

Oxfordshire County Council
Schools Forum – 3 October 2017

High Needs Review: Progress Report

1. Context:

The Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block (HNB) consists of all funding for education provision for high needs learners from age 2 to 25; Oxfordshire receives approximately £57m. The Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to keep the provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) under review and the Department for Education (DfE) provided a one off grant in December 2016 to carry out an in depth and thorough review. This is particularly important when funding arrangements are changing (National Funding Formula) and where the educational progress of children with SEND and sufficiency of specialist provision are growing concerns. A large percentage of the HNB supports children with SEND. The grant funding has provided an opportunity to review the block as a whole, including the interface between the funding streams and provision for all vulnerable learners.

One of Oxfordshire's key priorities is to improve the educational progress of vulnerable learners as set out in a [Strategic Overview 2016 – 2020](#) which sits beneath the [Education Strategy](#). The High Needs Review and action plans support the vulnerable learners' strategy.

2. Green shoots

At this stage 2017 attainment data are provisional and comparisons with national figures for vulnerable learners will not be available until October/November. However, there are some indications that Oxfordshire's performance is improving.

Early figures indicate that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at key stage 2 has increased to 42% this year from 29% in 2016, and from 9% in 2016 to 17% in 2017 for children at SEN Support.

At Key stage 1, the attainment of pupils with a statement of SEN or Education, Health and Care plan in Oxfordshire has increased noticeably since 2016 (from 10%-23% in reading, from 5%-17% in writing and from 8%-21% in maths). However, this is a relatively small cohort. The attainment of pupils at SEN support has also increased this year, but not by such a noticeable amount. Pupils with EAL in Oxfordshire have also shown a relatively larger increase in attainment this year, particularly in writing where almost 2/3 (65%) reached the expected standard, compared with 57% last year.

3. Governance

The governance arrangements for this work are now in place. The 'golden thread' for the priority to improve the attainment of vulnerable learners runs through the Children's Trust, Education Strategy, Children and Young People's Transformation Programme and Strategic Schools Partnership Board (SSPB). The Oxfordshire

Safeguarding Children's Board (OSCB) is also focusing on the safeguarding risks if children are absent from school and the impact on their attainment. A project steering group has been established and colleagues from a range of services and schools are involved in the work streams. There are clear structures in place for monitoring and reporting to the various boards on a regular basis.

Work streams

3. Review of central services supporting vulnerable learners.

The purpose of this work stream is to:

- review what is currently offered
- listen to the views of schools
- compare Oxfordshire's offer with national benchmarking and best practice
- make recommendations for changes for decision by Cabinet.

The intended outcomes are:

- restructuring of services to address gaps and to deliver services within the available budget
- clear information about what is centrally provided and expected standards of delivery
- quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that services have high impact.

A survey 'Have your say on services to support vulnerable learners' was carried out in the summer term and there were 69 responses and over 80 pages of comments. Clearly this is an important issue for schools and the comments and suggestions were greatly appreciated. Key messages from the survey will be shared through the usual communication systems including Schools News and Headteacher/Chairs of governor briefings, and the full report shared with the High Needs Review Project Group.

4. Locality approach

The purpose of this work stream is to:

- develop a locality approach to improving the skills, expertise and provision available in each locality to support children at lower levels of need.
- manage the increasing demands of children requiring specialist provision
- develop inclusive local provision and reduce the number of children being excluded from mainstream schools.
- improve the attainment of vulnerable learners.

The intended outcomes are to:

- enable localities, using comprehensive datasets, to plan and commission specialist provision, training and services
- develop the commissioning for vulnerable children bringing schools into the centre of decision-making about SEN and alternative provision resourcing
- develop the role of the local authority as a broker, holding to account school-to-school support mechanisms and flexible commissioning arrangements

- establish professional multi-agency locality networks to develop multi-agency strategies to improve children's and young people's outcomes.

The Children's Trust has confirmed the Banbury locality and an area in Oxford city as pilots for developing a locality approach and to achieve a step change for Oxfordshire's most disadvantaged communities. The Banbury pilot is progressing well with key players across sectors coming together to focus on specific outcomes. A strategic mapping exercise of existing groups and structures that focus on prevention and community development has been undertaken. Key multi-agency data at ward level have identified hot spots of concern and this analysis is overlaying data on deprivation, inequalities, attendance and exclusions, children's social care indicators, mental health and young victims of crime and their perpetrators on a ward level for use by the schools partnership.

The approach will be community-led, building on the expertise, knowledge and concerns of local people, professionals and community and voluntary groups in order to tackle problems at a local level. The new integrated service model in Children's Services and the development of the Locality and Community Support Service and Community Co-ordinators also adds strength to this approach.

The pilot work is intended to provide a template for other areas with rollout across the county by September 2018.

Given the high number of managed moves and exclusions in the Banbury area a Primary In Year Fair Access Panel (IYFAP) is being trialed from September 2017. The commissioning arrangements for alternative provision across primary and secondary is also being investigated to explore the feasibility of locality commissioning arrangements.

5. Sufficient, good quality, local specialist provision

The purpose of the work stream is to:

- review the supply and demand for specialist places
- improve forecasting and planning for special school and resource based provision based on Oxfordshire's revised housing growth plans
- re-assess special school capacities
- use the one-off capital fund (£2.4m) to maximum effect.

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce reliance on high cost independent and/or non-maintained placements
- maintain a strategic overview of supply and demand across all special schools and specialist provisions, ensuring priorities are reflected in the capital programme
- ensure that capital funding streams are used to maximum effect (basic needs, developer funding, one-off allocations from DfE and opportunities arising from Free School wave bids) to support long term planning

- engender a culture of openness, sharing developments across maintained special schools and academies, to ensure sufficient provision and efficient use of resources
- reach a consensus on the balance of children with Education, Health and Care plans in mainstream schools and special schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) recognises that local authorities have a vital role in long-term strategic planning, informed by detailed local knowledge enhanced through consultation with parents and carers, and good relationships with local schools. In June the DfE published guidance on the one-off capital grant announced in March 2017. Oxfordshire has been allocated £2.4m. Local authorities can invest the fund in creating new (additional) places at good or outstanding provision and/or improving facilities or developing new facilities. Local authorities can use it to improve special provision in mainstream schools and academies, special units, special schools and academies, early years settings and FE colleges. We will need to develop plans in consultation with parents, carers and providers on how to best spend the money. The final plan will be published on our Local Offer website by March 2018 in order to receive the first tranche of our allocation later in summer 2018. The plan will need to be updated in March 2019 to receive the final tranche of funding in summer 2020.

Detailed analysis of supply and demand of specialist provision is under way. Initial work will be shared with the special school working group in September. Regular reporting on special schools is now included at the Schools Organisation and Stakeholder Group, and is included in the [Pupil Place Plan](#).

6. Leadership and research

This [Annual Inclusion Conference, Diminishing Difference](#) was well attended and there were eminent and inspiring speakers including Sir John Dunford (National Pupil Premium Champion 2013-15), Matthew Haynes (Senior HMI), Sarah Hubbard (HMI) and Peter Henderson (Education Endowment Foundation), as well as examples of good practice in Oxfordshire schools. All the presentations and school case studies are available on the [OXSiT](#) (Oxfordshire's School Inclusion Team) website.

Several research projects are underway through systems leadership approaches including 'Maximising the use of teaching assistants' led by OXSIT, 'Reducing Persistent Absenteeism in Oxfordshire Schools' initiated by the Strategic Schools Partnership Board (SSPB), and 'Raising the attainment and inclusion of learners with challenging behaviour, including pupils at risk of permanent exclusion' (SSPB, OXSIT and MBOX (Mulberry Bush School)). These examples illustrate how we are working in partnership as an Oxfordshire system to meet the current and future challenges.

People continue to ask why the attainment levels of vulnerable learners, particularly disadvantaged learners and those with special educational needs, are below national levels. A substantive research project is being commissioned to identify the key enablers of, and barriers to, raising attainment levels in Oxfordshire, and to understand how the system as a whole can facilitate and support improvement.

7. Early Years, Special Schools and Post 16

Early Years

There have been significant changes in Early Years entitlement and funding arrangements affecting vulnerable children, including free child care for 2 year-olds from disadvantaged families and an increase from 15 hours to 30 hours for working families entitled to free childcare. The Early Years National Funding Formula has introduced a new Disability Access Fund (DAF), equivalent to £615 per child per year for three and four year olds in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and an Inclusion Fund for children with lower levels of need.

These changes have been introduced hastily, with limited time to consult, model, plan and communicate the changes. The national funding arrangements were introduced in April, however further engagement with settings and refinements will be needed over the next 12 months to ensure that fair and transparent systems are in place. Further modelling and monitoring of the DAF funding, Inclusion Funding, and tops-ups for those with Education, Health and Care plans is taking place. Given the increase in entitlement for the most vulnerable there will be inevitable increases in demand upon high needs funding, and as yet the full impact of these changes are not known.

Special Schools

An aspect of the High Needs review includes considering whether the current special school funding arrangements are fit for purpose. The last in depth review of special school funding took place in 2014/15 and resulted in a single banding approach across all special schools. The current review will be considering if this approach is inhibiting the development of local solutions for children with the most complex needs and contributing to the increase in independent and non-maintained special school placements.

Post 16

The high needs block covers funding for young people with high level needs aged 16 to 25 in further education and training. Meetings have been held with the three college principals in July to discuss the review and to consider ways to ensure that

- funding is fair, efficient, predictable, transparent and simple
- administrative burdens are minimised
- there are common approaches across colleges
- there is consistency with funding levels pre 16.

Numbers of learners in post 16 are increasing and young people are continuing in education for longer. Colleges are committed to providing high quality local provision and to reducing the number of young people attending independent specialist residential colleges.

Four meetings are being planned over the next 12 months with representatives from each of the three colleges in Oxfordshire and a consultant with expertise in SEN funding arrangements, to explore and develop funding approaches. The intention is to implement any changes from September 2018. We will also be exploring opportunities

to develop local residential experiences to reduce reliance on post 16 residential placements.

Contact Details of Lead Officers/Authors

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