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THE NATIONAL SEND FORUM Minutes 9th December 2020 Virtual Zoom Meeting

Present: David Bateson OBE (DB) *Chair*, Lorraine Petersen OBE (LP) *FLSE*, Rona Tutt OBE (RT) *NAHT*, Caroline Wright (CW) *RCSLT*, Stephen Deadman (SD) *NAHE*, Michelle Haywood (MH) *WMSSEND*, Carol Kelsey (CK) *NNPCF*, , Rob Williams (RW) *NAHT*, Richard Boyle (RB) *engage*, Chris Rollings (CR) *FLSE*, Julie Walker (JW) *sen.se*, Brendan Heneghan OBE (BH) *Engage*, Clare Dorer (CD) *NASS*, Catherine Ollington (CO) *NSN*, Adam Boddison (AB) *nasen*, Malcolm Reeve (MR) *WSS*, David Canning (DC) *BATOD/NATSIP*, Carolyn Morgan (CM) *FLSE*, Jackie Mullan (JM) *FLSE*, Kiran Hingorani (KH) *SWALSS/NASS*, , Penny Barratt (PB) *SSV*, Adelaide Chitanda (AC) *NGA*, Georgina Downard (GD) *IPSEA*, Jane Carter (JC) *PDnet*, Kate Williams (KW) *NASS*

Guests: André Imich (AI) *DfE*, Scott Howard (SH) *DfE*, Helen Nix (HN) *DfE*

Minutes: Andy Petersen (AP)

1. Welcome and Introductions

DB welcomed and thanked everyone for joining this virtual meeting.

**For
Action**

2. Protocol for meeting

DB went through some protocols for this virtual meeting

3. Apologies

Melanie Foster (MF) *NAS*

4. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed

5. SEND reference group update. (AB)

AB commented that Reference group minutes had been previously circulated and he proposed to pick out key points and take questions on the work of the group.

AB felt that there had been some frustration in recent months, not with colleagues in the Department (who most felt had worked hard to help colleagues in the sector to make the right decisions locally) but with wider elements of government and the joining up between different parts of them. This was particularly apparent for the Cabinet Office and Public Health England each having to sign things off, causing operational difficulties and delays to schools. Examples of this were the National Tutoring Programme and the Catch-up funding, and making sure that special schools in particular were not disadvantaged. Post 16 funding had also been an issue.

The group was aware that there had been announcements around more funding coming in to the system overall, which included quite a big amount of additional funding for special needs in terms of the high needs funding block. However, there were concerns about whether this funding would find its way to the appropriate end destination.

The research team from Deloitte had talked to the group about lateral flow testing because testing was an issue that kept arising frequently particularly as a result of complex medical needs. Members of the group were particularly concerned how easily equipment and testing capacity could be made available to particular elements of special schools. **AB** felt that Deloitte had gathered useful feedback about the issues.

The group had also received a presentation about financial benchmarking which he felt was indicative of the direction of travel of the group who could act as a “sounding board” for future policy.

CD had also raised the issue of educational workforce wellbeing. It was clear that this was an issue that the reference group would need to consider further in the future.

DB commented on the extraordinary lengths that school leaders had gone to during the crisis to ensure the safety and well being of both pupils and staff.

CD commented that current research particularly from Education Support showed the immense amount of stress school leaders were under currently. Her sense of the difference between leaders and other staff was the leaders were frantically working to try to manage the stress of other people in schools, but not always with someone trying to do the same for them.

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/blogs/teacher-wellbeing-index-2020-launches>

NASS had been piloting this year (pre-Covid) opportunities for staff to have clinical supervision which had come into its own during the pandemic.

DB commented that all the heads he had talked to spoke very favourably of their local networks and how much operational and emotional support they have had which had also helped bridge some gaps they had experienced with other agencies.

10 NSEND Thought Leadership paper on the Identification of SEND (MR)

The Chair brought forward this item on the agenda.

MR had produced overviews on identification of SEND for various organisations across the country ranging from local authorities to regions in terms of the four broad areas of need, and the primary categories of need and comparisons between them. Work had also been done on individual local authorities, Academy trusts and individual schools so as to provide a tool for schools to use so that they can update their pattern of SEND identification analysis and compare with national patterns.

MR would then be able to prepare a paper around this work. He needed to consider whether the primary categories of need were still relevant and whether they serve a good purpose.

Consideration also needed to be given to the four broad areas of need, what they were and what

they mean, **MR** felt that this would help mainstream school leaders of all levels to get into the idea that SEND is not just a single cohort, but made up of a very varied population in a school.

MR invited other colleagues to contribute to his work.

DB commented that this could be a sizeable area of work.

CK commented that it was important that the paper should incorporate a section on identification of needs before a child starts school, since this set the tone for their future journey.

RT queried how the graduated response should handle comorbidity?

MR thanked **RT** for raising this issue.

RB queried who made the initial decision on identification. His reading suggested that teachers made the initial decision to commence identification all the way through to an EHCP. Also, his research suggested that teachers were using old tests like maths and English. **RB** wondered whether **MR** could establish who was making the initial identification and what processes that they use, in particular, for those young people with social emotional, mental health needs. He felt that the processes were very classroom orientated. **MR** agreed to consider this point in his paper.

JC commented that in some areas there was a hierarchy of who was listened to in these judgements but often it was the specialist physical disability teacher who had the greatest insight into both the barriers to a child accessing learning and the wider curriculum but was often not listened to.

DB said this will be a significant item for the agenda at the next meeting.

6. Policy and DfE Update (AI)

AI firstly expressed his admiration for the additional work that schools had undertaken in the COVID crisis and the efforts that had been made to keep children in school. However, **AI** felt it was important to remember current research from Disabled Children's Partnership suggested that some families were suffering hardship and some felt that they were not being supported in getting their children back into school.

<https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Back-to-school-poll-report.pdf>

AI shared a presentation on screen about progress on the SEND review by the DfE (circulated with these minutes).

CR queried what the DfE's vision for the future was for Post 19 education? And also, what did the DfE see as the end-destination for C&YP upon completion?

AI replied that the 19 to 25 agenda is very much part of the SEND review and needed to be "cross government" since Education could not deal with this alone. DWP had recently addressed the National Conference of the Parent/Carer Forum about employment opportunities which indicated that it was in the sights of government but was likely to be a long road to travel.

JM queried whether there was any news on the DfE consultation on a national funding formula for special schools.

AI replied that he was unaware of such a consultation.

JM stated that this had arisen at a national finance group of School Business Managers. She had been told that a number of consultations were to begin in January, amongst which was a consultation on a national funding formula for special schools.

AI responded that the whole issue of funding was being addressed in the review particularly the issue about how funding goes into mainstream schools and could it be aligned with the rest of the high needs budget. **AI** promised to ascertain more about the funding review that **JM** had mentioned.

MR stated that his research showed that the biggest issue was the need for inclusive leadership in mainstream settings. Thus, all leaders need to be leaders of SEND. A further common issue was the

number of children that were moving from primary into secondary, and then not having their needs met in the secondary school and the secondary school was then requesting a specialist placement for that child. Finally, there was a lack of understanding as to what should be ordinarily available in a mainstream school?

AI responded that there was a statutory duty on local authorities to publish their expectations of what mainstream schools should deliver locally. However, some areas fell short in this respect and perhaps there was need for DfE to be a bit more directive about the expectations of what should be delivered by schools.

RW commented that he was interested to hear about improving accountability arrangements and the challenges that schools face in trying to support pupils whilst maintaining accountability and also inclusion.

AI responded that the review intended to look at all factors that could be improved to incentivise schools to do their best for children with SEND.

7. Regional Centres of Excellence (RCE) NSEND Research Update

DB gave an explanation of the background and his involvement with this area since 2002 when his multi-disciplinary school had characterised itself as an 'outward-facing centre of expertise' working with 6 LAs and supporting 500 children in mainstream.

RT gave a brief explanation of the Forum's involvement with the RCE project and its funding by Prof. Ben Laker.

Professor Ben Laker (BL)- the research benefactor - joined at this point

RT explained the forum had agreed that this funding would go towards mapping what provision for high cost, low incidence needs already existed. This would also help to identify gaps in provision.

CD/KW had done sterling work in getting the first stage of this research off the ground.

The results of their questionnaire confirmed that special schools in the southwest have operated on a regional basis for many years.

There was also a need to ensure that as the project moved forward alternative provision, hospital education and specialist support services are fully involved in further exploration of how RCE might develop.

AI's presentation had suggested that their review work needed to look forward so **RT** wanted to focus on forward thinking and how this could help in the future. Firstly, there has appeared to have been a lack of strategic planning as to what specialist provision is needed. locally, regionally, and nationally. The mapping was helping to build up a picture in terms of what is required by those who have the most complex needs and where it is to be found. At present money was wasted by local authorities because they didn't know where the most appropriate provision existed. Secondly there had been a lack of joined up working between education, health and social care. Thirdly, RCEs would aim for early identification and accurate diagnosis by multi professional teams, which would save money in the longer term and lead to a decrease in tribunal cases. In addition, fewer pupils with SEND would need to be excluded, because their needs would have been identified and addressed. RCEs would provide more flexibility and a "joined-up" approach between young people, their families across education, health and social care, across local authority borders, and across maintained and non maintained provision, to make the best use of resources.

CD commented the group's first step had been to try and get a sense of what was happening on the ground with special schools working locally and regionally with other groups of schools. So, a survey

using SurveyMonkey was undertaken. There had been a good response despite COVID. **KW** had been working on the survey to assess its results.

KW presented a paper on her initial analysis of the results of the survey (previously circulated) **HN** questioned (via chat) What are the specific child needs which you think are best met by this model?

CD responded that frequently it was children with autism with complex behaviours which challenge and which have escalated over time when needs haven't been met. So, in terms of demand, there's that particular group of children who if there had been earlier intervention, they might have had a better chance of having their needs met more effectively. The other group are those with very low incidence forms of special educational needs, so particularly sensory impairments and to some extent those with profound and multiple learning disabilities where a single local authority will never be able to provide the level of expertise that might be needed for some of those children. It makes real sense to organise provision on a sub-regional, local, or regional basis.

RT commented that the exact population of need was never established and there was still work to be done on this issue.

JC commented that anecdotal evidence from her West Midlands group suggested how difficult it was to find specialist provision, particularly for girls. As a result, girls have been placed a long way from home. **JC** would highlight girls with significant emotional health difficulties, and autism as an issue in the West Midlands.

KH commented that he felt a better response could be achieved in the south-west post COVID-19. The region had a culture of best practice sharing collaboration. He felt that really was what regional centres of expertise were about.

AB commented that the regional leads model that existed within Whole School SEND could form an important part of the operational implementation of this project. WSS were at a point where they were coming towards potentially the end of the current contract. Regionalisation could be incorporated into the bid for the new contract. **AB** suggested that he meet with the project group to progress this further.

DB summarised that the basic major messages were clear that there was a disposition to work collaboratively but the process needed to be tightened up in term of the continuum of provision.

HN expressed her gratitude for the work that had been undertaken. **HN** felt NSEND needed to be clear about what issue it was trying to solve. Because it sounded like there were actually five or six different aspects to this work. NSEND needed to establish where the regional focus would do best. Clarity was essential for what was plainly a very sensible set of recommendations.

DB welcomed **HN**'s challenge and commented that NSEND was idea rich, but information poor. NSEND needed to know more about what might be the workings of RCEs.

SH commented that he was interested to ascertain how NSEND envisaged RCEs would change outcomes for families.

CD commented that RCEs did not currently exist, schools claimed that they worked collaboratively but there was little evidence of how this was achieved **CD** agreed with **KW** that the project needed to go deeper into that issue. **CD** felt that there was a policy question or a moral question, which is, where were we going to intervene in the system to make the biggest difference?

DB commented that there was a cultural and ethos issue about enabling families to share experiences. **DB** felt that families were often confused by the number of "experts" required for their child. RCEs could do much to assist with the worries and concerns of these families.

CK felt that there should be more consideration given to “fallout costs” when intervention isn’t early enough causing escalation and related costs including parent’s mental health. RCEs could increase early intervention and stop costs increasing greatly.

CD (via chat) Our Social Return on Investment report backs up Carol’s point.

<https://www.nassschools.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2014/08/Social-Return-On-Investment-report.pdf>

AI commented that one of the basic principles of inclusion is that resources and expertise are taken to the child, rather than the child to the expertise and resources. **AI** queried how RCEs could drive this principle. In addition, more local expertise and provision for groups such as girls so that they are able to get their needs met more locally with better staff development and knowledge and skills. So how could regional centres address this?

KW agreed with **AI**’s comments and felt that the RCE could develop a regional offer similar to the local offer that could address low incidence need.

DB commented that mechanics and the legal side of placement regionally could also be a problem.

BL commented that he was impressed that the debate here was very passionate, and there seems to be real desire to actually want to do something with the research.

JM complemented the research but commented that she would like to see a larger sample.

SD queried how the group envisaged the research fitting in with, with the existing structures that were already there

RT responded that the research was to build on what was already there and fill in gaps where something wasn't there, and to make sure everyone knows what is there and what is available to support each individual need.

DB commented that although NSEND did not yet have the answers it did know the issues and addressing these would come into the next stage of research.

CW commented that it was important to ensure that this type of work was aligned with the health sector and that the two weren’t going in different directions. Speech and language therapy was an example of this.

SH thanked **DB** for the presentation and agreed to feedback to the SEND review team particularly in the areas of Early Intervention.

8. e-safety and remote learning/school platforms (JW)

JW explained that in Somerset a supported employment panel had been set up so that they could have a better understanding of the trajectory for young people ready for employment from Somerset special schools. They recognised that a number of young people were looking for employment opportunities within the public sector. So, Somerset had started a relationship with the police to look at how potential job roles could be identified within their organisation. Somerset were subsequently contacted by the police, raising concerns about young people with SEND who were not safe online and asking us whether we were aware of materials to support them in working with young people and parent carers because there was a lack of support by parents because they didn't think that their young people were unsafe online. **JW** queried whether colleagues had any really good practice/resources that supports online safety?

CK responded that NNPCF had just publicised a digital safety initiative for children, parents of children with SEND, which could be accessed via this link:

CK

<https://www.internetmatters.org/inclusive-digital-safety/advice-for-parents-and-carers/supporting-children-with-send/connecting-and-sharing-online/>

GD commented that the NSPCC had documents around this area which was high quality

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

National Online Safety - <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/guides>

DfE – Internet safety and harms – Teacher Training Module -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-training-internet-safety-and-harms>

CEOP - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

Thinkuknow - <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

Childline - <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/>

UK Safer Internet - <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>

9. NSENDF Thought Leadership paper on Inclusion (RT)

RT presented the above paper which had been previously circulated. Thanks, were given to the working group. **RT** emphasised that it was a draft at this point. **DB** queried how long a “Think Piece” should be. **AB** responded that there was no set length.

CK made 2 comments: 1. Should section 6 refer to the fact that there was no research evidence only anecdotal evidence which suggested that children were engaged in learning more virtually than at school. 2. **CK** felt that there should be a reference to the outcomes expected. **RT** responded that these were both valid points which could be considered for incorporation into the piece.

GD offered to direct the working group to 2 specific sections of legislation around inclusion.

DB commented that this would be useful since the group did not want the piece to be too “school-centric”. He also felt that SEND children could often become isolated and friendless when they moved to secondary school.

RT commented that she agreed with **AB**’s suggestion that the “Think Pieces” should be released in a batch.

GD

10 NSENDF Thought Leadership paper on the Identification of SEND (MR)

This item had been considered earlier in the meeting

11. Thought Leadership – next papers

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

12 Updates from Members

NAS: We have sent a submission to the APPG on SEND inquiry into the impact of Covid-19.

Also submitted evidence to the education select committee inquiry into home education, and the National Audit Office study on support for children’s education during the pandemic.

We have kept our website updated with details of government guidance and how this affects autistic children and their families.

We have been discussing future provision of autism training with DfE.

We are still waiting for publication of the new national all-age autism strategy.

We are planning a detailed education survey in 2021 to find out how the education system is currently working for children and young people on the autism spectrum.

NSN: A roundtable for special free schools was held in October. It was great to hear free schools come together to share their experiences. Several key documents were highlighted for schools to

refer to: HMCI commentary: [the future of area special educational needs and disabilities inspections](#). This was published alongside [the evaluation of the area SEND programme](#). The aim of the commentary was to give a voice and share what has been learnt from parents and families and the difficulties that face, particularly during COVID-19.

Special schools are already well placed to address mental health needs and supporting pupils to respond to changing context/ environments and have managed COVID-19 well with a high level of return to schools. NSN are running a handful of events over the upcoming months:

- A spotlight school visit to The Mendip special free school.
- A series of training events from free school principal designate
- A series of media training events for open free schools.

NSN contributed to the Education Select Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on schools, referring to all types – special, AP ad mainstream.

SWALLS: Conferences 2020-21:

- Headteachers/Principals: 1-day online conference 5 Feb 2021
- School Business Managers: 1-day online conference in the Summer Term 2021.
- Deputy and Assistant Headteachers: 1-day online conference 12 March 2021
- Governors and Trustees: Further sessions tbc

SWALSS Training Calendar 2020-21:

Training sessions that have taken place so far this term or are scheduled for delivery during the first half of this academic year. They include:

- Safeguarding in the Time of Covid (Deirdre Fitzpatrick)
- Off To A Flier – the initial inspection phone call (Mark Lindfield)
- Special School Governance (Deirdre Fitzpatrick)
- Deep Dives (Steve McShane)
- Middle Leaders Maths Support Group (Steve McShane) *
- Middle Leaders English Support Group (Mark Lindfield) *
- Outstanding Special School EYFS Practice (Mark Lindfield)
- Making Sense of Behaviour (Mulberry Bush) *
- Attachment Informed Practice (Mulberry Bush) *
- Stress Management (Schools Advisory Service)
- Supporting Mental Health (Ian Hunkin) *

* a series of sessions

Leadership and Management Courses:

Spring Term '21, with online sessions to take place during the Summer and Autumn Terms.

SWALSS Blogs Initiative:

- SEND Leadership Blog up and running
- SEMH blog up and running

All information can be found on the [SWALLS website](#)

SEN.SE: Preparation for Adulthood - Presented with Award for Enterprise in Education (pop up shop)- Developed 3 supported employment (SE) forums, steering group and panel across the county- Continue to be commissioned to lead on PFA across county - Accessed external funding to employ SE coordinator and train 20 job coaches - Running SEND Networks for mainstream schools across county - Support in the delivery of the WSOA - Lead school in TSH application - COVID support

network for SS heads - Conduit for communication between SS/LA and PH which has been very good.

ENGAGE: We have continued with the Engage and Connect events, alongside NASS, and recently had a successful session with Carolyn Eyre around the ever-hot topic of safeguarding. The National Conference is still pencilled in for July 1st and 2nd in Manchester. Fingers crossed! The National Student Awards are hopefully in Manchester on June 30th. Ditto! The National Creative Awards for students are now open and accepting short stories, poems and photographs. This year's theme is Journeys. There have been many regional Zoom events and chats, as we all recognise the importance of keeping in touch with each other and the significant stresses on school leaders during these times.

NNPCF

The annual conference was held in November online over a period of a week. It was accessed by many more parent carer forum reps than usual due to the online nature some groups had 1000 participants.

Some of it was recorded and is available to watch on the Parent Participation pages of Contact's website [NNPCF conference](#)

The Keynote address and Q&A with Professor Russell Viner, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, member of SAGE Children's Task and Finish Group, and Chair of the NHSE Children and Young People's Stakeholder Council might be of particular interest as he discusses the risks to children from Covid 19 as both an infection and from the pandemic.

13 Relevant updates from other affiliations, forums, trusts, alliances and partnerships

None

14. NSEND Forum Operation

AP reported that he was still experiencing problems with the website due to the developer prioritising paid work over Pro Bono work. A deadline had been set for completion of 16th December (note this deadline has been missed at the time of preparation of these minutes).

15. Any focus for actioned statements of agreement including future invitees

NIL

16. AOB

CR queried whether **Lorraine Mulrooney (NHS)** could be persuaded to attend a future meeting. **DB** agreed to ask if a substitute could be sent if **LR** was too busy.

RW commented that members could listen to recordings on the NAHT website of the APPG meetings via this link: <https://www.naht.org.uk/about-us/organisations-we-support/all-party-parliamentary-group-on-send/>

GD commented (via chat) IPSEA contributed to the APPG inquiry and you can see our submission here: <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/news/ipsea-responds-to-the-appg-for-send-inquiry>

15. Dates for 2021

3rd Feb, 31 Mar, 26th May, 7th July

DB thanked everyone for attending. **Next Meeting to be held on 3rd February 2021**