

Appendix Three

Response from Special Schools to the Trigger Mechanism for reducing funding

Hi Peter and Paul

I took the paper on the 'Principles and reviewing arrangements for commissioning places at Wirral Special Schools' to our full Governing Body meeting on 01.12.10. My Governors felt that it was a well laid out paper that gave a clear and reasonable explanation of the process the LA would follow. They do not feel that they need Officers to explain this paper, process or principals further and they assume that when it comes to discussing the actual implications for individual schools they will be informed and consulted at that time. At this point therefore they do not intend to send any representatives to the meeting on 9th December.

Governors did, however, make two further comments by way of feedback.

1. They welcome the fact that the LA are looking at this issue and would hope that plans and decisions are made promptly. We are in a financially very uncertain times and budget planning becomes therefore very problematic. Governors here do not wish to maintain a large budget carry forward and they will spend this wisely as soon as we are confident that we can afford to do so. We want to have more certain long term budget planning in place as soon as possible but need to know how the number of funded places will change in order to do this.
2. On point (iv) of the principles Governors would strongly suggest that a commitment to keep places under review and to **make prompt adjustments where required** is added. Governors here are very cautious about reducing places now and then future numbers rising again with no adjustment made. Once again we would return to having trigger funding. We have been in that position before and it is very unhelpful. While we do not expect an exact match of places / numbers every year or changes being made annually we would request a commitment to making adjustments as numbers consistently grow as well as when they fall.

I hope this clarifies our position and views.

Andre Baird
Headteacher, Foxfield School

Dear Peter

Thank you for your letter of 13 December in relation to special school places and funding.

I have previously shared this information with the governors finance committee including chair of governors, but have forwarded your letter to Breda as requested.

I have made my thoughts on the matter clear to WISPHA colleagues and to Paul Ashcroft.

- A fair and equitable system is paramount and no school should be dependent on trigger funding year on year to maintain its provision.
- Schools with large surpluses should not be tapping into the exceptional needs budget for additional funding.
- There should be no delay in redressing the balance and clawing back the surplus funding in a measured and systematic way

Hope that helps!

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Shirley Allen, Headteacher
Clare Mount Specialist Sports College

Dear Mr Edmondson

We are suggesting that we reduce our overall numbers from 120 – 115, the reduction coming from the Moderate Learning Difficulties section of the school. We are suggesting this in good faith on the understanding that this reduction in places would result in a reduction of finances of no more than £60,000.

We would propose to the authority that the monies derived from a further five surplus places (again from the MLD section of the school) enable us to do the following :-

1. We are currently running a quickly expanding service to mainstream schools that has been very well received and will extend this by –
 - a) Training on site working alongside staff at Hayfield School.
 - b) Support and advice on practice to Headteachers, SENCOs, Teachers and Teaching Assistants.
 - c) Support and advice offered to teachers of specific pupils in mainstream schools.
 - d) Training courses offered to staff of a number of schools.
 - e) Sharing and loaning of specialist resources.
(This in addition to the work that we do from our inclusion budget)
2. Expand the Communication Difficulties Base by 8 places (48 in all). (Current situation : 1 over number, 3 pupils in main body who LA recognised would be better placed in CDU, 2 pupils in main body with recent diagnosis of ASD, further parents were refused the CDU as a preference as it was full. Also offer placement for pupils with a receptive language disorder who are not currently supported by language bases). We recognise that the funding proposal would have to be amended accordingly.
3. Consider an assessment unit / nursery. (This may alter the proposal to reduce the numbers by five).

Additional considerations :-

- We will continue to support a small number of children who are very complex and whose needs are met by allocated Hayfield staff only because of surplus place funding.
- Also ask the authority to consider the difficulties in class sizes / organisation with reference to age and ability levels and fluctuating numbers.

The projected figure of 95 in May 2010 rose to 106 current, 107 in January 2011. As the number rose to above 100, because of the range of age and ability levels, it was not tenable to meet the children without creating an eleventh class. From January 2011 we will be operating with 107 children spread over 11 classes.

This is because it is typical to have classes of 14 within the MLD sector, for children aged 7 and over. For our youngest children with MLD, their needs have been proved to be best met in classes of 10 and under. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the spread of ages should be greater than 3 years. Trying to operate within 10 classes meant that the spread of age ranges within a class was greater than this and it was difficult to deliver a number of differing age and ability appropriate curricular in one class.

Whilst we appreciate that each school is unique, we would wish to see that there is fairness and transparency across the sector in any decisions that are made. We are particularly keen that Principle iii of the "Principles and Reviewing Arrangements for Commissioning Places at Wirral Special Schools" is adhered to.

Mr N Cooper
Chair of Governors
Hayfield School

Dear Mr Edmondson

My understanding of the purpose of the meeting on 9th December was to determine the principles on which we would base a policy to deal with a reverse trigger mechanism. The Governing Body of Kilgarth School and I are concerned that the seventy-five spare places are taking up £1.25m.

We were saddened that the meeting focused primarily on who would lose and who would win because we felt that the focus should have been on agreeing principles upon which the problem could be managed equitably and fairly.

Our view is that the proposals you put forward were reasonable, appropriate and just and we hope to work with you to progress the formulation of a policy at the meeting on 6th January 2011.

Jane Dawson, Headteacher
Kilgarth School

The Governors of Stanley School have read the proposals and fully understand the thinking behind them. They thank the officers of the Local Authority for their work on this.

We agree that places need to be kept under continual review and are happy to be in dialogue with the Local Authority about this.

We would ask that the following points be taken into consideration.

We would like to further investigate the trends in the numbers. Our present fall in numbers is directly related to a situation several years ago when Elleray Park accepted a narrower range of pupils than they currently do. This led to us being oversubscribed in certain year groups to accommodate these pupils. Leavers groups over a 3 year period recently were double the normal rate. We lost half the school over this period. This is not a normal pattern.

We believe the service we offer is of the highest quality. Our Nursery is not only accredited by the National Autistic Society (a specialist qualification) but by the Effective Early Learning Project (a mainstream one). We would like the Local Authority to explore ways this expertise can be better used for pupils with mainstream Nursery providers. This point may well be true for Lyndale and Elleray Park as well. We would particularly like to see more use made of the Assessment Place facility.

Our parents tell us repeatedly that they felt that better information about the availability of special school placements should have been made earlier to them. Linked to this we feel this option should be actively promoted as a positive one by all employees of the Local Authority and would like to discuss this further.

The population of the Special Schools has never been related to the formula for funding. For many years Stanley School was full, had many challenging pupils and has only recently called on central funding for this. This was probably an error on the part of the Headteacher as it may have led to the view that there were no significant problems in the school. Staff simply coped. The fall in numbers has highlighted the conditions we worked under for many years and we feel that the current ratios more closely reflect the staffing levels required for this group of pupils – in particular the more challenging who we are able to keep within the Local Authority system. We have clear evidence of the positive impact of the current numbers on behaviour for the most challenging groups. We would welcome a dialogue on this including our use of centrally funded money.

On a general note, in view of the uncertainty around school funding we would urge caution in making changes to any Special School funding. For the CLD sector we are 'end of the line' establishments. If we cannot cope with pupils it will inevitably result in expensive Out of Authority placements.

Many thanks for giving these points your consideration.

Chair of Governors
Stanley School

Background

The Lyndale school at present caters for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. About 80% use wheelchairs and are incontinent, about 80% are gastrostomy fed and 54% have epilepsy. This results in the need for a high staff / pupil ratio. For example toileting a child requires two staff. The school has at present 30 pupils and the number of places is 45.

The school is organized around the needs of the particular group of children. They can move safely around the school, they can exercise on the floor safely and there are enough staff to constantly observe their actions and reactions, as most of them are not able to communicate verbally.

The regime that is needed to educate the children has been an issue of ongoing discussion within the school. The Governing Body have discussed the issues many times and discussions have been held with Officers of the Authority, including the Director, many times in the last five years.

The Governing Body have requested over this time the Authority to jointly agree what the needs of the children are. We regret that this has still not been done.

At present the budget available to the school means that it is not viable in the long term.

We believe that the present proposals will in reality move from place led to pupil led funding.

The proposals

Although a figure of £280,000 is given as the “extra funding” available to The Lyndale School, our estimate is that there would be a decrease of about £130,000. This is based on the removal of 5 each of the higher two bands.

This would result in our losing 2 Teachers and 4 Teaching Assistants. This would result in teaching groups of 9-10. Each class would be staffed by 1 teacher and 4-5 Teaching Assistants per group of 10. This would not allow for the staff – pupil ratio needed by the children. It must be noted that such a ratio would mean that the school would need to make requests for 1-1 staff for extra funding for individual children in terms of ensuring their safety. At present this does not need to be done in view of the staffing ratio.

Our proposals

- An urgent review of the provision for PMLD children, starting with the needs of the children and using a “needs led” method to work out budgetary requirements.

- A review of costs of educating children out of Borough and in particular costs for PMLD children.
- That we ensure that any papers to Cabinet and Schools Forum have all of the facts needed for proper decision making.

Key Points

- The school has been asking for a review of finances for the last five years – a review based on the needs of children.
- The bands in the present formula need to be reviewed because of the changing needs of the children.
- Parents should be fully involved in the process.

Chair of Governors
The Lyndale School

Dear Peter

Re: Surplus Place Funding

Since our meeting on the 9th December and the information that you forwarded, the Finance Committee were able to meet and would like to submit the following views.

Whilst appreciating the needs of future pupils with SEN on the Wirral, we are concerned too, regarding the present population. In particular we have to consider those pupils currently attending Meadowside and those aspiring to attend Meadowside, in the coming year and subsequent years. This is where we consider increased funding and flexibility is required.

The opportunity to increase staff : pupil ratios, develop staff specialism and expertise; and improve provision in those schools currently benefiting from the surplus place funding is worthy, however this opportunity should be afforded to all Special Schools and not be developed through the unfair allocation of these funds. Without additional funding Meadowside cannot develop in this way.

Parents who wish their son/daughter to attend Meadowside should have access to excellent provision resourced by Meadowside. Places that are requested here should be resourced here, with opportunities for the school to develop as a centre of excellence, offering appropriate inclusive activities.

We recommend that the funds available from surplus places:

- Be recouped and retained within the SEN Sector
- Be available to fund resourced places in Special Schools requested by parents
- Be ring-fenced for Special Schools with specific criteria set for applications to be considered by a panel of Head Teachers; to meet the exceptional needs presented by individual pupils. There could be bandings of support ring-fenced for the different categories of need. This could then be used to enhance the staffing and provision around the child

We look forward to discussing this further.

Finance Committee
Meadowside School