

School's Forum 7 February 2006

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Consultation response to the 'SEN Matrix Funding for Mainstream Pupils with Special Educational Needs'

Purpose of Report

1. In July 2005 a report was brought to Schools Forum in respect of the Special Education Needs (SEN) funding matrix for mainstream pupils. This report is a follow up to the subsequent consultation on the contents of that report.

Background

2. Appendices 1, 2, and 3 of this report summarise the responses to the consultation.
3. Analysis of the responses indicated that around 70% of the respondents agreed with the purpose of the review and the majority were in agreement with the key principles and the need to delegate the centrally retained funding of £1.4m for pupils with a statement of 25 hours or more.
4. The key concerns raised through the consultation and the Directorate's response (*italics*) to addressing these concerns are outlined below:-

- 'The protection afforded to parents and children by SEN statements could be lost.'

Paragraph 13 (f) states that '(the matrix) aims, in time, to reduce the need for statements as pupils should receive intervention more readily through the matrix'. It is expected that once confidence in the matrix has grown there will be a corresponding reduction in statements.

'Removing Barriers to Achievement' the Governments strategy for SEN states that "local authorities should prioritise the delegation of SEN resources and reduce the reliance on statements (para. 4.2)"

- 'The process could be viewed as a cost cutting exercise.'
The implementation of the 'matrix' will be cost-neutral, and should in time enable more money to be directed towards the 'child' through reduced bureaucracy.
- 'Concern at the reliability of SAT's scores to determine SEN funding.'
The current formula methodology based on SATs is an interim measure; this formula will be reviewed in 2006-07. It is intended to move away from the imprecise application of SATs, towards a system of identification directly

related to SEN.

- ‘There is a need for strong and transparent moderation.’
Para. 34 describes the essential collaboration of the school SENCO and SEN Officer/Education Psychologist in this process.
- ‘Pupil descriptors need to be more specific.’
Descriptors are currently under review and will be adjusted next year if necessary
- ‘The process is too complicated.’
Training on the matrix will be delivered via SEN Officers and Education Psychologists to Headteachers, SENCOs and relevant others. Further explanatory notes will be published and made available to schools and parents.
- ‘The timescale for implementation is too tight.’
The timescale is indeed tight for the adoption of option (a); it is therefore more realistic to now adopt ‘immediate full implementation, with protection’ as the preferred option, i.e. all existing statements of SEN transferred across to the matrix in accordance with their stated assessment.
- ‘There was some uncertainty where special schools and Inclusion Centres (INCs) sit in relation to the matrix.’
Directorate of Children’s Services staff, in collaboration with special school headteachers are currently working on the development of a single matrix continuum from mainstream school, through Inclusion Centres to Special School.
- ‘The matrix will result in additional workload for SENCOs.’
Once integrated, the matrix should be no more time consuming than the current process of reviewing Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Proposals

5. It is proposed that option b is implemented (paragraph 42b of consultation document). *In order to provide financial stability to schools for 2006/07, it is proposed that all existing mainstream pupils with statements of SEN are transferred across to the matrix in accordance with their current stated assessment. This requires immediate full implementation of the matrix with protection.”*
6. New statements written from 1 April 2006 will no longer attach a specific number of hours support to each pupil but will instead place them appropriately on the SEN matrix (paragraph 15 of consultation document).

7. Heads/SENCO's will be required to maintain and update their SEN matrix during 2006/07 for submission to the Finance Directorate in January 2007 for funding in 2007/08. This will be an ongoing requirement (paragraph 44 of consultation document).
8. The centrally retained budget of £1.4m for statements of 25 hours or more is delegated in 2006/07 (paragraph 32 of the consultation document).
9. In the case of non- stated pupils with SEN, it is proposed that further training is undertaken with Headteachers and SENCO's during 2006/07. This is with a view to extending the matrix to allocate funding to pupils at School Action and School Action Plus from 2007/08. This would replace the current formula funding methodology which will be retained for 2006/07 (paragraph 47 of consultation document).

Finance

10. There will be no additional financial implications arising from the implementation of SEN matrix funding; it draws upon existing resources identified for SEN pupils. The centrally retained budget is £1.4m. The budget is cash limited; therefore an increase in eligible pupils will translate to a reduction in the unit of resource. It is a requirement that this budget is delegated to schools for 2006/07.
11. The funding of schools is prescribed by the DfES through the School Finance (England) Regulations 2006.
12. From 1 April 2006, the Schools Budget will be funded by a direct DfES grant: Dedicated School Grant (DSG)

Law

13. Councils' LMS Schemes are made under Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The Education Acts 1996 and 2002 also have provisions relating to school funding. The Code of Practice SEN 2001.

Equality Impact

14. The Council's Equal Opportunities Policy, together with relevant SEN legislation and guidance, in particular the 'Code of Practice – SEN, 2001' has been taken into account when considering the allocation of resources.

Recommendation

15. It is recommended that Schools Forum is invited to advise both the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services in respect of the consultation on 'SEN Matrix Funding for Mainstream Pupils with SEN' as set out in the proposals detailed in paragraphs 5 to 9.



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John Freeman
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Jon McCabe
Telephone: 01384 814203
Email: jon.mccabe@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers

Appendix 1 Consultation summary
Appendix 2 Consultation return
Appendix 3 Consultation return