**Open Session for Parents and Carers**

**Holy Trinity Primary School**

**Wednesday 18th May 2022**

**Hosted by Wirral Council SEND Service**

**Opening:**

Katy Bird, Head of SEND Service welcomed all attendees to the Open Session, noting the fantastic attendance and thanked all parents, carers and other stakeholders for coming.

**Introductions to Presenters:**

Sally Tittle, SEND Manager introduced a range of partner and community services attending:

**Community Connectors-** Delivered by Involve Northwest, Community Connectors enable individuals to improve their physical and mental wellbeing by building social networks that give long-term support. They can help adults make new connections, find work, access the right support services. For more info [www.involvenorthwest.org.uk/what-we-do/connect-us](http://www.involvenorthwest.org.uk/what-we-do/connect-us)

**SEND Youth Voice & Participation-** An introduction was given to SEND Youth Voice and Participation, which is based at Pilgrim Street Youth Arts Centre. The team use arts such as dance, photography, drama, and other creative methods to enable young people with SEND to express their experience, views and participate in decision making. There are a number of ways young people, from 8-years-old can get involved and the new Youth Partnership gives young people with SEND the opportunity to contribute to local decision-making for the Council and public services. For more info [www.localofferwirral.org/send-youth-voice/](http://www.localofferwirral.org/send-youth-voice/)

**Koala NW-** An introduction to the Short Breaks Club for children up to age 7 with SEND to enjoy activities and group sessions with other children. Koala NW also provide a range of support services for parents and carers which may helpful such as breast-feeding support and family support. For more info [www.koalanw.co.uk](http://www.koalanw.co.uk)

**Parent Carer Participation Wirral (PCPW)-** PCPW are a group made up of parents and carers for children and young people aged 0-25 years. PCWP are passionate about ensuring that the rights and needs of children with SEND on Wirral are identified and met. By doing this hope to improve the quality of life for children, young people and their families. PCPW offer the Local Authority, commissioners and service providers the views of parents and carers to influence service development, design and delivery. For more info [www.wirralparentcarergroup.co.uk](http://www.wirralparentcarergroup.co.uk)

**The Positivitree-** Focussing on self-care, The Positivitree have created a parent-led wellbeing movement. They focus on empowering parents and carers, practising self-care, give online support, and provide wellbeing activities. For more info [www.thepositivitree.com](http://www.thepositivitree.com)

**Open Discussion Session**

1. Concerns were shared by parents and carers about Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and the process. This included:

* EHCPs not enabling children to achieve their potential
* Not all professionals involved in the EHC process or delivery of plans know the timelines, the law, or what their role is in the plan
* Parent and carer input to the EHC needs assessment is not always sought or included in the overall assessment or plan
* Provision identified in the plan is not always given to the child
* The local area not doing enough to quality assure or check that the provision children and young people receive is meeting their needs

Responses were provided acknowledging that these are all findings of the Local Area SEND inspection and that there is considerable work being undertaken across the borough to make improvements. Katy Bird acknowledged the frustration that this was not happening as quickly as parents and carers would like to see it, but that the SEND Team and its partners are committed to making the changes needed.

2. Several attendees raised concerns about capacity within the SEND Service, this included:

* Dealing with the backlog of assessments that have gone out of timescale
* Prioritising annual reviews for those children and young people about to make a transition in their education
* Local Authority officers being over-loaded and needing more staff

Katy Bird informed attendees that capacity within the service is being increased and new posts have been created. Introductions were made to new team members in attendance. A full overview of the service will be made available, with details on roles and responsibilities, when recruitment is completed.

Part of the recruitment is for a Review Team, managed by Janine Barton (in attendance). The plan is for all Annual Reviews to transfer from the EHC Co-ordinators to a team of Annual Reviewers, which will reduce workload within the EHC Team and help to improve their capacity.

3. Issues of poor communication was raised by many attendees, with examples including:

* Parents and carers feeling ignored or not believed by professionals
* Professionals being rude and dismissive towards them
* Emails, texts and phone calls not being responded to
* Staff not listening to the parents and carers even though they know their children better than anyone else

Katy Bird stated that improving communication with parents and carers is the first priority for action and that events like these are intended to make that a reality. Katy provided context about the pressures within the service, at all levels, to respond to individual contacts. Many members of staff are working long hours to try to improve communications and responses, but there may be a need to create additional capacity for this and a helpline and/or duty service is currently being considered. An update on this will follow after seeking the views of parents and carers.

4. Many attendees spoke about how difficult their own experience has been in trying to engage with Local Area services and to get the support they need for their children. It was suggested that a meaningful apology from the Local Area representatives should be made to parents and carers. Katy Bird and colleagues from the SEND Team reminded the group that there were support agencies in attendance offering support, including PCPW, Positivitree, Koala NW, and Community Connectors.

5. Several points were raised regarding education. These included:

* When a child or young person has an EHCP, what the Local Authority does to ensure that they are getting the support outlined in their plan
* Children and young people are telling education settings about their challenges but feel they are being ignored
* Children and young people being out of school for significant periods of time
* Education settings can be inconsistent in their approaches to inclusion, with there being a wide range of experiences.

There were 2 Head Teachers in attendance who acknowledged all the issues raised by parents and carers. They offered reassurance that education settings and their staff were committed to making change. An Education Summit was recently held in Wirral, hosted by Senior Leaders, and this was the first introduction to developing an Inclusive Education Strategy. Both Head Teachers said that they feel positive about the support being provided to schools and that we need a collective approach to deliver change.

A lot of discussion about early intervention took place. The SEND Service has been focusing on what it can do to improve early intervention and enable more schools and education settings to support children and young people to thrive in the mainstream environment. Further information about early intervention in SEND will be available soon and is a priority for the Written Statement of Action.

**Throughout the session there were several parents and carers who stepped forward to offer their support to the SEND Service- as volunteers, sharing learning, or contributing to case studies. This was greatly appreciated by the SEND Service and Sally Tittle asked that anyone wishing to be involved to contact her via** [**localofferwirral@wirral.gov.uk**](mailto:localofferwirral@wirral.gov.uk)

Thank you to Mrs Wright (Headteacher) and Mrs Graham (SENCO) at Hoylake Holy Trinity Primary school for hosting the event and providing refreshments for everyone.