

Schools Forum

23rd June 2022

SEND Top-Up Funding Project

Recommendation:

To comment on the Schools Top-Up Funding Project prior to decision by the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme Board on the next steps.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Schools Top-Up Funding project. Decisions regarding this project will be taken by the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme Board, however the views of Schools Forum are welcomed.

2. Top-up Funding for EHC Plans

- 2.1 As noted in an earlier agenda item, the local authority provides top-up funding for learners with an Education, Health and Care Plan (also referred to as element 3 funding). Expenditure from the High Needs Block in mainstream schools and special schools is almost exclusively on top-up funding to schools to deliver the provision set out in section F of the EHC Plan.
- 2.2 As part of the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme, a project was set up to review the current top-up funding system. It was considered that the current funding system for schools of Bands C and D was no longer fit for purpose, with the average top-up funding allocation in mainstream schools (approximately £9,000) above the Band D allocation (£8,415). A considerable amount of administrative time is spent by schools and the local authority writing and considering 'costed individual education plans' for funding above Band D. Generic special schools also reported that funding levels on the special school matrix had remained unchanged since 2016.
- 2.3 The objectives of the Top-Up Funding project have been to:
- a) Ensure funding matches the provision in the EHC plan (section F)
 - b) Ensure appropriate funding is released sooner

In addition, the project also had an aim to establish a system that recognised needs across both mainstream and specialist settings. In line with Change Programme objectives top-up funding must deliver positive outcomes, be allocated in a transparent and fair manner and be financially sustainable.

- 2.4 Through the project, the local authority has worked with a stakeholder group, including members of the Schools Forum, to develop methodologies for a new top-up funding system.
- 2.5 Two methodologies were developed. The first is a 6x4 funding matrix describing dividing each of the four broad areas of special educational need into 6 levels of support. A score is then given for each level based on the contents of the EHC plan. Each score equates to a funding band. Some needs (eg. social emotional and mental health needs) have a higher funding weighting to recognise the higher level of resource required to deliver support. There are 16 funding bands ranging from £860 top-up to £23,060 top-up.
- 2.6 The second method was a costed calculator. Essentially this is an excel spreadsheet with drop-down list costing each element of each individual plan.
- 2.7 A trial was set up to run during the 2021/22 academic year. The trial has run from December 2021 and is still current (June 2022). 21 schools and settings agreed to take part. The local authority aimed to fund through these two methods over 100 children in order to establish:
 - a) Which method was most usable (in terms of leading to quicker decision-making)
 - b) Which method provided the most accurate use of funding (linked to provision in the EHC plan)
 - c) Whether either method was financially sustainable
 - d) Whether either method improved placement stability
 - e) Whether either method improved deliver of the outcomes in the EHC plan

3. Findings of the trial

- 3.1 Unfortunately, since the trial began only 15 children have received funding through the new methods. There are variety of reasons for this, including the staffing shortages in schools in the Spring term due to Covid-19. This has meant that requests to submit matrix and/or costed calculator returns have not been made. Additional training and reminders have been sent out and numbers are increasing week by week. However, overall there is insufficient evidence to judge whether or not the new methods are

financially sustainable, have improved placement stability or have improved the delivery of outcomes.

- 3.2 It is clear that schools have a preference on which methodology to use. The first methodology, the matrix, has been welcomed as clear and easy to use by all schools that have received the training. The second method, the costed calculator, is considered difficult to use – particularly where advice in EHC plans is not specific about group sizes or number of hours per week.

4. Going forward

- 4.1 The intention was to finish the trial and for the Change Programme Board to make a decision in July 2022. In the current position, the options are:
- a) Abandon the project and continue with current top-up funding system
 - b) Extend the trial
 - c) Agree one allocation system for implementation
 - d) Agree one allocation system and phase implementation to allow for changes in implementation
- 4.2 The stakeholder group were unanimous in their support of the matrix method, but realised that there was not enough evidence to prove whether this method was financially sustainable or improved outcomes. Therefore the group has recommended option d. In essence, the preferred allocation method is clear, but the funding that supports each band still requires further evidence. Implementation could be staged to allow for regular review of financial sustainability and outcomes.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The local authority welcomes comment from Schools Forum prior to decision by the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme Board on the next steps for the Schools Top-Up Funding Project.

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