

Consultation on proposal to close the Communication and Interaction (C&I) Resource Base at Queensway School, Banbury

This paper sets out the proposal to close the Communication and Interaction Resource Base hosted by Queensway School in Banbury. It explains the reasons for proposing the closure and how Oxfordshire County Council is supporting children who have communication and interaction needs.

What is a Communication and Interaction Resource Base?

Resource Bases are facilities hosted by mainstream schools to provide specialist support and interventions to children with special educational needs.

Communication and Interaction is a term used for children and young people who have particular difficulties with understanding what is being said and social interaction, this includes children with speech, language or social communication difficulties and those with autism and Asperger's syndrome.

The Communication and Interaction Resource Base hosted by Queensway School

The resource base hosted by Queensway School was originally established for children with speech and language needs.

Queensway was the first "Language Unit" to open in Oxfordshire in 1978, being then a 'cutting-edge' local provision for pupils with communication needs, who required intensive speech therapy, linked to specialised teaching but were not severe enough for a special school placement. These pupils previously would have had to go out of county for specific intervention.

Initially there were limited places offered within an existing unit for hearing impaired pre-schoolers and the two cohorts separated at age five. During the 1980s and 90s there were 16 language places for primary age pupils. Staff started doing "outreach" advisory work in other mainstream schools.

One noticeable pattern is that there has been a **consistent** cohort of pupils transported from Bicester.

The language provision has functioned alongside the Northern Hearing Impairment Team which is totally advisory. In the 1990s, the focus switched from resource bases to advisory support for inclusion in mainstream schools, numbers steadily dropped from 16 and the base has been empty since September 2010.

The number of pupils across the Banbury area has risen and this trend is forecast to continue. Queensway School has admitted an additional form of entry since 2012. There is steep growth in pupil numbers in the north of the county generally. New schools are planned and the specifications for these include Resource Bases.

Support for Oxfordshire Children with Communication and Interaction Needs

Oxfordshire aims to provide a broad range of ways and contexts in which children with Communication and Interaction needs are supported. This includes early intervention, specialist support for mainstream schools and a continuum of Communication and Interaction specialist provision.

Wherever possible children are supported in their local area and the strategy is for each area of Oxfordshire (North, Central and South) to have at least one primary and one secondary Communication and Interaction Resources Base. There is specialist advisory support provided by SEN Support Services (SENSS) for all schools.

Some partnerships of schools have also set up their own enhanced provision, ensuring specialist support when needed and developing high quality inclusive practice across the partnership. Schools in the Banbury partnership are committed to using specialist support to ensure they can meet the needs of pupils locally.

Reasoning for proposal

This proposal to close a specialist resource base has not been taken lightly. It is being made now because:

- The impact of earlier interventions, the breadth of specialist advisory support and the increasing expertise in schools and partnerships in the local area are all factors contributing to lack of demand for specialist places at the Queensway School base.
- Schools in the partnership have shown they can meet the needs of all but the most complex pupils with C&I needs in their local schools with the specialist advisory support from existing services including SENSS. There is NO reduction in budget. Services are being deployed to intervene earlier and empower schools to meet the needs of pupils now and those who will join the school in the future.
- The current need for resource base places in a more central part of North Oxfordshire and in particular for pupils in the Bicester area (who currently need to be transported to Oxford and / or Chinnor)
- The specifications for new primary schools in the North where there is significant population growth include a resource base. These would be smaller, more local provisions enabling the LA to respond flexibly to need.

This proposal is in line with the key principles of the SEND reforms, in particular early identification of needs and early intervention, high quality provision as local to the child's home and greater choice and control for young people and parents over support.

HOW TO RESPOND

Please respond by email to diane.cameron@oxfordshire.gov.uk putting **QUEENSWAY BASE** in the subject line. Or, write to Diane Cameron, School Organisation & Planning, County Hall, FREEPOST Oxfordshire County Council.

Responses must be made by 17 October 2014.