

SENSS

Communication and Interaction Support Service

Alternative Approaches to Advisory Work from September 2019

Briefing for Schools

Introduction

From September 2019 the SENSS Communication and Interaction (C&I) Support Service will be changing the way in which we work to provide advice, training and specialist support to schools.

We will be adopting a graduated approach, offering three levels of support as follows: Universal, Targeted and Specialist.

This approach has been developed by SENSS advisory staff in consultation with school leaders and SENCOs. Through the graduated approach, we aim to ensure that we use the resource within the specialist C&I Support Service to ensure the greatest impact, by empowering schools to meet the needs of children with Autism and Speech Language and Communication needs with confidence and in a timely way.

All Oxfordshire schools support some students with C&I needs and our secondary schools typically have a large cohort of such pupils. There are many skilled staff within the mainstream workforce already providing excellent support and differentiating teaching approaches in highly creative ways. As a service, we are ambitious about inclusion and we believe there is more that we can do to guarantee that all schools become inclusive, welcoming and comfortable places in which children with C&I Needs learn and flourish.

For some schools, the new approach represents a significant departure from how you are currently supported by your C&I Specialist Advisory Teacher (SAT), whereas in some areas these approaches have already been evolving for some time. From September – we will be adopting the graduated approach across the county.

Background

The C&I Support Service has responded to significant and steady increase in caseloads over the last decade and has taken carefully planned, strategic decisions during this period to ensure that we maximise the impact of our remaining resources to support vulnerable learners. We no longer, however, have the capacity to meet the needs of all the children on our caseloads as defined by the current service criteria for involvement, so a fundamental review of our approach to advisory work is therefore required.

We recognise the complex factors impacting on schools' capacity at present including budget constraints, academisation, issues with recruitment and retention of staff and a less flexible curriculum offer at secondary level, which can bring additional pressures to bear on the cohort of children that we support.

The recent Ofsted SEND inspection raises the critical issue of exclusions and attendance of children receiving SEN support in Oxfordshire. We are aware of and acutely concerned by the growing number of children with C&I needs at risk of missing out on aspects of their education, or already at the point of entrenched non-attendance due to anxieties related to their SEN. In considering alternative ways of working with schools we have given thought to how timely advisory input, at the earliest possible point in a child's journey, can build resilience and reduce the risk of disengagement and placement breakdown.

Alternative Ways of Working

In identifying alternative ways of working we have identified the following principles to guide the forthcoming changes to service delivery:

Principles

- **High aspirations for the inclusion of children with C&I needs** in mainstream settings and the clear expectation that schools make all reasonable adjustments to meet their needs. The Schools Accessibility Strategy, the SEN guidance, the Code of Practice and the Equalities Act guide us in this respect. As a service, part of our role is to constantly challenge schools, to ensure they are clear about their responsibilities to make the necessary adjustments for this cohort.
- **Empowerment of the mainstream workforce** is the vision of our support service. All professionals working in schools need the confidence, skills, knowledge and capacity to meet the need of children with SEN. To achieve this, a shift in emphasis from individual work with children towards systemic work with schools is required.
- **Intervening early to support quality first teaching** means our input has the most impact when we promote best practice for children with low level C&I needs. This prevents difficulties becoming entrenched and reduces the need for crisis or highly specialist intervention later on in the child's journey.

- **Promoting school wide inclusive practice** means, for example, developing good visual supports across the whole school and in every lesson. It means developing communication friendly schools and classrooms and high-quality differentiation of work. Where this is recognised and embedded in school wide practice, advisory staff spend less time and energy repeating the same advice to different people. It is widely acknowledged that basic good practice in these strategies is not only helpful for the C&I cohort, but for all children, enabling them to become more confident and independent learners.
- **Relationship based working** means we believe that we are most effective when we work closely with other professionals. Specialist advice has impact when offered in the context of strong, ongoing professional relationships. SENSS staff thereby become key members of the supportive team around a school. The same applies to effective work with parents and carers.
- **Consistency and not uniformity** means we are valued for being able to respond to schools according to your needs and priorities. Whilst we are determined to offer a consistently high standard of service, we recognise that one size does not fit all and aspire to offer a flexible service tailored to the needs of schools and individual students. We will work with you to identify your priorities for training and development of your schools' offer for children with C&I needs
- **Maximising the time spent in schools.** Our specialist staff are most effective when we are in schools providing training, face to face advisory support and setting up and modelling interventions with school colleagues. This means reducing reliance on written advice. Advisory reports can be time consuming to write and to read and are not always effective in changing the situation for the child.

Key Changes How will the service look from September 2019?

From September 2019 there will be a shift in emphasis of C&I Advisory support to schools from individual casework to whole school initiatives to develop best practice for all and support the development of C&I friendly schools.

The new SENSS C&I Offer will adopt a graduated approach to supporting schools framed around three levels of support as follows:

- A. Universal Support**
- B. Targeted Support**
- C. Specialist Support**

A. Universal Support

The needs of most children with autism and SLCN are effectively met in mainstream settings through approaches that are essentially good practice for all children. High quality first teaching, communication friendly environments, flexible, individualised approaches, the consistent use of visual supports and simple classroom adaptations such as the use of work stations or quiet areas and appropriately differentiated work.

Schools have the recently reviewed SEN Guidance in place to support high quality inclusive practice for children with C&I needs.

At the universal level, the SENSS C&I Team still have a significant role to play, through delivery of a core training offer to schools.

This includes Autism Education Trust (AET) Level 1 Training - Making Sense of Autism, targeting a good level of awareness for the whole school community, and a range of short, accessible ('bitesize') training packages offered free of charge to schools, to skill up staff in key strategies. There is also a traded training offer to support you such as AET Level 3 training for the SENCO or senior leaders, and level 2 training for Key Workers.

In addition, C&I staff can support schools to ensure everything is in place to facilitate success for this cohort of young people, for example by supporting them to complete an environmental audit, or working through the AET autism standards for schools, or training them in the use of the progression framework to monitor progress. They can also signpost schools to appropriate resources and interventions.

A collaborative approach to planning is encouraged in which S< / C&I Advisory Teacher initiate an annual planning meeting with the school to identify your training needs and development priorities - focussing the service interventions for the year on the areas you identify for development and your team's CPD needs.

SENSS staff will maintain a log of the input that has gone into each school at the universal level, but the onus will be on the school to ensure that strategies adopted as a result of this are reflected in pupil profiles, or, for example, in provision plans for individual children.

Children whose needs can be met by this level of good practice will not be individually referred to the SENSS C&I Support Service. If you are concerned about any child however, you can hold a 'no names consultation' with your SAT at any time, to explore whether more targeted support may be needed. It is anticipated that most children currently at Level 1 and Level 2 on the SENSS C&I criteria for involvement will have their needs met through universal support.

B. Targeted Support

Children identified for targeted support will be individually referred to the service.

Prior to making a referral a discussion between the SENCO and the SAT is required to ascertain whether a referral is necessary or whether needs can continue to be met through universal approaches.

An involvement log will be maintained for these children to chronicle the targeted support and interventions SENSS have suggested.

This level of the graduated response provides significant scope for ongoing informal consultation with specialist colleagues, but less reliance on visits / observations and reports about individual children than has been the case to date.

Close working relationships between the SAT, ASW and school staff facilitate this. As part of the team supporting the school, they will be available for incidental and informal advice and suggestions, on regular visits to the school, or by telephone and email.

The targeted offer from the SENSS C&I Support Service includes:

- More bespoke training for schools around topics identified as school development priorities.
- Consultation, support and advice around individual needs is offered, which may be in the form of telephone or email advice – may be offered through school based clinics, supervision meetings with staff or staff meetings for example.
- Support for schools to set up group interventions delivered by the school or by C&I Advisory Support Workers such as Spirals, Talkboost, narrative groups or social skills interventions.

It is anticipated that children and young people currently at L3 on the SENSS C&I Criteria for involvement will typically have their needs met through a combination of universal and targeted support.

Statutory Reports: Inputs from specialist services, the way in which specialist advice has been implemented, and the impact of this must, under the code of practice, be demonstrated in the educational advice provided for statutory assessment purposes, by the school.

In addition to the SENSS Involvement Log, school will be expected to keep a record of advice offered by updating pupil profiles and provision maps which will provide evidence for statutory processes.

Whilst the onus is on the school to coordinate and submit the educational advice - schools are encouraged to consult SENSS staff in drawing this up. SATs will suggest appropriate inputs to reflect the needs and appropriate support strategies for children receiving targeted support. The SENSS involvement log will inform this advice.

C. Specialist Support

To access this level of support children will be individually referred to the service using the current referral form. Referrals will, going forward, be accepted only from schools.

Prior to making a referral there will always have been a discussion between the SENCO and the SAT to ascertain whether a referral is required or whether needs can continue to be met using universal or targeted interventions.

It will no longer be possible for cases to be transferred from S< colleagues through the Integrated Service local group structures.

Where S< has been involved and their recommendation is that the school requires ongoing support from the C&I service, they will close the case and advise the school to discuss a referral with their SAT and proceed if appropriate.

The specialist offer from the SENSS C&I Service will include individual observations and advisory reports recommending specific strategies and approaches to meet need.

A single **initial assessment report** will be written based on the SATs observations and assessment and, where appropriate, discussion with parents. The report will set out the child's strengths, differences and support needs in some detail for the school. Advice will be included on strategies and next steps.

This report this will have a 'rolling section' which can have further advice added to it after subsequent visits and can be presented as an ongoing report. Any time a report is needed for statutory purposes – this document can be requested by the SEN officer – if necessary the SAT can be asked to update the report prior to an Annual Review or Statutory Assessment.

Whereas children with higher level needs typically received 6 visits per year under the old criteria for involvement, the annual number of visits will not be stipulated, going forward, for children referred for Specialist Support. It is anticipated that this may typically vary between three and six visits per year, but it is allowed that this may also vary according to need and current circumstances. For children with EHCPs SENSS inputs are not classed as 'provision' and therefore need not be quantified by the number of visits per year. The EHCP may reflect input from SENSS C&I at either Universal, Targeted or Specialist support, and may include specificity around strategies or interventions recommended by SENSS, but they will not specify a particular number of visits.

SATs will have the capacity to respond flexibly to changing needs and may therefore visit a few times in quick succession, for example, at the point of referral and assessment in order to establish appropriate support strategies, or to support the school in responding to crisis situations. They may then not visit again for a few months leaving the onus on the school to make contact as need dictates.

Individual interventions by ASWs will also form part of the SENSS offer to children referred for specialist support. For example, they may be deployed to provide support to individual children in understanding their diagnosis, managing their sensory needs, or specific work on transitions for example. Similarly, under the specialist offer SATs may call on SENSS SEMH Lead colleagues to provide specialist interventions around behaviour and emotional wellbeing.

A summary of the new criteria for involvement and the three levels of support is provided at **Appendix 1**

Next Steps and Further Information

If you have any concerns about the new approach, or would like further clarification, or to initiate a planning meeting – please make contact with your specialist advisory teacher to discuss these in the first instance.

SENS C&I Service have prepared a leaflet for parents for you to send home to explain the new offer – please circulate this to parents as appropriate.

Appendix 1: C&I Support Service - Revised Criteria for Involvement (Draft 02/19)

Appendix 2: Leaflet for Parents