
SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS (SEN) FUNDING

Purpose of Report

1. To update Schools Forum regarding the SEN funding reform and work on the methodology to determine the allocation of high needs funding above the £6,000 threshold.

Background

2. Traditionally SEN funding in Darlington has been delegated to schools through the Schools Funding Formula as a 'Notional SEN' allocation. This allocation is driven by a combination of free school meal and postcode deprivation (IDACI) factors. For mainstream secondary schools all funding for SEN is delegated. For primary schools up to £13,506 is delegated, with amounts above that coming from a centrally held fund and allocated with a statement.
3. The DFE changed the schools funding formula in 2014 and applied a £6,000 threshold for delegation of SEN funding through the Schools Block of the Direct Schools Grant (DSG). For Darlington schools this meant a reduction in delegated limits and the need for a movement of funding from the schools formula driven 'Notional SEN' allocation to the High Needs Block. The DFE intention is that high needs funding will be then be re-allocated on a needs led basis where individual pupils require additional support above the £6,000 threshold.
4. For 2014/15 the high needs funding taken from the schools notional SEN allocation was simply 're-allocated' to schools at the same level. This was a temporary measure to ensure that time could be given to reviewing the method of allocating top up funding in the future and ensure that any new systems are transparent and clearly discussed with schools.

Determination of SEN Funding Methodology for Support Needs above £6,000

5. Over the summer term a number of schools were involved in a working group to look at developing a methodology for allocating the high needs funding where individual support needs exceed £6,000. The group specifically looked at costed provision maps; this is where each identified support need, for example additional teaching support, is costed at individual learner level. A number of issues were identified as part of those meetings (and during a test of the system by Longfield Academy Trust), and further questions raised, specifically:

- what support could be claimed for as high needs and what was considered ‘to be part of the schools notional budget’
 - the ability to manage the process on a fair and equitable basis
 - how claims would be moderated and by whom
 - should there be an average cost for a service, such as a Teaching Assistant, applied across every school in Darlington to ensure fairness and transparency
 - the timescales for funding payments and when pupils are counted. This was a particular concern where pupils were transitioning in and out of schools (i.e. Year 6 to 7 and Year 11 into Post 16).
 - how funding for non-resource bases, for example specialist units in schools such as behaviour units and nurture groups would work.
6. Whilst the working group has been looking at costed provision maps, a number of other funding models are emerging and being trialled by other local authorities. These include more traditional banding systems, Resource Allocation Systems (RAS) linked to identified outcomes, such as those used in Social Care as well as other costed provision models. Additionally, in Darlington and across the country, work has been ongoing to determine the scope of the ‘local offer’ in schools and identify what schools would be expected to fund as part of their ‘local offer’ and what would be considered as additional. As these various issues have been raised by the working group it has become very obvious that further investigation is required to ensure that we get the right resource allocation model in place for Darlington.
7. Schools have also expressed concerns regarding unintended consequences resulting from changes to the funding, that are currently not fully understood by the school community. There is also a particular concern, due to a lack of baseline data resulting from the current allocation model in Darlington, about the overall impact on the DSG and how much money will have to move from the School Block to the High Needs Block.
8. It is therefore proposed that no changes be made to the funding formula for high needs in 2015/16; - this will give the Local Authority and schools, through further workshops, an opportunity to;
- look at the emerging models for the allocation of SEN funding and learn from other local authorities who have started to implement those models.
 - study the budgetary impacts of those models on individual school and DSG allocations
 - determine a model for SEN funding allocations that is appropriate for Darlington
 - assess the impact of that model on Darlington schools and DSG allocations and, if necessary, develop a transitional system to mitigate the impact of individual schools.

Recommendations

9. That Forum notes the content of the report and agrees to delay the implementation of any changes to the high needs funding model in 2015/16.

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