

Response to the Consultation

A total of 14 responses were received to the consultation. Consultees were asked whether they supported the proposal, they were also given the opportunity to provide their comments.

- 3 of the responses supported the proposal – 2 x Primary Headteachers and 1 x Councillor
- 1 response asked for further information – 1 x Councillor
- 9 of the responses did not support the proposal – these responses included 3 responses linked to one pupil in the current base, 1 response from the two members of staff working within the base, 5 responses from parents – 4 from parents of pupils currently attending the school and 1 from a parent whose child previously attended the school.

Detailed in bold are the comments made to the consultation, where a response is needed this is included below the comment.

Comments

1. **I am quietly confident that the support could still be offered within a mainstream setting**
2. **I support the closure of the HI unit as I believe the numbers are too small for it to be a viable unit and strongly believe that the needs of the children are better served when they are educated within a mainstream setting with additional support in situ.**
3. **Children do better in a mainstream school and can help them achieve their goals**
4. **It is a fantastic unit and helps a lot of children be a part of a mainstream environment**
5. **After attending the consultation meeting and hearing of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff I wondered how the individually tailored plans spoken of, for each child could be maintained. I think it could result in an oversubscribed service and individual families fighting for what is best for their children. A unit where students and families and school understand each other, I feel, would provide a more nurturing environment.**

I feel the children who use the unit are in mainstream education with the added bonus of the unit.

It would be a shame for the unit to close as it is still half full.

Response

It is intended that the funding previously used to support the Resource Base will be reinvested into increasing the level of specialist support available for children and young people with a hearing impairment. This will mean we are better able to meet need and tailor our support to individual pupils requirements in line with the National Sensory Impaired Partnership (NatSIP) recommended support levels.

We are encouraging all schools to promote a nurturing environment. We have funded a number of pilots, Nurture Champion training and in conjunction with Nurture Group Network have established a Halton network for schools.

6. **The school is renowned for its signing – it would be such a shame to lose it. It includes all the children who use it. Need this unit to continue.**

7. **There are 3 main hearing aids 1) air conduction 2) Bone Anchored be-ha 3) Cochlea implant. All types of aids are better if backed up with sign language as they cannot be worn at certain times e.g. swimming, ear infection etc. - even tiredness. After consulting with XXX - speech and language professional at the Cochlea Implant Centre, integrating Hearing Impaired children into mainstream school can work successfully BUT a percentage of children with a greater hearing loss and not fully developed speech - this will not work. It is far more detrimental for the children when it is beyond their capabilities in a mainstream class to develop fully. Therefore the Hearing Impaired Base at Westfield is an asset for these children and should remain open for however many children required it. There is too much distraction and noise to gain a child's attention. There is always going to be children that need extra help which can only be obtained in a classroom like the Base at Westfield. If you were concerned about the education of these children, put more funding into the Base instead of taking a risk with children's futures. BUT THAT MEANS PROMOTING THE BASE INSTEAD OF TRYING TO PUT PARENTS OFF SO THAT YOU CAN CLOSE IT. YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED. If you are going to adjust the lessons - slow down speech and give these children processing time "which is paramount" you then risk slowing down the education of the rest of the class. Education is the key to our future as well as theirs, so please do the right thing and let these special few children who need extra help use the facilities that are available at Westfield. The family doctor and also the Cochlea Implant Therapists are showing concerns for these children because it will impact on general and mental health problems - this would carry on into adult life (this obviously only applied to the children who need the base) Please promote the base.**

Response

Successful support for children with a Hearing Impairment ensures that individual need is appropriately assessed and met, which involves taking a great many aspects of a child's educational, personal and social circumstances into consideration alongside their deafness.

The majority of families choose for their children to attend their local school with additional Teacher of the Deaf support in line with National Sensory Impaired Partnership (NatSIP) recommended support levels.

Due to advances in technology, for the majority of hearing-impaired children sign support is not necessary and for the small number of occasions where a hearing-aid or Cochlear Implant is not in use, visual support can be achieved through a variety of techniques, of which sign is only one. Where such additional support is required, this can be achieved without resource base provision, for example in support of swimming lessons a range of visual communication can be employed by swimming instructors supported by a peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf.

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf are experienced in supporting teachers of mainstream classes to best support deaf children, including ensuring that they have time to process auditory information. This does not require any 'slowing down' of the delivery of lessons in any way, nor would it in a resource base context.

Even in a resource base the aim is for deaf children spend the majority of their time in their mainstream class.

- 8. As the proposal has only covered the base being currently accessed by the children with hearing impairments, it is not taking into account the other children throughout the school with specific learning difficulties which is also what the base was designed for.**

Would it be possible for the children to be in mainstream support as proposed but to use the base for interventions for the core subjects (Maths and English) and have a teacher to work with the children with specific needs. This does not necessarily need to be a teacher of the deaf, as all sign and hearing aid maintenance can be competently done by the support staff as it would in mainstream.

We currently have children throughout the school with dyslexia, ASD, Aspergers, English as an additional language, and of course hearing impairments.

Therefore it would benefit all these children to have timetabled access to the base and greatly improve their learning. This would be an added bonus for those children who are not at the levels they would be expected to be at and aid them greatly for SATS and assessments and help them achieve their potential.

Although closure has focused on the hearing impaired children it has not considered the children we have throughout the school with specific learning difficulties.

We would be interested to hear your thoughts on this.

Response

Most schools support pupils with special educational needs. Once the current pupils in the Resource Base complete their primary education the funding for the staff at the school will cease, however, the school can continue to use the Resource Base room and its facilities.

- 9. Two comments were received which did not support the closure of the Resource base but both contained information about a specific pupil – the specific comments have not been included but a general summary is included below:**
- a. the base provides intensive support which can assist where there is a mismatch between a child’s chronological age and hearing age which impacts on speech, language and communication**
 - b. specialist support is essential for pupils with a disability to support their wellbeing in younger and adult life. Closure of the school will cause detriment in overall wellbeing especially mental health**

Response

There will be no change to the current provision for the child referred to in the two responses. We are not looking to close the school but close the Resource Base. We will continue to provide specialist support until the current pupils complete their primary education. Should the proposal be agreed we will reinvest funding into increasing the level of specialist support available for pupils in mainstream settings across the borough.

- 10. I should like to know whether the unit will be based elsewhere. If not how will such provision be affected?**

Response

No – the proposal is to close the Resource Base. (see response to comment 9 above)

- 11. A letter was also received from Derek Twigg on behalf of a constituent. The letter detailed concerns about the proposal to close Westfield Hearing Impaired Resource Base. The letter contained information about a specific pupil and member of staff – the specific comments have not been included but a general summary is included below:**

- a. The Resource Base has been in place for many years and is much used and needed**

- b. Closure would have a detrimental effect on vulnerable children**
- c. The previous teacher of the deaf at the school now works at Halton Borough Council**
- d. The closure is a cost cutting exercise.**

Response

There will be 3 pupils in the base in September 2016. Feedback from parents of young children with a hearing impairment is that they would prefer their children to be educated in a mainstream setting with support.

We will continue to fund support for the existing pupils in the Resource Base until they have completed their primary education at Westfield.

The previous teacher of the deaf at Westfield has been recruited to a specialist teacher post working as part of the Local Authority team. The school have tried to recruit a replacement teacher for the school, however, they have been unable to do so as this model of provision is no longer in line with the current ethos for children with moderate to severe hearing impairment.

The closure is not a cost cutting exercise the funding saved will be reinvested into strengthening the level of specialist support available across the authority.