

Split Site Allowance – High Needs Settings

Purpose of the paper

1. To seek approval from Schools Forum to implement a methodology for applying a split site allowance for special schools or schools with Resource Bases operating over more than one site.

Background

2. In a small number of schools within Wiltshire provision is delivered across more than one site. Where those sites are distinct and require travel for pupils and/or separate administration it is recognised that there are additional costs to a school compared with single site provision. Wiltshire has traditionally supported the use of split site funding for mainstream schools within its formula, to support schools meeting a distinct criteria.
3. The current criteria for 'split site' funding, as approved by Schools Forum states

“A school will receive split site funding if, of necessity, it has 2 (or more) distinct campuses between which

 - travel, by means of a public highway of more than one mile, is required and
 - Class teaching and learning must take place on all sites with physically detached administration (i.e., on all sites).”
4. These criteria only apply to mainstream schools and do not apply to those schools set within, and funded from, the High Needs budget. This is because high needs provision is not funded through the main formula and must be funded through the place plus mechanism.
5. There are currently 7 Primary Schools within Wiltshire entitled to the split site funding. Funding rates are £65,000 for a Primary School and £100,000 for a Secondary School. The total cost of the split site allowance within the 2014-15 financial year is £455,000. Until the current financial year there has been no high needs provision delivered on a split site basis.

Funding a Split Site from the High Needs Block

6. Since September 2014, the Local Authority has become aware of two instances where schools, both funded from within the High Needs

Block, will face financial pressures from the opening of a second site to support high needs provision. In both cases the provision has been developed with the support of the LA. The schools affected are St Nicholas Special School, Chippenham, and Greentrees Primary School, Salisbury.

7. Whilst the formulaic approach and criteria within the formula for mainstream schools cannot be applied to high needs provision, Schools Forum can consider whether resources should be made available from within the high needs block to support the additional costs associated with split site provision.
8. Guidance from the Department for Education has suggested that split site funding can be awarded from the High Needs Block but not through a lump sum or formulaic allocation. Instead, any funding in respect of a split site would need to be incorporated in to the top up rates for a special school or resource base. This would result in a school specific top up rate to enable the additional costs to be recognised.
9. Schools Forum is asked to consider the principle that the costs of operating over more than one site should be recognised within high needs provision as they are within mainstream provision.

St Nicholas Special School - Chippenham

10. St Nicholas School, Chippenham has developed off-site facilities for children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties, in order to enhance the facilities at the school as well as free up space within the school to meet basic need.
11. The second site, formerly the Avon Vale Training (AVT) Building was identified at a purchase price of £337,500. The Strategic Planning and Places team secured an additional £414,000 from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) via the Demographic Growth Capital Fund (DGCF) specifically to renovate the Avon Vale Training Building.
12. The expansion of the off-site facilities has enabled the school to deliver a separate provision that will better provide for the growing needs of children and young people who attend the school. The financing for these developments has been funded by the Local Authority Accessibility money and a specific SEN grant held by the Local Authority.
13. The second site would fulfil the criteria for the mainstream split site funding, however as the DfE guidance does not extend to enabling the allowance for a special school no funding has yet been allocated to the school to support the second site.

Greentrees Primary School - Salisbury

14. Greentrees Primary School is underway with a new building for its Junior classes on a location that is 600m away from the current school site. The new school site is due to open from September 2015. The school has been asked by the LA to open up a Resource Base for 14 ASD pupils at the school in order to meet Basic Need requirements.
15. This school would not traditionally fulfil the requirements of the split site allowance, due to the second site being only 600m away from the main site. This exceptional circumstance has necessitated the requirement to consider a school-specific top-up allowance for this school in order to recognise the costs associated with the Resource Base split over two sites.
16. As with St Nicholas School, any funding would need to be met from the High Needs Block. As it is only the Resource Base, not the school, which would necessitate the funding for having a second site, any funding agreed should be proportionate to the distances between the schools.

Main Issues for Consideration

Value of split site allowance

17. The funding amounts for split sites in Primary and Secondary schools were agreed following the work of a small sub-group comprising head teachers from split site primary and secondary schools as part of the overall work on funding reform in 2012-13. The amounts of £65,000 for primary schools and £100,000 for secondary schools were felt to reflect the level of additional costs albeit that individual schools managed the provision across sites in different ways. At that time no special schools had split site provision and the costs of delivering across more than one site has therefore not been analysed in the same way. As a result it is not possible to simply apply either the primary or secondary rate as an accurate reflection of costs.
18. The School Funding Working Group considered this issue at its last meeting and, whilst the group supported the principle of a split site allowance, recommended that any split site allowance for high needs provision needed to:
 - a. Be developed as part of an agreed strategy between the LA and the school and in the context of the SEN Places strategy as it is developed;
 - b. Reflect the actual costs associated with the split site provision and therefore the school would need to provide evidence of the expected additional costs of managing the additional site to enable the agreement of funding to be considered in the overall context of the high needs block

19. In both cases the first of these criteria has been met as the additional provision has been developed in collaboration with the LA. Work would now need to take place with the schools concerned to estimate the additional costs associated with the split site provision.

Impact on Top Up Rates

20. Within Wiltshire a consistent set of banding values associated with agreed banding descriptors has been in place for special schools for many years. These were revised on the implementation of school funding reform but the principle of the same value for a pupil in a specific band across any special school still applies. More recently the same principle has been extended to Resource Base provision with the implementation of new top up rates in 2014-15.

21. The application of a split site allowance for high needs provision would require the development of school specific top up rates where a split site exists. The funding required for the additional site would need to be added to the top up rate for each band resulting, in this case, in a higher top up rate for a pupil in each band at St Nicholas School than in any other special school. This higher rate would not be because of additional needs of pupils compared with other schools but because of additional costs in the provision compared with a single site school. This principle would also apply to any split site funding agreed for Greentrees Primary School.

Overall Financial Implications

22. The cost of any split site allowance would need to be met from within the budget for top ups for high needs provision. Other papers on this agenda have highlighted the pressure that budgets within the high needs block are experiencing.

23. At this stage a split site allowance would only apply to the two settings detailed within this report. Currently there are no further plans to develop split site provision for special schools or resource bases and any further developments would need to be part of the overall place planning strategy.

24. The additional cost of split site funding needs to be considered in the context of developing quality local provision within Wiltshire schools rather than placing pupils in more costly external placements.

Proposals

25. Schools Forum agree to the principle that a split site allowance should be applied to provision funded from within the High Needs Block with the criteria recommended by the Schools Funding Working Group (paragraph 18).

- 26.** That work be carried out with St Nicholas School to identify the additional costs associate with the additional site in order to develop appropriate top up rates to be applied from September 2014.
- 27.** That specific proposals for a split site allowance for a Resource Base at Greentrees be considered at a future meeting.

Report Authors:

Liz Williams, Head of Finance

Tel: 01225 713675 e-mail: elizabeth.williams@wiltshire.gov.uk

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager

Tel: 01225 718587 e-mail: grant.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk