

SEND funding: longer-term changes - Call for evidence

1. Purpose of the Report

To consider the response to the Department for Education's call for evidence on funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

2. Recommendation

- 1) To comment on the responses in Appendix A

3. Details

- 3.1 In July 2014 when the government announced the extra funding of £390m to those local authorities they believed to be the lowest funded, they indicated they wished to review the distribution of funding for pupils with high-cost SEND. At the time the minister said this would be a priority for reform during the next parliament and the reforms would support the changes in the Children and Families Act 2014.
- 3.2 The current government do not have fixed plans at the moment but are planning for a distribution that is more formulaic, and less based on past levels of allocation. The review is planned to cover the distributing of funds relating to SEND from national to local level and from local level to institutions.
- 3.3 To help them the DFE have commissioned some research, which is being undertaken by Isos Partnership.
- 3.4 Firstly the Isos Partnership are conducting in depth fieldwork in 13 local authorities. Lewisham is not one of the authorities selected.
- 3.5 The call for evidence was issued on the 13 November 2014 and asked interested parties about how SEN funds can be distributed more fairly. The call for evidence ends on the 27 February 2015.

4. What are the earlier indicators of the likely change?

- 4.1 As part of the call for evidence a large pack of data about children and young people with SEND was published, by local authority. This included information about attainment, funding and health data such as hospital admissions, low birth weights and disability living allowances.
- 4.2 The supporting data covers not only the High Needs block but the notional level of SEN within the Schools block. The figures for Lewisham are:

2014/15 DSG settlement	
High Needs Block	£43,4m
Total DSG	£268.5m
Pupils	42,389
High Needs Block per pupil	£1,024
Rank per pupil	2
Total School Budget Funding	£191.3m
Total Notional SEN (excl. MFG)	£28,4m
Notional Sen Total - proportion of funding	14.8%
Rank %	14
Notional SEN per pupil	£669
Rank per pupil	6

The National position is shown in Appendix B to this report.

- 4.3 The above table shows that if you look at our funding we are one of the highest in the country. The exact position varies depending on the statistics you use to compare authorities but on a per pupil basis we are the second highest in the country. The issue with this funding is that it is not pupil related, opaque and not easily understood by Local Authorities. So reform in this area would be in line with some of the principles adopted for the distribution of the Schools Block. The desire for reform was first talked publicly about when the Minister announced the allocation of £390m. The approach here was for DFE to take a view on who they felt was the lowest funded and target resources towards them, not the authorities with the highest need. Under this, Lewisham did not receive any funding for the school block. It is a distinct possibility that a similar approach will be adopted and implemented in SEND. Whether ministers would have a desire to reduce authorities funding is an unknown, but there has been a reluctance to pursue this for schools' formula allocations.

5 Response

Our draft response has been drafted to highlight the need for greater transparency within the funding system and to ensure it is responsive to the needs of children and the growth in pupil numbers. It is also based on allowing as much local decision and flexibility as possible.

6. Conclusion

Our current level of funding compared to the rest of country is one of the highest. This should not be taken in isolation as needs of pupils and area costs need to be taken in account. In a time of austerity and reductions in public spending, resources will be scarce and it is likely that any available resources will be targeted to those deemed to be the lowest funded. The best case scenario for us is there is a move to link funding to the level of pupil numbers, allowing our pupil growth to be recognised and funding to follow.

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