



Learning together, growing together

Dorin Park School and Specialist SEN College

17.09.21

Results of Parent Focus Group of 13.09.21 re Childcare and Short Breaks

Dear Parents and Carers,

On Monday this week we held a Parent Focus Group to discuss childcare and short breaks. Thank you to all parents who either attended to share their views and ideas, and to those who sent views via email or our parent survey last term.

Parents shared their need for either short breaks (respite) or childcare (to enable them to return to work or continue to work). Parents wanted to make it clear that childcare is just part of the issue; most families have had one parent/carer leave a profession which impacts family financials and the health and well-being of these parents. Mental health is a huge part of looking after a SEND child and is further impacted by leaving a profession and reduction in family income. We discussed the differences in availability, accessibility and cost of these services, and the funding available for short breaks, but not for childcare from the Local Authority. Parents were interested in understanding the availability of grants to fund childcare costs (such as staffing costs).

The CWAC short breaks commissioners currently are open to applications from charities and businesses wanting to provide this service, and it will be interesting to see if any new providers come forward. We discussed that Bridge Wellness Gardens are working towards full wraparound care to enable parents to continue to or return to work. SPACE, LIVE!, and Disability Positive (Buzz Group) all provide a limited after-school and holiday offer, but parents find that this does not meet all needs; for example, to enable parents to work or the travel to and from short breaks can be significant.

We discussed the barriers to Dorin Park providing a childcare offer. These included ongoing site maintenance during all holidays making safety a considerable concern, the availability of staff, including the need to have senior leadership on site when providing clubs/childcare, and the cost of this care, which to some families was more of a barrier than to others, depending on individual circumstances.

We also discussed the level of demand for these services. On a recent parent survey, 6 families reported that they would be interested in breakfast club, and 20 would be interested in an after-school club. The summer school sessions we held in the summer were very well attended, with 45 families attending at some point over the two weeks. The summer school sessions were free, and whilst this was appreciated by parents, some have expressed that they would be happy to pay for this service, although there would need to be transparency in the costs so that parents can make informed decisions, based on their circumstances.

We discussed transport as a barrier for many families. CWAC cannot provide transport for children to be taken home from after-school clubs, although they can sometimes take children to after-school clubs if they are already eligible for transport, as long as there are no extra costs incurred when transporting a child. Some parents also queried why they could not pay the potential extra costs incurred by taxi contracts for transporting to clubs, as they would be happy to pay this. There was some concern that families may lose their home to school transport if they used after school clubs, as if they don't use the service they are eligible for, they may lose it.

Head Teacher – Lucy Lee

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We then discussed next steps. I agreed that school will:

- Look at the feasibility and cost of transporting our pupils to local clubs after school, using our own minibus. Parents would pay for this service. We will send a survey out to parents to establish demand.
- Pilot one night per week of After School Club at Dorin Park for our EYFS, Primary and KS3 pupils. This will be after half term and letters will be sent out to parents about it soon. There will be a cost to families for this club, but it will be subsidised by the short breaks funding.
- Plan to provide a week of summer holiday club in August 2022. The planned date of this will be given to parents as soon as possible, but applications for places will be in May 2022. This will be open to EYFS, Primary and KS3 pupils.
- Provide free training for childminders/nurseries/childcare providers/direct payment PAs to enable them to support individual children appropriately. Parents will need to request this service from school as and when it is needed.
- Discuss with the other local special schools and short break providers the feasibility and interest in providing holiday clubs in their schools/settings to complement the week we will hold.
- Meet with local primary schools to discuss the accessibility of childcare in their on-site clubs for our pupils.
- Enquire at the local higher education providers about advertising for staff to support after school and holiday clubs.

Thank you again to all families who were part of this process. I will keep families informed with the results of any of the work we have committed to as detailed above.

Yours sincerely,

Lucy Lee

Headteacher