

Committee for Employment and Learning Visit Report

Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon, 14 May 2014

Background

As part of its Inquiry into Post School Special Educational Need Provision in Northern Ireland the Committee for Employment and Learning agreed, to go on a study visit to Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon.

Attendees

The following Committee Members attended:

Mr Robin Swann MLA, Chairperson
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Ms Bronwyn McGahan MLA

Mrs Cathie White - Clerk to the Committee for Employment and Learning
Mr Vincent Gribbin – Assistant Clerk to the Committee for Employment and Learning

Sperrinview representatives:

Paula Jordan, Principal
Ruth Walker, Vice-Principal
Adrian McCreesh, Board Member
Martin Nixon, Board Member

Meeting

On arrival the Committee had an informal discussion with the representatives of Sperrinview regarding its work and the issues facing individuals with learning difficulties transitioning from school. The Committee was given a tour of the facilities available and met with board members for a further discussion.

Issues raised

- The school covers 3 Health Trust and 2 Council areas. This leads to complex issues around who is responsible for what regarding transport, fixing equipment etc.

- There are also different protocols, procedures and opportunities between the trusts.
- The School has been waiting 8 years for a transitions protocol to be established.
- Despite the transition reviews starting from age 14 the parents and school don't know where their children are going to until the last minute.
- The Southern Trust seems to have a good system but they don't have very much to offer, the Northern Trust has a poor system but to offer post 19.
- Staff at day-care centres are not trained to the level that school staff are trained for working with people with learning disabilities.
- As part of Transforming your Care, individuals who have spent years in day care centres and are institutionalised are being moved out into the community.
- There is no one body/organisation that takes an overarching approach to sorting out all the issues involved (health, transport, training, etc.).
- The school feels that they are bringing their pupils to a certain level, giving them employability skills and coping skills; getting them ready for training and employment opportunities that in reality do not exist. When they leave school they will not receive the same level of support and their skills will suffer.
- DEL FE figures mask the real numbers by lumping course for physical and learning disabilities together.
- The Executive needs to see the bigger picture – by providing good services on transition they can avoid a range of future mental health issues. By funding services after transition they will not have to fund mental health support etc. in years to come.
- The school would like to have a specific centre to send their transitioning students to where they would receive appropriate support.
- The school suggests that approximately 50% of their pupils have social workers assigned to them.
- Bamford legislation isn't helping parents.
- Transition meetings not involving the right people and often Health and education representatives are not attending.
- It would be worth finding out if there is an increase in parents keeping their children at home.
- There is no further education so the children regress.
- There should be a social clause for companies that receive funding from Invest NI etc. to employ those with learning disabilities or offer support.
- There needs to be more social enterprises.
- Cookstown FE college offers 5 days training, whilst Dungannon FE college offers 1 day training and individuals from Dungannon cannot access the

cookstown opportunities because transport cannot go across council boundaries.

- DE talk about education for life however for those with learning difficulties access ends at 19.
- There are 4 options for individuals with learning disabilities leaving education: 1. Find a job, 2. Go to FE College, 3. Go to an adult day-care centre, 4. stay at home.