
VOLUNTARY AIDED/TRUST ADMISSIONS CONTINGENCY 2013/14

Purpose of Report

1. To provide School Forum with further information regarding the Voluntary Aided/Trust school admissions contingency.

Background

2. In April 2013, a report was presented to School Forum outlining an historical agreement to top slice DSG funding to provide a contingency fund of £20,000 for Voluntary Aided / Trust Schools to call upon as support for discharging their admission functions.
3. The paper recommended a number of options with regard to the fund for the 2013/14 period and School Forum voted to 'keep the contingency fund for maintained schools only'. However, at the following meeting of School Forum (July 2013) the report was raised again and a request was made to provide further background information and clarification to support the decision.

The Fund

4. All schools are required to comply with the 'School Admissions Code', part of this duty involves requirements in relation to Admission Appeals. At the time of establishing the funding pot detailed in this report there were only two types of school within the Borough:
 - a) LA Maintained Schools, for which the LA is responsible for providing support for appeals; and
 - b) Voluntary Aided Schools, who are responsible for their own admissions and as such are charged by the Local Authority for admissions appeal hearings.
5. As VA Schools had to pay an additional amount to manage the appeals process the purpose of this contingency was to offset the charge through the creation of a fund to ensure that Voluntary Aided/Trust schools were not disadvantaged financially.
6. The fund operated on the basis of allocating a portion of the pot to each VA school depending on the number of appeals that school had dealt with during the academic year. The fund was retrospective and the amount allocated to a school bore no relation to the actual cost of providing a service to support the appeals process.
7. During 2011 and 2012 the landscape in Darlington changed dramatically and the vast majority of schools are now Academies (28 out of 36 in total). All academies are responsible for providing their own admission arrangements but were not eligible under the arrangements put in place for the historical contingency fund.
8. The paper presented to School Forum in April 2013 highlighted the discrepancy between Academies, LA Maintained Schools and VA Schools had the fund continued during 2013/14.

9. The Forum agreed 'to keep the contingency fund for maintained VA/Trust schools only', meant that VA/Trust academies are now treated the same as all other Academy Schools in that they are responsible for their own admission arrangements and pay for this requirement accordingly.
10. Of the other options available to Forum the option to cease providing a contingency fund for VA schools would mean that all VA/Trust schools are treated the same regardless of academy status. In this case the LA would still provide a service for LA maintained schools.
11. The option available to Forum that would provide similar treatment for all schools would have been to dramatically increase the size of the fund to enable all Academy and VA Schools to benefit from a financial reimbursement subject to the number of appeals they were involved with. There are currently 26 schools who have historically had appeals for their schools, and 10 schools who do not currently have appeals.
12. It should also be noted that due to the forecasted rise in the pupil projection numbers across the Borough, the likelihood of more schools being involved in appeals is quite high and as such the requirements for support funding from the contingency would have been greater in future years, and potentially unsustainable.
13. The current agreed proposal will be a disadvantage to those VA academy schools that historically have a high number of appeals, however, it is felt that this is more equitable to all schools.

Recommendations

14. School Forum are requested to note the contents of this report for information only.

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