

**Notes of the SEND Targeted Support Funding Model Working Group meeting, held on Thursday 22 February 2024. The meeting was held in the Civic Suite at the North Warehouse, Gloucester.**

**Present:**

**Forum Members:**

Rachel Bradley-McKay, Primary School Headteacher; Rhian Evans, Primary School Governor; Mikey Ezewudo, Primary School Governor; Justin Godding, Primary School Headteacher; Emma Gundry, Alternative Provision; Andrew Harris, Community Representative (Chair); Chiquita Henson, Secondary School Headteacher; Liz Oakey, Special School Headteacher; David Williams, Gloucester Diocese.

**Additional Attendees:** Harry Dixon Gough, SENDco for the Forest of Dean Trust; Kate Merriman, Headteacher at Gastrells Community Primary; Amanda Peck, Business Manager at Pittville School; Janet Ray, Finance Director, representing Forest of Dean Trust (Dene Magna School and Drybrook Primary); Ceris Towler, Headteacher at Stratton C of E Primary School.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, provided an overview of why the SEND Targeted Support Funding Model was being reviewed. He explained that the threshold of the model had risen repeatedly. This was because the growth in the number of EHCPs had significantly increased the cost of the model. There was no mechanism within the current model to control spend throughout the year, and the continued adjustments to the threshold to make the model work within a broad budget of £3-3.5M was not sustainable.
- 1.2 There was currently no oversight of the impact of the funding, which made it harder for the local authority to sustain the model, or commit more funding. He suggested that if the impact of the funding could be assessed, a case could be made for further investment in this model to reduce the use of high-cost specialist placements.
- 1.3 The current model exclusively used EHCP numbers to distribute funding. Using the EHCP as the only identifier or proxy factor to recognise the complexity of needs for a school cohort was a significant limitation in the existing model.
- 1.4 He explained that the model was set-up by the local authority in an attempt to address flaws in the Schools National Funding Formula (NFF), that prevented those with more complex cohorts receiving the additional funding that was intended. There were a number of proxy factors in the NFF which were used to identify the complexity of a school's cohort. However, the way in which the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL) was applied mitigated the benefit of these factors. Under the NFF, schools with less complex cohorts initially received less funding, but once the MPPFL was applied, they would be brought up to the same funding level as other schools. The widely held view was that the additional needs proxy factors needed to be applied after the MPPFL, to ensure that funding was properly responding to the needs of the school's cohort.
- 1.5 He referred to the financial modelling tool which had been developed and circulated to members to enable consideration of the impact of different approaches to allocating the funding. The modelling tool provided more control of budget and the proportion allocated to primary and secondary schools. He explained that the distribution of funding was materially impacted when: The three-year average for EHCP numbers was used; any of the additional proxy factors were included in the distribution of funding; and use of SEND support could be challenging due to the variation of practice in schools.

## **2. Workshop Session**

The meeting split into three groups each taking part in a workshop which covered the following areas:

### **2.1 Does the proposed model address the identified issues?**

The following points were detailed on the paper worksheets under the headings in italics:

*Sustainability: Thresholds for the current model continue to increase, making the model unsustainable*

*Strengths of the proposed model:*

- Ability to set sum and distribute for the year which gives opportunity to plan and control.
- Applying funding more specifically.
- Clearly sets out the challenge of a finite amount of money available.
- The current model does not work.
- More sustainable as cash limited.

*Further areas for consideration:*

- Opportunity for a longer-term view, e.g. views over 3 years etc.
- 3-year average - how will this affect small schools, infant schools?
- Hard to forecast.
- Could create a deeper inequity for schools.
- May be sustainable for the bigger picture but not for individual schools.

*Financial control: the current model provides no mechanism to control spend throughout the year*

*Strengths of the proposed model:*

- Further control of the budget – impact on planning and evaluation.
- The ability to control the proportion of funding that is allocated to primary and secondary schools.

*Further areas for consideration:*

- Need for set point to reflect level of funding – cannot change immediately but could review as an update.
- Interim financial impact of secondary education as funding moves through (immediate impact).
- Will there be any flexibility in year – across years?

*Impact: The current model provides no oversight of the impact of the funding, which makes it hard to commit more*

*Strengths of the proposed model:*

- Measuring tool and ability to evaluate based on planned need.
- Able to more clearly identify the impact.
- Some accountability - can see where the need is.

*Further areas for consideration:*

- What would the evaluation model be? How could that be measured? If a small amount of funding, can an impact be measured?
- Build in mechanism to provide impact, how do you measure? How do you measure what has not happened?
- Who are you measuring impact on?
- Capacity for accountability.

*Complexity of needs: the current model exclusively uses EHCP numbers to distribute funding*

*Strengths of the proposed model:*

- EHCPs, a rigorous fair process of “application”.
- Getting a direct relationship between EHCPs benefits those schools above “average”.
- Continuing support for EHCPs plus the complexity of needs.

*Further areas to consider:*

- October census link.
- Parental choice provides complexity.
- Cash limited.
- Which proxy factors would you add?

## **2.2 How we best distribute funding**

*What proportion of schools should be receiving targeted support funding?*

- All schools should receive funding based on ECHP need if they have an EHCP.

- 33%.
- Currently 50% of schools.
- Factors to drive the proportion rather than a balance/percentage of schools.

*What balance should we be looking for in distributing to primary and secondary schools?*

- Some costs might be primary and secondary per child, but primary and secondary split based on need – percentage of children or allocation of primary and secondary split.
- Possibly 65% primary, 35% secondary with regular reviews.
- Challenge of transition time – movement to primary focus.
- Potential of keeping the balance and adding in extra to primary on top, to support the transition process.
- What about resources based on smaller/larger resources, physical spaces/staffing?

*The benefits of including deprivations and other factors?*

- Statistically these mean there are larger needs in areas with additional factors i.e. deprivation, but not all schools (especially secondary) may be placed in these areas but children are not mainly from this catchment.
- Weighting should be towards SEND factors and be higher than others – potentially PPF and Free School Meals Ever 6 should not be included.
- Gives a fuller view of cohorts.
- Clear cut factors help, such as census data.
- Is this SEND funding the correct funding to be used for deprivation – is this double accounting?
- Consider the weighting of each factor carefully.
- Whole school overview and consideration of other factors.
- Providing a more steady funding based on the deprivation indicators.

*The best approach for utilising the SEND factors? (LPA, SEN Support and EHCPs)*

- EHCP – this is externally moderated.
- SEND support- has pros and cons – schools do this differently (record and provide differently). This may be many schools providing early intervention and needing an EHCP but could be the opposite.
- SEND support could be used to gain additional funding.
- These factors are open to interpretation and variance amongst schools and are possibly not reliable.
- SEND Support - school based decision – variation is high in what could be deemed as MyPlan+ level – needs quality assurance of MyPlan+.
- English as an additional language pupils – less of an impact on schools – not a flag.
- Low Prior Attainment – more consistent picture of movement and a larger indicator of need over time.

## **2.3 Implementation**

*What are key considerations we should consider when implementing the new model?*

- The large discrepancies from where we are now.
- Speed of transition.
- How are you going to share this information with parents/carers to change their expectations/beliefs?
- Who has capacity to implement/assess get external validation?
- Will this fit into the SEND Strategy for Gloucestershire?
- Limited percentage change? Stepped?
- Timeframes.
- What will happen to those schools which are negatively affected by this model? Do not change for 2024/25.
- Impact of initial change of funding allocations for the year ahead.
- Budget setting and dates line-up – April versus September.
- Time that children need to move through the system – phased impact of the model e.g. idea of shaping model to maintain and then transition the model.
- Link to SEND Graduated Pathway.
- Quality assurance for schools reviewing impact – what is the outcome.
- Could the same matrix be applied to primary/secondary or could the weighting be different?

*What risks or unintended consequences should we consider when implementing the new model?*

- Deficit budget for schools with high levels of EHCPs.
- Increase in suspensions/exclusions.

- Increased parental pressures – mainstream/SEND.
- Making problems worse.
- More movement to perceived good SEND mainstream schools.
- Risk of schools manipulating figures to achieve better SEND funding.
- Some schools will continue to actively not take children with SEND or ensure that children who might need an EHCP are encouraged to leave.
- Challenge – lack of control over parental choice.
- Can we be clear on MyPlan+ - quality assurance of children on the plan and the external agencies.
- Inconsistent use would be impactful.
- Exacerbating the impact of parental choice with EHCPs.
- Next step: Impact Education – what do you need to know and why?
- Transition: Apply a variation model to support current funding and a longer transition.

*General Notes:*

- Funding targeted for early intervention.
- Baseline expectations for all schools to provide SEND support.
- Should we be giving further consideration to pre-school/Early Years?
- Should proxy factors be looked at separately?
- For those school that 'win' do they need the funding?
- How will this fit for schools that do not fit into "average" model? (What about alternative provision/specialist provision centres?).
- SEND banding reflected.

### **3. Feedback discussion**

Following the workshop session a wide-ranging discussion took place, the key points of which are detailed below:

- 3.1 It was felt that the formula factors of deprivation, mobility, and English as an Additional language, in determining the allocation of funding, would not be of high value. There was a stronger view that EHCPs, Low Prior Attainment, and MyPlan+ should be the core factors in how the funding should be distributed.
- 3.2 The local authority should ensure that there was an equitability between schools around the deemed level of an EHCP and MyPlan+. It was pointed out that infant schools would have fewer children with an EHCP as usually the application process took place during KS1. This meant that it was often the case that infant schools were not in receipt of targeted support funding to support children with additional needs.
- 3.3 It was felt that the proportion split in 2023/24 for the 1 in 30 model, this being 65% primary and 35% secondary, accurately reflected the current level of need and should therefore continue. The majority of the funding being delivered to primary schools, supported the shift in focus towards early intervention support aimed at improving outcomes for children. It was recognised that the current proportion split may need to change depending on whether the number of EHCPs continued to increase.
- 3.4 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that as part of the annual cycle of the school census, schools that had received the targeted support funding would be asked to report back on how the funding had been used. The local authority would then be able to assess the impact, creating an impact report, from which a case could be made for further investment in the model to reduce the use of high-cost specialist placements.
- 3.5 There were questions around what the local authority would measure in regard to the impact of SEND targeted support funding, including how this would be measured and who would be responsible for carrying this out. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that a monitoring model would need to be developed. He emphasised that the review would be at the whole school level, and not at an individual child's level. Concerns were raised that it could be difficult to monitor and evaluate the results; it was suggested that a clear evaluation framework needed to be developed.

- 3.6 It was recognised that any additional weighting that was applied to the broader proxy factors meant that schools currently in receipt of funding would see a reduction. This was because the EHCP cohort did not necessarily align with the broader proxy factors that were being considered. Consequently, it was felt that there needed to be a phased transition to the new model.
- 3.7 Comments were made that it was clear that something needed to change as the current model was unsustainable. However, it was pointed out that schools could be identified as being in receipt of this funding and then perceived to be more inclusive and able to provide the right support for children with additional needs, more so than schools that did not receive the funding; thus an unintended consequence further exacerbating the current situation.
- 3.8 The Head of Education Strategy and Development pointed out that parental preference means that we will continue to see, schools that are perceived to have better SEND support, attracting higher proportions of children with SEND and the notion that every child should attend their local school was not realistic. Consequently, the focus was on supporting those schools that had a high number of children with EHCPs, alongside work going in the broader system around the development of an inclusion baseline to which all schools could operate, in order to get to a place of shared responsibility across the sector.
- 3.9 It was suggested that the health and care sector needed to become more involved with facilitating EHCPs and in the provision of support for the children. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that following the recent SEND Ofsted inspection at GCC, Ofsted had made it clear that more needed to be done by the health and care sector to support the quality and effectiveness of EHCP and SEND support. There was now a strong focus on getting the health and care sector involved and committed to providing support for children with EHCPs.
- 3.10 A question was raised on whether the new model could be adapted to reflect the weightings of the different mainstream SEND bandings. The Head of Education Strategy and Development commented that this was an important point and officers would need to look at how this could be built into the model.
- 3.11 It was pointed out that if the level of funding provision was going to change annually, this could cause significant issues for schools in terms of staffing and resources, particularly in being able to appoint teaching assistants. It was suggested that the local authority should allocate funding over 2-3 years instead of yearly to provide more stability. It was recognised that this may mean that the model was not as flexible and therefore able to adapt to short-term changes.
- 3.12 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that officers would reflect on the points raised and shape the proposals and recommendations on the SEND Targeted Support Funding Model that would be considered by School's Forum in March 2024. He agreed to share and test the provisional proposals and recommendations with the attendees of the working group once drafted.

Ends