



Schools Forum

Date: 12 September 2014
Time: 8.30 am
Venue: Shrewsbury Training and Development Centre

Item

Public

Paper

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Responsible Officer

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High Needs Funding

1. Summary

A chance to improve special schools funding.

2. Recommendation

To allocate a similar cash increase to the Special Schools top up funding as is being added to the AWPU from April 2015.

REPORT

3. Background

Local management of Special Schools distributed a pot of money. This pot was cost based, not needs led. It was based on Shropshire's historical funding base, which as time has gone on we have all realised is one of the lowest bases in the country. There was also a seven point distribution method in place for allocating money.

An additional band was added when it was found that the level of need could not be met by the resource provided; for the most complex profoundly disabled, autistic spectrum disorder and complex challenging behaviour students. An exception was also made for pupils with extreme challenging behaviour in the form of a block grant.

4. Current System

A four band system, A-D is currently in place and the existing resource pot was distributed using this system, the needs led approach was not used to decide the size of the pot which is perfectly understandable, after the work undertaken by the group looking at mainstream needs led funding.

5. Pressures

Numbers of pupils at Severndale:
1995 - 120 pupil places and 60 staff

2014 - 410 pupil places and 300+ staff

The number of students and staff are based across three sites; Monkmoor Campus, SCAT and Mary Webb School. Increased numbers have been reflected in other provisions and there has been a significant change in pupil needs across the sector.

The profile of pupils attending Severndale has significantly changed, we have evidence, both locally and nationally, and that the need has increased and continues to increase (stats from Barry Carpenter research).

As need increases we have found that staffing levels need to increase and as technology develops, we need to provide the technology for our students to access. Approximately 92% of Severndale's current budget is spent on staffing costs. For a student with ASD when the world does not coincide with their particular needs the student may become exceptionally violent, this requires 2:1 staffing for the majority of the day a cost of £29,200 and sometimes at 4:1 staffing for a significant period of time.

6. Technology

The developments in technology increases communication and independence levels for our students. The latest technology is Eye Gaze computers, this is an eye-operated communication and control system that empowers students with disabilities to communicate and interact with the world. By looking at control keys or cells displayed on screen, a user can generate speech. We have a PMLD student who uses this equipment and it has allowed her to communicate at school and with her family. The cost of this technology with the software is £5924 per Eye Gaze computer.

7. Pupil Wellbeing

Support has decreased forcing both Woodlands and Severndale to divert resources; Woodlands have employed a Pastoral Manager at a cost of £30,000. Severndale have employed Pupil Welfare Officer at a cost of £50,000, the impact of these appointments enables pupils to access education. It also helps their families to accept the system, ways of working, and help to reduce tension in the home.

8. Historical Context of Costs

The above has all occurred whilst cuts in the education system have been managed. As a specialist provision we have been protected from many of the pressures at the cost sometimes, of the GSB. However there have been a number of occasions where we have had to accept our fair share of additional costs i.e. when a national pay award has been agreed and not funded, and pensions and national insurance costs have increases .

9. Working in a Co-operative Environment

The purpose of the background information is to make the picture as clear as possible. We cost a great deal of money, but we also save a great deal. The

sector has been very proactive with the LA finding solutions, for example, reduce or stop the increase of out of county placements as a result saving significant sums of money.

We make grant applications to attract capital money to allow building work to occur, therefore creating additional places to meet demographic growth. The additional places available are reducing the need for extremely expensive specialist places.

The sector in Shropshire has worked extremely hard to support our colleagues in mainstream to meet the need, but we are all seeing a rise in pupil needs which is extremely expensive.

10. Diverting Funding

We have all felt the impact of budget cuts to other essential services, and because we have the most vulnerable student's we have had to divert funds to meet the void that has been left. The Woodlands has had to divert £10,000 of their budget to fund school meals. We cannot allow pupils to go all day without food; it may be the only meal some of the pupils have. Five years Severdale had a maximum of five tube feeds; this number is now 20 with a reduction in nursing hours. Therefore we have had to employ additional staff to meet this need at a cost of £100,000.

Health and social care used to provide services in schools to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils and their families. The concentration of such needs is greater due to the concentration of needs in the sector. It is evident that pupils and their families are going into crisis, as a result of changing criteria to access a service. Educational establishments therefore have to divert resources to support pupils and their families; this allows the pupils to access education.

We used to have conversations about how headroom in budgets would be used to meet priorities, this conversation has not occurred for many years. The 2015-16 financial year, is the first year such a conversation can happen. A great deal of work has already been put into the process of how such money will be delivered into schools. The news that a greater percentage of money will be delivered, dependant on the October pupil census, is exceptionally welcome.

From the special sector I am asking that all pupils are treated the same, with regards to the uplift. If the AWPU uplift is £250, the uplift to the banded top up figure is £250, if its £230 then so be it.

The total cost to the additional pot would be approximately £150,000 from an estimated total of £10.4 million. Committing this money would not have a detrimental impact on mainstream but would have a significant impact on offsetting some of the additional pressures being experienced by the sector.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report I will be at forum to answer questions. In the meantime if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.