

Minutes for the Meeting to discuss Josie O'Dwyer (DoB 19.1.95) Tuesday 9th January, 11 am

Present: Mrs C Russell (Senior Educational Psychologist)
Miss C Edwards (Headteacher)
Mrs Newberry (Student Support Co-ordinator)
Mr J. O'Dwyer
Mrs B. O'Dwyer

The purpose of the meeting was for Mrs Russell to feedback her observations of Josie to parents. The school had sought advice from Mrs Russell on how best to meet Josie's significant and complex needs.

Mr O'Dwyer wanted to record the meeting, but accepted that the majority of those present were not comfortable with this, and that minutes would be taken.

Feedback from Mrs Russell

- The lesson (a split language / literacy lesson, with two different teachers) was very appropriate and tailored to Josie's needs. Both halves of the lesson were well differentiated for pupils with learning difficulties and contained a high level of interaction, practical tasks, visual input etc. There was no writing required from the pupils.
- Josie understood the lesson
- She did not engage for very long when the input was verbal, and then she showed a lot of self-stimulatory behaviour, such as sliding down in her chair, putting her fingers in her mouth and up her nose. She re-engaged for a short time as soon as pictures were used. She was much more animated and involved when the tasks were practical
- Josie was co-operative on the whole, although there were a couple of times when she was not compliant, either with her peers or when instructions were given. Mrs Russell wondered whether Josie had known she was going to be observed, because staff told her that Josie had been much more settled and compliant than she often is. Mr and Mrs O'Dwyer said she had not known.
- Mrs Russell explained that it is possible that some of the confrontational and defiant behaviour Josie shows starts with a misunderstanding because of her difficulties with the semantics and pragmatics of language, but having once resisted she cannot then back down, although Mrs Russell had not witnessed this herself in the lesson she observed.
- Instructions need to include Josie explicitly
- Josie reacted positively with the TA, and responded appropriately to the teacher, including speaking in French
- All staff seen showed good practice in their dealings with Josie, in their delivery of instructions and information, using strategies such as repetition in simpler terms when she did not initially understand, reiterating appropriate behaviour expectations and rules, using distractions when she was not compliant

Parents' Concerns

- *The school year seemed to start well, but Josie became very distressed before Christmas and was apprehensive about coming to school*
School also noticed a difference in her towards the end of term. However, it is a long term and most year 7s get very tired by Christmas. Nevertheless, the social, emotional and intellectual gap between Josie and her peers also has become much more evident.
- *Lack of communication between home and school*
There have been occasions when Josie has lost the home-school book. Mrs O'Dwyer has provided a replacement. Both school and home will make every effort maintain the liaison. The book will also be used to record the number of times the cerebellum exercises are completed at school.

- *Why will a diagnosis of ASD make a difference?*

It will help everyone to understand what we are dealing with. Strategies for supporting a youngster with ASD will in any case be suitable for Josie, such as using distractions and incentives and careful teaching and overlearning of emotional language and social situations. Mrs Russell said that she was pleased the school does not physically restrain pupils as Mr O'Dwyer had asked, as, in her opinion, this is counter-productive. The best relationships are those built on trust and respect, recognizing that this is very difficult for a child with ASD. However, relationships based on dominance and control are not best in the long term, because the youngster will not be able to take an effective part in society. Eg we really want Josie to recognize that it would be helpful if she moved, not just to instruct her "move now".

Various references have been made by other professionals to a possible change in Josie's diagnosis from DAMP to ASD, but no-one at the meeting knew how far the process towards this has gone

- *The school has not yet done any physiotherapy / cerebellum exercises*

Josie's physiotherapy programme has recently been received by the school from Poole Hospital. However, there was no indication which of these exercises the physiotherapist recommended the school to do. Mr Izard, the school's PE Teaching Assistant, will do the relevant exercises with Josie as part of the PE lessons in which he works 1:1 with Josie. Advice will be sought from the physiotherapist, as she has not yet contacted the school herself.

TAs did do the cerebellum exercises regularly when Mrs O'Dwyer first gave them to school, but they were concerned about the safety aspect and have not done them recently. Mrs O'Dwyer said there was no safety issue. The exercises were provided by Dr Pauk, a neurologist in the New Forest who Josie has been seeing for over a year. He has also made recommendations about Josie's diet

Mr O'Dwyer does not want Josie to do hockey. He would rather she did her physiotherapy and breathing exercises

- *Risk Assessment*

Mr O'Dwyer is still waiting for the updated Risk Assessment

- *Homework Club*

Mr O'Dwyer believes that Josie is being discriminated against on the basis of her disability because she is not allowed to go to homework club. Mrs Newberry explained that there is minimal homework in the groups that Josie is in, and that every effort is made to ensure what homework she has is completed in normal school time. Mrs Newberry explained again the points she had made in an earlier communication with Mr O'Dwyer, emphasizing that it is not a 'club' in the social sense of the word, and that the TAs have a responsibility to the other pupils who need support with their work. Mr O'Dwyer wanted Mrs Russell to raise the question of discrimination with the LEA, but was informed that this was not her role. Mr O'Dwyer indicated that he will pursue this matter.

Suitable placement

- Parents had looked at the possibility of the Sheiling School before choosing Ringwood, but the Sheiling wouldn't take Josie because of her scratching others
- Beacroft School had not been thought appropriate when Josie had a diagnosis of DAMP. Now, given her cognitive ability range and the possible ASD diagnosis, Beacroft would be appropriate, either in the ASD unit or the main part of the school. Mrs Russell explained some benefits of a special school for Josie, such as smaller classes and, in particular, the fact that the whole school curriculum is aimed at the youngsters being independent despite their difficulties, whereas in mainstream school she needs an adult with her all the time, which is keeping her in a child's role. Beacroft is over-subscribed, and entrance is via acceptance by the Admissions Panel, which next sits in March. Josie's name would have to be put forward by mid February if parents wanted her to be considered. Another benefit of Beacroft is that transport would not be an issue.

- Mr and Mrs O'Dwyer said that Beaucroft sounded idyllic when Mrs Russell described some of the activities they do and the links with QE School, as well as the increased potential for Josie to be able to make friends with children with similar needs and interests
- Mr and Mrs O'Dwyer were keen to go and look round Beaucroft
- Mrs Russell said her view that a special school placement was in Josie's best interests was in no way a criticism of Ringwood school
- Portfield School, nearer Josie's home, is for much more severely autistic youngsters

Behaviour and sanctions

- Mrs O'Dwyer did not want Mr Himmel to be called if Josie has misbehaved, as Josie sees this as a treat and a victory for her. Miss Edwards explained that this is the normal system; if the level of defiance is such that it is affecting the learning of others, then the head of year or another member of the leadership team is called. Miss Edwards stressed the positives that Josie has experienced in school, such as going to the front of the hall in assembly to receive an award, and the benefits of focusing on the positives.

Other points

- Miss Edwards asked Mr O'Dwyer to be reasonable in the number of e-mails he sent to Mrs Newberry. She explained that she has a duty of care to her staff, and that it was not reasonable to have large numbers of e-mails arriving on a regular basis. Mr O'Dwyer felt that it was easier to make only one point per e-mail, so that he can keep track of what has been answered. Miss Edwards emphasised the need to use the appropriate forums for genuine concerns, and not send a huge number of e-mails.

Action points

- Mrs Russell will contact Dr Sarah Morris, Consultant Community Paediatrician to find out what progress has been made in the re-diagnosis of Josie's difficulties
- Mrs Newberry will contact the physiotherapist so that she can show the TA how to help Josie do the exercises which need to be done at school
- Appropriate physio exercises will be done in school, probably as part of her PE lessons, as soon as all parties are happy with their responsibilities
- The school will restart the exercises from Dr Pauk, and note in the back of Josie's home-school book when they have been done
- Mrs Russell will ring Paul Magill, headteacher of Beaucroft School, to advise him that Mr and Mrs O'Dwyer hope to look round the school
- Mr and Mrs O'Dwyer will arrange an appointment with Mr Magill to look round Beaucroft, with a view to applying to the Admissions panel to consider Josie when it next meets in March
- Mrs Newberry will update the Risk assessment to take account of the physio and cerebellum exercises, and will ensure Mr and Mrs O'Dwyer receive a copy

Meeting closed at 1.10pm