

Leicester City Schools' Forum response to SEND consultation Nov 2020

Dear Richard Sword (copied to all Governing Bodies)

I am writing to you with regards to the SEND special school funding rates review consultation: <https://consultations.leicester.gov.uk/sec/sendschoolsfunding>.

This is a consultation that all interested parties can respond to, but it is a statutory requirement for Schools' Forum to write to you with a view. This consultation closes on Friday 27 November.

Schools' Forum has heard from a number of presenters involved in, or affected by, the consultation, who all had compelling and passionate views. Amongst the Forum members, there are naturally a range of views, however the majority opinion was to agree with the proposals put forward in the consultation. There were, however, significant concerns from nearly all members about the proposals put forward.

Members felt that these reforms in SEND funding and realignment of funds were overdue, and that, on balance, the proposal felt like a fairer system because it would ensure that all children attending special schools in Leicester would be funded appropriately for their needs and not according to which school they attend. Members expressed the view that some schools, under the current funding rates, do not see parity of funding, and the proposals put forward in this consultation would equalise the funding arrangements and prevent some schools going into deficit positions. There was recognition that some Special Schools have been underfunded historically and that in some cases this has been compounded by their cohort need having increased and diversified over time.

There was an acknowledgement that there would be 'losers' from the consultation, although the majority of special schools would be better off under the new rates. Concern was also expressed over the provision for children with special needs: the need for more places, expertise, and resources to support SEND children should have been taken into account in a greater way rather than a pure financial focus. Whilst understanding that the consultation's remit was connected to banding proposals, Forum would welcome greater understanding of High Needs Block spending. One suggestion was that a review of the overall High Needs Block spending should have happened before special schools' funding rates were reviewed. Further concerns were raised over the complexity of the proposals, and that the online consultation open to the public was light in terms of consulting and questioning, meaning any meaningful viewpoints may be lost.

Another suggestion was that moderation of the newly devised levels needed to be undertaken, to ensure provision across the schools is not replicated, and also to ensure that there are no gaps in the continuum of provision. Special School Heads fed back that they have changed their designation over time and now meet the needs of a broader cohort than previously. The moderation exercise would enable us to see the full continuum of provision including any gaps or duplication of

provision - something which we would not want to see when there is such a finite limited budget. The moderation exercise is vital in giving clarity and understanding of the needs of young people within each of our Special Schools.

SEMH provision, and expansion of that existing support and provision, is a priority for heads. Those young people being put forward for statutory assessment represent the tip of the iceberg rather than being representative of need. Mainstream schools spend hundreds of thousands of pounds of their budgets setting up support and provision for students with high levels of need however there comes a tipping point whereby their needs can no longer be met in a mainstream environment. Whilst schools will welcome DSP arrangements in this area of need, they will supplement the number of places available through schools' own provision and will not be able to provide provision for those students with the highest need. There are also concerns about the LA utilising the roll of The Leicester Partnership School to provide long term education for students with an EHCP. Students with an EHCP should not be educated at a PRU and this strategy is also directly impacting on the ability of the PRU to provide early intervention – a vital part of the support process that schools cannot afford to lose in a time where the numbers of young people presenting with SEMH needs is growing.

Additionally, caveats to supporting the proposal were expressed as follows: that there is a written and agreed transition for those schools whose funding will reduce; and that the rate change does not increase the cost to the High Needs Block due to children and young people being sent out of the city, or indeed reduce the capacity of special schools to educate young people.

Yours faithfully

Jessica Edmonds

Chair, Leicester Schools' Forum.