

Report to the Education Scrutiny Committee

London Borough of Southwark

Kintore Way Nursery

Introduction

NAHT welcomes the opportunity to come to speak to the Education Scrutiny Committee about the current and ongoing proposals to reduce spending at Kintore Way Nursery but also to speak with Elected Members about the value that maintained nursery schools bring to the wider education landscape and the hugely beneficial and important role they play in support children with SEND.

We will not spend too much time on the current financial situation for all local authorities at present other than to acknowledge these are significant and challenging. However, we are also clear that whilst resources are limited and the calls on those resources many, we believe that there is a clear and unequivocal need not just to protect the early years provision you have in Southwark but to expand upon it, drawing on the expertise and experience that exists within your dedicated and long serving, specialist workforce.

In terms of Kintore Way itself this is an important nursery school and one of the oldest and biggest in the country. Behind the new facades that have gone up in Bermondsey over the past few years there still remains a high level of need and Kintore Way is meeting that need now as it has done for over 80 years. Kintore Way is an 'Outstanding' local service and something for the borough to be rightly proud of. We understand that times are tough and money tight but Southwark must be careful not to lose yet another vital service to austerity or indeed to diminish it to the point where it becomes just another child care setting. Kintore Way is a school and provides more than just child care.

The limited resources that do exist must be used to ensure those most in need receive the support they require to engage meaningfully and positively with the wider community.

Context

Kintore Way Nursery School currently provides early years education for 204 children of which around 90 or 45% have SEND. The deficit that has developed at the nursery has not been caused by a failure of the management at the school to manage the budget properly but rather because much of the additional funding that is required to support those children with SEND must come from its existing budget even though the needs of some children are far greater and therefore require far greater resources than children without additional needs.

Whilst the school, having identified there is need that requires support, can apply to Southwark for additional funding to help the school meet that need the funding provided by Southwark is rarely sufficient to cover the true cost of supporting any given child with SEND.

The SENDIF system for providing additional funding to support children with high needs who have not yet secured their EHCP will pay a maximum of £6000 per child per year, however, the vast majority of children do not receive anywhere near this amount.

A child with an EHCP can expect to receive £9000 for additional support in a mainstream school and £20000 in a special school. Therefore, even if a child waiting for an EHCP was to receive the full SENDIF entitlement they would still get £3000 less than it is recognised is required to support a child with SEND who has an EHCP.

In Kintore Way's case this difference, between what is received through SENDIF payments and what they actually need to spend supporting many children with SEND, has been the primary driver of the deficit. It is precisely because Kintore Way is inclusive and experienced in supporting young children with SEND that they have built up the deficit.

In addition a couple of decisions taken by the council but not adequately resourced have also led to the deficit increasing, specifically the opening of a reception class which was never properly supported by the borough despite the borough requesting it be opened.

SEND Services

The SEND system in England is broken and many children are currently not receiving the support to which they are entitled. Only 49.2% of EHCP applications are concluded within the statutory timeframe meaning over half of children in need have to wait, sometimes lengthy periods, for the outcome to their application.

There are shortages in Education Psychologists (360 fewer than in 2010). An average vacancy rate of 23% for Speech and Language Therapists and the number of Specialist Teachers for the Deaf has reduced to 887 from 1062 a decade ago.

This is not being driven by a reduction in need as the number of EHCPs has been growing at around 9% a year for some years now (total active EHCPs as at Jan 232 was 517,026). This diminishment of the specialist workforce means that the vast majority of locally employed SALTs and EPs spend the vast majority of their time reviewing EHCPs for children they have not met and means that therapeutic work in many areas is non-existent.

School leaders at primary phase constantly cite the lack of specialist staff as one of the major barriers to being able to support children with SEND.

Southwark bucks the trend for the initial refusal of an EHCP rate with 38% of first time applications being refused as compared with 22% nationally. However, the picture in Southwark in terms of SEND rates is much the same as elsewhere in the country and with only 3.7% LA decisions to refuse an EHCP being upheld at the First Tier SEN Tribunal in 2021/22 it is probably the case that the overwhelming majority of cases refused in this borough will be overturned if the case gets to a tribunal.

Indeed, the challenging and adversarial Tribunal system which pits families against councils cost local authorities around £73 million in legal costs in 2021/22, money which would have been much better spent on supporting those with SEND.

One positive of course is that whilst Southwark is suffering with the same challenges faced by all other local authorities as a result of cutbacks and underfunding it does have Kintore Way Nursery which is hugely successful in identifying and supporting need early and setting children and their families on a path towards securing an EHCP. The earlier the EHCP is awarded the better the outcomes for the family.

Kintore Way also has access to the therapeutic input of Ed Psychs who provide insight into the needs of the child and strategies and techniques for the children and families aimed at managing the

challenges they find. It also works closely with SaLTs to support children with speech and language barriers to overcome these before they enter primary school.

Services in the community are few and far between so Kintore Way (currently supporting around 90 children with SEND) plays a vital role not just in Bermondsey but in supporting the whole of Southwark with its management of SEND. As well as ensuring children who need special school places are identified early on.

Resource Base

The good news is that the Council could make a significant and positive difference by taking a decision to fund early intervention services through its maintained nursery schools. Many LAs operate resources bases which are specifically designed to identify and support children with SEND with a view to allowing them to access greater resources through the EHCP process earlier in their school journey.

Aside from the clear financial benefits this provides to the Council in gaining access to greater resources from central government it also provides younger children and their families with the support need to transition more successfully to primary education.

We all know that the SEND system is fundamentally broken and that it is common for parents to have to fight to get the resources they need and to which their children are entitled. It is important to consider how exhausting an experience of constantly battling with public institutions to access services can be and also how this pits local authorities against parents.

The borough has recently saved £3.2 million from the GLA roll out of universal free school meals for all primary aged children.

London Council's have done some excellent work in this area (albeit from before the pandemic) on the hidden value of MNS which can be viewed here: [Hidden Value: A report exploring the role and future of maintained nursery schools in London | London Councils](#).

We would encourage Southwark to explore running a pilot or trial of a resource base using Kintore Way as the centre for this and with a view to improving upon the support that is provided early on to those children with SEND.