Briefing Sheet for Schools' Forum Members – 17th October 2012

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I am observing this Forum today as I believe it is a relevant Forum with which I should engage for 2 reasons.

Firstly, LBWF are currently working with the charity sector in WF on a revised Compact. I am on that working party and keep saying to the Council officers there that I think this Forum should be involved, eg. someone from the Forum attend the working party and report back to the Forum, as many schools are, or will have charitable status, and may already, and increasingly in the future liaise with charities for services for their children eg. Carefree Kids

However, the officers working on the Compact seem to know nothing about the Schools' Forum.

So,seeing details in the WFN this week of this meeting tonight, I decided to find out more by coming along.

Secondly, I also want to share with you examples of things happening in WF schools in relation to the charity I Chair (WFDA), as I believe this should be something the Schools' Forum is made aware of and discusses at a future meeting.

1. Screening for Dyslexia
   With a lack of Educational Psychologist support now, parents and schools themselves are requesting WFDA screen children for dyslexia. This is a much cheaper alternative to a full dyslexia assessment and as we use qualified dyslexia specialists the information we are able to supply from the screening is very comprehensive.
   Our screening sessions are fully booked to Christmas and we have a waiting list for 2013 of 31, so anyone contacting us for screening now will not be screened before Easter. That is an unacceptably long time to wait, but as a small charity with very limited funds we cannot do anything about it. With support, we could train another 1 or 2 screeners and supply them each with a laptop, increase our number of users on the screening licence and reduce that waiting list. It is an ever growing list which is why, without further financial support we know we cannot get it down to a more reasonable level.

2. Dyslexia Support in Schools
   Some schools are using the services of WFDA as part of their support for children with dyslexia, yet we receive no funding for this from the Borough and the schools are reticent to fund it too. This situation needs to be addressed.

   3 Brief Examples:

   When we did not think we were going to secure a grant for our Week Long Transition Summer Club in 2012 we wrote to the families that had already provisionally booked a place to say that we were planning to charge £50 per child for the week, as a contribution to the costs of it and that through our own fundraising efforts we would meet the shortfall. We immediately received a number of responses from families who said they simply couldn't afford that, including this:

   Hi yes I'd still like Connor to have a place.
   However I'm a single mother with three young kids and struggling financially. I appreciate what you've said regarding funding but was also not aware that I needed to contribute. Due to my circumstances would it be possible for Connor still to attend? He is really looking forward to coming ***and he has a statement of education and at his last review recently we discussed this as part of his transition plan.*** It would be a shame for him to not be able to do it now. Do you have any plans in place for this situation?

So, our Transition Summer Club was included in that school's plans for Connor's transition, yet no funding was available from the school or the Borough for him to attend.

An example last week from a parent whose son attends an Academy Secondary School in the Borough:

We have had a meeting with the SENCO. She informed us that William is still on the SEN register (School Action) and following tests William (age 11 years and 6 months) now has a reading age of 10 years and 10months which he has improved greatly and the spelling age of a 9 year old. I believe his spelling has improved, but still being that of a 9 year old gives us cause of concern. The help WFDA have given him is invaluable and greatly appreciated and we feel has definitely helped him progress.

The School are giving William 20 minutes extra reading once a week during a registration period and a 10 minute per day home reading programme. The SENCO has asked that William's WFDA tutor contact her so that the SENCO can be updated on his progress. ***It seems that the school are not giving extra support on spelling and are relying on WFDA to provide this support.***

So the parent here has flagged up her concern that William's school are relying on WFDA to provide support, again without any contribution towards the cost of that support.

An example 2 weeks ago:
The child is now in year 6 and has been receiving pretty intensive literacy teaching since the age of 7 but has made little progress. They are trying to get things set up for him so that he will be able to cope in secondary school.

(We have a waiting list for our literacy classes, so suggested a touch typing class might be a good first step while waiting for a place. We charge £5 per session for touch typing and £12 per session for literacy).

Getting him to classes may be difficult. I think the school will be able to arrange for someone to bring him and his mother to the first typing class but subsequent visits may or may not happen. Talking with the school though it seemed worth giving it a go and the same for literacy classes if and when a suitable vacancy arises.

On the question of payment the school said there was no way the mother could afford £5 per lesson, £4 is not much better.

We went back to the school to say that we cannot subsidise any further and that one of our Trustees was even considering whether she could personally help this family pay for the class. When we explained that to the school they said that they would get the money from the School PTA to pay for it.

So, 3 examples since June 2012 that have come across my desk as Chairman of the Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association. How many other examples are there that we are not hearing about, either because the parents are not battling for their child, or the schools are not being proactive?

The Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association are struggling to secure funding to enable our screening, classes and annual transition club to continue, yet increasingly these services are being seen as crucial, because nothing else is available.

We spent a significant amount of time on a grant application to Lloyds TSB this year and they, and some other funders we have approached have stated that they feel the services we provide should be funded from the schools/local authority and therefore would not give us a grant.

I would ask the Schools' Forum to urgently address how such provision can be funded for children in LBWF to enable us to continue supporting these children and helping them reach their potential.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Adèle Bird