

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM – SEPTEMBER 2012

REPORT OF THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

FUNDING FOR PUPILS WITH HIGH NEEDS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new set of funding arrangements for pupils and students with high needs (low incidence/high cost – pupils with statements of special educational needs or individual funding packages) are due to come into effect for all schools. There are transitional arrangements proposed for the year 2013-2014 that offer some financial protection before the new system operates fully from April 2014.

This report outlines progress on the funding consultation carried out with all schools and makes recommendations about the transitional arrangements for April 2013 and for the funding arrangements from April 2014.

Background

The funding consultation posed 14 questions, some with sub-divisions. A total of 21 schools responded; 10 mainstream and 11 special schools.

The funding consultation and a digest of responses are attached in the appendix.

This report offers a summary of each question, the responses to it and a recommendation.

Q1 This question asked if there were any additional principles that the LA should adopt in addition to those outlined in the national consultation.

Responses

Comments were made about the relative importance, significance and implications of some of the principles but no additional ones were proposed

Recommendation 1

Wirral adopts the principles and approach outlined in School Funding Reform 2012 to underpin the new system of funding pupils with high needs.

Q2 This question asked for views about three alternatives for the use of inclusion monies currently in special schools' budgets.

Responses

Seven responses favoured placing the money in the High Needs block and special schools inclusion work is reviewed to re-commission successful projects and initiatives from special

schools. Two favoured it being placed in the high needs block to fund the cost of pupils provision. Two favoured it being available for re-commissioning

Recommendation 2

The current arrangements for inclusion monies are retained subject to a future review of current projects and initiatives.

- Q3 This question asked for views about a banding model approach and about the illustrative example and proposed setting up a working group from the Forum tasked with developing a local banding system for top-ups

Responses

Some detailed responses were received. Most agreed with the banding model approach, several pointed out that the illustrative example was alarming and argued that it wrongly assigned monetary values.

The majority of respondents agreed with need for a working group, a couple suggested independent advice was needed

Recommendation 3

A working group of the Schools Forum is established to develop a local banding model for top-up funding for pupils with high needs.

- Q4 This question asked if Wirral should use the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to construct budgets for the transitional year.

Responses

The overwhelming majority agreed with need to use the MFG.

Recommendation 4

The Authority uses the MFG to construct budgets for specialist provision for the transitional year 2013-2014.

- Q5 This question asked whether additional local protection for special schools was necessary as result of budget changes and empty places, and if so what could they be and how would they be funded

Responses

There was mixture of responses to this question. Several felt that there could be a need in certain instances, such as, a small special school, that time scales for implementing a new system may make it necessary, that BESD schools needed protection, that there should be top slice of the DSG for the loss of specialist school status.

Recommendation 5

Local protection for may be considered for individual special schools affected by significant turbulence because of funding changes due to empty places.

Q6 This was a question about funding excess places

Responses

The majority of responses agreed that using top up funding was preferable to current trigger arrangements.

Recommendation 6

Excess places in specialist provision is funded on the basis of the high need pupil top-up

Q7 This was about developing a reviewing cycle out of current local work to integrate with the proposed arrangements for place reviews by the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

Responses

The response agreed with this proposal

Recommendation 7

The current local arrangements for reviewing surplus places are amended to keep all places under review and integrated with EFA arrangements.

Q8 This question was about future use of the current exceptional needs budget.

Responses

Most respondents agreed, with some qualifications, with the suggestions made about the use of this budget.

Recommendation 8

The exceptional needs budget is placed in the high needs block to honour existing agreements, and in future the monies will be used to fund top-ups.

Questions 9-12 involved questions about changes to places in current provision.

Recommendation 9

The Authority move ahead with the locally planned changes to reduce the number of places by five each at Foxfield Secondary Special School and The Lyndale Primary Special School.

Recommendation 10

The Authority move ahead with the increase to the number of places at Gilbrook Primary Special School from 50 to 55 by April 2013

Recommendation 11

The Authority move ahead with the proposal to close the Education Inclusion Base at Rock Ferry Primary School at the end of the academic year 2013.

Recommendation 12

The Authority move ahead to increase the place number at Elleray Park from to 80 from April 2013

- Q13 This question was about increasing the value of the individually assigned pupil units so that Wirral is in line with that strongly recommend by the government.

Responses

The majority of responses were in agreement.

Recommendation 13

The sum of £250, 000 is delegated to mainstream schools so that Wirral's five units of individually assigned support is increased in value form £5,665 to £6,000.

- Q14 This was an open-ended question for any additional comments.

Responses

A flavour of them can be seen responses can be seen in the appendix.

No recommendations are made with regard to this question.

Julia Hassall
Acting Director of Children's Services