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Schools Forum

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Wednesday, 18th January, 2023 at 4.00 pm

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATED TO THE LISTED REPORTS

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REVIEW OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN SOUTHAMPTON MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   Southampton City Council is seeking to strengthen inclusive practice in its mainstream schools and settings and to ensure that its mainstream offer is high quality and consistently good. As part of this process, it wants to review the way in which the sector is funded and supported.

1.2   Peter Gray (SSCYP) has been consulted about undertaking this work. Peter has significant knowledge and experience of SEND funding approaches across the UK, having worked as a consultant to local and national government on this issue for over 20 years. He was engaged earlier on in the year in helping to review and develop a new approach to funding Southampton's special schools, which is now in process.

1.3   The focus of the current review is on all aspects of mainstream SEND funding, including schools' use of their delegated budgets ('notional SEND') and additional funding currently allocated through EHCPs. Consideration has also been given to the role and funding of the Authority's SEN support services and Southampton's current use of alternative and specialist provision (within Borough and further afield).

1.4   The review also includes the ways in which SEND is funded in early years and further education settings.

1.5   The report provides an analysis of Southampton's current approach, highlighting positives and key issues, together with options/ways forward for further development.

2. **CONTEXT**

2.1   Southampton's capacity to invest additionally in funding and support for mainstream is limited by its broader financial position. Over the last few years, spend on High Needs has exceeded the budget allocated by central government (despite substantial increases over the last 3 years) and it has built up a significant cumulative deficit. A paper to Schools Forum in 2021/22 proposed a 0.5% top slice from schools' budgets to help address this. This proposal was not accepted. However, there was agreement to pay off some of the overspend through the use of DSG[1] reserves. A subgroup of Schools Forum has been established to help develop a more collective approach to tackling some of these issues but this has not met for some time owing to stretched resources at an LA level.

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[1] Dedicated Schools Grant

2.2   The Council has now applied successfully to be part of the Government's Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme which will help in providing some analysis of factors contributing to the overspend and the possibility of one-off grant funding to help address some of these.

2.3   The number of EHCPs maintained for Southampton residents has increased substantially over the last 7 years (from 803 in 2015 to 1,938 in January 2022[2]). The rise in mainstream schools and settings has been particularly significant (from 313 to 849[3] over the same period), with an additional increase in numbers placed in special schools (from 441 to 746). The percentage of school age pupils with EHCPs is now above the unitary and national averages (4.9% vs 4% for unitaries and 4% for England overall). A recent forecast by Newton Europe for the DBV programme suggests that numbers of pupils with EHCPs in local/preferred mainstream schools will rise to nearly 1,150 by 2025/26 on current rates of growth, with an overall total of nearly 2,500 across all types of provision.

2.4   The Government has indicated that growth in High Needs allocations to Local Authority areas will be limited to inflation after the end of the three-year budget settlement agreed from 2019/20, with a short 'parachute' period planned for 2023/24. It is therefore imperative that future spend is managed effectively. This will only happen if there is a strong collective approach.

2.5   The Authority's current financial strategy has been to try and strengthen capacity to meet needs more locally, reducing the need for high-cost placements in the independent/non-maintained special school sector. The impact on spend has been limited by the time taken for existing pupils to work their way through the system and rising costs of placements in INMSS schools. Numbers have stabilised over the last few years to around 60 pupils, with a slight reduction predicted for this financial year.

2.6   In addition to expanding the number of places in its state-maintained special schools, the Authority is in the process of extending its number of mainstream resource bases provision, through the creation of a new secondary provision at Redbridge Community School.

2.7   The Authority has recently produced a broader strategy for education (2022-2027), which sets out a number of priorities. Among these is a desire to promote greater inclusion through the further development of practice in mainstream schools and settings and the creation of a clearer continuum of provision.

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[2] Source: DFE SEN2 statistics: June 2022
[3] Includes pupils in mainstream resource bases/units

2.8   The Authority is keen to maintain positive relationships with local schools and collaborative working across the sector. A number of schools are now managed within multi-academy or local cooperative trusts. However, most of these continue to have a strong commitment to linking with other local colleagues. Mainstream cluster groups have been maintained which operate on a geographical basis.

3.   METHODOLOGY

3.1   The review was based on the following activities (see Appendix 1 for details):

(i)   Interviews with senior LA officers and Chair of the Schools Forum
(ii)   Interviews with key officers and support service managers
(iii)   Interviews with senior managers from Health
(iv)   Meetings with Heads and SENDCos from mainstream primary and secondary schools
(v)   Meeting with Early Years officers and a local EYs provider
(vi)   Meeting with Learning Support Leads for two local mainstream FE Colleges (City and Totton)
(vii)   Interview with SENDIASS lead and chair of Parent Carer Forum, followed by meetings with groups of parents (with children in mainstream schools)
(viii)   Visits to two of the three classes managed by Springwell in mainstream primary schools, to the resource base for deaf/HI primary pupils at Newlands and the secondary ASD resourced provision at Bitterne Park

3.2   Meetings with officers and SENDIASS/PCF were held online. Interviews with mainstream Heads and SENDCos and visits to resource bases were face to face.

3.3   In addition, relevant documentation was scrutinised, along with data on pupil placements/provision and financial costs.

4.   LEVELS OF SUPPORT FOR ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM

4.1   Levels of funding and support for additional needs in mainstream can be categorised as follows:

Funding provided to mainstream schools/settings in their delegated budgets

4.2   All mainstream schools receive funding in their delegated budgets to meet SEND. This is based partly on pupil numbers and partly on demographic indicators such as

levels of social disadvantage and percentage of pupils with low prior attainment[4]. This is described as 'notional SEN'. It is not earmarked in the same way as Pupil Premium funding and Heads/governors can determine how much is used for this purpose and how funding is spent.

4.3   Since the introduction of the Government's 'top-up' system in 2013, schools are expected to use their funding not just to meet their general range of SEND but also to make a contribution to support for pupils with more complex/significant needs who are funded additionally. This has become known as 'the first £6k'.

4.4   With the rise in number of pupils with EHCPs and the increasing focus on funding for these, the broader profile of 'notional SEN' has started to get lost.

4.5   Funding for Early Years mainstream settings is different to schools. There is no equivalent of 'notional SEN', although providers do receive a small amount of deprivation funding based on their cohort, along with some disability access money (based on children's registered entitlement to Disability Living Allowance).

4.6   Funding for SEND in mainstream FE college budgets comes from two sources: 'element 1' is drawn from college core budgets, which include some additional funding for 'deprivation' (based on a combination of levels of social disadvantage and students with lower attainment on entry[5]); 'element 2[6]' is accessed from the ESFA when students receive additional ('top-up') funding from their resident Authority.

4.7   The nature of provision that mainstream schools and settings make 'ordinarily' can vary considerably, although local areas are increasingly starting to articulate what they expect to see in place, particularly when additional funding or alternative/ specialist provision is being requested.

Parents as partners

4.8   There is extensive evidence to show that, where schools/settings work positively in partnership with parents/carers, outcomes for children and young people are better, particularly for those with SEND. And yet, for some schools and parents, achieving and maintaining this kind of relationship continues to be problematic[7], particularly when things are not going well, when there is a tendency for blame.

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[4] At present, the extent of notional SEN funding (and the formula for its distribution) is locally determined but it is likely that a more standardised approach will be developed as part of the move towards greater national consistency.

[5] Grades lower than C/4 in English and/or Maths)

[6] Equivalent to the 'first £6k' in schools. This is deducted by the ESFA from the local area High Needs Block

[7] Gill Crozier (1998) describes the relationship as idealised, with school accountability and safeguarding requirements promoting a culture of 'mutual surveillance'.

4.9   The development of local SEND Information & Advice Services (SENDIASS) and other arrangements for mediation have to some extent addressed these issues. However, there is increasing recognition of the need for better training, both for schools and parents, so that effective partnership can become a reality.

4.10   Where relationships are difficult, parents are more inclined to see statutory assessments and EHCPs as a mechanism for strengthening their 'voice', even though this does not in itself lead to improvements in collaboration and joint working and may promote a more adversarial position.

External support services

4.11   SEN support services have traditionally performed an important role in helping schools and settings to meet needs, at both individual pupil and institutional level. They can also make a useful contribution in supporting parental involvement and helping to build bridges when relationships are difficult.

4.12   The size of such services has decreased considerably over recent years, with increasing budget pressures for local areas. In some, there has been a move to a 'sold service' model, with greater involvement of schools in determining service contributions and priorities. Funding for Behaviour Support was transferred to the Schools Block in 2013, leaving schools to decide whether to continue to fund this provision, individually or collectively[8].

4.13   Most Local Authorities still retain a core service capacity for pupils with 'low incidence needs' (physical/sensory difficulties) and for autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

4.14   Educational Psychology Services have also played a part in assessment and intervention. However, their time has been increasingly focused on statutory SEND activity (e.g. providing advice for EHC needs assessments). With pressures on core LA budgets, the trend has been towards traded services for non-statutory activity, with schools buying in different levels of support. However, with recent recruitment and retention issues, it has been difficult for some services to provide staffing beyond the level that is needed to cover basic statutory requirements.

4.15   Reduced capacity for external support has meant that mainstream schools can feel that they are left to face challenges on their own, with more limited access to supported intervention. In this context, they are more likely to seek a more limited role for external services, in terms of validating requests for additional or alternative provision.

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[8] Through a process of annual 'de-delegation'

Therapy support

4.16 A range of therapy services continue to be provided for children and young people in local areas. Physiotherapy still tends to be a core Health service, fully funded and provided by them. Funding for speech & language and occupational therapy is usually joint, with contributions from local CCGs[9] and the area High Needs Block. The balance of these contributions and what each pays for varies across the country and is more contended as both Education and Health budgets experience increasing pressures. Resolving these issues requires good local relationships and strong arrangements for joint commissioning.

4.17 There is an increasing tendency for schools to commission their own therapy resource with some local frustrations about sufficiency and recruitment/retention issues.

Additional funding for individuals with more significant needs

4.18 The traditional approach to targeting pupils for additional funding has been through the statutory assessment process. This has a number of disadvantages in terms of administrative demands on schools and local authorities, and the susceptibility of the system to individual school/parental pressure. Schools vary in their experience of SEND and thresholds for applying for additional funding can be relative.

4.19 A number of LAs have addressed these issues through setting up more dynamic systems for resource access. These are considered in section 8 of this report.

4.20 The mechanism for accessing additional funding in the Early Years is typically through an Early Years Inclusion Fund. This is usually resourced through a combination of Early Years Block and High Needs Block money, with applications being decided through a local authority panel. Allocations are usually made on a relatively short-term basis.

4.21 Mainstream FE Colleges now usually access HN funding through EHCPs but this is not a national requirement.

Specialist provision and alternative placements

4.22 Placements in alternative and specialist provision tend to be regarded as separate, but they can be seen as a form of mainstream support – for pupils whose needs may be too challenging to meet in their local school context. This is particularly the case for pupils who are placed for short-term assessment and intervention, for example in Pupil Referral Unit settings.

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[9] Clinical Commissioning Groups (now Integrated Care Boards/ICBs)

4.23 Funding for these is drawn from the local area High Needs Block and placements tend to take a bigger share of this resource, as they include not just top-up but also the full £10k place cost for each individual pupil[10].

4.24 It is therefore vital that this kind of provision is consistently focused on those pupils with the most complex/significant needs.

5. SUPPORT AND FUNDING IN SOUTHAMPTON SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

Notional SEN/ordinarily available provision

5.1 A significant amount of money is included in mainstream school budgets for notional SEN (£12.2m in total in 2020/21: £6.36m for primary and £4.84m for secondary). Amounts per school range from £26k to £273k in primary and from around £255k to £630k in secondary. The formula is based entirely on low prior attainment. It is more common for this also to include a proportion of funding associated with social deprivation factors (as these tend to be linked to delays in language and social development and behavioural/social issues. It is likely therefore that notional SEND funding levels in Southampton are lower than in some other comparable Authorities, particularly for schools with higher levels of disadvantage[11].

5.2 Awareness of this level of funding for SEND varied across those interviewed. Mainstream Heads typically regarded it as part of their general school funding which they had a responsibility to deploy to meet the learning needs of all their pupils. With increasing pressures on budgets, it was important for them to ensure flexible use of a range of funding streams. Funding was not as clearly identified or monitored as, for example, Pupil Premium.

5.3 Heads also tended to emphasise commonality of commitment to SEND and inclusion across the school sector, with differences in support and provision (and numbers of requests for additional funding) largely reflecting demographic differences and levels of need.

5.4 Mainstream SENCos and SEN support services, on the other hand, pointed to variability in levels of support and provision even between schools with similar demographic profiles, particularly at the primary phase. They were not always aware of the amount of notional SEND funding in their schools[12] and felt greater

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[10] For mainstream school placements, the first £6/10k is drawn from the school's budget and therefore from Schools Block rather than HNB

[11] This will partly depend on the weightings given to SEN/AEN-related factors in the overall school funding formula. The Government's Green Paper has proposed that, in future, notional SEND will be driven through the National Funding Formula, which will support a more consistent approach across England as a whole.

[12] SENCos were more likely to know if they were part of the school senior leadership team

transparency was needed in order to be able to judge the level of investment in this area of provision and help assess its impact.

5.5 Variability was partly evidenced anecdotally (for example, through reference to some schools being less positive about admitting pupils with more significant needs) and partly through experience of attending the Authority's SEN decision-making panels. Thresholds for submitting EHC needs assessment requests were seen to vary across schools. Secondary SENCos also pointed to variations in levels of need for pupils with EHCPs transferring from primary, with surprise about some pupils who had not been through this process, but also about others whose EHCPs were still active[13].

5.6 Some secondary Heads queried whether the Authority was clear enough about its own expectations of the provision that should be ordinarily available in mainstream schools. Work is currently in hand to co-produce a document that sets this out, as a reference point for schools, parents and other relevant agencies[14]. A number of those interviewed cited the lack of a dedicated SEN school improvement adviser who could provide a focus for this development and help ensure a stronger and more consistent mainstream SEND offer.

5.7 The situation is complicated by the national requirement that schools should draw on their delegated budgets to fund the 'first £6k' of provision for pupils with EHCPs. This has increasingly tended to dominate discussions of notional SEND budgets in local areas, with more inclusive schools feeling they are penalised by having to use their general SEND budget more than others for this purpose. Some Heads and SENCos also felt that this model of funding encouraged parents to expect '1:1 support' when needs might be better met through some form of group provision.

Working with parents

5.8 There was evidence from the discussions with parents' representatives of variable relationships with schools. Some parents report positive communication and joint work to address issues and concerns. Others report more negative experiences, including:
(i) parental concerns not being listened to or followed up
(ii) unwillingness to make reasonable adjustments (as expected by disability legislation).
(iii) need for more systematic involvement in review so that parents have a better understanding of whether progress is reasonable and provision appropriate)

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[13] Some of this was ascribed to the influence of parental factors/demand on decisions
[14] This was identified as an aspect of good practice in the recent DFE research on managing High Needs expenditure at local area level:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1084458/DFE_HN_Budget_case_study_report.pdf

(iv) uncertainty as to whether expectations of schools are reasonable

(v) barriers to admission

(vi) issues around transition and phase transfer

(vii) variations in staff understanding, quality, confidence and skills

5.9   While issues are not universal (and there is excellent practice in some schools), they appear to be leading to some loss of confidence among parents more generally in the quality of school-based support and a tendency to believe that EHCPs are the only mechanism by which they can ensure their children's needs can be adequately met.

5.10   The volume of EHC needs assessment requests (and associated statutory activity) is meaning that there is less capacity for parental support and mediation, both from SENDIASS and from local authority services.

External support services

5.10   The extent of support service capacity in Southampton has diminished considerably over the last few years. This is partly due to pressures on High Needs budgets from rising numbers of pupils being placed in specialist provision (and associated costs) and partly on broader budget issues which have limited the LA's capacity to invest as much as they would like in early intervention services.

5.11   Although the Early Years Advisory Team has reduced its staffing, it is still able to provide broader SEND support to settings as well as targeted input for individual children with more significant needs. However, the volume of requests for support has risen, with settings reporting considerable impact of loss of early intervention capacity (particularly in more disadvantaged areas[15]) and lack of early educational experience during the pandemic/lockdown period.

5.12   The Authority also maintains a Portage service which is mainly focused on support to parents and families of children with significant disabilities (with some input to settings where this is relevant). There are good links between the teams and with Health services (particularly the specialist health visitors who provide a point of communication between Education and more universal early years health providers). An Early Years Panel meets regularly, involving a range of relevant services. This receives Health notifications, coordinates service inputs and considers whether EHC needs assessments may be appropriate.

5.13   There are a number of different teams providing advice and support to mainstream schools. Outreach for pupils with learning and/or behavioural difficulties and ASD is provided by Springwell. Capacity used to be much bigger with support being delivered by a number of different special schools. The budget is now considerably

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[15] Sure Start, Children's Centres etc

reduced (£216k), with an expectation that the service covers a wide range of needs and both the primary and secondary sector. This is a comparatively small resource compared with that available in some other LAs. Rising staffing costs within a fixed budget have also meant that Springwell school has had to subsidise the service from its core budget in order to try and maintain current outreach capacity. With increased financial pressures in school, this is no longer viable. Additional funding has now been put in to recognise this.

5.14 The service endeavours to help schools build capacity (through training and consultancy) as well as responding to individual pupil concerns. There is a core allocation of visits to all schools[16], which enables Heads and SENCos to determine priorities. Additional inputs are now subject to a financial charge. Take up from schools is high at the primary phase (over 90%) but lower for secondary (less than 60%)

5.15 The Head of Outreach has also taken responsibility for coordinating the primary and secondary SENCo 'hubs' which are intended to support local networking and sharing of good practice.

5.16 Although the Local Authority commissions the outreach service from Springwell, there is no formal service level agreement that sets out expected staffing levels, model of working or desired outcomes and there has been limited external review.

5.17 Other SEN support service teams include:

(i)   The Specialist Teaching Advisory Service:

This service provides advice and support for children and young people with hearing or visual impairments from early years to post 16. The service manager also oversees the high-cost equipment budget for pupils with physical disabilities. There is no capacity to provide advice and support for such pupils in mainstream. Where needed, this is provided on an informal basis by Cedar special school.

The service budget is relatively large compared to similar provision in other comparable Authorities, but this includes the costs of the resource base for deaf/HI pupils at Newlands primary school (which would normally be funded and managed separately).

Funding is provided from the Authority's High Needs Block.

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[16] There is no differentiation between schools to take account of different levels of need

(ii)   *The Language Intervention Team*:

Commonly referred to as the 'SALSA[17]' service, this team provides advice and support to mainstream schools with regard to pupils with speech, language and communication needs. It was originally created as an alternative to speech and language unit provision and was focused on KS1. However, the service is now offered to all school phases, albeit on a mainly traded basis. The service's core budget[18] is around £87k.

The model is successful in helping to defuse some of the pressures for 1:1 speech and language therapy that are being experienced in many other Boroughs. There is an emphasis on building capacity (given the high frequency of these kinds of needs) but scope too for individual pupil involvement. However, there can be a tension between what schools say they want (and the need to derive income) and what the service thinks they may need, which makes the school improvement function less coherent.

While the service is offered to schools across the city, only around 50% of primary schools currently buy into this, which means that common understandings and approaches cannot be guaranteed.

5.18   Advice and support to mainstream schools and settings is also provided by the Authority's Educational Psychology Service (EPS). The service is partly funded from the LA's core budget (for its statutory SEN and strategic activity) and partly through income generation[19]. Two-thirds of income is generated through sold services to schools. The rest comes from engagement by other LA service teams (eg LAC, Youth Justice Board etc) or city-wide project activity.

5.19   There is a universal free offer to all schools, which allows a basic level of consultation[20] with every school having a named link EP. Schools can then choose to purchase additional time for further consultation, involvement with individual pupils and/or project/training activity. Most schools buy in some level of EP capacity. Staff have a good level of skills and experience, and recruitment appears to be less of an issue than in some LAs nationally.

5.20   There has been a strong tradition in Southampton of support for emotional literacy, which the EPS helped to develop. Many schools have trained 'ELSAs[21]' on their staff and the EPS remains involved in their ongoing training.

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[17] Speech and Language Support Assistants
[18] Funded from the HNB
[19] Currently a 50/50 split
[20] Along with access where needed to critical incident support
[21] Emotional literacy support assistants

5.21 Despite the service's efforts to provide a balance of activity, the rise in number of EHC needs assessments is having some impact on its ability to support schools at an earlier stage and there is only limited involvement now with children and settings in the early years.

5.22 While CAMHS was not specifically included in this review, schools volunteered their positive experience of the Mental Health in Schools project, which they felt was providing access to advice, intervention and support in a relatively responsive way. This was helping to address some of their ongoing frustrations with access to CAMHS support and levels of family engagement with this service.

5.23 The current organisation, structure and funding base of Southampton's SEN support services present a number of challenges:

(i) Management is dispersed across the system, with the risk that services can end up working in parallel, with differing priorities and the potential for duplication

(ii) Although there is an emphasis within all service teams on capacity-building/training, this is not well-coordinated. There is no overall policy, for example, on what training should be provided for free and what it is reasonable to expect schools to pay for, or any clear overview of impact

(iii) The trading basis of some services means that developments are based on schools' willingness to pay, which can be a barrier to ensuring more locally consistent approaches (eg to meeting the needs of pupils with ASD[22])

(iv) Capacity for intervention and support at individual pupil level is thin, which may be contributing to escalation of difficulties in some key areas of concern (eg ASD/SEMH). Some of the SENCos interviewed considered that the recent growth in EHC needs assessment requests might be partly due to a reduction in the availability of external advice and support

Therapy support

5.24 Funding and provision of therapy support varies significantly across the country. In Southampton, the situation has been relatively straightforward, with one CCG[23] commissioning most therapy services for children and one provider (Solent), which also provides support to children in some neighbouring Authorities.

5.25 The CCG funds a core offer for children in the early years, with involvement in Southampton's multiagency disability assessment team (Jigsaw) and some broader input (drop-ins/access through the Early Years Panel). There is also a core offer for school-age pupils, which is delivered by Solent's integrated therapy team (involves

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[22] The Authority has initiated an Autism in Schools project (jointly with Health) but this is currently focused on only a small number of schools (based on interest)

[23] Clinical Commissioning Group

physio, speech and language therapy and OT). Access to the service is not dependent on whether a child has an EHCP, although priority is given to them when there are capacity issues/staff shortages.

5.26 All schools have a named link from the therapy team. However, the service is still accessed on a referrals basis, with decisions being made on the basis of a 'prioritisation score' (based on level/type of need and expected impact/outcomes). While physiotherapy tends to be targeted at known individuals, speech and language therapy support works more flexibly, with a focus on supporting school staff. Where there are multiple referrals from one school, the therapist will typically visit to agree inputs and priorities. There is limited OT capacity and a long waiting list for this kind of support.

5.27 There are some links between speech and language therapists and the Language Intervention Team, although generally they do not share caseloads.

5.28 Some schools have chosen to buy in an enhanced level of service from the therapy team (or in some cases from private providers)

5.29 The CCG in Southampton has continued to give priority to funding therapy services, wherever these are delivered. However, there are some concerns that a shift to a much larger commissioning body (and a greater focus on achieving budget economies) may lead to less willingness for Health to invest in school-focused services and disrupt local funding arrangements.

Additional funding for individuals with significant needs

5.30 In Southampton, access to additional funding for pupils in mainstream schools is managed through the EHC needs assessment process. There is currently no other mechanism apart from a small amount of funding for pupils with medical needs where there are no associated SEND issues.

5.31 The latest figures (as at 15/11/22) show a total of 857 Southampton pupils in mainstream schools receiving additional funding through EHCPs (789 in state schools within the City and over 68 in schools in neighbouring Boroughs). The cost of mainstream school top-ups in 2021/22 (when numbers were lower) was nearly £5.6m. Most of this was linked to pupils in primary schools (£3.27m vs £2.33m in secondary).

5.32 Numbers in any one primary school (at November 2022[24]) range from 1 to 22 (from 0.4 to 6.9% of the school population). Numbers in secondary schools vary from 6 to 59 (from 0.7 to 4.7% of the school population). There is no clear link between numbers with EHCPs and the percentage of pupils on SEN support (see Tables 1a and 1b below).
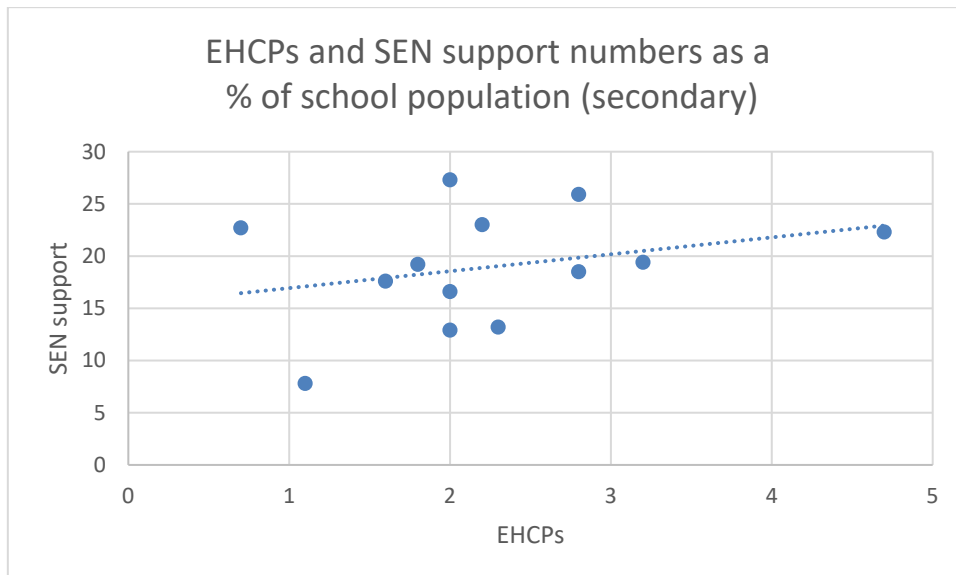
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[24] Not including pupils in SEN centres/resource bases

Table 1a: Graph showing relationship between % of pupils with EHCPs and % on SEN support in all Southampton primary schools
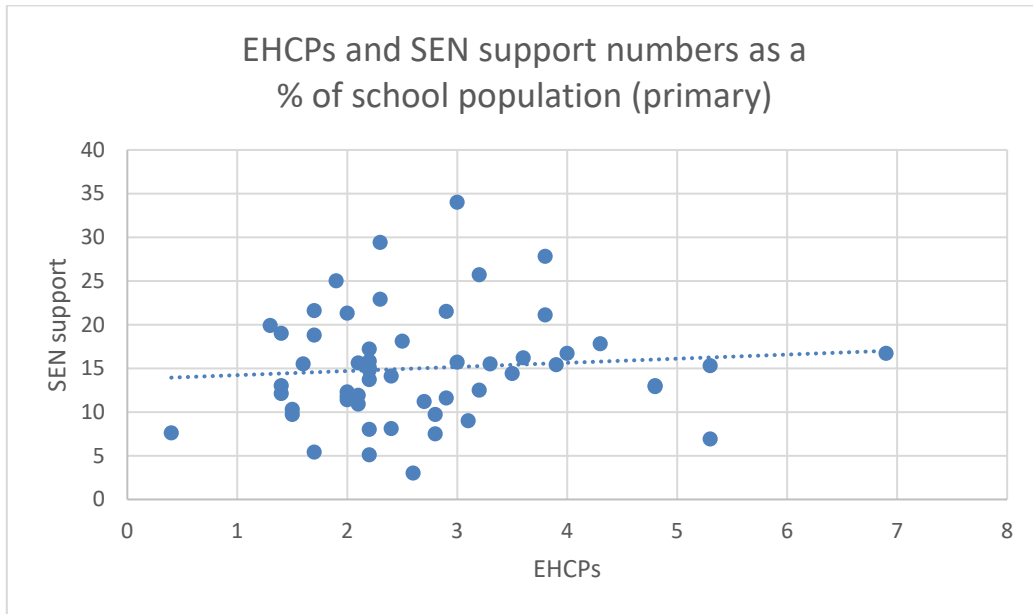
Table 1b: Graph showing relationship between % of pupils with EHCPs and % on SEN support in all Southampton secondary schools

5.33 This data can be interpreted in a number of different ways. For example:

(i)   Pupils with EHCPs have complex and significant needs that cannot be predicted by schools' overall demography. They are likely to occur anywhere (and in varying numbers).

(ii)   Some schools with higher overall levels of SEND are more used to dealing with these issues/have better provision in place (meaning that they may be less inclined to request additional funding).

(iii)   Schools may differ in their thresholds for recording pupils as 'SEN support': where there is a higher incidence of pupils with difficulties, there may be less inclination to identify them as needing support individually

(iv)   Some schools are more inclusive or are seen by parents as being better able to meet children's needs (which affects their school choices).

5.34   There was some evidence from this review that differences between schools in the percentage of pupils with EHCPs may reflect different levels of inclusiveness (actual/perceived). There was some evidence too of informal signposting by professionals and parents to schools that had a particularly strong reputation for good SEN practice. This presents challenges not just in terms of a fair distribution of need but also in terms of funding pressures: schools with higher numbers of EHCPs have to draw more heavily on their delegated budgets[25] than others who are able to deploy this resource more generally[26].

5.35   There was also evidence of differences in thresholds for additional funding applications. Decisions all go through the statutory assessment panels, which are attended by a range of officers. There is limited capacity for mainstream Heads and SENDCos to be involved in this process, given the frequency and length of panel meetings, and therefore few opportunities for peer support and challenge. While the Panels try hard to be consistent in their decision-making (and turn down a number of applications), there was some evidence of variability in the thresholds for making requests, which link partly to school expectations and experience and partly to the influence of parental factors.

5.36   There is a budget of around £550k for additional funding in Early Years settings[27]. Funding is mainly derived from the Early Years Block[28], with a few children receiving EHCP allocations, particularly in the period leading up to school transfer. There is a high volume of applications which are mostly agreed[29], usually for fixed periods (with settings needing to reapply). There appears to be some discrepancy between thresholds between early years and school phases, with some parents expecting 1:1 support on school transfer which would be seen as inappropriate at this phase. There can also be difficulties in maintaining additional support because of the

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[25] To find the 'first £6k of support'.
[26] There is no mechanism in the current local school funding formula that takes this into account
[27] £600k was allocated this year to reflect increases in demand
[28] The High Needs Block covers the cost of Portage and the Early Years SEND Advisory Team
[29] Referrals are processed by the Early Years Advisory Team

difference between the early years and school phase funding systems. Some LAs provide transition funding at this stage (without an EHCP requirement) to support more successful transfers and reduce the need for EHCPs when support is only needed for a defined period.

5.37   Currently early years settings have to initiate a large number of EHC needs assessment requests to support admission into school, which takes a significant amount of their time while providing them with few direct funding benefits.

5.38   There are currently 346 Southampton students with EHCPs in mainstream FE with a further 35 in local 6th form colleges. Not all receive additional funding. Current spend on this type of provision is around £830k. The funding picture is complex because of the number of cross-border placements and the ways in which places are agreed and funded. A range of colleges are used, with no single major provider. Southampton City College (which is relatively central) does not have a strong tradition of provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities and is currently only funded for 50 places, with only 35 of these being Southampton residents. On the other hand, Totton College (run by NACRO) tends to specialise in providing for this group, with 71 students from Southampton and 211 with EHCPs overall[30].

5.39   The impact of student and parent choice means that it can be difficult to predict numbers of places required and where students will be going. This can mean that colleges are not always aware early enough of the extent and nature of students' needs (and the support they may require). It also means that it is difficult to staff colleges on a predictable basis, with most funding still coming through on an individual basis.

Specialist and alternative provision

5.40   Overall spend on special school provision in Southampton is substantial (nearly £21.6m including placements in the independent/non-maintained school sector). The percentage of pupils attending such provision is higher than average for unitary Authorities and there has been an ongoing increase over the recent period, with a waiting list for places. Overall, placements in specialist and alternative provision now account for around x% of the overall HN spend. While this is an important form of support for pupils with SEND, it draws more heavily on HNB funding and it therefore needs to focus consistently on those with the greatest need.

5.41   Although special schools reported that admissions were becoming more complex, there are still a number of those placed whose needs are not significantly greater than others who remain in mainstream[31]. When there is a higher number of pupils in specialist provision, there is likely to be an increasing blur between some of those

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[30] Over 50% of the college population
[31] Particularly at the secondary phase

placed outside of mainstream schools and others that remain. It can also reflect differences between schools in levels of inclusion and variation in the quality of mainstream provision.

5.42   Southampton has had a positive history of collaborative involvement of schools in managing pupils at risk of exclusion. Permanent exclusion rates are relatively low despite levels of need in some schools. In the secondary phase, there has been an active and supportive Fair Access/Inclusion Panel consisting of assistant heads or deputies. This is currently needing to be refreshed, following the Government's introduction of the new Admissions Code and some turnover in leadership in local schools. Secondary school capacity has been recently enhanced through the devolution of some of the funding of the secondary pupil referral unit (Compass) and the strengthening of in-house alternative pathways.

5.43   While there is also collaboration at primary school level, with cluster representatives attending the primary inclusion group (PHIG), some issues were raised about the current model of provision and support. Springwell outreach has lost a key member of staff who tended to specialise in this area and, although Compass does provide some primary places, these are typically part-time and used to support transfer to longer-term specialist provision. Southampton's primary SEMH school (Vermont) has experienced a significant rise in demand, with a number of pupils admitted who have missed a considerable amount of formal schooling.

5.44   Compared to some other LAs, Southampton has a relatively small number of mainstream resource bases/additionally resourced provisions. There are two bases for deaf/HI pupils (one primary and one secondary). The primary base has recently moved to a new school (Newlands), with staffing managed and funded through the Authority's Specialist Teaching Advisory Team. The secondary base currently has no Southampton pupils, and the specialist teacher has recently been off on maternity leave. Discussions are now in process to bring this resource under the management of the Authority's service. This will have the benefit of being able to deploy staffing across peripatetic and base functions depending on needs[32].

5.45   There are three bases in Southampton primary schools which are managed by Springwell special school. This provision is relatively unique in so far as:

(i)   it is age-phased, with children attending one primary school at KS1 and then moving on to 2 further bases in different schools as they move up through the system

(ii)   placements are decided by Springwell (in consultation with parents), with pupils typically starting their primary career at the special school and moving

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[32] Incidence of significant hearing loss is now more unpredictable/variable

into the bases from there if this is considered to be a suitable option for them. Direct admissions into the bases from other schools are rare.

(iii) Levels of access to mainstream classes are relatively limited (particularly from YR to Y4), with teaching mainly happening in the base

(iv) Progression is typically to special school at secondary transfer, with no secondary equivalent

(v) Staffing is determined by Springwell and funded through their core school budget

(vi) The range of needs is quite broad, with pupils with learning delay as well as some with ASD and varying levels of learning difficulty

(vii) There is an uneven distribution across the City with two schools being located close to Springwell and the other across the other side of town

Class sizes are quite small (6-8), with relatively favourable staffing levels, which are intended to support mainstream access, as well as base teaching, when this occurs.

5.46   There are no specific resource bases for ASD at primary level. However, there is a secondary provision at Bitterne Park (ARB[33]), which caters for pupils with ASD and the ability to follow a mainstream curriculum. This was originally opened for a small number of pupils with complex needs (who were finding it difficult to engage with school or who might otherwise have gone to special schools out of the City). However, numbers have increased considerably (now over 50). The provision operates quite separately to the main school, with its own budget (including AWPUs which the base lead uses to 'buy in' inputs from specialist subject teachers). Access to mainstream lessons for most pupils is relatively limited.

6.   POSITIVES OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

6.1   Despite academisation, Southampton has managed to retain a collaborative ethos, with good relationships between schools and with the LA and some structures that support this (clusters, inclusion panels etc). There is a shared commitment to meeting the needs of the local community.

6.2   There is a strong SENCo network at secondary school level, with opportunities to share and review practice.

6.3   There is positive support to early years settings, with a focus on the development of inclusive practice as well as targeted involvement with young children with significant and complex needs. Communication between Health and Education at this stage is good.

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[33] Autism Resource Base

6.4 Support for pupils with speech and language needs is well-established, with a good level of investment from Health and a school-focused language intervention team. The Educational Psychology Service has retained a capacity to provide support and advice beyond its statutory role. Springwell continues to prioritise its outreach activity even though overall capacity has reduced.

6.5 There is mainstream involvement in the Authority's SEN decision-making processes and in managing pupils who are at risk of exclusion. The percentage of pupils who are permanently excluded in Southampton has remained lower than the national and unitary average.

6.6 There are examples of inclusive practice across the age spectrum, in the early years, primary and secondary phases and post 16. Primary schools are extending their own capacity, with external support, with a particular focus on emotional literacy and behaviour. There are also developments in the secondary phase, with a broader range of learning pathways in some schools and moves towards greater ownership and responsibility for subject and pastoral staff.

6.7 Inclusion is a key focus within the Authority's new Education Strategy, with the aim of strengthening and clarifying provision that should be ordinarily available in mainstream schools and the development of an inclusion charter.

6.8 The Authority places a strong emphasis on communication with parents. Positive relationships are being re-established with the local Parent Carer Forum and there is a desire to pick up and address any emerging issues.

6.9 The High Needs Block funds the Portage early intervention service which helps strengthen parental capacity and ensure that very young children with complex disabilities get off to a good start.

7. KEY ISSUES

7.1 Southampton currently faces some significant challenges relating to historic overspends and increasing demands. While additional Government money has helped to address existing deficits, there is little new resource available for further investment. Any available capacity will need to be carefully targeted.

7.2 The main focus of the Authority's financial strategy to date has been on extending local capacity/numbers of places in specialist provision to help reduce reliance on higher cost placements in the independent/non-maintained sector). This is an important agenda. However, attention will also need to be given to managing the growing demand. A key aspect of this should be ensuring that the mainstream SEND offer is as strong and consistent as possible.

Strategy

7.2   While the Authority's education strategy emphasises developments in inclusive practice as a key priority, it is less clear how these will be achieved. Leadership responsibilities will need to draw on both school improvement and SEND functions and this may be difficult in the absence of a dedicated substantive SEN improvement adviser role within the Authority.

7.3   While a number of external support service teams place an emphasis on capacity-building in the mainstream sector, this is not co-ordinated. Activity is tending to be led by different specialisms or linked to individual service trading targets. The dispersal of management within existing structures may be adding to these issues.

7.4   There is a particular need for a coordinated focus on areas that schools and settings are finding increasingly challenging (eg ASD and SEMH). A significant proportion of the growth in demand relates to these two types of need.

7.5   Opportunities for SENCos to share good practice appear to be less well developed in Southampton than in some other LAs, particularly at the primary phase and there is limited use of secondment of mainstream staff into SEND development roles.

Variability in mainstream school practice

7.6   There is evidence from this review of variability between schools, at both primary and secondary phases. Current SEND decision-making systems involve limited peer support and challenge and schools differ in their thresholds for requesting additional funding. Parents report positive experience with some schools (communication and collaboration) but more difficulties with others.

7.7   There are also differences in inclusiveness between phases, with a significant number of pupils moving out of mainstream schools around primary-secondary transfer. There is a view that there are some schools that are less receptive to admissions and some that are seen by parents to have a more inclusive offer. Numbers of pupils at Great Oaks special school have risen significantly over recent years and there is a cohort of pupils who might be expected to access mainstream in other areas.

7.8   Numbers in the Autism Resource Base have also risen significantly, and the provision is now at capacity. It will be important that all secondary schools are able to offer a good level of support to pupils with these kinds of needs, given the increase in volume of diagnosis.

7.8   A recent summary of available reviews of international research on the impact of mainstream inclusion by the author of this report (in conjunction with Professors Brahm Norwich and Rob Webster) shows positive effects for most children with

SEND in terms of academic and personal/social outcomes, and positive/neutral impact on outcomes for their mainstream peers (Norwich, Gray & Webster, in press).

7.9   The evidence showed that effects are mediated by the degree to which schools and teachers recognise the need to respond to the diverse needs of their learners and their skills and confidence in doing so. This has implications for the level of training and support that schools need to help them address these.

Current funding approach

7.10   There is variable knowledge about the level of funding for SEND in schools/colleges' core budgets. This needs to be more transparent, with clearer expectations about levels of investment to help ensure consistency and equivalent priority across the sector and evaluate impact.

7.11   Southampton's current system of accessing additional funding in mainstream schools and colleges is a traditional one, requiring statutory processes with all their associated positives and issues. While the system offers a sense of longer-term entitlement, it is not dynamic and funding allocations tend not to be actively reviewed. This means that some pupils hold on to resources longer than they need to, while others miss out on funding that could have prevented escalation of issues, if it had been provided at the right time[34].

7.12   Statutory assessments are also susceptible to demand pressures, from parents who are more familiar with the system and have the personal resources to negotiate it, and from some schools that consider they have a particular funding need. Conventional decision-making processes do not adequately address differences in thresholds for cases being put forward, leading to a level of inequity.

7.13   This kind of funding system also promotes inflexible use of additional resources, with parents feeling that a high level of '1:1' support is required on an ongoing basis and limited incentives to promote a greater level of independence (Webster & DeBoer 2019).

7.14   While there is still access to some external support, it is increasingly important to create more structured opportunities for peer support and challenge. School cluster groupings with clear leadership/facilitation and funding have proved a very effective resource in some other parts of the country and are now being developed in a number of other LAs, both as an aid to school improvement and as a means for targeting resources on a more equitable basis.

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[34] The current system for funding early years settings is more responsive in this regard.

Parental confidence

7.15 Considerable work is still needed to strengthen parental confidence in schools' ability to meet pupil needs. Currently, there is over reliance on statutory assessment to ensure needs are met, with some conflict with schools who may not feel this is necessary. Good communication and active engagement with parents are key. Not all issues require 'big' solutions, just greater clarity about what parents can reasonably expect. Some local areas have found it useful to develop a 'good practice' charter as a mutual reference point, building on the example first developed in Rotherham.

Transitions

7.16 There was evidence from this review of problematic transitions for parents and schools as children move through the phases of education. Differing systems and funding expectations between early years settings and mainstream primary schools are leading to an increasing requirement for statutory assessment to support admission at that stage. Literal application of the EHCP consultation process at primary-secondary transfer is leading to a heavy administrative load for staff in secondary schools and negative experience for some parents who can experience several rejections. The system is heavily paperwork-based and encourages schools with no prior knowledge of pupil needs, to adopt a cautious position on their ability to address these.

7.17 While parental 'choice' has become an increasing feature in the education landscape, both for pupils with SEND and more generally, the current process does not support the development of greater familiarity and understanding which would help guide both parent and school decisions more effectively. It also encourages more last-minute planning when it is known that discussions are better informed and more positive if they happen well in advance of transfer.

7.18 Even where communication between schools and with parents has been reasonable, it is still important that transitions are more personalised from the child/young person's point of view. The most effective approach tends to be for next phase 'keyworkers' to be identified so that they can get to know pupils in advance and provide a clear point of contact for parents with regard to any emerging concerns.

7.19 The diversity of the post 16/college 'market' has some positives in terms of the range of opportunities for young adults with different types/levels of need. However, there could be a case for strengthening the offer for students with learning disabilities in *all* establishments, so that they can access suitable education more locally. More predictable pathways would also assist in financial planning for this cohort of pupils.

Organisation and focus of mainstream resource bases

7.20   The new model for HI/deaf provision is a sensible one, given the varying incidence of pupils with severe/profound hearing loss, the impact of cochlear implants and parental preference. However, there needs to be a balance between supporting access for pupils wherever possible to their local school and placement decisions based on economies of scale and disability identity. This needs to be the subject of formal discussions between the head of the Specialist Teaching Advisory Team and the LA (as commissioner of this resource). Any gaps in provision and support leading to out of city placements should also be reviewed to help ensure all needs can be met locally.

7.21   Consideration needs to be given to the current focus and extent of ASD resource base provision and to where this should fit along the continuum. While there is clearly need to ensure local capacity is as strong as possible, creating new provision does not always have an impact if it is not clearly targeted at where it is needed. The Authority will also need to review what level of ASD it expects all schools to be able to meet, to ensure a strong universal offer and avoid resource base schools becoming a magnet for parental choice.

7.22   The Springwell mainstream class model has not been reviewed by the Authority for some time and may need redesign. In particular, consideration needs to be given to:

(i)   Whether admissions should continue to come solely from Springwell school or be a broader resource for pupils in the mainstream primary sector

(ii)   Whether pupils attending the classes full time should be on the roll of the host school (rather than Springwell as currently)

(iii)   Whether funding should lie with Springwell or be delegated to the host school to manage

(iv)   Whether needs should continue to be generic (or focus on particular types of difficulty eg ASD)

(v)   Whether the classes should continue to be based within three separate schools with children moving between these as they progress through primary

(vi)   Whether there could be stronger local area linkage, to cut down on travel distance/costs/time

(vii)   What should be the expected pathways for secondary transition

8.   SUPPORTING AND FUNDING PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM: ADDRESSING THE ISSUES:

8.1   Positive progress is already being made in addressing some of the issues identified above. However, some significant system and cultural changes are also needed to help

improve practice and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs. These are set out below:

Transparency of school SEN funding

8.2 Information on notional SEN budgets should be more widely available and be a reference point for Heads, SENDCos and governors in schools and for key local authority services. Clearer mainstream accountability for SEND outcomes is likely to be a theme from the national SEND review[35] and for future inspection activity.

Support and challenge

8.3 Consideration should be given to further strengthening external support, particularly for pupils with ASD and/or SEMH, given the growing pressures in these areas and the high percentage of EHCPs where ASD is the primary need. Services will need to play a key role in helping schools better meet these needs and help manage levels of demand for additional resources and specialist/alternative provision. The Authority should also consider the re-establishment of a dedicated post for SEND school improvement.

8.4 Consideration should be given to the development of formal school clusters (involving both primary and secondary schools to support more effective transitions, and with the potential to extend to include representatives from local early years settings). These could be a strong source of peer support and challenge, as well as playing a role in the better targeting of High Needs resources[36].

Models for additional funding

8.5 There is no legal requirement that *any* level of additional funding has to be determined by EHCPs. Some LAs use systems which allocate resources through other means. The best of these involve schools more collectively in identifying priorities, through a structured process of peer moderation. This allows pupils with more complex needs to be targeted more consistently as well as offering the opportunity for support and advice from colleagues in other mainstream schools where this is needed.

8.6 For example, a number of Authorities have devolved a proportion of the mainstream HN budget to local clusters of schools (usually cross-phase) with SENDCos working together to deploy this resource in a more focused and dynamic way. Cluster leads also work together with LA officers and services to encourage consistency and ensure

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[35] To be published late spring/early summer this year
[36] Some level of devolution of HN funding to clusters could be included, as has happened in some other Authorities, so that needs can be met more flexibly/without recourse to statutory processes. Service capacity (eg EPS; speech and language therapy) could also be deployed at this level, giving schools a more collective role in identifying priorities/focus

that any remaining funding held centrally is targeted at those with the most significant/complex needs.

8.7 In other areas, a proportion of funding has been devolved to individual schools (to enhance their in-house capacity), with collective commitment (and associated processes) to ensure remaining resources are properly focused and managed.

8.8 In all these cases, it is important that both schools and parents have confidence in the system, with a focus on how children's needs will be met (with or without additional funding) and on working together to achieve positive outcomes.

8.9 A system that involves stronger cross-phase working also helps to improve communication at points of transition as children are already 'known. It can also enable a more coordinated and focused input from external support services, both in terms of pupil level intervention and development of school capacity.

8.10 There would be considerable advantages in the Southampton context to move in this direction:

i) It would build on existing strengths in relationships between schools and commitment to meeting the needs of the local community

ii) It would help extend good practice across all mainstream schools and achieve a more consistent and high quality 'mainstream offer'

iii) It would provide a more dynamic system for additional funding, in which schools had a greater 'stake'

iv) It would help identify more consistently those pupils with more significant/ complex needs who should be a priority for additional support or placement in specialist provision

v) It would strengthen relationships between local schools and support service practitioners

vi) There is the potential for greater alignment over time between funding systems operating in different sectors (early years/school/FE college)

9. RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS

9.1 System change is a complex process and requires active engagement of all stakeholders, as well as strong and consistent leadership from the LA. There are time and budget constraints for both schools and the Authority, but experience elsewhere has shown that this can lead to improvements both for professionals and families, but also better outcomes for children and young people. The current system, as it stands, is unlikely to be financially sustainable.

9.2   It is recommended that, as an initial step, this report is shared with relevant parties, through a series of briefings[37].

9.3   Following consideration by key officers, a Task & Finish Group should be established involving mainstream Heads and SENDCos and relevant LA personnel (SEN and Schools Finance). Parents will be a group to consider in moving forward and it is recommended that they are represented through the involvement of SENDIASS/PCF.

9.4   The group should be established as soon as possible with a clear agenda and timelines. The aim should be to develop a new approach to mainstream funding that could be shared with all schools and other relevant stakeholders as a model to be decided.

9.5   Implementation would be likely to start from September 2023, although some steps could be taken before then. The Authority should consider making some new money available for this development, as part of their DBV grant application.

References:

Norwich, Gray and Webster (2021): Impact of mainstream inclusion on pupils with SEND and their non-disabled peers: summary available on the SEN Policy Research Forum website: www.senpolicyresearchforum.co.uk

Marsh, Gray and Norwich (in press): Analysis of factors underlying differences in High Needs Block allocations to Local Authorities in England

Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (2019): Contrasting responses to diversity: school placement trends for all Local Authorities in England: 2014-2017

Webster & De Boer (2019) Teaching assistants: their role in the inclusion, education and achievement of pupils with special educational needs, European Journal of Special Needs Education, 34:3, 404-407

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[37] Including Schools Forum/the High Needs Funding Subgroup, and then all mainstream Heads and SENCos

Appendix 1:   List of interviewees:

Head of Education
Head of Service (SEN & Disability)
Education Strategy Lead
Chair of Schools Forum
Schools Finance Officer
Acting Head of SEND Casework Team
Principal EPs
Head of Outreach and Head Teacher (Springwell)
Head of Specialist Teaching Advisory Team
Head of Language Intervention Team
Head of Early Years and Early Years SEN service
Early Years Advisory Teachers
Inclusion/exclusions manager
Designated Clinical Officer (Health)
Children's therapy services manager

Group of primary heads
Group of secondary heads
Groups of primary SENCos
Group of secondary SENCos
EYs provider (x1)

Interview with SENDIASS lead and chair of Parent Carer Forum

Visits to:

Springwell classes at Mason Moor and Bitterne CofE primary
Provision for deaf/HI pupils at Newlands Primary
Bitterne Park ARB
Southampton City College
Totton College

(special schools visited as part of earlier funding review)

Documents and data:

Education strategy: 2022-2027
Reports to Schools Forum on High Needs expenditure (various)
Delivering Better Value Module 1 output (Newton Europe)
Data for DFE SEN2 return (November 2022)
Summary of HNB spend (2021/22)

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