

A special school developing its outreach role in partnership with the Local Education Authority (L.E.A.) and Health (Primary Care Trust).

A possible post CAP strategy?

1. Introduction

Clydesdale School is the only special school within this Local Education Authority (LEA) and caters for pupils with a range of severe and complex needs across all ages. The LEA stretches across a large geographical area and in order to promote inclusion the school, in partnership with the LEA, has developed an outreach function. A team of specialist colleagues form an outreach service that supports mainstream schools in relation to pupils with complex needs.

The outreach team developed expertise in ICT curriculum access issues alongside their other outreach work and a system was evolved whereby schools can contact the team for advice / assessment about Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) and Assistive Technology for Learning (ATL).

The school employs Diane, a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) who has specialist skills in the use of AAC and ATL. She is able to work alongside Jenny, a teacher who has specialist skills in the use of ICT, to assess pupils and give advice to schools. Diane and Jenny are both CAP contacts and their complementary skills enable them to carry out multidisciplinary assessments with other colleagues who may be involved.

Jenny and Diane work with colleagues in the LEA and the Children's and Young People Directorate of the Primary Care Trust (i.e. Paediatric services) to provide information and advice about children and young people's need for AAC and ATL. They support both in managing specific budgets for this purpose. Both systems will be described.

2. Allocating equipment to support pupil's communication. The system developed between the Local Education Authority, the Speech and Language Therapy Service in conjunction with Clydesdale School.

In 1996 a panel was set up to allow colleagues in Education and Health to share assessments and to jointly make decisions and purchase appropriate AAC equipment for children and young people. The health authority now spans 2 Local Education Authorities / Local Education Authorities and both collaborate with the PCT in using this system.

Each LEA contributes approximately a quarter of the budget and the PCT contributes a half. The system is clear and the budget is **for Aids to communication only**. If money is left over at the end of the year it goes back to the budget holders in proportion to their contribution.

➤ **The assessment process**

In the early days assessments were carried out by Diane, the SALT employed by Clydesdale School, as she had developed specialist knowledge in the area of AAC. More recently the system has matured and assessments are carried out by speech and language therapists from within the SALT Service and the Service employs their own SALT who specialises in AAC; this person is also a CAP contact. Diane, the SALT employed by Clydesdale School also works with the outreach team and children can be raised with her via the outreach service.

When it appears that a child is likely to need a communication aid involved colleagues are contacted. They will collaborate to collect appropriate information that evidences the need for a particular piece of equipment. AAC equipment can sometimes be loaned to a young person to allow them to see which suits them best. This provides 'evidence' to the panel of the appropriateness of a particular piece of equipment and the young person's response.

➤ **The decision making process**

A panel, made up of education and health colleagues meets once a quarter to evaluate requests and make decisions about the purchase of equipment. The panel comprises:

- ✓ Head of SALT Service from within the Trust (Chair)
- ✓ SALT from the Child Development Centre
- ✓ 2 reps from a special school in LEA A
- ✓ 2 reps from Clydesdale school in LEA B
- ✓ Education officer from LEA A
- ✓ Education officer from LEA B

Each case is discussed and a decision is made at the meeting about the equipment to be purchased. Colleagues on the panel are chosen because of their expertise in this field and they are able to challenge each other and offer advice about different equipment or additional assessments if necessary.

If it appears that more sophisticated and complex assessments and interventions are needed the issue can be referred directly to Diane and Jenny, the CAP contacts, via this process.

➤ **The criteria for prioritisation**

Since more complex resources have been available through CAP the panel tend to purchase smaller, cheaper aids from this budget. Some children also access aids through other routes such as ACT in Birmingham. When CAP comes to an end it is likely that the size of this budget will need to be reviewed.

Some examples of the methods / criteria that are used to manage the budget and make decisions.

- Children are raised with the panel as early as possible so colleagues can be forewarned of possible cases and plan their budget appropriately;
- Evidence must be presented to show there is a communication difficulty rather than a curriculum access issue;

- There is fair access for children from both LEAs but the budget is not 'rationed'; there may be more equipment given to children in one LEA one year and more to the other the next, depending on need;
- The age of the child is considered, and the difference it will make to their quality of life;
- 'Value for money' in terms of evaluating the cost / efficiency of different pieces of equipment that might be suitable;

and if the budget is becoming 'tight'

- whether the child's needs are immediate; and
- whether the AAC could be accessed through a different budget.

➤ **'Ownership' of the AAC equipment**

The AAC equipment can be used by the child / young person until they no longer need it, and even into adulthood if necessary. This is similar to equipment allocated via CAP. If a child no longer needs a particular piece of equipment then it comes back to the 'bank' that is maintained within the Speech and Language Therapy Service and can be used for assessment purposes or allocated to another child if appropriate.

3. Involvement with CAP.

Jenny and Diane became involved with CAP because of their involvement in existing work described above, and the expertise they had developed. The LEA and colleagues from Severdale began to be aware of the range of issues that were addressed by CAP, not only AAC, but also ATL.

The LEA, with the support of colleagues from Clydesdale then began the process of developing and monitoring practice across the LEA.

4. Allocating ATL equipment to promote curriculum access. The development of a coherent system within the LEA and developing the role of Clydesdale School.

This system has been developed at several levels to ensure pupils are able to access ATL speedily and efficiently, with as little bureaucracy as possible using the Council's Access Initiative funding.

**Strategic management group –
Manages the Access Initiative within the
Local Authority Asset Management Plan.**

Senior colleagues from across Council Departments, who are responsible for the Access budget meet regularly (once a term) to develop policy, plans and systems and to review and monitor implementation, including budget management.

**Day to day responsibility for managing the system
to assess the need for and allocate ATL**

The Senior Advisor (SEN) implements the agreed system and makes decisions on a day to day basis. She sits on and is accountable to colleagues in the strategic group.

**Requests for equipment for pupils,
Including ATL.**

The outreach team at Clydesdale School have systems for receiving requests for ATL multidisciplinary assessments from schools and other agencies. When this happens Diane and Jenny will work with colleagues to complete the assessment and send a report to the Senior Advisor (SEN).

If the LEA receives requests from other agencies for ATL further confirmation regarding the appropriateness of the request may be requested from the outreach team at Clydesdale and further multidisciplinary assessment are carried out and a report submitted as above.

The processes developed at each level are described in more detail below.

➤ **The strategic management group.**

The Access Initiative budget was already in place within LEA and, in accordance with DfES guidance, it was agreed that 'Access' covered a wide range of issues, not only physical access to buildings. A significant issue was the enabling of individual pupils who have complex educational needs to have appropriate access to the curriculum through, for example, the use of special equipment or Assistive Technology for Learning (ATL).

It was agreed within the Local Authority that a portion of the access budget was appropriate for this purpose and that a fair, transparent and equitable system should be developed.

The strategy within this Local Authority is shared across departments and is linked to the Asset Management Plan. The LEA is trying to ensure that all schools are accessible over time and that individual pupils have the access they need on an ongoing basis.

The following colleagues meet on a half termly basis to develop policy, monitor systems and spending and make any necessary changes.

- ✓ Assistant Director Access
- ✓ Assistant Director of Advisory & Children's Services
- ✓ Client and Programme in Property Services
- ✓ Principal Property Surveyor
- ✓ Education Premises Manager
- ✓ Access Support Services Manager
- ✓ Senior Advisor (SEN)

As colleagues on the strategic team are responsible for different issues such as buildings, school improvement, pupils with SEN / disability, etc. they are able to share information about the pressures and legal responsibilities in different parts of the organisation and to take account of these when making decisions. These are senior colleagues who are responsible for this budget and decisions can be made quickly, collaboratively and efficiently as all appropriate colleagues are present.

As this forms part of the Capital programme, it is reported on a regular basis to the Asset Management Plan Working Group which reports to the Education Scrutiny Panel, thus the system is embedded in the Council framework.

➤ **Day to day management of the system for assessing and allocating ATL for individual pupils.**

It was felt that to develop a 'panel' would restrict the efficiency of this system. The Senior Advisor (SEN) is therefore given responsibility for collecting and evaluating 'evidence' about individual pupils who need additional equipment to allow their access to the curriculum. She is supported in this by a senior administrative colleague, who processes all referrals. If it is an ATL issue then the request is passed to Jenny and Diane at Clydesdale who will complete an assessment for the LEA in collaboration with any other involved professionals such as Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, etc.

The 'evidence / information' is sent, in the form of a report, to the Senior Advisor (SEN) who then makes the decision.

Factors used in making the decision involve:

- Health and safety issues.
- Trying to make intervention as early as possible.

- Evaluating whether there is a major difficulty in accessing curriculum.
- The cost of the equipment.
 - Schools are expected to fund minor items from their own budget although this varies according to the size of the school. This LEA has a number of small schools.
 - If it is an ATL issue Jenny and Diane are able to 'try out' a variety of equipment with pupils and take 'value for money' as well as appropriateness into account when making recommendations.

As colleagues from Clydesdale will be involved in the assessment for Assistive Technology they are able to offer additional guidance to the school. For example if it is a small piece of equipment that is needed they will advise the school about purchasing the equipment itself or if there is a training need then appropriate training can be given. When this is the case the request goes no further and the school are able to respond appropriately.

The partnership between Clydesdale School and the LEA enables speedy and efficient responses to be made to schools and the LEA receives further information only when it is appropriate for them to fund equipment.

➤ **Assessments of individual pupils and recommendations to the LEA by the Clydesdale Team.**

This system is based upon the CAP assessment process.

The system for assessment of individual children has been set up by Clydesdale School Outreach team in conjunction with the LEA who provide additional funding to enable this process to take place. All schools are supplied with forms so that they are able to make requests for involvement in a consistent format. Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and speech and Language Therapists also have access to this system.

Once a referral is received a pre-assessment visit is made by the specialist ICT outreach teacher to see the pupil in their own (usually mainstream) school. This is to gather information about the needs within that setting, and to make a preliminary evaluation of areas to assess in more detail.

Not all assessments identify that equipment is needed. Sometimes immediate advice can be given, or a short-term loan of equipment be agreed. On occasions the assessment may lead to the school being advised on ways they can modify curriculum access use their existing resources to meet needs. In these cases it is not appropriate to send advice to the LEA and the school are informed and they carry on their work through interventions at School Action or School Action Plus in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice. When this happens the school knows that the team can be contacted for ongoing advice and support should this be necessary.

Where more in depth assessment is needed this will usually be carried out at Clydesdale School so that different pieces of equipment and software can be used. The

pupil, their parent / carer and a teacher from their school are invited to attend. A request is made that other professionals who have been identified as being involved, such as SALT or OT attend if possible.

The Clydesdale Team, comprising the specialist teacher, a speech & language therapist with ICT expertise plus the school's ICT manager are involved in the assessment. During assessment agreement is reached about the recommendations. If it is agreed that a single inexpensive piece of equipment is required, then schools would be advised straight away that the LEA would expect them to meet this need for the pupil.

Whatever the conclusion, a report is written which is sent to the pupil's school for distribution to parents and all agencies involved. If it is appropriate to make a recommendation to the LEA the report is also sent them.

Jenny, the specialist teacher at Clydesdale takes responsibility for liaising with the LEA. As soon as a decision is made by the LEA, written confirmation is sent to the Clydesdale team and the referring school. The LEA purchases the equipment which is issued directly to the school. The Clydesdale Team contact the school to offer support and training.

Clydesdale maintain a database of all the equipment issued. There is a system for re-calling / re-issuing equipment so that equipment no longer needed by a pupil may be used in assessing others. Sometimes pupils are loaned equipment so that they can be assessed over a longer period (within their own school). Where appropriate this equipment can be re-issued. In this way the team have developed a bank of equipment and software owned by the LEA, which is added to on an on-going basis.

The database is also used to schedule reviews or follow up monitoring to ensure that the equipment is suitable and is being used appropriately. This could be as simple as a phone call or it may involve a school visit which could be done by a different member of the outreach team on one of their routine school visits.

The systems described sits alongside the CAP initiative and provides a system whereby appropriate information is gathered over time should the issues surrounding a pupil become more complex and a request to CAP for more sophisticated equipment become necessary.

It is felt that there have been several major factors in ensuring that this system works. These are:

- Having colleagues on the strategic team who are responsible for different issues such as buildings and pupils with SEN / disability. This allows colleagues to be made aware of the different pressures and legal responsibilities in different parts of the organisation.**
- Having a colleague who is part of the strategic team manage the system for assessing for and allocating ATL.**
- That the day to day manager is the Senior Advisor (SEN) who also line manages SEN Monitoring Officers. This ensures that there are clear and coherent links between the work of the Education Advisory Service (school improvement) and Children's Services (SEN monitoring.)**
- Close, collaborative working practice between the and the LEA that involves assessment, support to mainstream schools, written advice to the LEA, and the monitoring of pupil progress when allocated a piece of equipment – without the need for statutory assessment.**

5. Two examples of the difference this system had made to children in mainstream schools and their teachers.



Sally was in Year 1 when she was referred to the team. Sally has a statement of special educational needs for fine motor and learning difficulties, she also has a limited attention span. Through the statement the LEA are funding non teaching support in her mainstream school. ICT needs were identified through a Clydesdale Assessment, and the LEA agreed to fund identified equipment. The school committed to supply part of the overall package of equipment needed. CAP have not been contacted in this case, and the LEA are meeting the needs efficiently. This pupil can be seen pictured with her BigKeys, tiny mouse and flat screen monitor. The equipment has made a significant difference to Sally's attention as she immediately 'connected' with her ICT equipment and is motivated to use it.

Her teacher comments:

"Things have been so much better since the equipment arrived. Before we were getting little or no independent writing, but now we do! Motivation has increased no end, and the difficulties with pencil control are addressed."

Sally said "I like pressing the keyboard".



Mary is in Year 2 and has Cerebral Palsy. She has a statement of special educational needs for physical difficulties and learning difficulties.

The school and LEA had already made significant provision through the early work of the Clydesdale Team. These provisions having been made, the Clydesdale Team supported an application to CAP which was accepted. The pupil went on to receive a portable writing aid, keyboard and guard a rest, and a carry case. She also has another keyboard for use when she uses a PC. She can be seen hard at work in the classroom.

Her Teaching Assistant remarked what a huge difference the equipment makes;

“She is able to work independently now at the same table as the others in her group. She used the other keyboard for her SATs and we feel she did really well.”

Mary is pleased and said “I can write much faster now”.

The package of equipment will go with her when she moves to KS2 in September. Her team at school feel she is “well set up” and it’s unlikely in the short term that anything additional will be needed.