

Allocation of Funding Growth in Specialist Places

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek agreement on the methodology for allocating funding for the growth in places in Wiltshire specialist provision from the high needs block.

Background

2. Wiltshire currently operates a growth fund within the Schools Block to fund mainstream schools for pupil growth. This is in line with National Funding Formula (NFF) criteria and is used to:
 - support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need
 - support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation
 - meet the revenue cost of new schools
3. The NFF criteria for supporting pupil growth do not extend to the expansion of places within provision funded from the High Needs Block. As part of the High Needs Sustainability Plan, Wiltshire Council is delivering significant numbers of additional places across its special schools as well as developing new Resource Base provision.
4. Currently when an expansion of specialist provision is agreed, or a new school/resource base developed, funding is put in place from the date at which the places are opened (usually the start of the academic year). It is recognised that there is a cost to the schools of recruiting and training staff in advance of new classes being opened and that this is not currently reflected in the funding model.

Main Considerations

5. It is proposed that a mechanism for supporting the significant planned growth in specialist places is put in place. Any “growth fund” for specialist places would need to be funded from the High Needs Block.
6. In the first instance Schools Forum is asked to agree a growth fund mechanism for the expansion of existing special schools and development of new special schools. The principles of any growth funding mechanism should be that funding is proportionate, predictable and applied on a formulaic basis in line with agreed criteria.
7. Schools Forum is also asked to agree that similar principles should be applied to the development of new resource base places however further work is required to finalise a methodology for resource bases in line with the principles outlined above.

Proposed Criteria

8. The proposed criteria for funding pupil growth for the expansion and development of new special school places are as follows:
- 1) Growth funding will be applied to new places being delivered as part of the Specialist SEND Place Strategy. Growth funding will not be applied to ad hoc increases in places or where a school agrees to support an additional child over the planned place number – these increases will be managed as per the current processes.
 - 2) Place funding will be applied one term in advance of the places opening. For example, if new places are to come on stream from September in any given year, place funding will commence from April. This would enable an additional 5/12ths of place funding to be utilised to support recruitment of staff, staff training, etc
 - 3) Payments will be based on the increase in planned place number agreed with the LA.
9. The principle of agreed growth fund criteria will replace any individual school level discussions in relation to “pump priming” funding.

Financial Implications

10. In the current financial year it is estimated that the cost of the proposed growth fund for special schools will be £650,000 based on planned delivery of new places.

School	Places		Difference	Growth Fund £
	Sep-23	Sep-24		
Springfield	210	250	40	166,667
Downland	90	90	0	0
Exeter House	177	210	33	137,500
Silverwood	460	510	50	208,333
SAIL	82	115	33	137,500
			156	650,000

11. This is provided for within the special school top-up budget for the 2024/25 financial year and excludes any new places covered by a separate SLA. In 2023/24 £0.499m was paid in one off “pump priming” payments to expanding special schools. Based on the numbers of new places the spend under the proposed formula would be in line with the previous year.

Proposal

12. It is proposed that:
- a) Schools Forum approve the principle that advanced funding should be allocated to support expansion of specialist places.
 - b) Schools Forum approve the criteria for allocating growth funding for the planned increase in special school places.
 - c) Schools Forum agree the principle of applying a similar approach for the development of new resource base places and agree that proposed criteria should be drawn up.

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