's feedback on the Youth Justice Plan. I would comment as follows.

**Early diagnosis of learning difficulties:**

Schools, and other settings and providers of education for children and young people aged 0–25, are required by the Children and Families Act 2014 to follow the statutory guidance contained in the Special Educational needs & Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice 2015. This guidance outlines the key processes that are essential for identifying, assessing and meeting special educational needs effectively.

All schools and settings must ensure that all their young learners receive 'quality first teaching' that recognises the needs of the child and differentiates teaching approaches according to those needs. Where it is becoming clear that a child has a learning difficulty requiring special educational provision, the school or setting must inform the child's parents/carers, and set out what they will do to meet the child's needs. This includes setting out the changes in provision that will be additional to, and different from, the quality first teaching that the child will continue to receive. There should be a clear plan for the delivery of this enhanced approach, reviewed at least 3 times per year, and based on an 'assess, plan, do and review' (APDR) graduated approach to meeting the child's needs. This whole process starts with the child, parent, teacher and school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) working together, and, if input from external agencies is required, this should be incorporated into the APDR planning process.

With regard to dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties, schools and settings should implement evidence-based quality first teaching approaches to meet identified needs, and, if impact is not seen over time, then advice could be sought from additional specialist services available to the school, for example, Educational Psychology.

There should be absolutely no need for a parent to pay for a private diagnosis of dyslexia or specific learning difficulties, because the needs and interventions required to meet these needs should be provided in school through the APDR process. A private diagnosis of dyslexia does not therefore bring access to additional resources in school.

With regard to ADHD and Autism, significant investment has been made in Doncaster in relation to our neurodevelopmental pathways, and in particular a redesign of our pre-diagnostic triage process, the General Development Assessment (GDA) pathway), to ensure that children are placed on the right diagnostic pathway, and to avoid any unnecessary delay in accessing services. This is a consultant-led pathway where detailed referrals are made from schools/school nurses in close liaison with the child/young person's family.

Since this redesign, the outcomes have been extremely positive. This process is fully NICE Compliant, and, as of the end of March 2019, we had diagnosed 100% of children under 5 within 18 weeks after their first face to face consultation; for over 5s, between 90-100% were similarly diagnosed, a position which has been sustained. Further to this, our positive diagnosis (conversion rates) following referral to the autism pathway are 96% and 86% for under 5's and over 5's respectively.

Anecdotal evidence from families has also been positive, and the services have been considered as 'very good' once the diagnostic process has begun. In terms of areas for improvement, parents have articulated that the waits to reach the diagnostic pathways are too long. This is something practitioners and leaders are aware of, and are working hard to source additional investment to reduce these waits. Additional resource has also been identified to develop a post-diagnostic support service for children/young people diagnosed with autism and their families. Work has begun and we are hopeful that a new service will be in place at the start of the next fiscal year.

All of the above is delivered within the APDR graduated framework of practice outlined within the SEND Code of Practice.

### **Provision for speech difficulties**

Provision in schools for speech, language and communication difficulties is supported by the Speech and Language Therapy Service (SLT) in Doncaster. The referral route to SLT is open to any concerned parent, and schools make a referral via a form which requires a parental signature. At the recent SENCO network meeting, SLT launched guidance designed to help schools and settings decide whether a referral to SLT was required. Therapy for non-complex difficulties are usually seen in clinic. There are currently 3 satellite clinics, Edlington, Mexborough and Thorne, and the main out-patient centre based at Chequer Road. This provision is typically for delays in language development or speech disorders, such as stammering. Therapy for more complex difficulties usually takes place in the child's school.


Again this whole approach is delivered within the APDR graduated framework of practice outlined within the SEND Code of Practice.

## **Big Picture Learning**

We are currently delivering the *Big Picture Doncaster* (BPD) provision away from the Bentley campus. This is due to some ongoing matters that are being worked through currently with *Big Picture Doncaster* and other partners as well. Due to the complex nature of the young people attending BPD, it is essential to ensure that the environment and delivery method is suitable for the type of learning taking place. With this in mind, the decision was taken to find suitable alternative provision for the young people which will continue away from the Bentley site for the remainder of the term. We have taken the decision to pause referrals for any new children until further notice, and we will be deferring the formal process for this. We are continuing to work alongside Big Picture Doncaster and other partners to strengthen the BPD offer, and we will also ensure that there is effective provision for all young people that require it. We are also arranging opportunities and additional activities for the current cohort of students through the summer, based on their aspirations and goals.

I trust the above is helpful, and thank you once again for the Committee's feedback and support of the Plan.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ros Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first letters of "Ros" and "Jones" being capitalized and prominent.

**Ros Jones**  
**Mayor of Doncaster**