

Note of Public Meeting held at Earlston Primary School – 14th September 2016

18 persons were in attendance comprising parents of pupils from Spectrum Support, staff from Spectrum Support, staff from Earlston High School and members of the local community.

The meeting was chaired by Councillor Sandy Aitchison – Portfolio Holder for Education. The panel comprised Donna Manson - Service Director Children and Young People, Christian Robertson – Senior Lead Officer Inclusion and Additional Needs, Sarah Fitch – Manager Complex Needs, Susan Graham – Headteacher Earlston Primary and Justin Sinclair – Headteacher Earlston High School. The panel gave a presentation and answered questions.

Points raised by the meeting attendees were:

Attendees were positive about the facility being provided and complimentary of the design.

Points and queries raised were:

A parent asked - with regards to Early Intervention, is there going to be a nursery provision?

The response was that there is no barrier to providing nursery provision but the individual children's needs would have to be considered. Transport for the child would also need to be taken into account and as currently, there would be discussion with families to find the best model for the child whether it be local provision or specialist provision.

There was a question about whether in relation to the proposal document page 16 which states "*A purpose built learning environment which provides our children and young people with profound and complex needs with an environment which will support their learning and wellbeing*", whether there would be children attending with a broader range of difficulties than currently.

Mrs Manson replied that it is interesting how some families label their child where as other don't wish this and that this building is seen as a safe, secure managed environment with staff who are highly trained, who focus on meeting challenges and accept that some children don't fit into a simple box. This descriptor is to capture the families that fall into the gaps. However reassurance was given that rather than a dilution of the service, the establishment of this school is a great enhancement to the current provision in Scottish Borders.

The capacity of the building being 50 was questioned. There are 3 classrooms that can accommodate about 8 children in each depending on the activity. However, this provision could be made available beyond the school day for National Groups to use as it is a safe environment with purpose built playground which could provide a chat/social session for parents and children. Spectrum Outreach Teachers might want to use this building to bring the children together on occasion and it is a flexible resource which has space to be this way ie. Other groups of children could use the building at different times.

Reassurance about the relationship with mainstream settings was sought and it was confirmed that the school nearest home will always be the mainstream school and wherever the child is enrolled for mainstream, that school takes control of the Child Support Plan but works jointly with the spectrum staff to support the child and parents.

Parents asked when the school would open and concern was raised about transition planning and transport issues.

Transitional plans which will be put in place and will involve families were described. It was explained Education do not have ownership of transport but in the audience was a Transport Officer who was recording concerns over transport. Carla Upton confirmed that she recently took up post and is committed to improving the service and working closely with Education is looking at developing a 3/5 year plan to provide better continuity of service and staffing.

When asked about staffing ratios, Mrs Manson replied that changes are not anticipated but there is a wish to ensure the resource is more mobile and equitable. If rolls do change, a more flexible allocation of staff may be needed. Scottish Borders ratios are better than other local authorities/organisations. The ratio of staff to children during a day depends on the child's needs and the activity that they are doing.

In closing, Justin Sinclair confirmed that the Earlston community are very supportive of the schools in their village and he knew that the community would welcome the new school.

Susan Graham added that Earlston Primary School is really looking forward to establishing close working links with the new school. Staff and children alike are excited to have a new school right next door.

Councillor Aitchison closed the meeting by asking two ladies in the public meeting if they could remember their time at school in Earlston. The ladies commented that Education has changed somewhat since then but stated Education in Earlston had always had a good reputation.