

Schools Forum Minutes 9/5/2024

Attendees

Sarah Tomkinson
Nancy Meehan
Rachel Setter
Hannah Baker
Rob Parr
Dan Hamer
Steven Hulme
Stuart Bellworthy
Mike Lock
Jim Piper
Jake Grinsill Head Teacher Ilsham Academy
Tim Stephens
Jayne Jones
Steve Margetts
Alex Newton
Stewart Biddles

Apologies

Tamsin Summers
Clive Star
Laurence Frewin
Malcome Coe
Rachael Williams

1. **Previous minutes**

Agreed in principle but grammatical issues require a re-write.

2. Matters arising

Points that RW agreed to bring to future meetings will be addressed at our agenda setting meeting.

Allocation to next meeting

Send statistics and transition budgets to future meetings.

Financial Report

Rob Parr

The final position for last financial year is £1.024 million, slightly better than the deficit budget that we set on our safety valve plan of £1.263 million. We have been in the safety valve for 18 months, at the end of 23/24 we are £207,000 better off than we thought we would be.

The pressure area is independent special school placements.

The cumulative position it is just under £12.8 million overspend. Overall, we have received just short of £7.3 million from the ESFA, which leaves a net deficit of £5 - £5.5 million, if the safety valve continues, we can wipe that out over the next few years.

On page 13 is the EHCP adjustments to schools in year and although that is over budget, it is less than we spent in 22/23. We have started to see an impact on ceasing some of the EHCPS. This has had an impact on the finances. On the following page is the high needs contingency, which is the special school places and various ad hoc adjustments from the high needs block where we are closer to budget.

Tim Stephens asked if we have checked the 95% funding received has flowed through to the settings and Rob Parr said we need to wait for the adjustment to be made in July.

3. Safety Valve Report

Weekly/monthly high-level overview of where we are on the report.

There is a concern now as the number of EHCP's are going in the wrong direction- we have been aware for the last 4 to 5 months.

Submission due 29th May as to where we are with our DSG management plan.

Nancy Meehan

The challenge is as of yesterday we had 1,576 EHCP's in the system with another 34 plans still to issue through the Feb, March, April period and only 10 to cease so we will be actually be at 1,600. This is veering back to where we were at the end of 2022, which is not a good position for us to be declaring to the DfE.

The challenge we have is that the starting point was let's see what plans are in the system that could be ceased. What we are not seeing is a reduction in the request for statutory assessment. Our DSG management plan and our written statement of action was saying we should be at 15

per month, with the graduated response being embedded, the culture change being embedded, etc. and we are still hugely above that each month. We are averaging 27 a month. Approximately 60% become plans considering previous rates, the present position now is that we are going in the wrong direction with our request for statutory assessment. We have put in place to have an early next step meeting prior to the request for statutory assessment.

We are still seeing a huge rise in RSA's and we are not seeing the equivalent ceasing of plans at this stage. There are now five local authorities that have had their payments suspended because they haven't met their DSG management plan, and it appears there is now becoming a much more robust scrutiny of the plans as we're moving forward into this financial year. We have spoken to one of those local authorities around any insight into how that has occurred for them. They had been placed because they were not meeting their original submitted DSG management plan, they were placed on enhanced management. They still did not meet what was required under an enhanced management and monitoring plan, which was monthly meetings, and on that basis, therefore all their payments have been stopped, as are four other local authorities.

We know that it is going to be a challenging position for us going forward. Rob met with some of the wider local authorities' people, and they were very clearly identifying some of the challenges.

Rob Parr

The DfE are implying that each LA that has problems are alone but what came out from every single local authority was that they all had issues but generally, nobody had any sort of agreement or financial support from health for EHCP'S.

Nancy Meehan

Pre-December, Nancy came to a school forum and talked about the ICB funding and funding around the EHCP's coming from health and the nonexistent funding we've had from the last two years from our ICB colleagues. We did submit a pre proceedings letter to them and they understand they need to be funding several of the of children's EHCP's we're yet to see any monies yet. Nancy had a conversation with Anne Marie Bond as the chief exec and said, she was very clear when we met with them, January, February time, we had to have a position by this financial year of what they were going to do and support.

We could not go into another financial year where we end up with no supportive funding for our children with complex needs who are on ECHP's, that should be coming through ICB funding. We have struggled to get a further meeting with them, so we did say that we were going back to the pre action letter unless they came round the table within the next two weeks.

They are now going to meet with us on Friday of this week.

Nancy has met Anne Marie and we are putting a very clear position from ourselves about what we're expecting this year from them.

We will work through a pathway that is Devon, Plymouth and Torbay wide where we have a consistency because that is the ICB footprint, but not being in a position where we are in a financially negative position this year, while we wait for that pathway to be put in place.

Nancy will update at the next school forum.

Rob Parr

Every authority has the same issues.

Hannah Baker

In terms of the cessation work that's going on in the local authority, we really are scrutinising every annual review that is coming in and, we did do a piece of forecasting work at a whole group of Year Elevens and also some year thirteens that we were hoping we were going to cease.

Because the safety valve has moved the deadline forward, we are not going to be able to report on the 30 ceased plans. We can say that they are ceasing in progress, but because we have had to pull those annual reviews forward and because there is an 8-week legal period of the cessation process, we have had the rug pulled from under us a little bit.

Hannah wanted to give the assurance that she spoke to all of the SENCO's at the last two SENCO forums actually about cessation and looking for the ceases and celebrating when those young people have met the outcomes on their plan that is still very much there and very much live.

We have moved the next steps meetings; they can still happen and a thank you to your SENCO s and your schools who did that pilot piece of work and we have now rolled that out.

What the SENCO's are coming back and saying quite clearly is it is very much about parental confidence.

She thinks that is a theme that we are seeing throughout a lot of the SEND improvement work that's happening is that the confidence in our parents to believe that need can be met is just not there at the moment, although we can offer these next steps meetings to happen earlier and we are going to do a little bit of a comms campaign in the next newsletter and I would really appreciate that all that the SEND newsletter goes out in your newsletters, also ultimately if parents want to put that request for statutory assessment in they can and she wanted to highlight that was the feedback from the SENCO's that actually it's very much about parental confidence that is the issue at the moment.

Stewart Biddles

Was at a meeting yesterday and there's a paper there saying that 40% of our 0 to 9-year-olds are going to have speech and language communication needs forecast. There is going to be that increase in

EHCP requests, those RSA's because there's also the same paper said that the health authority don't have enough speech and language therapists to meet the level of need that's there. It's coming at the same time where schools are pressurized in terms of their own funding.

There are less adults in school to support those children and do the work even if we have the speech and language progression tools, etc. There are not the adults to then do that screening, that is another burden that schools are having. The guidance we are getting from Islington, though their schools are funded in a very different way, our schools also have less money per pupil in the first instance, when we look at changes to EHCP's and changes to school funding, all that support that is going into children is being squashed. The only way that schools can support some of these children and give the parents the confidence they need is by going down the RSA route. Previously we might have had additional staff that we could move from other areas in the school to support some of these children and reduce the need for statutory assessment. But those times are long since passed, and there is nothing we can do about it in this meeting, but it's worth highlighting some of those elements that are impacting.

Sarah Tomkinson

Asked whether we could have a breakdown of what phase the requests for statutory assessment are coming from because we know that when children are coming into school, our early years colleagues are working really hard with them, but we've got an increased number of children coming into school who are nonverbal and still in nappies. It would be good to have some understanding of what phase the RSA's are coming from and the areas of need that the children have.

Nancy Meehan

We have got a really positive and robust dashboard now that we have built based on all the information, when we meet, we could consider bringing that dashboard forward, which breaks this down to the detail of need area, age group, etc. When we went to speak to Ofsted, and CQC we were chosen as one of the local authorities that under the new inspection framework to have an engagement meeting with Ofsted and CQC in February. Because we have got that dashboard and know ourselves so well now, we were able to speak to where it's coming from, what are the issues, what areas and what do we need to do about it. It is important to bring that forward at the next meeting, then we can decide how much information is wanted at the meeting.

4. Exclusions and Suspensions EHE

Dan Hamer

See report attached from agenda.

A team approach was suggested by Stuart Bellworthy for all principles to come together to share the information and discuss the issues that are currently putting us under pressure with the numbers of Exclusions and Suspensions and EHE.

Rachel Setter/Nancy Meehan have picked up with Ofsted and ICB to work as a partnership with Headteachers.

Nancy to co-ordinate

5. S19 Funding

See report attached from agenda.

Issues re MTS - Not quorate – Dan to bring back to next meeting.

Spending £1.2 million and only recouping £20k

Mike Lock would like further information re MTS plan, building and needs.

Waiting for oversight when papers are in the public domain. Agreed to defer and bring back 20.6.24.

Stuart Bellworthy

Asked about sharing information and bringing all Headteachers together to discuss issues with EHCP's etc. Possible to invite the lead inspector for Ofsted and DfE and ICB to work as a partnership.

Steven Hulme would welcome the meeting.

Nancy to co-ordinate.

We are at a point in time now for our young people and we can't let this escalate any further, we can see the figures, they're not going in the right direction, and behind each one of those figures is a young person and a child who is actually not achieving in both their education but social, emotional as well.

Steven Hulme

Would welcome an opportunity to meet with Headteachers.

6. Items for next meeting

Update from health paying towards the EHCP's.

Summary of school allocations

S19 in connection with Hannah's high needs block spend – Dan Hamer

Early years funding update – Rob Parr - September

Vacancy for a primary Academy Governor – check membership