

Schools Forum Interim Report

13th October 2010

Review and Reconfiguration of Special School and Mainstream Unit Provision

Special School Funding Review

“The review will develop proposals for the funding of special schools, designated unit provision, outreach support from special schools and other providers. This will build upon the review undertaken at the request of the Schools Forum in 2008/9.”

Background

Previous reports to Lincolnshire County Council and The Schools Forum identified that the present funding arrangements were and are not driven by the principles of effective funding:

- Simplicity
- Equity
- Efficiency and VFM
- Openness and transparency
- Accountability
- Etc

That the system:

- Is anachronistic
- Reinforces the “needs – gets”
- Puts the authority in the position of schools bargaining for resources on admission
- Reinforces “scheme is almost fit for all – but not all e.g. unit provision and funding in place for some schools for ASD”
- Funding by needs descriptor e.g. MLD restricts flexibility of placement and so impact on VFM
- Potential resource drift – pressure for more places, and for higher unit value on places

The work undertaken in 2008/9 to address the funding of special schools was reported to Lincolnshire County Council on 08/09/2009 with the paper setting out some broad outlines of a scheme developed by a working group of headteachers, officers and representation from Schools Forum. This work was fundamentally flawed as it did not take into account the funding being made available to BESD schools and excluded this group of schools from the remodelling proposals based on staff – pupil ratios.

Action to date

A Special School Funding Group has been established with clear terms of reference and reporting time frame.

Membership of the group includes: headteachers, officers, governors, representation from Schools Forum (3), elected member (1).

The group has met on four occasions to date, this has been supported by separate meetings by officers to undertake preparatory work, meetings with groups of special school headteachers and researching regionally and nationally.

The key principles currently being worked to are:

1. The review will encompass all special schools.
2. Existing funding will be used to support the formula.
3. Where there is a compelling need for additional funding this should be articulated e.g. outreach.
4. Funding will be allocated in a transparent, fair and equitable manner.
5. Funding will be simplified to remove the dependence on ad hoc arrangements.
6. Funding will be driven by a set of band descriptors that identify needs and behaviours rather than the present “type of need”.
7. The band descriptors will be few in number and encompass all needs.
8. The opportunity will be taken to simplify the present funding formula and “roll up” budget lines to simplify the model.
9. That a three year average should be used to determine place needs rather than the present cap based on historical take up, which is then topped up from DSG contingency as and when places are required.

Considerable progress has been made in a short period of time, highlights being:

- An acknowledgement by the group (including BESD representation) that the present funding arrangements for the schools require review.
- The need to stop the “one to one” funding to enhance school provision.
- The drafting of 5 band descriptors to determine funding levels.
- Agreement that funding will be based on a needs model based on percentage of band descriptors accommodated.
- An activity led modelling of special school funding requirements is being undertaken to a) demonstrate the levels of funding required to maintain a special school and b) to inform the funding level for each band descriptor.
- That this will be moderated by headteacher peers and the authority.
- That triggers will be agreed whereby a school will take above their agreed roll and trigger resources at a % e.g. small special schools 2% above roll.
- That funding to support outreach should be centrally provided and supported by clear commissioning arrangements.
- That the authority will review the PFI contribution by the BESD schools as part of the review of their funding.
- That the model is sufficiently flexible to support the needs of all special schools, will be responsive to the needs of the LA when special schools seek and gain academy status and will be effective in identifying funding levels for DSU provision.

Next Steps

- To draw on the activity led funding models to determine the unit cost and weighting for each of the band descriptors.
- To revisit school self analysis of pupil population based on the band descriptors.
- To revisit the band descriptors to clarify the exceptional need to be accommodated by the Band 5 descriptor.
- To model special school budgets using the band descriptors to support the report to Schools Forum in 2011 and as part of the wider consultation process.
- To review funding for hospital and psychiatric placements.
- To review funding for residential provision.

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