

A Report into the Shropshire Council Alternative Provision

Shropshire Council is undertaking a review into its alternative provision. This review has incorporated many strands. From engaging with schools, communicating with TMBSS, reaching out to other local authorities and most recently gauging school opinions with the local authority AP survey. Shropshire Council has aimed to gather the initial opinions and advice from a range of sources, this has allowed us to see what might be both viable and desirable for any change going forward. Following this initial outreach our next step will be to consider all options and hopefully go out to schools for a full consultation within the next few months in order to understand and consider their full opinion on any proposed changes. At the centre of this change is a desire to enhance the learning the children and young people along with providing additional support for schools with a potential outreach service. It is believed that this combination of support both for the school and child or young person will be the outcome of any new model.

This report will aim to briefly set out the contributions of the AP survey as well as the findings from research into other local authorities.

How successful - in general - was intervention for the pupil(s) accessing TMBSS behaviour intervention provision?

The overall feeling among those schools who replied was a positive one with 75% of recipients believing that the intervention by TMBSS was a very successful (45%) or successful (30%). This is in contrast with those who were neutral about the intervention 15% and those who found it very unsuccessful 10%. The theme of the comments was that schools were grateful for the support and regarded it as professional and supportive towards both integration back into mainstream and providing a location where pupils could break with negative behaviours and work on solutions. The service it is believed has meant fewer permanent exclusions as pupils who have attended have following the provision improved their behaviour. However, there were concerns raised by some schools around effectiveness of the provision, as some pupils have had to be permanently excluded following re-integration into mainstream, it was also raised that the limited space available at TMBSS meant that some pupils have been unable to get any intervention that they required and subsequently had to be transferred to a different school. An interesting point that was made was the impact of the parents or the home life of the children and young people as some schools regarded the enthusiasm of the parents or intervention from other council services as a factor in the success or failure of the intervention.

Would you be prepared to pay a contribution toward the cost of the provision?

Whether or not schools should pay a contribution towards the cost of any provision is a dividing subject. The respondents to the survey were divided on the issue with 54% supporting some kind of contribution while 46% were against any such move. There were a wide range of reasons behind each 'yes' or 'no' decision. Those who are willing to consider a contribution to the provision did so for many reasons, one way this could be done it was suggested was through the following on funding, if a child or young person is in a dual role than it may be the AWPU follows that child or young person, it might also be that if the pupil is in receipt any high-needs funding that this also follows the child or young person. Many appreciate the work undertaken by TMBSS and believe a contribution would benefit the service. Others pointed to a trend nationally that sees local

authorities move towards a 'contribution' model. It was also pointed out that an alternative provision as recognised by TMBSS is not necessarily available in other authorities and if a new model needs school support then it will have to be considered. There is a recognition from across schools that the provision offered is something beneficial to schools as well as pupils. The proposal of a contribution however needs more explaining, those who responded noted how it was difficult to make a 'yes'/'no' decision based on the information available and if more information was available a more informed decision could be made.

There was some concern expressed which believed the service currently on offer needs to be enhanced or improved upon before anything else. The overwhelming reason for rejecting the notion of a contribution however was the strain on school budgets and a lack of funding, a lot of schools rejected the notion of a contribution for this reason, those who supported the proposal also expressed concern over budgets and the need to realise this reality for schools.

Primary school option

Retain the 50/50 shared placement but restrict to 3 terms, with pupils attending for Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesday will be used for TMBSS staff to go into schools to offer outreach support

The idea proposed for a new primary model was met with a majority of positive support with 67% of respondents either being very positive (14%) or positive (53%), 19% of respondents were neutral while 14% were negative. There was a large section of comments on the model with the majority of those responding offering a different perspective. The comments have demonstrated the wide variety of opinion and areas that need to be explored going forward. The proposal of an outreach service through TMBSS was regarded as a positive by the majority of respondents, the key positives were identified as a means of helping support schools as well as the pupils, this was emphasised through the idea of outreach and the sharing expertise (this would have the bonus of) allowing TMBSS staff to see pupil's behaviour in usual (school) setting. The dual role would mean pupils will have a sense of continuity between settings, along with the enhanced potential of supported integration back into mainstream – keeping contact with school and peers. The negative aspects of this model were identified by respondents as a concern over TMBSS staff capacity for outreach, and level of availability for all schools. There was also a repeated concern over the proposed three term limit, with respondents instead believing time in TMBSS should be looked at on a case-by-case basis (some schools raised the possibility of an increase in permanent exclusions if a term limit was imposed). It was stated that children might need a break from the school setting in order to re-set behaviour.

Secondary Option

Model 1: *Full day support on four days a week, day five used for staff to go into mainstream schools and offer advice and outreach support. This model would require another SEMH centre to cater for increased demand, potentially in the Market Drayton area.*

Model 2: Move to a shared placement model similar to the primary phase. Monday to Thursday students are allocated either a morning or afternoon session the remainder of the day will be supported in their mainstream school. Friday will be used to offer advice and outreach support.

Model 3: Students are allocated a full day at TMBSS on Monday and Tuesday or Wednesday and Thursday. If a student attended TMBSS on Monday and Tuesday they would be supported for the remainder of the week in their mainstream school. If a student was supported on a Wednesday and Thursday at TMBSS they would be supported for the remainder of the week in their mainstream school. Places would be restricted to three terms and then return to their mainstream school. Friday would be used for TMBSS staff to offer advice and outreach support.

The secondary option considered three proposals. The first model was considered overall the more positive with 62% of respondents considering it either very positive (37%) or positive (25%). Model two however was split with 50% considering it very positive (12%) or positive (38%) and another 50% who regarded it as negative. Model three was not considered positive or negative, but rather as neutral 75% with those who were positive and negative both being 12.5%. Model one therefore can be considered the preferable option – however there were a lot of comments on the proposals which set out many different perspectives of the secondary schools.

Schools were very different in their responses, all approaching the models from a different perspective. An overarching theme was the need to keep a focus on the individual students and the realisation that for many of the students referred to TMBSS there is not a one size fits all approach and that those in TMBSS have a wide variety of complex needs. That said however, going forward if the local authority is going to enhance the provision provided it might be necessary to have a standard overarching model. It is for this reason that getting an idea of what schools think of the different models is so important going forward.

The idea of model one was met with the most positive response. Being within TMBSS for four of the five days allows for a significant period of time away from the mainstream setting, the one day a week outreach opportunity on the other day where TMBSS staff could come out and engage with schools may be regarded as an opportunity to develop and share good practice. There is concern with the secondary models that a joint attendance at both the TMBSS setting and the mainstream will be impractical with the reality of teaching, most notably at GCSE level. Model one might however be more practical with those in KS3, one day a week in school would act arguably as an anchor and give the student a continued sense of belonging. It was suggested that pupils in their one day a week at mainstream could be placed within the schools own 'pupil support centre' as a basis for reintegration. This reintegration it was suggested could merge with a different model as student progress is achieved as to become slowly a way to move full time back into mainstream. It was a concern that any outreach service would be too stretched if it operated county wide. There are also a lot of clarification questions that were requested such as any proposed cost of a four day a week provision, what the intended outcome would be of any provision, how long would each placement last and what would be the procedures to review students following a return to mainstream, and what would happen if behaviour deteriorates. These questions make up the initial phase of looking into the impact and effect upon schools the models suggested.

On the option of a shared placement there were both opportunities and concerns. Operating a shared placement model would allow for more flexibility for both the school and student. The student would benefit from still feeling part of the school as well as maintaining those social links with peers, in this regard a sense of belonging would be maintained. For the school a shared

placement would allow for a possible relief of the original pressure that led to any exclusion, possibly enhancing any phased return when this is considered necessary.

Some schools regarded the 50/50 dual placement both evident in model 2 and 3 as potentially difficult. The difficulty stems from the issue with timetables most evident for those in KS4 and undertaking their GCSEs, any 50/50 placements would impact on attendance in lessons and learning. Built upon this it was suggested that model two was more suited to primary schools, in a secondary setting the model restricts continuity and would lead to gaps in learning. The outreach provision and cost was also raised and questioned. The response to model 3 was similar to that of model two, with similar issues being raised over the dual setting proposal. An overarching concern was also expressed through a concern over the financial aspect of any new model upon school budgets.

There was a concern raised over the provision offered by TMBSS and how it relates to the mainstream setting, noting the lack of a range of subjects and to a KS4 standard. The behaviour standards were also raised as it was noted that there is more leniency towards certain behaviours that are not acceptable in a school setting.

How do you feel about the development of an outreach support service?

The idea of an outreach support service was supported across all primary and secondary respondents. The reaction was in support of the idea with 91% agreeing it was very positive (29%) or positive (62%), 9% regarded the idea as neutral. This initial reaction demonstrates the support for the idea.

The overall response to an outreach service was one of positivity towards an idea that would benefit schools and pupils. It was agreed that having professional staff visit the school environment would be a benefit to the pupils and the school. It would act as a way of bridging the gap between the schools and the alternative provision, as well as potential act as a preventative service. Respondents emphasised the willingness of staff to learn and gain new skills that would come with an outreach service, improving the techniques of those members of staff who are less experienced, and it would also allow the TMBSS staff to see the pupils in the usual school setting. An outreach service may also be a way of meeting a demand that is not available currently in some schools, and in this regard, it might act as a means of reducing the number of permanent exclusions.

There were some concerns however: some schools were concerned that any outreach service might lead to a replacement for a full time or dual provision placement. This point was built upon by another school who emphasised the need for some children to have a full-time provision with the aim of reintegration into mainstream education, but this reintegration should be into the classroom setting rather than into segregation. The number of schools in Shropshire and the distance between them meant that some schools were concerned about the availability of staff and felt that the staff may be too stretched to deliver a high-quality service. The option of an outreach service is something that has support, however there are concerns and further questions that need to be explored.

