

**Re: Committee Inquiry into past Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.**

Thornfield House School and Outreach Services caters for the needs of children and young people with Specific Speech and Language Impairment. It is a regional resource and was set up to provide a service to all of Northern Ireland. Currently the school has places for 90 pupils who are accommodated in 10 class units.

Pupils who meet the entrance criteria (and subject to available places) are able to enrol in Thornfield at any point in the school year. To gain entry to Thornfield the child's primary need must be Specific Speech and Language Impairment, but other learning disabilities such as ASD can co-exist.

Pupils can remain in Thornfield House until Year 12, after which they must move on to Further Education or Training Provision.

## **Response to the Terms of Reference**

1. Pupils leaving Thornfield House School and Outreach Services at the end of Year 12 have the following choices and opportunities available to them:
  - Belfast Metropolitan College
    1. Working Towards Independent Living
    2. Pathfinders
    3. Route to Success
  
  - Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey)
    1. Aspire to Work
    2. Route to Work
  
  - Dr B's Restaurant, Bridge St, Belfast
    1. Level 2 Hospitality, Literacy, Numeracy, ICT
    2. Be Up For Work
  
  - Training and Employment Schemes such as the ABL/NOW project (supporting young people with ASD).
  
2. The Transition service recently carried out a survey of our young people and their parents. They should be able to provide the most up-to-date information on this matter.
  
3. The best practice in post school provision would be to engage with all the Services such as FE Colleges, DEL, Transition Services, ASD Services, parents and employers to ensure each individual need is being catered for. The Careers teacher in the school liaises with these agencies and the parents in order to assist with the transition of the pupil from Thornfield House School. The individuality of each pupil must be stressed and the provision available should reflect this. The very specific needs of a young person who presents with SLI in addition to ASD should not be underestimated. There is an immediate need to lobby DEL for additional funding to provide realistic opportunities for young

people and increase their readiness for adult life. A wider range of support networks for work placement could be created in conjunction with increased Entitlement Framework Funding. The Local Area Learning Community Careers cluster groups have addressed the issue of transition and career path planning by organising parent information sessions in collaboration with Eye4education. This will help parents gain a better understanding of the transition process and how to help their child plan their own career path.

4. Parents have voiced their concerns that their child's statement ceases when they leave Thornfield House School at the end of Year 12. Other SEN schools have the funding and facilities to extend beyond Year 12 and their pupils are able to retain their statement until the end of their time in that school. The parents of pupils with ASD are particularly concerned with the loss of the statement as their children are especially vulnerable and many will struggle to use public transport or be aware of when they need to ask for help. It would be beneficial to some of the Thornfield House School pupils if the school was extended to KS5. The Head of Careers in Thornfield House School has a difficult task researching the most appropriate path for the pupils to take and liaising with relevant bodies and parents. Much of this is done outside of the main school day as staffing levels in school are not sufficient to allow time for Careers planning.
  
5. The main barrier to co-ordination across departments is time to develop links and to address issues of readiness of students. Schools need to develop enhanced collaborated practices with Area Learning Communities and effective levels of EF funding must be sustained in order for the ALC to contribute effectively to the provision of SEN pupils post 16.

Appendix 1.

**With reference to Annex B “Definitions of Learning Difficulty”.**

Specific Speech and Language Impairment was not included in the above list produced by the Committee for Employment and Learning. All the pupils in Thornfield House School have Specific Speech and Language Impairment cited on their statement as their main learning difficulty. This is a criteria of entrance to Thornfield House School and we are concerned that it appears to have been omitted from the above list.