

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2020/21
PROPOSALS - COMMENTS

Question 1

Do you agree with the Local Authority preferred proposal to move 1% of the schools block into the high needs block in 2020/21 (option 1)?

NO. Too many schools will face a funding crisis with this option.

As the LA is aware, the issues around the deficit in the High Needs budget in Darlington is not of schools' making but previous leadership decisions and a lack of foresight within the SEND team of the LA. As a school, we have consistently ensured that pupils with additional needs are well supported whilst always taking account of the effect on the town as a whole when we request additional funding etc. We are continuing to do this, despite significant financial constraints and so feel that the money is needed within schools at this difficult time of transition from bands to ranges. The children who need supporting are still in our schools! When the figures are taken into account, it is clear that the options (A-D) make very little difference to many. However, they make a significant difference to us and to the offer we can make for our pupils and their families.

Whilst moving 1% of the schools block does not affect my schools personally I know and understand the pressures all schools are facing around funding and this would increase those pressures.

Question 2

If you do not agree with the Local Authority preferred option do you agree to a movement of 0.75% or 0.5%?

I agree with up to 0.5% with no strings, although the principle that the government should properly fund SEND means that I feel it is wrong to mask the issue by using mainstream funding to bail out high needs, and so am reluctant even for this amount.

Top slicing the schools block plus lower top-ups is a double hit. I could only agree to a higher figure (than 0.5%) if there was a corresponding increase in the mainstream top-ups. Yes the reduction has created a LA saving, but top-ups are so low now as to create a perverse incentive for inclusion.

We agree with 0.50% only as we have already contributed in previous years to the deficit and this is unsustainable moving forward.

Question 3

If you do not agree with any of the proposed transfers from the schools block to the high needs block listed in this paper (options 1, 2 & 3), do you wish to suggest a transfer amount and why this amount is proposed?

We feel that the option modelled around a 0% transfer would benefit our pupils the most whilst still supporting those in other schools and allowing the LA time to implement the plan agreed last year to recover the money in the High Needs deficit. We felt we had to agree with a larger transfer last year than we were comfortable with.

It should be noted that for many schools, little effect is seen whichever percentage is agreed but for us, it could mean the difference between keeping the staff at the current levels we have

which support our very challenging cohorts. For those schools who see little difference, there are rarely the challenges seen that we face daily.

Question 4

Do you agree with the proposal that there are no changes to the formula factors used in Darlington' local formula for 2020/21 other than those required by NFF policy?

Yes – we need to move as close to the NFF as possible ready for the future when we may have little option.

No. Inclusion of the mobility factor.

Question 5

Which of the options for distributing the additional funding do you think is most appropriate to fund all schools across Darlington and why?

D – From my understanding this is the option that is closest to the NFF that Darlington are moving towards and it supports those schools who have the intakes that require most support.

I don't have a strong preference; there isn't one option that is the most appropriate for all schools. I am happy to go with a majority view or be persuaded by a particular moral argument.

Option C - We feel this would get us to the NFF quicker than the other options.

Option 3, 0.5% transfer from the schools high needs block would be the best option for all schools, with Option D being the most preferred option for our school.

Option D takes into account the prior attainment which reflects well the particular issues faced by pupils who being in Reception in schools like ours as compared to less disadvantaged areas of the town. If we are making decisions at Schools' Forum to support all pupils in all Darlington schools then Option D is the fairest as it will alleviate to some extent the level of disadvantage already experienced by some children by the time they are 4 years old and the effects of this that are seen throughout their education.

All depends on what sector you are representing; it is clear that option D is more beneficial to the majority of Primary Schools, whereas Options A to C seem to be more equitable in terms of the funding being distributed across both sectors

Option C – as this incorporates all the NFF unit values.

0.5% movement is supported because it provides the highest weightings for Primary Prior Attainment factor, hence targeting funding at helping children catch up with their learning and progress. It also still allows considerable minimum funding guarantee protection for all schools.

Option B because of the minimum funding guarantee weighting of 1.84%. This will be in line with NFF lump sum of £110k.

Option D is better for primary schools. Options A to C seem equitable for all sectors in terms of funding. Overall option D is the preferred option

D move to the NFF as soon as possible

Comments

It seems unfair that some schools will vote for options despite the fact that it makes little if any difference to them in terms of finance and yet we have an equal say in a decision which will have profound implications to us going forward in terms of pupils, staff and the wellbeing and effectiveness of our school. We are in the small minority of schools who always take the wider view for the town, contribute to all discussions and decisions and consider the best interests of every child in the town. We hope that the more passive schools consider the wider view if and when they make their views known.

We are disappointed that once again there has been a lack of discussion or debate about how collectively to address improvement priorities across the Borough before any decisions are made. In our view, in determining the local funding formula, it is essential that we start from the basis of the current state in terms of academic standards and Ofsted ratings of our academies and schools in Darlington. In other words, we should be taking the opportunity to ensure funding is targeted at the areas of most need, in order to support strategic school improvement priorities and to facilitate increased social mobility.

The models presented could be viewed as divisive because of the significant differences in gains between different schools and phases, both within an across options.

Finally, the consultation provides information based on historical census data. It would have been more helpful to have figures based on the most up-to-date information collated directly from schools.