SCHOOLS' FUNDING FORUM (SFF)

SUBJECT:	Update on progress of implementing the new £6k High Needs funding in mainstream schools – Background paper from SEN Team

AUTHORS:	Julie Ely, Head of SEN Louise Langley, Monitoring & Quality Assurance Manager – SEN
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SUMMARY OF REPORT:

In order to comply with the Department for Education (DfE) requirement in relation to providing top up funding for high needs pupils (those requiring more than £6k worth of support) an appropriately structured assessment system and robust mechanism to cost SEN interventions or Presenting Needs, was implemented from 1st April 2015.

This paper is an update on the progress and planned work to be carried out to refine the process and provide continuous improvement.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background information to the new high needs funding process in mainstream schools is detailed in paragraphs 1.1 to 1.4 from the financial paper under this item.

2 Administration and Gatekeeping on new high needs funding process

2.1 In addition to the statuary requirement of compliance with the new £6k threshold, the SFF fundamentally supported a process that would reduce the need for statutory assessment and a system where the funding would be targeted more effectively and get to the pupil at an earlier point in time.

2.2 SFF members were concerned about the robustness of the process to guarantee that the necessary level of control could be put in place to ensure an equitable outcome for each application.

2.3 At the SFF meeting on the 28 November 2014 it was agreed that a team of LA officers would be recruited with the remit to ensure that a suitable robust administration process was put in place to manage and control the new process. Within the SEN unit a new SEN monitoring team was set up and five SEN High Needs Funding (HNF) officers were appointed

3 Role and processes of the SEN Monitoring Team

3.1 To ensure robustness and equitable decision making for applications the following have been established:

- High Needs Funding Officers have been given guidance on the decision making process (appendix 1).

- Area HNF Officers have weekly meetings with the Area Provision Evaluation Officer, who provide SEN expertise for the provision being delivered by the school.
- All the HNF Officers meet fortnightly to discuss complex cases with the Monitoring & Quality Assurance Manager to quality assure the decision making.

3.2 HNF Officers are currently making contact with schools to discuss applications within a few days and making decisions on HNF applications within a fortnight. This means that most schools will begin to receive funds within 6 weeks of their initial application.

3.3 Initially due to unfamiliarity with the form and what information was required, applications were taking SENCos a long time to complete. Therefore, HNF Officers have attended AEN Update meetings and SENCo Forum meetings to provide more details on the process. Officers have also been offering individual support to SENCos either over the phone or at their school. SENCos who have made several applications are now reporting that they can complete it within an average of 2 hours.

3.4 The system and process continue to be developed with feedback from the SENCos and schools. Below is a summary of the feedback and suggestions received, along with what was done in response.

- Schools wanted some additional staff to be able to enter information on applications to save Headteachers/SENCos valuable time. Therefore, additional staff were given access to the system to enter information and headteachers were able to delegate their responsibility to submit the form to a nominated member of staff.
- Schools wanted applications that had been deferred to have funding backdated to the date of initial application once it is agreed and as it was felt that no school should be disadvantaged by the request for additional information, this was agreed.
- Schools were being timed out of the application form on the ‘narrative questions’ and losing their response. Therefore, every school registered on the system were issued with a word document template that can be used to edit the answers before copying and pasting them into the online form. ICT were unable to extend the time out facility as this is required for data protection purposes.
- The purpose of the resubmit button was not clear to school. Therefore, the button was changed to read ‘Edit Application’.
- Schools felt that the amount of information needed for the application was time consuming. Therefore the number of ‘narrative questions’ were streamlined and reduced.
- Schools wanted the format of the timetable to be more user-friendly. A plug-in software version was sourced and purchased.

4 The next step

4.1 The process for reapplication will be available from December.

4.2 Processes for ensuring funding details are on EHCPs have been developed.

4.3 Agreed provision plans for HNF will be shared with SEN placement officers to be incorporated into the EHC Plan.

4.4 For pupils with an EHC Plan the funding will be tied in with the Annual Review date, however, funding is agreed until the payment period after the AR so that schools have time to make their applications.