**Developing provision locally: new funding for SEND:**

**Background:**

This year, Birmingham has received a substantial increase in the money it receives from central government for pupils with more complex SEND (the ‘High Needs Block’). The Authority has been working with Schools Forum to decide how this money will best be used. Some will go towards repaying deficits resulting from overspends in previous years. Extra funding is also being given to the City’s specialist providers to take account of growth in costs of learning support staff. However, a substantial amount is still available to support local developments.

The Developing Provision Locally initiative is based on Birmingham’s new SEND strategy which aims to:

* Reduce reliance on high cost specialist placements in out of City schools
* Enable pupils to access high quality provision as close as possible to where they live
* Enhance the capacity of mainstream schools and settings to work together to provide for pupils in their local area and to plan the provision that they need

This paper sets out the rationale for this initiative and the processes by which additional funding can be accessed. It identifies 4 key development priorities that the Authority would like to support.

**What are we trying to achieve?**

Birmingham receives a set amount of money from central government to meet the needs of children and young people with more complex/significant difficulties. Over recent years, we have found it difficult to meet needs within the available budget. Now that there is more money in the system, we want to improve how we do things. It is important to use this opportunity wisely to avoid future overspends as we are not confident, in the current economic climate, that further increases will continue to be available.

We want to ensure that:

* We get the best value out of our overall spend: we do not believe that this is currently the case
* Children and young people with high needs in Birmingham have equal opportunities to a good quality education: access should not be influenced by whether parents (and schools) have the resources and knowledge to negotiate the system
* Children and young people with high needs can be educated close to their home, preferably in a mainstream school/setting but, if this is not possible/appropriate, in a specialist provision that does not require substantial travel: at the moment, some children have to be placed outside the City; others attending schools in Birmingham have lengthy journeys
* All out mainstream schools and settings have the skills and resources to meet needs effectively: the significant majority of our HNB funding is being used to fund placements in specialist and alternative position – there needs to be a better balance.
* Mainstream schools and settings can play a greater part in shaping how HN funding is spent in their area, by working together collaboratively at local level and providing mutual support: currently funding is too centralized and spending decisions can feel very remote from schools’ day to day experience.

**What is being proposed in practice?**

*Localities:*

Birmingham is reorganising its SEND staffing on an area basis to help promote more integrated working between services and schools/settings. It is also seeking to support school locality working by building on existing secondary networks and primary consortia. Six areas with corresponding consortia are being proposed, as follows:

East Coleheath, Eastwards, FAYs & Saltley Plus  
South Kings Norton, Hall Green  
South West Northfield, Senelleys, Quinbourne  
North West Handsworth, Aston / Nechelles, & Ladywood  
North (inc Sutton Coldfield) Erdington, Perry Barr & Sutton Coldfield  
Central Sparklers

While we are aware that some of these groupings are more established than others, we think that these areas are the best option to use when funding and supporting local developments. Geographic groupings are also important given their link to local communities.

*Funding:*

We intend to top slice some of the DPL fund for City-wide activities (particularly to help strengthen some of our existing specialist capacity to meet needs within the City; and to develop more robust local pathways for post 16 and early years). We will then divide the remaining budget into a notional allocation for each Area, based on the key formula indicators the DFE uses for distributing HNB to Local Authorities. To help guide local planning, we will also give an indicative proportion of funding to be spent on primary and secondary phases.

Possible funding levels for the six areas are outlined in appendix one. This is the total amount of new money available. It is important that all developments are sustainable longer-term within this budget. Recognising the scale of this proposal, projects will need to draw on the experience of ‘early starter’ groups/Areas, to ensure that learning is shared and funding is equitable and sustainable city-wide.

*Development priorities:*

We have 4 priorities for development that we think will need to sustainable improvements in provision for pupils with high needs in Birmingham:

1. *New mainstream HN funding model (not reliant on EHCPs)*

Evidence from other Authorities has shown that this is not achieved simply by removing the requirement for EHCPs. While these are administratively burdensome, they provide a process for gatekeeping/managing demand. We would like to move to a funding model which involves more collective management of the available resource, that includes people who fully understand the realities of the mainstream context and what is possible in this environment (SENCos/Inclusion Managers). In the best funding models, peer moderation is a key ingredient of the process. We can learn from these but need to pilot the process in one or two areas of the City, so that best practice can be extended to the rest of the Authority.

We would like to increase the amount of funding that is available for mainstream support. Funding will also be needed to enable involvement of key personnel and to help support transition. System change can be complex and will also require an element of project leadership.

1. *Secondary curriculum pathways for vulnerable groups*

There is evidence that a number of pupils are included successfully at the primary stage but struggle with the curriculum and social demands of secondary mainstream education. Primary schools and parents can have doubts about their children’s ‘ability to cope’. Secondary schools can be concerned that growing attainment gaps (even with relative progress) will be regarded as a negative indicator of school effectiveness. Schools can address this issue individually but there are advantages in a more collective approach that sees effective education of vulnerable pupils as a key aspect of school quality.

Funding will be needed to help extend the secondary school offer (particularly for those with lower attainment or at significant risk of school refusal). It will also provide greater opportunities for sharing practice and supported self-review.

1. *Primary provision for pupils with SEMH*

Provision for pupils with SEMH at primary school sometimes feels like ‘all or nothing’. Pupils either access the limited number of places at COBS or Birmingham’s two SEMH specialist provisions (often having to travel some distance from home), or schools have to find a way to manage by themselves. This may lead to ‘pragmatic’ solutions such as part-time timetables which, if sustained for long periods, fail to meet children’s educational needs. The problem may then be passed on to the secondary sector with little effective resolution, leading to a significant chance of permanent exclusion. We would like to support the development of more local support/provision options, managed by schools on a more collective basis. We think this could lead to more flexible/dynamic use of provision, with clearer plans for reintegration/supported transfers to other local schools.

Funding will be needed to create this capacity, which will enhance (and work in conjunction with) what is already available through COBS and local support services.

1. *Cluster-based support*

The Authority is already planning to organise its SEND services around localities/areas. There is an opportunity to strengthen support at school cluster/consortium level to tie in with this development. This will provide greater capacity for intervention/prevention and help avoid duplication. It will also ensure a greater focus on key priorities and a more consistent capacity across schools for meeting needs in-house.

Some funding will be needed to enhance capacity and for cluster team coordination functions.

**Next steps**

Deciding the right way forward will take collective discussion. We would like to support this over the next month by inviting Area Head Teachers to participate in Teams discussions with key officers. These will be organised by the Authority in liaison with identified Area leads.

We are aiming to provide each Area with key baseline data so that local mainstream Heads can understand the current picture of provision use/HN spend on pupils who live locally. This will help decide relative priorities and evaluate progress over time.

In parallel, City-wide leads will be identified to help progress each project strand. We are currently considering offering a part-time Head Teacher secondment for mainstream HN funding developments (with consultancy input to draw on best practice nationally), along with BEP and LA service support for the other project areas.

We are anticipating that funding will start to be made available from September 2020.

**FAQs:**

*Why can’t we bid for this money as individual schools? Or with schools we already have a strong link with (eg MATs; established informal relationships)?*

The High Needs Block is a collective resource for all of us working with children and young people. To use it effectively and equitably, we need to ensure that there is a consistently strong offer across *all* mainstream schools and settings. This means that as many as possible need to be involved – not just those with good/outstanding practice who want to develop further.

Children live in local communities and pupil issues can have a strong link to neighbourhoods. For example, developing new local provision for primary aged pupils with SEMH for example will benefit from schools working together that are geographically close. Local groupings will also support developments that are cross-phase.

*Is this money sustainable? Or will we back to square one when we get to 2021?*

The Government’s recent HNB increase has been guaranteed for a year. We believe that it is highly unlikely that this would be reversed. While there are going to be significant economic pressures, the Government would find it difficult to take away funding that most LAs have already committed to pupil provision.

We are however concerned to ensure that all developments are sustainable and generalisable over time. This may mean phased release of new funding rather than spending it all at once. It is vital that this new money has a measurable impact. We do not want to be facing further overspends down the line because developments have not been properly focused.

*School partnership takes time and effort. Is it reasonable to expect us to do this when we have so many other pressures?*

We recognise this. Schools have more pressures than ever, and there will be even more to do post lockdown. However, evidence from other LAs indicates that collaborative working on SEND saves time in the long run, particularly if we can develop ways of resourcing schools that are less administratively burdensome and allow decisions to be made closer to where the issues are.

*Why can’t you just give us the money and let us decide what to do with it?*

Birmingham is a very large Authority, with significant variation in practice. Developments need to be manageable and amenable to systematic evaluation. We also need to draw on existing examples of good practice, locally and nationally, rather than reinvent the wheel.

*Why are you spending this money on mainstream schools? Surely it would be better just to create more places/capacity in our existing specialist provision?*

One of the main reasons why we have been facing overspends over recent years is that there has been an ongoing increase in numbers of specialist placements. We cannot go on doing this for ever. Our percentage of pupils in such provision is already above average, even for Authorities that have a similar demography. We also spend a greater proportion of our HNB on specialist provision, with relatively little on supporting pupils with HN in the mainstream sector.

We do believe, however, that special schools can play an important role in reducing reliance on out of City placements, and in supporting mainstream schools in development of effective practice. We will therefore be looking to fund initiatives with these outcomes in mind.

*How will we know if we have made a positive difference?*

We will assess impact against the key indicators identified in our SEND strategy. Some of these will relate to improvements at the child/pupil level. However, we will also expect to see improvements in the quality and consistency of provision, greater equity and value for money, and a stronger sense of collective responsibility at local level. We will provide key data to aid self-assessment at school/cluster/consortium level and will undertake City-wide evaluation through a project steering group (involving Heads and officers) and through an independent review.

**Appendix One**

**Birmingham SEND plan: Schools’ Proposition**

***Area groupings and maximum budget shares available if areas participate fully in all project strands***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Six Areas** | **Secondary Network** | **Primary Consortia** |
| EAST **£1,620,339.70**    CENTRAL **£673,307.61** | East  **£588,610.23**  - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  Central  **£351,442.13** | East Wards **£304,522.41**  Cole Heath **£298,522.89** FAYS **£250,229.18**  Saltley Plus\* **£178,704.99** - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  Sparklers **£321,865.48** |
| SOUTH **£902,034.24** SOUTH WEST  **£897,508.52** | South  **£453,632.21**  - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  South West  **£455,056.21** | Hall Green **£255,086.97**  Kings Norton **£193,315.06**  - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Senneleys **£114,476.16**  Quinbourne **£122,239.80**  Northfield **£205,736.35** |
| NORTH  **£1,136,804.12** | Sutton  + North  **£527,210.44** | Sutton **£206,210.45**  Erdington **£193,903.03**  Perry Barr **£208,993.20** |
| NORTH WEST  **£1,225,005.80** | North West  **£579,048.78** | Handsworth\* **£312,793.94**  Aston & Nechells **£191,007.53**  Ladywood **£142,155.55** |