

PUPIL SUPPORT IN BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY

By Bill Alexander

Summary

This report makes a proposal and seeks approval for funding of a new service to support pupils in specialist and therapeutic activities in the Badenoch and Strathspey area.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Highland Council and Joint Committee have committed to a necessary range of Additional Support for Learning Services across the authority, and to the investment of funds to support Highland's children as far as possible within Highland.
- 1.2 Over recent years a number of local developments have been supported by the Committee as part of this strategy, and these have enabled many children to be sustained in their local communities, and have helped reduce the number of young people who may require out of authority placements.
- 1.3 The Committee has also been committed to an equity of access to such specialist resources, and this report involves a proposal that addresses a shortage of provision in one particular part of the authority.

2. Additional Support for Learning Provision in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey

- 2.1 New Additional Support for Learning facilities in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey have been developed at Drummond School, Inshes Primary, Millburn Academy and Nairn Academy.
- 2.2 In addition, *Apple Grove* in Inverness is entering its third year of operations, providing dedicated provision for a very small group of young children on the autistic spectrum.
- 2.3 There has also been a gradual expansion and improvement in the resources required to support pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, exhibiting challenging behaviour, ranging from intervention in the early years through to alternative placements designed to create a sound start for young people once they leave formal schooling.
- 2.4 In addition to the established services at 'The Bridge' and 'Black Isle Education Centre' (located in Ross-shire), 'Doorways', formerly known as 'The Glade', has had a particularly good year, intervening effectively in the troubled lives of a substantial number of young children. Many of these children were able to return full time to their base schools where they maintained their places. At any one time, 'Doorways' has up to 7 children on its roll.

- 2.5 In addition, there are resources being offered by the voluntary sector and private interests. For example, Abriachan Forest School, John Muir Trust and Glachbeg Outdoor Centre.
- 2.6 However, it has continued to prove difficult to meet the range of needs of a small group of young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who live in Badenoch & Strathspey. Where services that are in addition to mainstream school are required, it has often been necessary to use the provision in Inverness and beyond, and this has often proved difficult and accordingly unsuccessful because of the distances and also the time and staffing demands that are involved.
- 2.7 There have been a small but significant number of young people from this part of the authority in out of authority placements, and it is likely that this disproportionate number is in part due to the lack of additional local early intervention services.

3. Proposal for Badenoch & Strathspey Nurture Centre

- 3.1 The Fasgadh Fais Community Interest Company is an established organisation based in Newtonmore, set up in June 2008 for the purpose of supporting primary education and to achieve "a safe place for learning and growing."
- 3.2 As a CIC, it is a limited company for community benefit, and not for private advantage. This is achieved by a "community interest test" and "asset lock", which ensure that the CIC is established for community purposes and the assets and profits are dedicated to these purposes. Registration of a company as a CIC has to be approved by the Regulator who is an independent official, established by The Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004.
- 3.3 The CIC has been in discussions with local Area Managers about a service for children from the Badenoch & Strathspey area. Further to these discussions, it is proposed that we commission an off-school site service, to provide:
- Classroom space for pupils receiving out of school tuition;
 - Therapeutic art sessions;
 - Accommodation for one-to-one work and groupwork, undertaken by tutors, mentors, lead professionals and Primary Mental Health Workers, among others;
 - A base from which to undertake curricular activities within the local environment;
 - Computer access for pupils as part of an enhanced curriculum;
 - A base and meeting rooms for professionals involved with the various support agencies as required.
- 3.4 The Service is available for up to three days a week, from 9.30am – 3.30pm during term time, and for up to four children at a time, at a cost of £150/day.
- 3.5 It is proposed that services to the value of £12,000 should be commissioned in the first year, and that this should be subject to a Service Level Agreement and then reviewed.
- 3.6 It is envisaged that this service will help reduce the need for out of authority placements. It is therefore also proposed that funding is vired from this budget

heading, albeit members will be aware that there is an element of risk with regard to this, as this is a demand led budget, that has been a budget pressure.

- 3.7 One of the Directors of CIC is a member of staff in the Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Pupil Support Service. This helps to provide confidence in the nature, ethos and operation of the proposed service, but assurances have also been sought to ensure that there will be no conflict of interest with the normal duties of that individual. As part of this, various safeguards will be established, including the oversight of the service by Highland Council Service Managers and the routine management of access to the facility through the normal processes determined by the Area Service Managers Group.

Recommendations

The Joint Committee is asked to agree funding from the out of authority placements budget of £12,000 to initiate this new service.

Bill Alexander

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