

Schools Forum

October 11th2013

Update on the Review of the Special Schools Funding Matrix

This report relates to both maintained and academy schools

For information only

Recommendation

The Schools Forum is recommended to:

1.0 Agree to further work being carried out on reducing the place funding at special school nurseries with an anticipated implementation in April 2014

2.0 Note the work to develop a new top up matrix for special schools with an anticipated implementation in September 2014

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A report was brought to this Forum in June detailing the review to revise the way that Special Schools are funded in Warwickshire. This will relate to both the nursery funding and the special schools funding matrix which provides pupil specific top up funding for pupils aged 5 to post 16 in special schools.

1.2 The nursery funding is being reviewed as it is currently based on agreed places rather than participation; the latter being the way that other nursery provision is funded in non-specialist settings and follows the principle of funding following the pupil.

1.3 The top up funding matrix is being reviewed as the funding reforms introduced in 2013/14 have resulted in pupils with similar needs being funded at different rates depending on the school they attend. There was an agreement from Special School head teachers that this was not an equitable position to be in and that work would be undertaken to equalise the funding rates across all special schools in Warwickshire.

1.4 The timescales can be locally agreed: there is no central directive to introduce these changes. However, the original aim included in the project documentation was for these changes to be ready for implementation in April 2014.

2.0 Progress to date

2.1 A Project Team has met twice to discuss the main issues and the Project Board has met once to agree the recommendations being presented within this report.

2.2 Nursery Funding in Special Schools

2.3 Special school nurseries are funded for 152 x 12.5 hour places. This provision is carried out within 6 special schools and offers them funding of £685,000. Due to the fixed placed nature of the funding, data regarding actual pupil numbers is not routinely collected. However, for this project, the schools were asked to provide a snap shot of participants over the last 3 terms. The results are shown in the table below.

		Brooke	Exhall Grange	Ridgeway	Welcome Hills	Oakwood Primary	Woodlands	
Current hours funded		325	175	350	425	325	300	
Total hours		12,675	6,825	13,650	16,575	12,675	11,700	
@9.37 per hour	Funding	£118,765	£63,950	£127,901	£155,308	£118,765	£109,629	
Actual pupil hours								
	May-13		120	313	203	188	80	
	Jan-13		120	313	168	198	130	
	Oct-12		135	325	165	138	160	
	no. weeks							
Summer Term	14		1,680	4,382	2,835	2,625	1,120	
Spring Term	12		1,440	3,756	2,010	2,370	1,560	
Autumn Term	13		1,755	4,225	2,145	1,788	2,080	
TOTAL HOURS			4,875	12,363	6,990	6,783	4,760	
@9.37 per hour	Funding		£45,679	£115,841	£65,496	£63,552	£44,601	
Variance		£0	£-18,272	£-12,059	£-89,811	£-55,213	£-65,028	£-240,383

2.4 Whilst data for Brooke was not available in time for the review, the picture is clear that a move to participation away from places will lead to a significant reduction in nursery funding to special schools. On the other hand, the need for places within the non-specialist sector is growing and there is limited funding available for this currently.

2.5 The Project Team were concerned that the dip in funding on a school by school basis could be significant and that time would be required to adapt to this position and that the long term stability of the nursery provision may be jeopardised. It was recognised that there will still be a need for specialist provision for those pupils with complex needs.

2.6 As these places are already attracting funding, the approach of maximising the use of these places before the non-specialist sector is used was considered. However, it was noted that, due to parental choice, the Local Authority does not have complete influence over the destination of such pupils. As such, it could not say these places need to be used before other provision is considered although there was a general recognition that non-specialist provision could be used to offer education for some SEN nursery children without impacting on their outcomes.

2.7 It was suggested that one way of minimising the impact on special schools but still allowing for the re-allocation of funding to the non-specialist nursery sector would be to offer them a reduced protected place funding with flexible funding of pupils where the numbers exceeded this lower level. This would allow for a core staffing structure to be in place and for some nursery provision to remain in each of the 6 current schools.

2.8 It is expected that the impact of this revised approach would still release funding from the special schools (level to be determined) that could be diverted to the non-specialist provision. Further analysis work will be undertaken by the Project Team to determine a revised minimum level of places allocated to special schools nurseries. The intention is still that this will be ready for implementation in April 2014.

2.9 In order for any recommendation to be presented for approval by Cabinet in December, it may be that the Forum is required to consider the proposals before the next scheduled meeting on December 5th. The intention is that if a proposal is drawn up by mid-November, a paper be distributed electronically to Forum members to understand if there is likely to be significant objections. In the meantime, a draft Cabinet report will be written and will only require finalising following a discussion at the Schools Forum in December.

2.10 Special Schools Matrix Funding

2.11 Special schools are funded by a £10,000 place fund for each pupil and a top up amount depending on the needs of the pupil. The top up value is decided by assessing the specific needs of SEN pupils and placing the pupil in the most appropriate position on a matrix having regard to descriptors included in the matrix. The Project Team considered the existing matrix and proposed that it be amended to be more focused and to be written in a way that includes the 4 categories of SEN that the new legislation refers to: that is Communication and Interaction, Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development, Sensory and Physical Development and Cognition and Learning.

2.12 Work to revise the matrix was completed and the latest version is shown as Appendix A (still in draft form). The intention is that this matrix will be used in both

mainstream and special schools, therefore introducing some comparability in funding decisions.

2.13 The development of a new matrix, in a different format, means that the current funding associated with the existing matrix needs to be reviewed. In order to be able to provide some logic behind any revised funding banding, costs of differing levels of special school pupils were collated. This provides a baseline for understanding the needs of certain pupils and typical costs associated with those needs. Whilst this is by no means an exact science as pupils needs vary greatly, it aims to give some degree of confidence when the final funding allocation is decided.

2.20 Whilst the project is concerned with a matrix that provides top up funding to pupils, each pupil will also attract £10,000 place funding. Part of the costing exercise also looked at the types of costs that would be covered within this £10,000. Looking at the 2012/13 actual costs, it covers, on average, the fixed costs of each of the special schools (non-teaching costs, administration and premises costs etc) plus the cost of a teacher and Teacher Assistant in each class, taking into account the fact that there may only be 12 pupils in each class. It appears therefore that the £10,000 place funding offers a reasonable reflection of the costs incurred for pupils with milder learning difficulties who need only a smaller pupil: teacher ratio without too much specific further intervention. This offers some assurance that the top up funding should reflect the more specific needs of pupils, over and above the core place funding which will meet basic needs.

2.22 Both the Project Team and Board agree that the new matrix is a way forward but that this should not be implemented until September 2014 which is when the new Education Health and Social Care Plan is expected to be go live following the new SEND legislation. As such, revisions to the top up matrix for special schools would not change until then either.

2.23 It was agreed that this was a suitable timescale and suggested a pilot be carried out using the new matrix when new pupils are assessed or current pupils re-assessed, allowing for the funding factors within the revised matrix to be adjusted reflecting real life case studies. This will probably span from January 2014 to July 2014 and a similar pilot will also be carried out in a sample of mainstream schools. The intention is that the cost of this revised matrix will be cost neutral so careful monitoring of the costings associated to each of the descriptors will be required to ensure that the overall funding envelope is not exceeded.

2.24 The Forum will be updated at future meetings as to the progress of this work.

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