

Schools Forum Meeting
Held on Wednesday 26th June 2019
At Bedford High School

Minutes

Members Present:

A.Hardy (Chair), E. Ellis, T. Cunningham, D.Hurst, A.Birchall, A. McGlown, L.Loftus, R.Lewis, A. Isherwood, M.Atkins, J.Buckley,

Observers: M. Wilkinson, K.Winnard, A.Grice,

In Attendance: J. McDonald (Strategic Finance Manager), A.Meehan (Group Finance Manager), C.Pealing (Interim Assistant Director – Education), M. Larkin (Clerk – Governor Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

G. Hayes, JA. Hewitt, F.Quinlivan, V. Birchall, K.Ward, H.Phillips, Cllr Jenny Bullen

2. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION UNDER AOB

- Free School
- Self-Assessment Toolkit

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th May 2019 be approved as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising

It was noted Mr Meehan had circulated the updated 'Table 1 – Summary of School Balances' within the DSG Out-turn 18/19 report to include the median balances figures and also the median annual increase/decrease in balances as requested by forum.

4. CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The Chair explained an online survey – call for evidence – *Provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities and for those who need alternative provision: How the finance works* had been circulated prior to the meeting to allow for views to be shared at this meeting to formulate a response.

1) What formula factors are most important in providing schools with enough money to ensure they meet the needs of their pupils with SEN?

Response: 1. Age-weighted pupil unit of funding (AWPU) to be at a realistic level to begin with
2. Low prior attainment
3.Mobility - additional funding for schools that have a high proportion of pupils who start at a school mid-year.

It was noted there was no proven link between FSM and SEND.

2) Would allocating more funding towards lower attainers within the low prior attainment factor help to better target funding towards the schools that have to make more SEN provision for their pupils?

Response: Unsure – as not all SEND pupils may be low prior attainment

3) What positive distributional impact would this change in approach (e.g. creating tiers of low prior attainment) create for mainstream primary and secondary schools?

Response: No impact

4) Would such a change in approach introduce any negative impact for mainstream primary and secondary schools?

Response: Unsure

5) Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below, and in the comments box give the advantages and disadvantages of your preferred approach.

Local authorities should retain the flexibility to develop, in consultation with their schools, their own method of targeting extra SEN funding to schools that need it.

Central government should provide more guidance for local authorities on how they should target extra SEN funding to schools, but local authorities should remain responsible for determining the amounts in consultation with their schools.

Central government should prescribe a consistent national approach to the targeting of additional funding to schools that have a higher proportion of pupils with SEN and/or those with more complex needs.

Response: Forum agreed with the first statement re LA's

6) Is it helpful for local authorities to continue to calculate a notional SEN budget for each school, and for this information to be published, as now?

Response: Very unhelpful – Forum agreed for this to be calculated but it was not helpful to be published as there is a lack of understanding around funding.

7) For those responding from a school, who in your school(s) is involved in decisions about spending from the school's notional SEN budget?

Response: Forum agreed this was dependent on individual schools

8) Should the national funding formula for schools include a notional SEN budget, or a way of calculating how much of each school's funding is intended to meet the costs of special provision for pupils with SEN?

Response: Yes

Forum agreed: The level of the threshold makes little or no difference to the system for making special provision: it is the level of funding available to schools and local authorities that is crucial.

9) If you are responding on behalf of a school, do you have a clear understanding about what provision is “ordinarily available” to meet pupils’ special educational needs in your school?

Response: Forum agreed: the LA offer and the School’s offer were published on schools’ websites. There was a lack of understanding of the LA offer as this was not clearly publicised.

10) How is this offer communicated to parents?

- School’s published SEN information report on website
- Published local offer
- Discussions between teachers and parents
- Discussions between SENCO and parents

11) Does your local authority make it clear when a child or young person requires an education, health and care (EHC) plan?

Response: Yes, the process is publicised. Forum agreed the understanding of this was dependent on the reader.

12) The current funding arrangements help schools, local authorities and AP to work together and to intervene early where such action may avoid the need for permanent exclusion later

The current AP funding arrangements help schools and AP to reintegrate children from AP back into mainstream schooling where this is appropriate

Response: Strongly Disagree

13) How could we encourage more collaboration between local authorities, schools and providers to plan and fund local AP and early intervention support?

Response: Forum agreed: more investment in AP to allow more creative flexibility to be set up

14) What changes could be made to improve the way that the AP budget is spent, to better enable local authorities, schools and providers to use the local AP budget to provide high quality AP, intervene early to support children at risk of exclusion from school, or reintegrate pupils in AP back into mainstream where appropriate?

Response: Forum agreed: More flexibility was needed for LA’s and schools. Pressures on schools need to change around judgements as accountability measures do not support an inclusive approach.

15) Please use the box below to share any examples of existing good practice where local authorities, schools and AP settings have worked together effectively to use the AP budget to provide high quality AP, intervene early to support children at risk of exclusion from school, or reintegrate pupils in AP back into mainstream where appropriate.

Response: Engagement Centre's – although there were constraints around the registration of provision

16) Are there aspects of the operation of the funding system that prevent young people from accessing the support they need to prepare them for adult life?

Response: Yes – the 16-25 yrs entitlement has placed increased pressures as Post 16 is underfunded

Schools and the LA need to be trusted to work for the best interests of pupils

It was suggested representatives from colleges or Post 16 would be better placed to respond to this question.

17) Notwithstanding your views about the sufficiency of funding, please describe any other aspects of the financial and funding arrangements that you think could be amended to improve the delivery of provision for young people with SEN.

Response: Forum agreed: if budgets were increased to provide support earlier there could be a reduction the need for future interventions as the level of reception pupils with additional needs is increasing.

18) Are the current funding or financial arrangements making early intervention and prevention more difficult to deliver, causing costs to escalate?

Response: Yes

19) If you can you provide examples of invest-to-save approaches with evidence that they can provide value for money by reducing the costs of SEN support, SEN provision or other support costs (e.g. health or social care) later, please describe these below.

20) If you think there are particular transition points at which it would be more effective to access resources, please indicate below those you believe would be most effective to focus on.

Response: Forum agreed: all transition points were equally important

21) Please describe as briefly as possible below changes that you think could be made to the funding system nationally and/or locally that would foster more effective collaborative approaches and partnership arrangements.

Response: Forum agreed: more funding to be made available to support current existing provision in schools and to LA's

22) Are there any aspects of the funding and financial arrangements, not covered in your previous responses, that are creating perverse incentives?

Response: Forum agreed: Space within schools, an increase in funding nationally and improved distribution to ensure high needs areas receive what is needed

23) What aspects of the funding and financial arrangements are helping the right decisions to be made, both in securing good provision for children and young people with additional needs, and in providing good value for money?

Response: Retaining and extending the LA offer

5. SEND TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

Ms Peeling circulated a report at the meeting and highlighted:

- Capital funding should match current levels of need
- Issues around alternative provision – including the issues around identifying, assessing and supporting needs early and the increased number of special school places
- Parental choice – which continues to impact on demand and has increased at transition from primary to secondary and nursery to reception
- Exclusions – Ideally all permanently excluded pupils would access intervention at alternative provision before returning to mainstream but this is not possible due to demand, the numbers at alternative provision for KS3 have increased this year
- A small number of places have been commissioned with Independent Schools, this is not ideal and in some cases, referrals have not been accepted
- Tutoring has been provided for some pupils this year

Q. Is this tutoring being provided at home?

A. No, in community facilities where possible.

- In order to try and resolve these issues with every increasing numbers: investment has been made in engagement centres and has started to offer primary places
- Work had been undertaken with an independent school to open in Wigan who's costs were similar to the maintained SEMH school, an additional 30-40 places had been sought and work was ongoing with this school to open a new provision in Leigh, it was acknowledged this was additional costs but it was half the cost of out of borough placements and the additional transport costs
- Additional capital had been invested to current special schools to increase places
- Task and finish groups had been established to investigate efficiencies for resourced and outreach provision

Q. Have the task and finish groups finished?

A. A consultant was due to provide a more objective view for the outreach and resourced provision. The SEMH group identified immediate savings would not be made but support will be provided for strategies moving forward.

- A Sensory support services review was being undertaken
- An engagement centre type programme was being considered across early years
- Consideration was being given to 'team for school' and introducing a Signs of Safety approach
- Processes for EHCP's was being reviewed and support for all stages without a plan were being considered
- Work was ongoing for a children's plan, the need to address early intervention and response to children with SEMH
- Confidence for parents with children's needs being met in mainstream schools needs to increase and how this can be supported

The recent parliamentary debates constantly spoke of 3 key areas that must be in place to make the system work and ensure resources are effectively deployed:

- Strong Leaders
- Appropriate Provision
- Integration with Partners

We need the cooperation of all schools to help reduce demand and improve outcomes which will reduce spending across the high needs block. The budget cannot be balanced while demand continues to increase at the rate that it currently is.

Previously it has been agreed the LA services would not be slash and improved support was needed. Consideration of the reconfiguration of the TESS offer is being made.

6. 3 YEAR SCHOOL BUDGET FORECASTS

A report was circulated, and it was highlighted the budgets submitted for 2019-20 identified three primary and a nursery school are forecasting deficits in the current financial year, the total value of the deficits was £173,690.

Following the completion of the three-year budget forecasts it was found 71% of schools were forecasting a deficit in 2020-21 and 85% in 2021-22. For schools not anticipating a deficit by year 3 (2021-22) they are still forecasting 'in-year' deficits and only through a result of balances previously accumulated they are able to balance their budgets.

Further request will be made to schools in the autumn term to complete and submit three-year budget plans, information from this will be presented to Forum.

Suggestions were shared that schools should highlight one off payments and show where the Government may not continue this support and the impact it would have.

In relation to the request made at the previous meeting regarding asking academies to share their three-year budget forecasts, 6 out of 28 had provided information, none of which had forecasted a deficit for 2019-20 or 2020-21, 33% were forecasting deficits in 2021-22.

Mr Meehan asked forum members to acknowledge if the information provided was useful in allowing leaders to explain the situation to Governors.

The Chair had circulated a template letter for schools prior to the meeting, it was agreed this would be circulated.

7. SCHOOL PLACES PLANNING

It was agreed this item be deferred to the next meeting. **Action – Agenda item for next meeting**

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Forum discussed the recent announcement regarding the Free School confirmation from the Great Schools Trust.

Ms Pealing explained concern had been raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner regarding the process and information sharing.

Forum discussed the growth funding received by the LA which was allocated on a formula based on PAN. It was suggested a task and finish group look at growth. **Action – Agenda item for next meeting**

The Chair informed members a self-assessment for the Forum had been completed and the following areas highlighted:

- Attendance
- Voting rights
- Terms of Office
- Canvassing views
- Feedback

9. FUTURE MEETING DATES: (all meetings to commence at 1.30 p.m.)

Working Group to meet Wednesday 25th September 2019 – 10am at Wigan Town Hall

The following dates were confirmed for the next academic year:

17th October 2019

28th November 2019

23rd January 2020

5th March 2020

7th May 2020

18th June 2020

Venues to be confirmed.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting closed at 3pm

