

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM
May 2020

MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY, 10TH MARCH 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT:

D Judson (Swift Academies (Chair)); M Butler (Education Village); C Large (St John's CE Academy, CE Diocese); M Shorten (Carmel College); M Fryer (Governor, Hummersknott); KA Lyle (The Rydal Academy); D Vizzard (St George's); P King (Fed of Mowden Schools); S Welsh (Whinfield Primary); P Ayto (Reid Street Primary); S Hudson (Rise Carr College); S Crowther (Mt Pleasant); M Taylor (St Bede's RC primary School); A Martin (St Aidan's CE Academy); K Reid (Polam Hall); E Calvert (William House).

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

B Nielsen (Finance Manager); T Murphy (Head of Education & Inclusion);

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES

G Easterlow (Head of SEN); E Marshall (School Forum Officer); P Richardson (DBC); J Moorhouse (Carmel Academy Trust); H Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools); N Gibbon (St Aidan's Academy); E Sayers (Finance);

1. Welcome, Introduction & Register/Declaration of business interests

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and a round of introductions took place.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of Meeting 14th January 2020

The minutes (previously circulated) of the Schools Forum meeting held 14th January 2020 were agreed as a true record.

3. Budget Update 2019/20

The Finance Manager outlined items in the previously circulated report highlighting the overspend in the high needs block.

The main changes to the variances reported within high needs budgets were highlighted at paragraph 7 of the report, along with a breakdown of independent school/out of area placements at paragraph 8.

Questions were raised regarding spend on independent placements and the commissioning process. The group were informed that the Council is part of the NE12 (a joint commissioning framework with 11 other northeast Councils) and use Council's procurement processes. A new SEN Commissioning Manager has been recruited by the Council, who will lead on future placements.

Recommendations

School Forum noted the current budget position.

School Forum noted the high needs budget pressures.

4. Allocation of additional high needs funding to support the high needs recovery plan

The Head of Education & Inclusion outlined the key points within the previously circulated paper. The position within Darlington for EHCP's in comparison to regional and national was highlighted along with a number of tables showing Darlington's high need statistics.

It was mentioned that the DfE are looking at the first £6k funding within schools (for high needs) model and that a consultation may take place.

The report included an estimate of the financial resources available in Darlington for high needs over the next two years which includes the increase in high needs funding received from April 2020 (assuming that this funding continues in 2021/22). In line with Government policy the additional funding received for high needs is not intended to be used purely to bridge the current high needs deficit and therefore a number of proposals to use some of the additional funding for initiatives were put forward. These proposals will inform the way SEN/High needs is delivered and will provide a better use of the high needs block in the future in terms of service provision and allow expenditure to remain within budget.

The Forum discussed the paper and the proposal and the following comments/questions were noted

- The figure for mainstream EHCP includes resource bases
- The new resource bases will be used to prevent out of area placements

- There will be formal consultation with schools on the use of the Rise Carr 14-16 provision
- Inclusion, work has started within workforce development. Support officers will provide outreach support. If the pilot is successful this may move to a traded service. Exploration will take place on how this will fit in with the VPP.
- Align ranges for exported pupils, DBC has placed based upon host LA top up values. There will be an attempt to align all placements with Darlington's ranges. The need to consult wider with schools was raised.
- Start up of SEN units, will allow for initial diseconomies of scale. Staff will be in place from opening, though places will not be full so additional funding is required as top ups will not cover costs.
- Where are the pressures in the future, is MLD still relevant? Work is ongoing with the LA and the CCG regarding need and joint commissioning. A full offer is needed to cover a whole system approach.
- Would it not be wise to set aside some of the new funding for future pressures?
- Funding received in the high needs block is not capital funding, so is not being used for construction.
- Some building may become available in the future as school rolls fall, these buildings will be considered for future high needs requirements.
- The funding of the new SEN Commissioning Manager was raised. This post is funded through the Council's budget and sits within the Commissioning Team rather than in Education Services.
- That although new capacity is being created, we are still increasing number in independent/out of area placements. All places are reviewed to identify which pupils can be returned. It is not appropriate to bring back settled placements and there is parental choice to consider.
- The time line for the Tees Valley Free school was questioned. DfE are currently interviewing providers. Until the providers are selected the scheme will not move forward.
- To repurpose some local estate into highly specialist provision
- Rise Carr is working with a number of children that were out of area, although highly specialised packages these are lower cost
- How VPP funding is accessed?
- Could funding be made available for SENCO work on putting plans together for children that leave?
- The LA cannot open schools, the only route is a free school.

Recommendations

Forum noted the additional allocation of high needs block funding

Forum agreed to support a wider consultation process on the proposals outlined.

5. Any Other Business

No other business

Date/Time/Location of next meeting

Tuesday, 19th May 2020

2 pm Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Darlington