

Schools Forum High Needs Monitoring Sub-Group

MINUTES

Thursday 15th February 2024: 2 pm – 4 pm

Attendees and Apologies:

Paula Ayto (Chair)	Primary Academy Vice-Chair Schools Forum	Reid Street Primary School	
Alex Nelson	Primary Academy	West Park Primary School	
Deb Hindson	Primary Academy	Heathfield Primary School	
Caroline Green	Special School	EVAT Beaumont Hill & Marchbank	Represented by Nicole Gilbert
James Keating	Secondary Academy	Hummersknott Secondary School	
Sally Hudson	Maintained	Rise Carr (PRU)	
Andy Gilpin	Non School/Post 16	Darlington College	Apologies
Mel Kane	Secondary Academy	Carmel RC College	Apologies

Local Authority:

Joanne Littler	Interim Head of Service for SEND & Inclusion
Emma Clennell	Finance Manager
Helen Watson	Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager – Children/Young People and SEND
Michelle Louisa-Dickins	Strategic Commissioning Manager - SEND
Elly Marshall	Education Partnerships Officer

Item No.	Item Discussion
1	<p>Welcome, introductions and apologies</p> <p>Register/Declaration of business interests – None</p> <p>Any Other Business – None</p> <p>Nicole Gilbert, Deputy Head at Beaumont Hill Academy introduced herself as substitute for Caroline Green.</p>
2	<p>Minutes of meeting held on 23rd January 2024</p> <p>Minutes were accepted as an accurate record.</p> <p>The matters arising were:</p>

	<p>QFT work with the Parent/Carer Forum – JL updated that Anne Davison is undertaking further work on the Darlington ranges document to make it more parent/carers and child/young person friendly.</p> <p>Year 6/7 transition - Provision is not always replicable from Year 6 into Year 7 and alternative provision should not be a ‘destination, but an intervention’. Schools need to set outcomes and focus on re-integration. Where alternative providers offer a different curriculum sometimes there is little incentive to return to mainstream school. It is important to provide transition support for unregistered providers. The group agreed a ‘lite’ referral form should include detail on what outcomes are expected.</p> <p>These issues have been discussed by the alternative provision working group and a new quality assurance protocol has looked to strengthen the referral process and monitoring framework of unregistered providers. Additionally, the new VPP return requires schools report on re-integration success. However, it was agreed to have a report on 6-day provision, and the group are also interested in knowing what success rates are for attending 6 week/12 week placements. The group discussed the VPP budget and discussed other commissioning proposals for use of the funding. It was agreed that this should be discussed by JL with CK and DG.</p> <p>Action: JL to discuss with Calvin Kipling and Dianne Gage and bring a paper to a future meeting.</p> <p>The transition working group is going to include enhanced transition focus after half term and a presentation will be provided for the Primary Forum on 1st March.</p> <p>The group discussed data which had been circulated in advance. It was noted that Year 6 requests for EHCP are high and needs are rarely at the lower bands. The number of permanent exclusions were noted as being higher by February 2024 than as there were in the whole of the previous academic year.</p> <p>The group noted the work being accomplished by the Primary EBSA project which RCC are driving.</p> <p>The group noted that provision for girls with ASD is under-represented. The number of TV free school places for Darlington pupils will be announced in March 2024.</p> <p>JL also confirmed that work is being implemented by SEND officers discussing transition at Year 5 reviews.</p>
3	<p>High Needs Budget – March Schools Forum proposals</p> <p>EC presented the proposed high needs budget. Pressures for 2024/25 were noted to include growth at 8% bringing it in line with the reported EHCP increases seen and reported to the Safety Valve programme (to date).</p> <p>Other areas of pressure are inflationary costs within ISP provision, increase to the PFI affordability gap and the Vulnerable Pupil panel expenditure. All outreach services are included on their current basis and the hold positions for the Travellers and Low Incidence Need services have been factored into the budget.</p>

	<p>The budget is extremely tight, although we have seen a 3.4% increase in overall funding (£677,640), most of it has been diverted into our special schools to increase the places to 330 from 295, with the expectation that this should help to reduce the numbers of pupils that are going into independent, expensive ISP placements. There is a risk that lead times may have an impact on this strategy, and if placements are named by other LA's we will still bear the costs of out of area placements, if we can't utilise the additional capacity.</p> <p>After allowance for the current position and growth, there is no availability for contingency in the plan, both the spend to save projects have been taken out to accommodate these pressures.</p> <p>The group noted the report and agreed that no changes to the budget were appropriate at this point due to the lack of options within the funding envelope, it would therefore be presented to School Forum on this basis.</p> <p>The group were reminded that the ringfence to the HNB deficit will be removed in 2026 and will no longer be a separate reserve in the Local Authority accounts, the funding to pay the deficit off as part of the Safety Valve programme is subject to maintaining an in-year balance.</p> <p>The group noted that the strategy to reduce high-cost placements has had an impact however the system needs to look at with wider solutions which include early intervention. A specific case was discussed, and it was agreed that a placement review/case study would help to see what the overall costs to the system have been.</p> <p>Action: JL to initiate case study with social care</p> <p>Other mitigations were discussed including development of placements for girls with ASD in mainstream, challenging decisions at MAPP, joint funding and commissioning, diverting funding to mainstream schools for CPD, outreach as part of the graduated response, smaller group work in mainstream schools, earlier 1:1 support, joint commissioning e.g. trauma pilot 'Rockpool'.</p>
4	<p>Outreach Review</p> <p>HW updated that the LA Senior Leadership Team will be reviewing the work undertaken to date on the outreach review.</p>
5	<p>Resource Base Review</p> <p>Heathfield and Northwood</p> <p>Consultations have concluded and the relevant change requests for DfE will be submitted. An Equality Impact Assessment is due for sign-off.</p>
6	<p>Beaumont Hill Sustainability</p> <p>Discussions are ongoing with BHA regarding funding which are commercially confident.</p> <p>Out of district places from other LA's need further discussion.</p>
8	<p>Meeting Schedule/next meeting (below)</p>

9	Any other business
	None

Dates of meetings – Hummersknott Academy

- Thursday 14th March 2024
- Thursday 18th April 2024
 - Thursday 20th June 2024
 - Thursday 18th July 2024