

1. Introduction

This report has been compiled by officers in Education, Social Services and colleagues from the Harrow Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership's Special Educational Needs Project Group. The report provides information on:

- provision and support currently available to children from birth to age five who have special educational needs and their families
- areas of recent progress to increase the range of provision and support and to develop cohesion between the agencies that work with the children and their families.
- areas of work to be developed to improve cohesion and ensure, parents and carers understand what support and advice is available and young children who have special needs have improved outcomes.

2. Services available

Partnership working between health, education and social services provides a range of services for children with special educational needs, their families and early years settings who work to support them. Details of these services, together with referral routes are given in appendix 1.

3. Data

The data attached as appendix 2 is provided by the Therapy Services at Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow Educational Psychology Service, Harrow Assessment and Provision Service, Portage and the Sensory and Communication Team.

The data provides:

- Information about the number of Harrow children under 5 who have special educational needs
- The number of children seen by individual services
- The number of children in each category of special educational need.

4. Assessment

The assessment of children and their special educational needs is carried out over time. Parents and carers are included fully in the whole process and, wherever possible, the child also has involvement in the assessment process.

Children born with obvious special needs are seen immediately after birth by paediatricians working in the hospital where they are born. At Northwick Park hospital, paediatricians and other members of the Health Team ensure children and families are referred to professionals within the hospital. They will also ensure referrals are made to relevant professionals or agencies working in the community e.g. a baby who is born with a visual impairment will be referred to the Sensory and Communication Team and possibly the Portage Team.

Children whose needs are not obvious at birth but become apparent before the child's second birthday are mainly identified by parents or by Health Visitors during routine development checks. Parents usually seek advice and support from their GP or Health Visitor who then signpost them to the relevant agencies for support.

From September 2003 a child with special educational needs and their family could also be referred to a social worker in the Children with Disabilities Team who will assess and provide services as appropriate.

Many children are not assessed as having special educational needs until they start pre-school or nursery class. Staff working in early years settings who have concerns about a child's progress can contact the Foundation Stage Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (Area SENCOs) who will offer support and advice to the setting to help them meet the child's development and learning needs. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Play Plan (IPP) is written and agreed with the child's parents/carers. This stage of assessment is called Early Years Action.

If the Individual Education or Play Plan is followed but the child's development and learning progress is still of concern a decision will be taken to move the child onto Early Years Action Plus and involve other professionals including the Educational Psychology Service.

If it is agreed that a child may need to have a statutory assessment a Learning Profile will be completed to assess the child's cognition, communication and sensory skills. Consideration will also be given to the progress the child is making against the stepping stones in the Foundation Stage Curriculum.

If, at the end of this comprehensive assessment process it is agreed that a statutory assessment is necessary the Foundation Stage Area SENCOs will support the setting to gather all the necessary information from professionals. This information is then passed to the Assessment and Provision Team who initiate the formal statutory assessment process.

5. Transition and progression to school

The importance of a well-planned transition between the early years setting and the school the child will be attending is critical. There are current examples of good practice especially when the Foundation Stage Area SENCOs have been involved to provide support and guidance about the transition process.

Transition is an area that needs to be worked at further to ensure that best practice occurs in all settings.

6. Inclusion in Early Years Provision

Supporting children in their formative years to be included in their local mainstream early years provision is the core principle underpinning the various strategies that are put in place by the Education Service, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Health, Social Services and other agencies.

All agencies strive to deploy staff to work in local provision to support children's progress and development. Speech and language therapists, together with physiotherapists and occupational therapists, all see children in their local in-borough pre-school or nursery class where appropriate. Other professionals support children in their local early years provision, even where this is out of borough provision, wherever practicable.

In line with government expectations, the growth bid approved by Members for the Early Years and Childcare Service has provided funding to recruit two Foundation Stage Area SENCOs. Their role is to work in Pre-schools, nurseries, nursery classes and Reception classes to support early years practitioners and teachers to develop strategies to

- assess the needs of children who have special educational needs
- assist staff in planning to meet the needs of those children and ensure they have access to a quality learning environment
- support staff to understand how relevant legislation impacts on their work e.g. the SEN Code of Practice.

The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership allocates a ring fenced government grant of £26,187 to provide opportunities for early years children without statements of special educational need to be included in their pre-school. Allocation of Inclusion funding* is against set criteria and for a limited period of time and must be approved by the Foundation Stage Area SENCOs.

*This small amount of funding is also available for children (aged up to 16) with special educational needs to be included in out of school provision.

7. Referral Routes for Pre school Provision

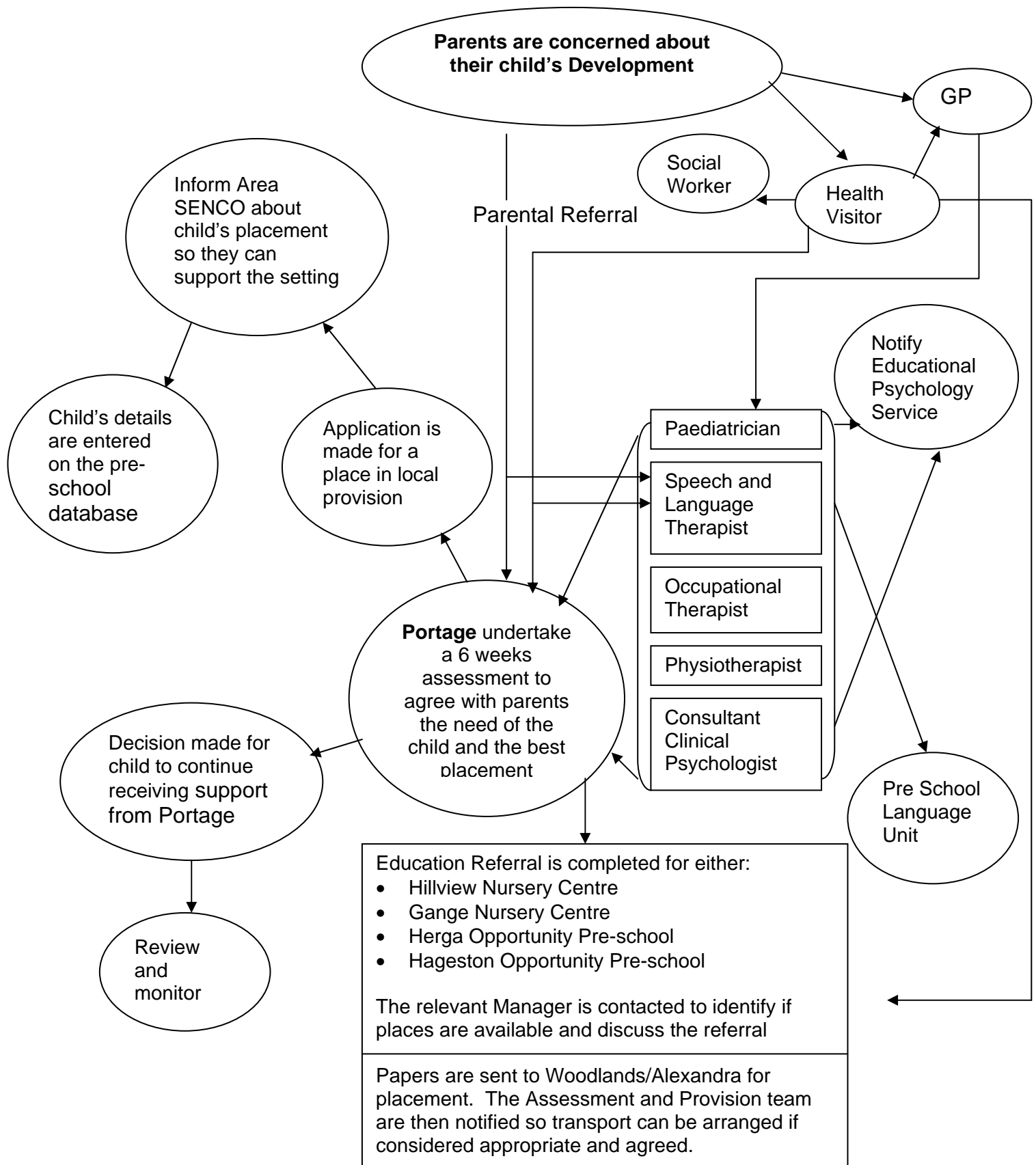


Diagram 2 on page 5 shows the referral routes to provision. Additional information about provision and how places are accessed can be found in Appendix 1.

7.1 Special provision

Where it is not practical or in the child's best interests for them to be included in their local mainstream provision a range of placements is available depending on their need. The specialist provisions in Harrow are:

- Pre-school Language Unit
- Herga and Hageston Opportunity Playgroups
- Hillview and Gange Nursery Centres
- Alexandra Nursery
- Woodlands Nursery

8. Management and Co-ordination of Early Years SEN Services

The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships Special Educational Needs Project Group provides a forum for professionals to discuss early years special educational needs issues and improve joint working. The Terms of Reference for the Project Group are attached as Appendix 2.

The Project Group has representation from all sectors as demonstrated below in diagram 3

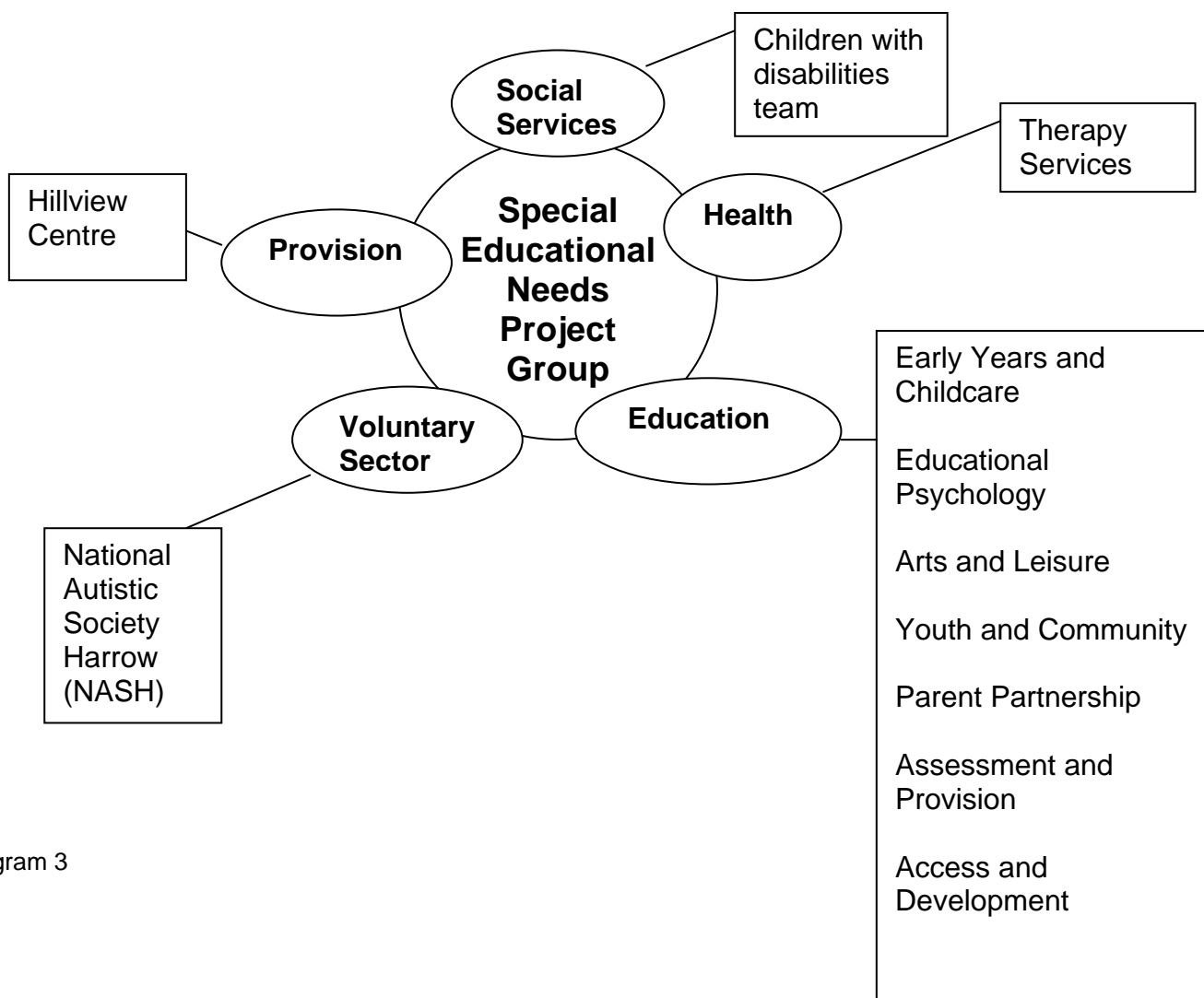


Diagram 3

Early Years SEN Support Services in the Education Department are managed as set out below in Diagram 4.

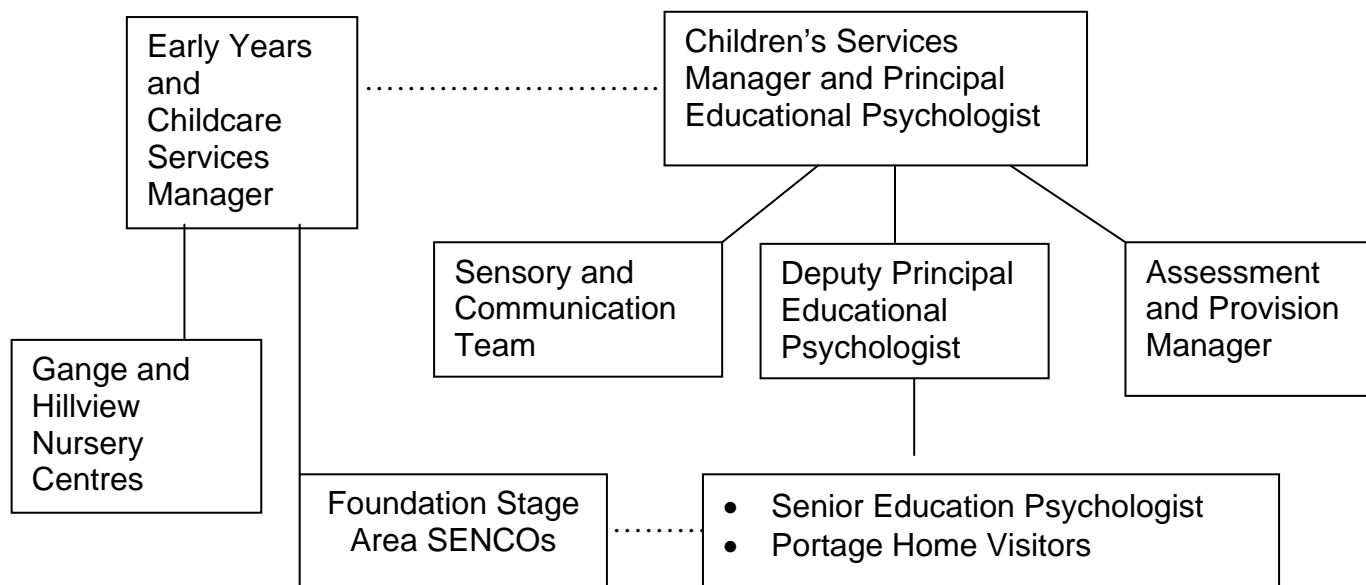


Diagram 4

9. Significant achievements

Over the past 18 months there have been a number of significant developments in Harrow to support children in their early years who have special educational needs and their families.

9.1 Appointment of the Early Years and Childcare Manager

In June 2001 the Early Years and Childcare Manager was appointed to lead the work of the Early Years and Childcare Services Team and work across departments to lead initiatives and maximise opportunities for using Government Grant funding to improve service delivery.

9.2 Nominated SENCOs

In 2001 the Government, through the National Day Care Standards made it a requirement that every private and voluntary setting should have a trained member of staff who would have responsibility for children with special educational needs. All 64 private and voluntary settings in Harrow have a Nominated SENCO. Every nominated SENCO has completed the level 1 training course and the majority have completed level 2 and 3.

In 2003 a level 4 course has been provided to extend nominated SENCOs knowledge and understanding of their role and how to support children with special educational needs.

9.3 Children with Disabilities Social Work Team

This is a newly created team, who are providing a dedicated social work service to child with a disability and their families. The age group is from birth to potentially 19 years with a planned transition process, where appropriate into Community Care Services for those who will continue to require services in adulthood.

9.4 Early Bird

In Autumn 2002 two Portage Home Visitors and two Speech and Language Therapists attended the National Autistic Society training in Barnsley to become accredited Early Bird trainers. In March 2003 the first Harrow Early Bird programme commenced offering support to 4 families who have young children under five with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder diagnosis. The Harrow Early Bird Programme will be run throughout the year at Hillview Centre by the 4 accredited trainers who work in pairs.

The impact of the first Early Bird programme on families has been evaluated following guidelines set by the National Autistic Society. A copy of the evaluation is attached as Appendix 3.

9.5 Foundation Stage Area SENCOs

In January 2003 the two appointed Foundation Stage Area SENCOs started working with early years settings in Harrow. Their main aim is to support private, voluntary and maintained sector settings to provide a quality inclusive learning environment for children within the Foundation Stage.

Since January 2003 the two Area SENCOs have provided support and advice to 9 pre-schools, 6 nurseries and 17 schools on a range of issues including behaviour, transition and planning.

9.6 Portage expansion

In 2002 the Harrow Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership received, through the Childcare Grant, a ringfenced sum of money to support special needs early intervention strategies.

Portage is a key early intervention support service that was struggling to meet the needs of an increasing number of families who have children needing structured support to reach their full developmental potential. A decision was made by the Partnership to use part of the Grant to fund an additional worker. The employment of the worker has enabled the Early Bird Programme to run and has meant families needing urgent support are able to receive it. All children are seen within 6 weeks from the referral being received, a significant improvement on the previous position.

10. Issues to be addressed

10.1 Disability Discrimination Act

From September 2002 the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) became applicable to all providers of early years services. The DDA has applied to the provision of childcare since it came into force in 1996. At that time education was exempt from the DDA. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 brought in changes to both the special educational needs legislation and to the DDA. The changes extend the coverage of the DDA to include education so that, from September 2002, it is unlawful to discriminate against disabled children in the provision of any service.

The duties of the DDA apply to all early years settings whether or not they are in receipt of government funding. There are two core duties under the DDA which apply to all settings:

- Not to treat a disabled child 'less favourably';
- To make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled children

10.2 Action being taken

Additional training is being provided by the Area SENCOs, to support pre-school settings in understanding how this legislation applies to their work. An information booklet has also been distributed.

Support is given to pre-schools who operate in church halls and multi-use buildings, to address these particular challenges to allow all children to be included. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership can sometimes support settings to find ways to cover the costs of adjustments or adaptations.

10.3 Impact of Moving and Handling Legislation

Legislation regarding moving and handling of children has been in place since 1992 but has had an increased impact since 2002 when the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) came into force. This legislation has a number of implications for employers, practitioners and other agencies including:

- The requirement for all early years practitioners who work with children requiring moving and handling to receive basic level training which should be funded by the employer
- The need for employers who include children with physical disabilities to provide appropriate equipment such as hoists to minimise the risk to their employees. All pieces of equipment need to be checked every 6 months by a qualified assessor.
- The need to ensure written risk assessments are in place.

10.4 Action being taken

The LEA will fund equipment for children to attend their local provision if the child is at Early Years Action Plus.

Training is being provided to support pre-schools in how to carry out Risk Assessments.

Basic level lifting and handling training will be funded by the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership for all Foundation Stage Practitioners who need it..

11. Future Developments

11.1 Woodlands First and Middle School

Exciting plans are in place for Woodlands to be relocated a new building in 2005. The new building will increase the capacity of Woodlands to 70 places and allow significant interaction with Little Stanmore First and Middle school.

The headteacher, together with other professionals are keen to maximise the potential of the existing Woodlands site and the new building which will provide opportunities for

- staff working at Woodlands to disseminate their expertise to colleagues who are including children with special educational needs in mainstream schools
- increasing childcare facilities for children with special educational needs

11.2 Transition

In the Autumn Term 2003 improvements in the transition of all children between settings in the Foundation Stage will be introduced. It is especially important that this is done to ensure children with special educational needs experience a quality transition process between pre-school and school. The work will include:

- Producing Transition information sheets which can be completed with accurate, meaningful information by the setting where the child has attended and which will be used by the school receiving the child
- Providing training for those completing the sheets
- Providing training for SENCOs and other staff on the transition process

11.3 Tracking

The appointment of the two Foundation Stage Area SENCOs means that some children who have received support to include them in early years settings will be tracked to monitor their progress as they go through school. This process will enable professionals to assess whether the strategies in place have been effective and allow professionals the opportunity to reflect on ways to improve service delivery for young children with special educational needs, their families and the settings they attend.

11.4 Training

It is planned to continue running the level 1 to 4 training for nominated SENCOs and plans are underway to write a level 5 course for the 2004-05 training programme.

Plans are underway to gain accreditation for the modularised Behaviour Management training course which is available to all Foundation Stage Practitioners. Accreditation will mean that those undertaking the course can count it towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Early Years and Childcare or Playwork.

12 Monitoring Progress

Guidance for the 2004-2006 Early Years Development and Childcare Strategic Plan has just been issued by the Department for Education and Skills. The guidance requires the Local Authority and the Partnership to work together to further increase service cohesion and ensure early identification of special needs is at the heart of all service provision.

The Plan will set milestone targets and the progress will be reported at full meetings of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. The Strategic Plan will be presented for approval by Members in January 2004.