

Notes of the School Improvement Grant meeting, held on Wednesday 9 December 2021. The meeting was held remotely.

Present:

Schools Forum Members (maintained representatives):

David Alexander (Secondary School Headteacher), Anne-Marie Delrosa (Secondary School Governor), Lisa Jones (Primary School Headteacher), Becky Martin (Special School Governor).

Secondary School (Maintained) Headteachers:

Kieron Smith (Headteacher of Archway School), Scott Albon (Headteacher of Barnwood Park School).

Chairs of Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers:

Clare Steel (Headteacher of Alderman Knight School), Lyn Dance (CEO SAND Academies Trust).

Chair of Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers:

Kerry Cunningham (Headteacher of Longlevens Infant School).

Chairs of the Local Primary Partnerships: Kate Burke: Chair of WGSP (Headteacher of Yorkley Primary School), Karen Howard: Chair of GSP (Headteacher of Harewood Infant School), Jane Farren: Co-Chair of TDP (Headteacher of Norton C of E Primary School), John Jones: Chair of NCSP (Headteacher of Bourton-on-the-Water Primary Academy), Jon Millin: Chair of CLP (Headteacher of Shurdington C of E Primary School), Debbie Sleep: Chair of SAS (Headteacher of Stroud Valley Community School).

GCC Officers: Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, Clare Dudman, Head of School Improvement, Jo Bolton, Democratic Services Adviser and Clerk to the Schools Forum.

1. Clare Dudman, Head of School Improvement, gave an overview of the background and context of the local authority's (LA) school improvement duties and the government's proposed changes to the school improvement monitoring and brokering grant. She explained that the grant was allocated to LAs to enable the effective discharge of many of their school improvement duties, including monitoring the performance of maintained schools, brokering school improvement provision and intervening in under performing schools as appropriate. The government, without any prior notice, had launched a consultation on 'Reforming how local authority school improvement functions are funded'. The consultation ran for only 20 working days, giving limited scope for LAs to respond. Gloucestershire County Council's response to the consultation had been circulated to Gloucestershire's schools.

2. She explained that under the current arrangements there was a distinction between core and additional improvement activities. The government was proposing to remove the grant and change the regulations to enable all LA school improvement activity, including that provided in connection with additional improvement activities, to be funded in what it sees as a similar way to academies who 'top slice' from school budgets. The government sees that this is comparable with 'de-delegation from schools' budget shares, with the agreement of the local schools forum or the Secretary of State. However, this would prove inequitable as there had been a range of growth and capacity funds delivered either centrally or through the Regional Schools Commissioners office on which academies could draw, which maintained schools could not.

3. The rationale behind the proposal to remove the grant was that local authorities rarely needed to utilise intervention powers, many historically poorer performing schools were now academies, and core improvement activities were part of a continuum of wider activity. Local Authorities had noted that the fact that the reason there was little need to use formal intervention powers was because of the effective targeting of the grant to avoid this becoming necessary. The Head of School Improvement noted that the Association of Directors of Children's Services had provided comprehensive feedback on its concerns about the proposals. An outline of their concerns can be found [here](#).

4. It was reported that the government was considering the following two options:

- Option 1 - A reduction of 50% of the LAMB grant amount in 2022/23, resulting in a loss of income £360k. Total removal of the grant in 2023/24, resulting in a loss of income totalling circa £720k.
- Option 2 – Total removal of the grant in 2022/23. A loss of income £720k.

The other potential outcome, although not likely, was that no changes would be made to the grant.

5. The Head of Education Strategy and Development emphasised that if the government was to progress either of those two options, then it would place the LA in a very challenging position with only a short amount of time to adapt before the new financial year. There had been widespread disappointment of the government's plan to remove the grant as well as asking schools to dedelegate funds for school improvement support when budgets were already stretched. There were concerns that there would be a significant disparity between the funding of LA maintained schools and academy schools if the grant was removed. The Association of Directors of Children's Service's (ADCS) had responded to the consultation, setting out the key areas of concern and the resulting negative impacts the removal of the grant would have on LA maintained schools. The ADCS had also made it clear in its response that the pandemic had highlighted the significant central role the LA had in working with all schools (regardless of governance) to ensure that the system provided a great education for all children and young people.

6. The Head of Education Strategy and Development commented that he hoped the DfE, having reviewed all of the feedback, would at the very least extend the timescale for the removal of 50% grant funding, to give LAs the chance to mitigate the impact of the loss of income.

7. Modelling work was being undertaken to establish how school improvement activities could be funded via de-delegation. Whilst all other de-delegation amounts were often on a per pupil basis, it was felt this would not be the best option in this instance. If this route was taken, all schools would need to pay the same amount meaning a cost of £9 per pupil. For a large secondary school this would result in a significant impact on its budget in comparison to a primary school who have greater access to services. If school improvement funding did need to be de-delegated on a per pupil basis, then it was likely that secondary schools would need to be excluded, unless the DfE adapt the de-delegation rules to allow for variation in the amount paid per pupil for secondary schools. Consequently, the modelling suggested that de-delegation on a *per school* basis would be a much fairer option. If the consultation concludes in favour of the proposed model, to cover the loss of 50% of the grant all local authority maintained schools would need to de-delegate around £1865 in the next financial year.

8. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that decisions on de-delegation to fund school improvement would be taken at a Schools Forum meeting by the Forum members representing maintained schools across the school sector (i.e. Special, Alternative Provision, Primary, and Secondary). Each part of the sector would vote separately. The DfE was due to publish its findings on the consultation in January 2022, therefore it was likely that an extra, single focus meeting of the School Forum would need to take place in March 2022.

9. The Head of School Improvement explained that the LA had commenced with the development of a school improvement traded service. The development of the service was planned before the government's consultation was launched, in order to increase the offer of school improvement activities to schools. The prospect of the grant being removed had resulted in the work to get this rolled out being expedited. The short timescale involved with the potential removal of the grant meant the LA was unfortunately not yet in a position to offer this service to schools to mitigate the impact. It would take approximately 18 months - 2 years before the service was fully established. The LA was aiming to develop packages of support that schools could purchase independently or as part of a cluster or grouping. It would be a mixed economy of central services and a wider range of support available including utilising skills from both inside and outside the county. It was recognised that some schools had already bought in external school improvement partners, and as a result, not all schools would buy-in to the service initially. However, officers anticipated that as the service became increasingly established more schools would buy-in to it. It was noted that the traded service would be offered to both LA maintained schools and academies.

10. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the traded services offer would run in parallel to the de-delegation funding. There was scope for the de-delegation amount to be reduced after one year once the traded service became established.

11. It was reported that currently all LA maintained schools had the offer of one visit, per year, from a School Improvement Adviser. The government's proposal to remove this grant, would mean a loss of service, leading to a lack of intelligence in schools, and less opportunity for LAs to act before performance deteriorated significantly and formal intervention became inevitable. It would also impact on the LA carrying out its statutory function of having oversight of school improvement actively in the whole school community; this was a critical area of concern given the LAs significant accountabilities to parents, carers

and the children and young people (particularly the most vulnerable). Officers felt that it was essential that the LA's School Improvement Team remained in place in order to continue carrying out those functions.

12. A headteacher pointed out that if the de-delegation amount was calculated on a per school basis, then small primary schools with much smaller budgets in comparison to large primary schools, would be paying the same de-delegation amount, which was inequitable. Questions were raised on whether a three tiered pricing system could be implemented for the de-delegation amounts - dependant on the size of a school (i.e. small, medium, large). The Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that currently the regulations did not allow for any variation between the per pupil amounts. However, if this changed following the outcome of the consultation, then the LA could undertake some modelling work on adjusting the per pupil rate to reflect the size of the school, with a view to potentially presenting this as an option for consideration by the Schools Forum.

13. A headteacher posed the question of why schools that were doing well, should be required to pay for a service, when it seemed that the LA would only be focusing the services on schools that required intervention. Some schools did not receive any LA school improvement services, or only a very limited service, and therefore it may prove difficult for all schools to support a de-delegation proposal. Officers clarified that the grant did not just fund the core school improvement activities, it funded a range of other services such as Fair Access and consultation on school admission arrangements, which affected all schools.

14. A headteacher stressed that it was essential that schools were provided with a choice in how the school improvement business model operated, rather than being required to pay a significant amount of per pupil de-delegated funding (particularly in the case of a secondary school). The Head of School Improvement acknowledged that a step change was needed to move towards a genuine partnership between schools and the LA, operating via a Gloucestershire schools' partnership body, to enable schools to have a voice and so that important issues such as school improvement could be driven forward collectively.

15. It was recognised that ultimately the consultation was part of the government's wider agenda of moving towards full academisation. It could be implied that the removal of this grant was removing a barrier to academisation.

16. The Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that work on modelling the potential options would continue and further information would be circulated once the outcome of the consultation was published - due end of January 2022.

Ends.