

Note of Public Meeting held at Wilton Primary School – 13th September 2016

16 persons were in attendance comprising parents of pupils from Spectrum Support and staff from Spectrum Support.

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 and Claire Turnbull – Headteacher Wilton Primary. The panel gave a presentation and answered questions.

Points raised by the meeting attendees were:

All attendees were very positive about the facility being provided and valued the investment.

Parents were reassured that the curriculum being offered to their children in the current provision would be continued. For example, access to a pool for swimming would continue and how best to deliver this will be discussed on an individual basis. Parents were advised that the new school would be right next to the primary school and a five minute walk from the High School. The walk to the high school is through a safe pedestrian route and there are plans for a new playground area to be shared with the new school and the primary school. This would allow the children to be outside in a safe environment. Both the primary school and high school are excited to be welcoming this new purpose built school to their community and looking forward to establishing close links.

A number of queries relating to transport and previous issues were raised. Donna Manson highlighted that Scottish Borders Council is to provide a plan for transport door to door for each of the individual children. It is important that there is a detailed plan and a backup plan with transport particularly for those with additional needs. Mrs Manson gave assurance that over the coming months the individual timetable will be discussed with families.

Mrs Manson also spoke about difficulties when weather affected travel and highlighted that localised decisions will be made working in partnership with bus companies and taxi services to ensure minimum disruption where possible and a commitment was made to improve arrangements for Additional Support Needs Pupils as part of the Emergency Plan.

Questions were raised regarding staffing provision and ratios as well as pupil numbers.

Reassurance was given that the existing staff from Wilton and St Ronan's Spectrum Support Provision will be relocated to the new purpose built school in Earlston. There is to be no reduction in the number of staff. The children receiving support from Wilton and St Ronan's will transfer to the new school and it is also hoped that a child currently receiving provision out with the authority may attend the school perhaps one day a week. As the school is established it is expected that new applications would be received but these would only be accepted if it meets the needs of the child. Perhaps an additional five children could be accommodated but if so the school would be staffed accordingly.

It was highlighted that by establishing the building as a school Scottish Borders would be able to attract National Groups/Bodies to use the school in the evenings to meet and provide support for parents.

During the summer there may be the same number of children or a new intake. Children have different needs, it may be they are placed in their local mainstream school or have some time in each.

When asked about the planned management structure, it was identified that there is a need to look very carefully at this, at what other specialist schools have in place and what we currently have before making a decision about this.

A local elected member commented on this being about the children and a key issue is that this is purpose built for a reason. He felt that the centralised location of this school made complete sense in this case. Councillor Aitchison added that he appreciates that centralised locations can cause difficulties for outlying areas and highlighted events where this can cause some difficulty for these schools attending.

Parents were informed that they would be able to make visits to the facility in advance of the opening.

Following the meeting, parents attending reported being reassured by what they had heard and by the responses to their questions. A report in the local paper quoted a family likewise.