

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM - MARCH 2012

REPORT OF THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

PLACES IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS - SURPLUS PLACE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the progress made piloting and implementing a process designed to respond to reduced demand for places in special schools. The process was fully implemented in January 2012 and recommendations are made about reducing the number of places in two special schools.

Background

A report was received by the Forum in January 2011, and its recommendations accepted, that led to a pilot being conducted for 12 months about reducing the number of places and consequent budget reduction in special schools. The report had support from headteachers of special schools and their governing bodies. The approach adopted involved those schools with more than five surplus places in the January census agreeing to a reduction in places, or submitting proposals for the use of the funding that was in addition to what the school ordinarily provided. A report was presented to the Forum in July 2011 describing the process of submissions being considered by a Surplus Places Panel, with the opportunity for schools to appeal to an Appeals Panel if they disagreed with the Surplus Places Panel. No appeals were made during the pilot phase and the report made the following recommendations for the use of future surplus place funding.

- To convert the £196,665 of funding at Orrets Meadow in to part-time places for non-statemented children with severe literacy difficulties with effect from September 2011.
- To reserve £120,000 to commission 8 places for children in the growing area of demand of social and communication difficulties in either a special school or primary school for September 2012.
- To use the balance of £66,685 to fund additional demand for places in oversubscribed special schools and to meet the cost of primary provision in Wirral Hospital School.
- To allocate £100,000 to the exceptional needs budget in September 2012.

This approach to funding methodology is in line with Government proposals in its Green Paper (March 2011) about SEN '*Support and Aspiration; A new approach to special educational needs and disability*'.

Surplus Places 2012-2013

Following the January census in 2012 four special schools; The Lyndale, Foxfield, Orrets Meadow, and Hayfield submitted proposals about the use of surplus funding to the Surplus Places Panel that met on 6th February 2012. The Panel's decisions were communicated to schools by the 10th February with an opportunity for appeal by 27th February 2012. No appeals were received and the Appeals Panel was cancelled.

After due consideration the Surplus Places Panel agreed to support the innovative proposal to convert surplus places at Orrets Meadow into places for children without statements for up to 12 months. The submissions from Foxfield and Lyndale were declined for one or a combination of the following reasons:

- Schools were not offering activity above and beyond what they should ordinarily provide.
- The funding they were requesting could be requested through the exceptional needs budget.
- The service they were offering could be bought in from schools should they so wish.

The Panel decided that the census data about Hayfield Special School did not demonstrate that a downward trend was established and so no change to the number of places at the school is recommended.

The projected savings are £156,000.

The recommendations made for the use of the projected savings forecast in the report of July 2011 are met with the exception of monies to be allocated to the exceptional needs budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To continue to pilot a scheme to convert surplus places at Orrets Meadow into places for non-statemented children with severe literacy difficulties for the academic year September 2012 – August 2013.
- To reduce the budget for places at Foxfield School from 138 to 133 from September 2012 to April 2013 using trigger funding arrangements.
- To reduce the budget for places at The Lyndale School from 45 to 40 from September 2012 to April 2013 using trigger funding arrangements.
- The total savings of £156,000 to be used to:
 - Fund eight places costing £120,000 a full year (£68,300 part year) that consultation has agreed to be commissioned from Clare Mount Specialist Sports College for young people with social and communication difficulties.
 - To use the balance to fund additional demand costing £36,000 full year (£23,000 part year) for places in over-subscribed special schools and to meet the cost of primary provision in Wirral Hospital School. Any shortfall in funding would be met from the SEN Action Plan.
- The process will be evaluated with stakeholders and a final policy produced for adoption before the end of the financial year.

David Armstrong
Acting Director of Children's Services