

# High Needs Strategy

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This strategy sets out Gloucestershire's approach to ensuring that high needs funding is utilised effectively and efficiently to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people with additional needs.
- 1.2. It sets out the context and consultation which inform 3 strategic aims and our plans to deliver these aims:
  1. To deliver an inclusive education system characterised by effective early intervention and supported by a skilled workforce able to access specialist support
  2. To ensure high quality specialist provision is available locally for those that need it
  3. To deliver a sustainable budget

## 2. Background and Context

### *The national picture*

- 2.1. In common with other local authorities, Gloucestershire's high needs budget is overspending and is currently in deficit. It is widely recognised that this is a national funding issue which is generated by changes to the SEND code of practice in 2014, an increase in children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and a reduction in local services available to support schools, children and young people and their families.
- 2.2. The national context is detailed in a recent report compiled by the ISOS Partnership for the Local Government Association ([Have we reached a 'tipping point'? Trends in spending for children and young people with additional needs](#)), which predicts that 74% of local authorities will be in deficit on high needs by the end of 2018/19 and that the deficit at national level will be up to £1.6bn by 2021.
- 2.3. Whilst we recognise that there is a broader funding issue, it doesn't deter us from ensuring that we are making best use of the funding that is available to deliver a high quality service for the children and young people of Gloucestershire.

### *Strategic context*

- 2.4. A multi-agency strategy has been developed with partners to improve outcomes for children and young people with additional needs. [The Joint Strategy for Children and Young People with Additional Needs including SEND](#).
- 2.5. In summary, the Strategy sets out the county's vision to develop and provide services that achieve positive outcomes for children and young people with additional needs.
- 2.6. The strategy has been developed as a partnership with all stakeholders including parents and carers, schools and colleges, health and social care. It replaces the county's SEND strategy taking into account the engagement with children and young people and their

families through our work with the Parent Carer Forum and direct discussions with other parent carers and children and young people's groups.

- 2.7. All children can have additional needs at some time in their lives and may need support for a short period of time, or for longer. We use the term 'additional needs' as an appropriate description for all children and young people in need of support. Crucially, we want all agencies working with children and young people to see the person first and not the category of additional need they may have. The most effective support will be that which builds on their strengths and enables them to become as independent as possible. The strategic vision is for:

*Services from across education, health and care to enable growth and development so that each child or young person can thrive and reach their potential to become an independent, healthy and happy adult.*

- 2.8. Building on the Joint Strategy, a major consultation on high needs was launched in June 2018 aimed at addressing the challenge of improving outcomes and achieving a sustainable budget in the education arena. The consultation paper proposed an approach that:
- helps children and young people to make better progress
  - provides more flexible support to meet the needs of individual children
  - gives schools better access to specialist support
  - passes more funding directly to schools to respond to the needs of children as they arise, reducing the reliance on EHCPs
  - provides peer support for parents and carers within their school community
  - builds on local primary school partnerships
  - reduces exclusions from school
  - builds on the post-16 offer, with more positive outcomes

### **High Needs organisation and funding**

- 2.9. Children are considered to have high needs if the annual cost of supporting those needs is greater than £6,000. Funding is provided by central government through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The High Needs Block totals £58.9m for 2018/19 and covers spending on:
- children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) attending mainstream schools. Schools are expected to meet the first £6,000 with the High Needs budget funding a 'top-up' where the additional support costs exceed £6,000
  - special schools
  - specialist placements in independent schools
  - Alternative Provision for children permanently excluded from school or those unable to attend school due to medical needs
  - Specialist services e.g. the Virtual School for children in care
- 2.10. Rights and expectations are set out in legislation, in particular the [2014 Children and Families Act](#) and the [SEND Code of Practice: 0-25](#).

## **Outcomes for children and young people**

2.11. In general educational outcomes for children in Gloucestershire exceed the national average. However:

- children with SEND do not make the same level of progress as their non-SEND peers
- permanent exclusions from Gloucestershire Schools are the highest in our family of similar local authorities and amongst the highest in the country
- De-registrations from school to Elective Home Education have increased sharply in the last two years

## **The overspend**

2.12. Like most local authorities, Gloucestershire's high needs budget is projected to overspend - by £4.7m in 2018/19. The budget has been supported by DSG reserves over the last two years but those reserves will be exhausted this year, leaving a deficit at 31st March 2019 of £2.8m. All the main areas of spend are running ahead of the budget with the greatest pressure being on:

- EHCP top ups in primary schools – Total spend of £8m which is an overspend of £1.75m compared to budget
- Alternative Provision schools – Total spend of £6.4m which is an overspend of 1.5m compare to budget.

2.13. The pressure is illustrated by the rise in the number of EHCPs, which is also reflected nationally. At the end of December 2018 the total number of EHCPs in Gloucestershire stood at 3,573, an increase of 47.4% since January 2015 and the introduction of the SEND reforms.

## **3. A high needs action plan for Gloucestershire**

3.1. To address the challenges and deliver the strategic aims outlined above, we will develop a plan that includes the following actions:

- Support the development of primary local inclusion clusters (LINC)s with devolved funding and co-commissioned support services, linked to parent support networks.
- Invest in the development and implementation of a Restorative Practice programme for schools. The programme will aim to support early identification of need and underpin effective strategies for intervention through the development of a restorative school culture.
- Support new approaches to tackling exclusions in secondary schools in line with the recommendations from the government's review of school exclusions – [‘The Timpson Review’](#).
- Develop and implement a [Specialist Commissioning Strategy](#) with the following key features:
  - a strong network of special schools.
  - a more flexible boundary between mainstream and special, to include outreach from special schools

- new specialist provision for children of secondary age with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs.
  - bespoke packages for children with children who would otherwise be in specialist placements in the independent sector
  - Develop and implement a [Post 16 Strategy](#) built around the following principles:
    - preparation for adulthood from year 9 and with additional support available
    - a range of provision appropriate to needs and geared towards preparation for adulthood and employment
    - supportive transitions between and within settings with good quality advice and guidance
  - Improve the use of the graduated pathway by ensuring that:
    - there is greater challenge and rigour in the EHCP process;
    - that all stages of the graduated pathway are used effectively;
    - that schools are able and supported to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of a changing cohort of pupils, by ensuring that resources are available to support early intervention;
  - Developing a stronger partnership approach with schools especially the Schools Forum and with a particular focus on achieving a sustainable budget.
  - Continuing with current approaches to Early Years with a strong focus on transition from early years setting to primary school.
- 3.2. Progress on the delivery of the action plan will be governed by the Joint Additional Needs steering group and will reported regularly to the Schools Forum and the Gloucestershire Headteachers Associations.