



Report to Schools Forum

Date: 30th June 2020

Title: High Needs Block Update

Author and/or contact officer: Liz Williams, Head of Finance (Children's Services)

Schools affected: All maintained schools and academies, FE Colleges and Early Years Settings

Recommendations:

Schools Forum is asked to note the impact of the final outturn for 2019-20 on the High Needs budget for 2020-21 and to agree the proposed approach for the development of a High Needs Block Recovery Plan.

Reason for decision: to agree the approach to reducing and monitoring costs against the High Needs Block.

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to outline the proposed approach to mitigating the continued pressures on the High Needs Block and to clarify the proposed governance of that process.

2. Current Position and Implications for Future Years

2.1. Appendix 1 to this report summarises the outturn for 2019-20 against the High Needs Block and the agreed budget for 2020-21. The outturn position highlights the key risk areas for 2020-21.

2.2. The table demonstrates that 90% of the High Needs Block spend is directly on places and top-up funding for pupils with EHCPs across all phases and placed across a range of provision and pupils placed in Alternative Provision. This means that changes to the level of spend will impact over time as many existing support packages will need to continue.

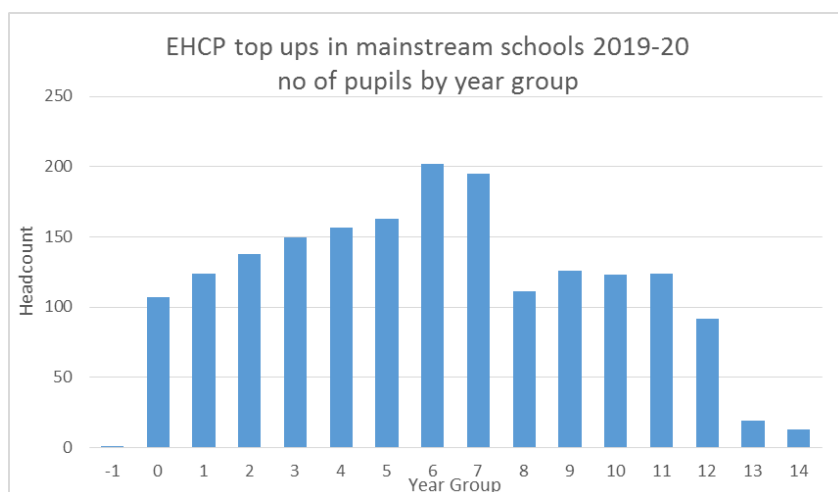
2.3. Initial modelling work carried out in November 2019 indicates that if demand continues at the current rate, across the current mix of provision, spend will increase by £7 million by the end of the 2021-22 financial year with the key areas of pressure being support for pupils with EHCPs in mainstream schools and in special schools. This projection needs to be reworked based on current activity levels and this is likely to indicate that the pressure in future years will have increased further.

2.4. The proportion of children with plans recorded in mainstream placements (including pre-school), and further education placements have increased from March 19, while those in special school and independent / non-maintained placements have decreased.

- Mainstream ↑ 1.8% - from 41.5% (1734) to 43.3% (2046).
- Special ↓ 2.8% – from 35.6% (1484) to 32.7% (1547)
- Independent / Non-maintained ↓ 0.7% - from 5.5% (231) in 2019 to 4.8% (228)
- Further Education ↑ 1.8% - from 11.3% (473) to 13.1% (619)

Please note that these increases/decreases relate to the percentage of the total number with plans at the placement type and not the actual number.

2.5. The current numbers of pupils with EHCPs in mainstream schools is spread across the different year groups as follows (as at 31st March 2020):



3. Mitigating Actions

3.1. Actions which have already been implemented include:

- Revised SEN panel procedures which will impact on the decision making processes for September 2020. This has had a significant impact on

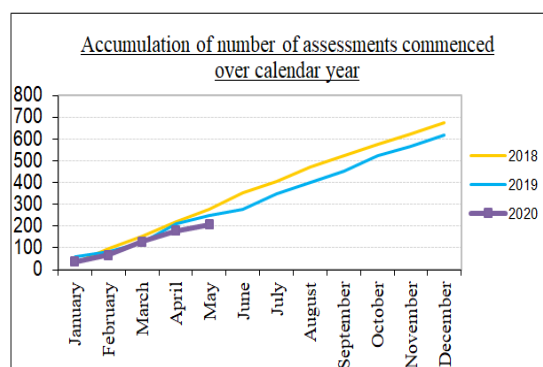
ensuring all students transferring phases of education have a school place for September 2020 named on their EHC Plans for September 2020.

Phase Transfer Deadline of 15 th February	Number / %
Next school named	385 / 97.7%
Type of school named	9 / 2.2%
Deadline not met	1 / 0.1%

A review with schools across the county is planned to improve the process even further, starting earlier and facilitating effective consultation and placement. 5 new independent placements were agreed as part of this process, 2 of equal cost when comparing local options so schools were named in line with parental preference.

- b) Review of processes for EHC Plans to ensure resource allocation is appropriate and is reviewed. A new system is in place for agreeing EHC needs assessments which is ensuring more robust decision making. 207 new EHC needs assessments have been commenced in the period January – May 2020, a 17% decrease on the previous year.

	2018	2019	2020
January	31	57	37
February	66	27	31
March	57	43	60
April	65	86	51
May	59	36	28
June	76	27	0
July	52	74	0
August	65	51	0
September	53	49	0
October	49	75	0
November	52	40	0
December	51	53	0
Average	56	52	41



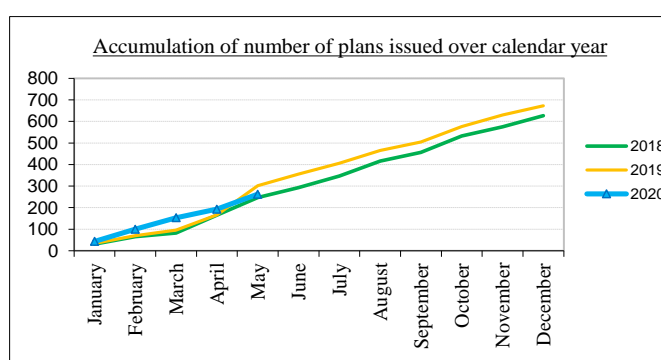
As part of the work of the Quality EHCP Impact Group, a new request for EHC needs assessment form was developed to enable correct information to be supplied to facilitate accurate decision making. , Training was rolled out to schools in the Aylesbury area, which was very well received:-

Attendees felt the materials were easy to use	55% reported they were excellent 35% reported they were good
Tasks were clearly explained	58% reported this is as excellent 32% reported this as good
Session was useful	54% reported this to be excellent 39% reported to be good
When asked if SENCOs would attend similar sessions in the future	100% said yes!

Wycombe and CSB sessions are planned during June 2020 to ensure the new request form is in full circulation.

The total numbers of new plans issued by BC for 2020 is 262. For the same period in 2019, 302 were issued, a decrease of 13%.

	2018	2019	2020
January	31	34	43
February	34	36	57
March	17	26	53
April	83	70	40
May	82	136	69
June	46	53	
July	53	51	
August	70	59	
September	40	40	
October	76	71	
November	43	54	
December	52	43	
Average	52	56	52



All of this work is focused on ensuring the students who really need the support of an EHC Plan get this, and that time / resource is not invested by all, working on requests that will not lead to EHC Plans. In May, 53% of requests for EHC needs assessments were agreed; we aim to raise this %, and reduce the number coming in – the right children at the right time.

- c) Speech and Language link – this is expected to reduce the numbers of requests for EHC Plans, focused on children aged 5-7years as an early intervention measure. Review sessions are planned this month to look at the impact of this and we can report further to the next meeting.
- d) Focus on Ordinarily Available Provision: launched in January 2020 through initial training sessions, greater highlighting of the provision that is expected to be put in place for those children at SEND Support utilising already delegated funds to schools.

Both Ordinarily Available Provision and Speech and Language Link form specific workstreams from the SEND Support Impact Group, now chaired

by the Principal Educational Psychologist, Tim Jones. Future focus is planned on SEN identification and identifying those that if left could escalate further, and providing support for these.

e) Side by Side work with schools to focus on inclusion:-

Chiltern Wood School	Project started September 2020; work supporting schools with their SEND Support offer in the Wycombe area
Stony Dean / Amersham School	Children are placed on the roll of Stony Dean School but are based in Amersham School with the support of specialist staff from the special school
Furze Down School	Utilising the MITA (Maximising Impact of Teaching Assistants) as the model for improvement, Furze Down School are supporting schools in the north of the county – Winslow / Buckingham areas

f) Review of the methodology for allocating top up funding for pupils with EHCPs; following consultation with schools a new model is proposed for the allocation of top-up funding for pupils with EHCPs. The model is needs led and is based on a number of bands. The proposal is described more fully in a separate paper on this agenda and the impact, following implementation, will be a more transparent and equitable funding system to support pupils with SEND.

4. Further Recovery Actions

4.1. In order to achieve a sustainable level of spend within the High Needs Block it will be necessary to ensure resources are allocated in the most effective way to meet need and that opportunities to intervene earlier and support pupils in local provision are maximised. There are clear dependencies between the work required to manage spend and the work to develop the key strategies in relation to SEND services. These include:

- Review of the SEND Improvement Plan



- Development of the SEND Strategy
- Development of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy

4.2. A number of key work streams are proposed as part of the High Needs recovery work:

4.2.1. Data

Accurate and up-to-date data is key to the development of the Buckinghamshire Sufficiency Strategy and understanding demand across different need types. The budget monitoring work this year has identified that we need to improve information flow relating to placement decisions and recording of need and support packages.

A key work stream will be to ensure we have accurate and timely data to inform financial planning and monitoring.

4.2.2. Commissioning and Procurement

The Sufficiency Strategy will inform commissioning priorities to enable a move away from spot purchasing of placements towards a coherent commissioning approach to our work with providers to meet needs that cannot be met in-house, underpinned by robust contractual oversight. This work stream will also include a review of how placements are procured and monitored to ensure outcomes and value for money are achieved.

4.2.3. Review of Alternative Provision

This review, to include the areas highlighted below, is to ensure we are maximising support for pupils in local provision and providing support, particularly for mainstream provision, to meet need and an emphasis on a more inclusive approach to provision (aligned to Ordinary Available Provision). Work to review ARP provision has already commenced whilst the other projects need to be scoped.

- a) Additional Resourced Provision (ARPs) in mainstream schools
- b) Pupil Referral Units
- c) Hospital and Home Tuition
- d) Specialist Teaching support
- e) SEN Support

4.2.4. Review of External Placements

A review of all external placements is required to better understand the needs that are not being met in county and whether there are opportunities to develop provision to support pupils more locally

- 4.3. A more detailed plan is attached at Appendix 2 to this report outlining some of the more detailed actions and timelines under of these headings. This plan is an initial draft and further work will be required to finalise the tasks and required resources for the different workstreams.
- 4.4. The plan will also build on the progress made against the recommendations from the recent Impower report which has been circulated to schools.
- 4.5. As previously reported the DfE has confirmed the ringfencing of DSG deficits meaning that the Council is not able to utilise its general fund to offset a DSG deficit without permission from the Secretary of State. Pressures within the High Needs Block therefore need to be met from within the overall DSG budget or from DSG reserves, which are now depleted. Proposals and actions coming forwards from these workstreams will need to include actions to reduce spend within the High Needs Block and will also need to consider whether funding needs to be allocated from other DSG blocks in order to support specific actions.

5. Governance

- 5.1. As identified above, the work to ensure spend against the High Needs Block can be sustainable going forwards is dependent on a number of other strategies and workstreams already underway.
- 5.2. It is therefore proposed that this work is closely linked to the SEND Improvement Plan work that reports in to the Integrated Services Board as well as to Schools Forum.
- 5.3. The current governance structure for the SEND Improvement Plan includes a number of Impact Groups focused on specific areas of work. It is proposed to utilise those existing groups so that the work is managed within the SEND Improvement Plan process. These groups are included in the table in Appendix 2.
- 5.4. Update reports will be presented to Schools Forum at each meeting.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. Reporting and forecasting against the High Needs Block is being developed to include activity data and unit costs. This will be reported to each Schools Forum meeting.

6.2. Development of the work on the recovery plan will be continued in line with the SEND Improvement Programme.

