

Schools Forum

6th July 2015

High Needs Funding

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out proposals for a review of the current arrangements for High Needs Funding for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN).

Background

2. The current arrangements for High Needs Funding were developed during 2012 -2013 in order to implement the fundamental changes to funding for pupils with SEN introduced by the Government.
3. There was widespread consultation prior to the introduction of the High Needs Funding Arrangements, and as a result of this the decision was made to use a banding system which applies to mainstream, special schools and additionally resourced provisions alike. This was introduced in April 2013, with a similar system for early years settings being introduced a year later.

The Case for Review

4. There are a number of factors which would support a review of the High Needs Funding Arrangements at this point. These are as follows:
 - The funding arrangements have now been in place for over two years and it is therefore timely that a review takes place.
 - The introduction of the new requirements of SEN reform under the Children and Families Act 2014 has created a new SEN system. There is a new Code of Practice, SEN Support has replaced early years action/action plus and school/action schools action plus, and statements of SEN have been replaced by Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. There is the option of a personal budget for those with plans. This system is different to the one in place when current High Needs Funding arrangements were introduced. In addition the new system places a clear focus on the improvement of outcomes for children and young people with SEN and this needs to be taken into account in any allocation of funding.
 - There are increasing pressures on the High Needs Budget. Between 2013/14 and 2015/16 the expected spend on High Needs increased £2.8m taking into account academy recoupment.
 - Earlier this year the DfE undertook a call for evidence exercise earlier in the year and are considering the way they distribute the “High Needs Block” within Dedicated Schools Grant.

- The system for accessing and allocating funding has had an impact on the work of SENCOs, Headteachers, LA Officers and other professionals in terms of paperwork, consideration at panels, the need to apply for funding at least annually.
- There has been pressure on the budget as a result of the need to increase planned places for pupils eg. Pre 16 high need places in maintained schools / academies has increased by 66. This has essentially been a reactive process.
- There have been questions raised about the equity of the system across providers and about the fact that the system is the same for all types of schools, mainstream and special and whether there should be any different arrangements for special schools / academies.

Proposed Scope of Review

5. Given the context set out above, it is proposed that a review of the system for High Needs Funding is undertaken and covers the following areas:
 - The age range from early years to further education, given the scope of the SEN system now being 0-25.
 - All types of providers: early years settings (including the Early Support Nursery); mainstream schools (maintained and academies); special schools (maintained and academies); additionally resourced provisions; further education.
 - The banding system including criteria and values within available resources.
 - The application process for High Needs Funding. This will need to include how this fits with the EHCP process and also SEN support for those pupils without EHCPs. It will also need to ensure transparency in the use of funding, the possibility of the funding being taken as a personal budget and the need to link it clearly to improved outcomes.
 - Planning for future needs in terms of placements to ensure funding is used proactively rather than reactively.
6. Consideration also needs to be given to how the review should link with the Council's Scrutiny process of School Place Planning arrangements. The Forum are asked to consider setting up of a sub group and associated membership to advance the work. The sub group would be supported in its work by appropriate officers from the Local Authority.
7. Ideally the review should take place in time for any changes to be implemented for financial year 2016-17. This timescale will be challenging as time will also be needed to consult with settings on any proposals from the review and therefore, some changes may be implemented from 2017/18.

Recommendations

8. The Schools Forum is asked for views on the proposed review of High Needs Funding and the next steps in taking it forward.

David New
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