

REVIEW OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN HOUNSLOW MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Hounslow has experienced continuing issues in managing its High Needs spend within the budget allocated by central government. A paper to Schools Forum in 2015 identified a £6.75m shortfall against projected spend for 2015/16. This was addressed through a significant transfer of funding from Schools Block along with some use of DSG reserves. Despite this additional funding, a further shortfall was projected for 2016/17, which required an extra top slice from mainstream schools and a reduction in top-up payments to specialist provision and pupils with EHCPs in mainstream. The Authority took the opportunity of DSG changes in 2017/18 to rebalance High Needs and Schools Blocks on a longer-term basis.
- 1.2** The Borough now has one of the highest High Needs Block allocations in London (SENPRF 2019). Nevertheless, spend has continued to increase over recent years, with a growing number of pupils with EHCPs. The Borough is currently needing to manage a cumulative £12m HN deficit, which is only partly being offset by the increase in HNB allocation it is receiving from central government for 2020/21 and 2021/22. Although there is a possibility that further government increases may be available for 2022/23, it is unlikely that a similar level of growth will be sustained beyond then. It is therefore imperative that future spend is managed effectively. This will only happen if there is a strong collective approach.
- 1.3** The 2015 Schools Forum report identified a number of steps that the Authority was taking to address the overspend, which were developed in consultation with schools through a Task and Finish Group. The strategy relied heavily on the strengthening of capacity to meet needs more locally, reducing the need for high-cost placements in the independent/non-maintained special school sector. Since then, further specialist provision has been created for pupils with ASD (new mainstream SEN Centres/ Resource Bases; a new special free school; increased places in other existing provision), and it is in the process of developing a further special free school for pupils with SEMH (social, emotional and mental health needs).
- 1.4** Hounslow now has the highest percentage of pupils aged 2-18 in specialist settings in London (CSIE 2019)¹. However, demand for places continues to increase. And despite the growth in local capacity, the number of pupils in independent/non-

¹ Between 2017 and 2019, special school numbers increased by 163 (30%): the highest increase in the region and 3 times the national average change.

maintained specialist provision remains high (around 174), with significant associated costs (over £8.7m)².

- 1.5** The Authority initiated a comprehensive HN review last year, which has led to the formation of several workstreams. Key review findings and a range of relevant data have been shared with relevant stakeholders. Two substantial areas for development are:
- (i) The strengthening of pathways for local inclusion, including the development of a more consistent high-quality mainstream offer
 - (ii) Improvements in partnerships and provision for pupils with HN post 16, to ensure more effective preparation for adulthood
- 1.6** Officers are seeking external consultancy to help move forward developments in both these areas. This report relates to the area of support and funding in mainstream schools and settings (including Early Years and post 16 in mainstream schools and FE colleges).
- 1.7** In line with DFE requirements, the Borough has established a High Needs Deficit Recovery Board which is chaired by a local primary school Head Teacher and which is playing a key role in overseeing progress to a more sustainable financial position.

2. FOCUS OF THE REVIEW

- 2.1** As part of its deficit recovery strategy, Hounslow has already started to look again at its local specialist provision to ensure this can meet the needs of pupils as far as possible within Borough, with reduced reliance on placements in other Authority schools and in the independent/non-maintained special school sector. Some of its provision is being re-focused and areas of over-capacity are being identified. Officers are also keen to look at how mainstream provision can be strengthened. A new SEND Adviser has been appointed to the School Improvement Service who has revitalised local training and networking opportunities.
- 2.2** However, there is a need for a broader evaluation of how schools are currently resourced, both in terms of their use of delegated budgets (notional SEN) and their access to any additional funding and support. All access to additional funding in Hounslow mainstream schools is through the statutory (EHC Needs Assessment) process and officers are interested in exploring other models that could be more dynamic and less administratively demanding.

² Over half of these have ASD as their primary need. Numbers and costs are expected to rise further (projections for 2020/21 are 187 pupils at a total cost of £9.6m).

- 2.3 In addition, officers are interested in reviewing the Borough's existing arrangements for alternative provision and the way that this is currently commissioned.
- 2.4 Peter Gray (SSCYP) was approached to carry this out. Peter has extensive experience of strategic contributions in this area, having worked on mainstream support and funding issues with a wide range of Local Authorities (including a number of London Boroughs) as well as nationally.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The review was based on the following activities (see Appendix 1 for details):

- (i) Interviews with senior LA officers and Chair of the High Needs Recovery Board
- (ii) Interviews with key officers and support service managers
- (iii) Interviews with senior managers from Health
- (iv) Meetings with Heads, SENDCos and governors from mainstream primary and secondary schools
- (v) Meeting with group of Early Years providers
- (vi) Meeting with Principal and Learning Support lead for mainstream FE College
- (vii) Interview with SENDIASS lead and chair of Parent Carer Forum, followed by meetings with groups of parents (with children in mainstream schools)

3.2 Due to Covid restrictions, all meetings/interviews were held online.

3.3 In addition, relevant documentation was scrutinised, along with data on pupil placements/provision and financial costs.

4. LEVELS OF SUPPORT FOR ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM

4.1 Levels of funding and support for additional needs in mainstream can be categorised as follows:

Funding provided to mainstream schools/settings in their delegated budgets

4.2 All mainstream schools receive funding in their delegated budgets to meet SEND. This is based partly on pupil numbers and partly on demographic indicators such as levels of social disadvantage and percentage of pupils with low prior attainment³. This

³ At present, the extent of notional SEN funding (and the formula for its distribution) is locally determined but it is likely that a more standardised approach will be developed as part of the move towards greater national consistency.

is described as ‘notional SEN’. It is not earmarked in the same way as Pupil Premium funding and Heads/governors can determine how much is used for this purpose and how funding is spent.

- 4.3 Since the introduction of the Government’s ‘top-up’ system in 2013, schools are expected to use their funding not just to meet their general range of SEND but also to make a contribution to support for pupils with more complex/significant needs who are funded additionally. This has become known as ‘the first £6k’.
- 4.4 With the rise in number of pupils with EHCPs and the increasing focus on funding for these, the broader profile of ‘notional SEN’ has started to get lost.
- 4.5 Funding for Early Years mainstream settings is different to schools. There is no equivalent of ‘notional SEN’, although providers do receive a small amount of deprivation funding based on their cohort, along with some disability access money (based on children’s registered entitlement to Disability Living Allowance).
- 4.6 Funding for SEND in mainstream FE college budgets comes from two sources: ‘element 1’ is drawn from college core budgets, which include some additional funding for ‘deprivation’ (based on a combination of levels of social disadvantage and students with lower attainment on entry⁴); ‘element 2⁵’ is accessed from the ESFA when students receive additional (‘top-up’) funding from their resident Authority.
- 4.7 The nature of provision that mainstream schools and settings make ‘ordinarily’ can vary considerably, although local areas are increasingly starting to articulate what they expect to see in place, particularly when additional funding or alternative/specialist provision is being requested.

Parents as partners

- 4.8 There is extensive evidence to show that, where schools/settings work positively in partnership with parents/carers, outcomes for children and young people are better, particularly for those with SEND. And yet, for some schools and parents, achieving and maintaining this kind of relationship continues to be problematic⁶, particularly when things are not going well, when there is a tendency for blame.
- 4.9 The development of local SEND Information & Advice Services (SENDIASS) and other arrangements for mediation have to some extent addressed these issues. However, there is increasing recognition of the need for better training, both for schools and parents, so that effective partnership can become a reality.

⁴ Grades lower than C/4 in English and/or Maths)

⁵ Equivalent to the ‘first £6k’ in schools

⁶ Gill Crozier (1998) describes the relationship as idealised, with school accountability and safeguarding requirements promoting a culture of ‘mutual surveillance’.

- 4.10** Where relationships are difficult, parents are more inclined to see statutory assessments and EHCPs as a mechanism for strengthening their ‘voice’, even though this does not in itself lead to improvements in collaboration and joint working and may promote a more adversarial position.

External support services

- 4.11** SEN support services have traditionally performed an important role in helping schools and settings to meet needs, at both individual pupil and institutional level. They can also make a useful contribution in supporting parental involvement and helping to build bridges when relationships are difficult.
- 4.12** The size of such services has decreased considerably over recent years, with increasing budget pressures for local areas. In some, there has been a move to a ‘sold service’ model, with greater involvement of schools in determining service contributions and priorities. Funding for Behaviour Support was transferred to the Schools Block in 2013, leaving schools to decide whether to continue to fund this provision, individually or collectively⁷.
- 4.13** Most Local Authorities still retain a core service capacity for pupils with ‘low incidence needs’ (physical/sensory difficulties) and for autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).
- 4.14** Educational Psychology Services have also played a part in assessment and intervention. However, their time has been increasingly focused on statutory SEND activity (e.g. providing advice for EHC needs assessments). With pressures on core LA budgets, the trend has been towards traded services for non-statutory activity, with schools buying in different levels of support. However, with recent recruitment and retention issues, it has been difficult for some services to provide staffing beyond the level that is needed to cover basic statutory requirements.
- 4.15** Reduced capacity for external support has meant that mainstream schools can feel that they are left to face challenges on their own, with more limited access to supported intervention. In this context, they are more likely to seek a more limited role for external support, in terms of validating requests for additional or alternative provision.

Therapy support

- 4.16** A range of therapy services continue to be provided for children and young people in local areas. Physiotherapy still tends to be a core Health service, fully funded and provided by them. Funding for speech & language and occupational therapy is usually

⁷ Through a process of annual ‘de-delegation’

joint, with contributions from local CCGs⁸ and the area High Needs Block. The balance of these contributions and what each pays for varies across the country and is more contended as both Education and Health budgets experience increasing pressures. Resolving these issues requires good local relationships and strong arrangements for joint commissioning.

- 4.17** There is an increasing tendency for schools to commission their own therapy resource with some local frustrations about sufficiency and recruitment/retention issues.

Additional funding for individuals with more significant needs

- 4.18** The traditional approach to targeting pupils for additional funding has been through the statutory assessment process. This has a number of disadvantages in terms of administrative demands on schools and local authorities, and the susceptibility of the system to individual school/parental pressure. Schools vary in their experience of SEND and thresholds for applying for additional funding can be relative.
- 4.19** A number of LAs have addressed these issues through setting up more dynamic systems for resource access. These are considered in section 8 of this report.
- 4.20** The mechanism for accessing additional funding in the Early Years is typically through an Early Years Inclusion Fund. This is usually resourced through a combination of Early Years Block and High Needs Block money, with applications being decided through a local authority panel. Allocations are usually made on a relatively short-term basis.
- 4.21** Mainstream FE Colleges now usually access HN funding through EHCPs but this is not a national requirement.

Specialist provision and alternative placements

- 4.22** Placements in alternative and specialist provision tend to be regarded as separate, but they can be seen as a form of mainstream support – for pupils whose needs may be too challenging to meet in their local school context. This is particularly the case for pupils who are placed for short-term assessment and intervention, for example in Pupil Referral Unit settings.
- 4.23** Funding for these is drawn from the local area High Needs Block and placements tend to take a bigger share of this resource, as they include not just top-up but also the full £10k place cost for each individual pupil⁹.

⁸ Clinical Commissioning Groups

⁹ For mainstream school placements, the first £6/10k is drawn from the school's budget and therefore from Schools Block rather than HNB

4.24 It is therefore vital that this kind of provision is consistently focused on those pupils with the most complex/significant needs.

5. SUPPORT AND FUNDING IN HOUNSLOW SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

Notional SEN

5.1 A significant amount of money is included in mainstream school budgets for notional SEN (£25.6m in total in 2020/21: £15.2m for primary and £10.4m for secondary). Amounts per school range from £91k to £659k in primary and from around £270k to £961k in secondary¹⁰.

5.2 In Hounslow, notional SEN budgets are based on a sum of the following elements:

- 5% of the AWPU and lump sum (recognising the responsibility of all schools, whatever their demography, to provide for individual needs)
- 15% of deprivation funding¹¹
- 15% of funding for EAL (English as an Additional Language)
- 100% of low prior attainment (reflecting the link between this and the general range of learning difficulties)

5.3 Awareness of this level of funding for SEND varied across those interviewed. Mainstream Heads typically regarded it as part of their general school funding which they had a responsibility to deploy to meet the learning needs of all their pupils. Funding was not as clearly identified or monitored as, for example, Pupil Premium. Governors were aware that there was money for SEND within their schools' budgets but their focus tended to be on understanding the provision being made and issues around pupils causing particular concern. There was no evidence of a systematic approach to evaluating whether the level of investment in SEND provision was reasonable or the extent of its impact¹².

5.4 Governors tended to assume that their SENDCos were more aware of school SEN funding. However, interviews suggested that knowledge was variable and depended largely on whether SENDCos were members of the School Leadership Team and were involved in broader budget decisions.

5.5 The focus of discussions in interviews tended to be more on the 'first £6k'. There was concern in some schools that this system penalised inclusive schools who had to draw and more from their general SEND budget to make the initial funding contribution for

¹⁰ Small schools (studio etc) receive a much smaller amount

¹¹ In school funding formula – does not include Pupil Premium

¹² Some of those interviewed had attended SEND training and were aware of provision mapping

pupils with complex/significant needs. Some Heads and SENCOs also felt that this model of funding encouraged parents to expect '1:1 support' when needs might be better met through some form of group provision.

- 5.6** When applying for EHCPs, schools felt that they had to demonstrate, through provision maps and other evidence, that they had already deployed substantial resources to that pupil as an individual. In practice, applications were more likely to be based on increasing concerns that schools were unable to meet pupil needs, rather than on a technical analysis of spend. With limited external support, there was also not much opportunity for schools to reflect on their use of resources and whether these were having the greatest impact on pupil progress.

Working with parents

- 5.7** There was evidence from the discussions with parents that relationships with schools were not always easy. This was leading to some loss of confidence more generally in the quality of school-based support and a tendency to believe that EHCPs were the only mechanism by which children's needs could be adequately met.
- 5.8** There was a tendency for parents to be unsure what they could reasonably expect and some felt that they had to tread carefully with schools so as not to jeopardise their child's placement. Experience of access to education during the Covid lockdown periods had been variable.
- 5.9** Training on working with parents had been offered to schools by SENDIASS but this had only been taken up by a few. The SENDIASS lead had not been invited to attend the SENDCo network on a regular basis so opportunities for communication on some key issues had been missed.

External support services

- 5.10** Hounslow used to have a substantial multidisciplinary service, providing learning and behaviour support to mainstream schools as well as support and training for ASD and physical/sensory needs. This was substantially reduced in 2017 due to saving requirements, with only the physical/sensory service now retained centrally¹³. Behaviour support is now provided to primary schools only on a subscription basis from the Borough's integrated PRU/SEMH provision (Woodbridge Park). There is some informal outreach from local special schools and SEN centres.
- 5.11** Over recent years, there has been no central support team for pupils with ASD. This is a significant issue given the growing numbers of children being diagnosed and the

¹³ Now called SEN Support Service. Unlike in some LAs, there was no decision to move to a traded model for learning support, although some staff continue to offer a service to schools on a private basis.

need to ensure a good level of skills and confidence in meeting these needs across the mainstream sector. A new post has recently been created to try and address this gap. However, this provides only limited capacity for support and intervention at the individual pupil level.

- 5.12** Hounslow's Educational Psychology Service continues to carry vacancies, although some of these have recently been filled. The Service remains centrally funded, with no pressure to trade. However, most of its work relates to the statutory process, with little capacity for support and intervention¹⁴. Longer standing Heads and SENDCos reported that they missed the regular multidisciplinary meetings involving EPs and SEN support service staff, which provided a point of coordination for school support activity.
- 5.13** By contrast, Early Years settings felt they were well supported by the EYs SEN Service, both in terms of training and advice regarding individual concerns. Those interviewed reported that they had little option other than to include, and they valued the support they were able to access in doing so.

Therapy support

- 5.14** In Hounslow, occupational and physiotherapy support for mainstream pupils are mainly clinic based and fully funded by CCG. In addition, the CCG funds specialist clinic-based speech & language therapy (for dysphagia/stammering).
- 5.15** The CCG also funds a Speech & Language Therapy (SALT) service to mainstream, but this is currently restricted to one-off assessments/reports and statutory advice for pupils going through EHCNA process. The Service is struggling, within its existing capacity, to meet the ongoing increase in EHCNA requests (with a high percentage of pupils unknown to the service at this point). There is limited ability to maintain ongoing involvement for pupils with more significant needs or undertake capacity-building activity.
- 5.16** The High Needs Block provides funding for SALT and OT support for individual mainstream EHCPs, but schools then choose whether to purchase input from the NHS service or from private providers¹⁵. There is a strong expectation among local parents and schools that ongoing 1:1 support is the most appropriate model of delivery. There are risks therefore that demand for EHCPs can be fuelled by a desire to access this level of provision (which is not available ordinarily)¹⁶.

¹⁴ The PEP manages a small number of CAMHS teacher posts which provide support for pupils with emotional/mental health needs and for some with an ASD diagnosis.

¹⁵ Around half currently buy from the NHS team

¹⁶ The HNB pays for therapy input to specialist settings (not all), which is provided by the NHS service. There has been concern that expansion in local specialist provision was not matched by growth in staffing (but this has recently been addressed)

- 5.17** The therapy model appears to work better in the early years where SALTs have a capacity-building/training role and close links with the Early Years SEN service. In a number of other local areas, there would have been a greater emphasis on this activity in schools as well (eg through participation of Learning Support Assistants in Elklan training and more focused use of SALTs to develop individual intervention programmes).
- 5.18** Hounslow has been fortunate that both Health and Education have continued to commit funding for therapy services. This has been supported by strong joint commissioning. However, there are some concerns that a shift to a much larger CCG (and a greater focus on achieving budget economies) may lead to less willingness for Health to invest in school-focused services and disrupt local funding arrangements.

Additional funding for individuals with significant needs

- 5.19** Projections for 2020/21 indicate that there will be nearly 780 pupils in mainstream schools receiving additional funding through EHCPs (642 in Hounslow state schools, over 120 in schools in neighbouring Boroughs, and a small number in independent mainstream). Overall cost of top-ups for the year is estimated at nearly £6m.
- 5.20** Numbers in any one primary school (January 2020 census¹⁷) ranged from 0 to 22 (0 to 4% of the overall population). Numbers in secondary ranged from 3 to 27 (1 to 3% of the overall population). There is a variable link between numbers with EHCPs and the percentage of pupils on SEN support which ranges from 4 to 25% in primary and from 7 to 25% in secondary.
- 5.21** Differences in percentage of pupils with EHCPs may reflect different levels of inclusiveness or lower thresholds for funding applications. There was evidence from interviews of informal signposting by professionals and parents to schools that had a particularly strong reputation for good SEN practice, with formal approaches by the LA in some circumstances. Some schools with SEN centres/resource bases had lower numbers of mainstream pupils with EHCPs, which could suggest they were more able to meet some needs with expertise based ‘in-house’.
- 5.22** Decisions about additional funding for mainstream all go through the statutory assessment panels. There is limited capacity for mainstream Heads and SENDCos to be involved in this process, given the frequency and length of panel meetings, and therefore few opportunities for peer support and challenge. While the Panels try hard to be consistent in their decision-making, there was some evidence of variability in application thresholds, which link partly to school expectations and experience.

¹⁷ Not including pupils in SEN centres/resource bases

- 5.23** There is a budget of around £740k for additional funding in Early Years settings. Historically, equal contributions have come from the Early Years and High Needs Block. However, the HNB contribution has recently been reduced to help manage the growing overspend in that budget, with a clearer focus on children with significant or profound/complex needs¹⁸. Overall, around 290 children received additional funding support during Spring Term 2021. Allocations ranged from £400 - £1,750 per term¹⁹.
- 5.24** Around 210 fte Hounslow students have attended mainstream FE colleges during 2020/21, with an overall cost projection of around £1.25m. The main colleges attended are West Thames (118 fte), Richmond (31 fte) and Ealing, Hammersmith & West London (25 fte).
- 5.25** As is the case in most other areas, students with HN in FE colleges are funded individually, even though there are bespoke courses/unit provision for those with more complex/significant needs. West Thames provides a wide range of courses from pre-entry to level 2 and beyond.

Specialist and alternative provision

- 5.26** Numbers of Hounslow pupils in specialist provision are relatively high compared to those with EHCPs in mainstream schools/settings (over 63% of the total pupils receiving HNB support) and there has been a 30% increase since 2017. Overall, placements in specialist and alternative provision now account for around 85% of the overall HN spend. While this is an important form of support for pupils with SEND, it draws more heavily on HNB funding and it therefore needs to focus consistently on those with the greatest need.
- 5.27** A number of those interviewed in this review felt that placements were not always matched to level of need. When there is a high percentage of pupils in specialist provision, there is less likely to be such a significant difference between some of those placed outside of mainstream schools and others that remain in this sector. It can also reflect differences between schools in levels of inclusion and variation in the quality of mainstream provision.
- 5.28** Some of those interviewed were frustrated that there were no places available for some pupils with significant difficulties or that their needs were considered to be too complex for some local specialist providers.
- 5.29** By contrast, provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and behaviour difficulties in Hounslow has been relatively responsive, with PRU,

¹⁸ The Early Years Block now pays for those with moderate to severe difficulties.

¹⁹ Based on 15 hours pw attendance. A large proportion of these (nearly 60%) were being funded at the 'significant' band level (£1200 per term) with only a handful at the top rate.

outreach and special school functions organised on an integrated basis (Woodbridge Park). Secondary schools have worked together and with the Hounslow Education Partnership and other agencies to meet most needs in Borough, with an emphasis on collective responsibility and using the available provision in a targeted and equitable way.

6. POSITIVES OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

- 6.1** Despite academisation, there remains in Hounslow a strong collaborative ethos, with good relationships between schools and with the LA. There is a shared commitment to meeting the needs of the local community.
- 6.2** Schools are willing to be involved in addressing HN budget issues and are involved in the different strands of the deficit recovery process. An experienced primary Head is leading the Deficit Recovery Board, with support from a SEN Programme Manager/ SEND Commissioner and a number of areas of activity are now under way.
- 6.3** There is recognition of some of the issues and an appetite for improvement.
- 6.4** There are examples of inclusive practice across the age spectrum, in the early years, primary and secondary phases and post 16.
- 6.5** Reported attainment outcomes for mainstream SEN pupils at school support are generally good.
- 6.6** There is new leadership within the Authority, with a strong commitment to SEND improvement and managing available funding more effectively.
- 6.7** A new and energetic SEND adviser has been appointed who has strengthened training and networking opportunities for mainstream SENDCos and other related staff. These have been maintained during the Covid period online. Topics have been relevant to particular mainstream concerns (e.g. ASD; speech & language difficulties; SEMH).
- 6.8** Developments have included greater opportunities for peer support and challenge.
- 6.9** There is a collaborative approach to meeting the needs of pupils who are at significant risk of exclusion (through the work of the Fair Access Panel, Hounslow Education Partnership and local providers).
- 6.10** There are currently good relationships at commissioning level between Education and Health, with established protocols for meeting medical needs in mainstream schools and settings.

7. KEY ISSUES

7.1 Hounslow currently faces some significant challenges relating to historic overspends and increasing demands. While additional Government money is helping address existing deficits, there is little new resource available for further investment. Any available capacity will need to be carefully targeted.

Strategy

7.2 Evidence from recent years shows that reliance on creating additional capacity in local specialist provision has not led to the desired outcomes. Overspends and demand for places have continued to grow, with limited impact on use of higher cost provision in the independent/non-maintained special school sector.

7.3 This strategy has been based on two assumptions:

- i) That increasing demands relate simply to increases in the numbers of pupils with significant/complex needs²⁰
- ii) That new local provision will plug the gaps driving out of Borough placements

Neither of these assumptions are accurate. Firstly, demands also relate to other factors such as budgetary and accountability pressures on mainstream schools (which are not dealt with by all schools in the same way). Moreover, the rise in numbers of pupils identified as having 'high needs' is largely associated with ASD diagnosis. Not all pupils with ASD have complex and significant needs, but as diagnosis increases, all schools need to have the skills and confidence to address these kinds of difficulties.

Secondly, creation of new local provision does not necessarily drive down INM placements. It needs to be properly targeted and commissioned, and overall numbers in specialist provision still need to be contained. Otherwise, new provision rapidly becomes full, with limited space available when needed for pupils with more complex and challenging needs.

7.4 Up until recently, the strategy has had more limited emphasis on the need to strengthen mainstream provision (what is 'ordinarily available' in all Hounslow schools). This is the area that is likely to have most impact on current demands and help lead to a more manageable system.

7.5 The evidence from this review suggests that the strategy has had less impact because of a high level of turnover of senior LA leadership over the recent period. Greater stability will be needed to see through the progress of any future strategic changes.

²⁰ Additional places has been created to meet projected increases based on historic trends

Achieving and sustaining the confidence of mainstream schools/settings and parents will be critical.

- 7.6** The Authority has recently set up an Operational Board involving key managers/ service leads²¹. This will help ensure a more coordinated approach to planned developments and progress review.

Overuse of specialist provision

- 7.7** Hounslow already has the highest level of use of specialist provision across all London Boroughs. Further expansion of places is unlikely to be the best or most cost-effective ways of meeting local children's needs. Moreover, there is evidence from this review that a number of those currently being placed could have had their needs met in mainstream given appropriate interventions, funding and support.
- 7.8** A recent summary of available reviews of international research on the impact of mainstream inclusion by the author of this report (in conjunction with Professors Brahm Norwich and Rob Webster) shows positive effects for most children with SEND in terms of academic and personal/social outcomes, and positive/neutral impact on outcomes for their mainstream peers (Norwich, Gray & Webster, in press).
- 7.9** The evidence showed that effects were mediated by the degree to which schools and teachers recognised the need to respond to the diverse needs of their learners and their skills and confidence in doing so. This has implications for the level of training and support that schools need to help them address these.
- 7.10** While some Head Teachers justify the current system by pointing to the relatively strong academic performance of pupils in Hounslow on SEN support, this is likely to be above average given the higher percentage placed outside the mainstream sector.

Funding for SEND in mainstream school/college budgets

- 7.11** Funding for SEND in mainstream school and college budgets needs to be more transparent, with clearer expectations about levels of investment to help ensure consistency and equivalent priority across the sector and evaluate impact.

Parental confidence

- 7.12** Considerable work will be needed to strengthen parental confidence in schools' ability to meet pupil needs. Currently, there is over reliance on statutory assessment to ensure needs are met, with some conflict with schools who may not feel this is necessary. Good communication and active engagement with parents is key. Not all

²¹ SENDIASS is also represented

issues require ‘big’ solutions, just greater clarity about what parents can reasonably expect. Some local areas have found it useful to develop a ‘good practice’ charter as a mutual reference point, building on the example first developed in Rotherham.

Availability of external support

- 7.13** External support and advice is now much more limited in Hounslow and schools can feel they have no-one to turn to when they are experiencing significant challenges. A particular gap relates to support for pupils with ASD, where other LAs typically retain a dedicated support team. This can provide a focus point for training and ensuring a more consistent local framework for meeting these kinds of needs, as well as more targeted support for pupils where placements are in danger of breaking down.
- 7.14** The current model for funding and delivery of speech and language therapy support is leading to frustrations, not just for schools and parents, but also for the service itself. Consideration needs to be given to the deployment and focus of this resource so that it has the most impact and helps achieve the best outcomes for children.
- 7.15** At present, schools with SEN Centres/resource bases are in a privileged position as they are able to draw on the skills/expertise available to strengthen their broader practice. Other schools don’t have this option. Hounslow is considering commissioning outreach services from some of its specialist providers. Given experience in other Authorities, it will be important that this is properly formalised and funded, with a clear service level agreement setting out expected outcomes.
- 7.16** In the absence of significant external support, it will be important to create more structured opportunities for peer support and challenge. School cluster groupings with clear leadership/facilitation and funding have proved a very effective resource in some other parts of the country and are now being developed in a number of other London Boroughs.

Accessing additional funding

- 7.17** Hounslow’s current system of accessing additional funding in mainstream schools and colleges is a traditional one, requiring statutory processes with all their associated positives and issues. While the system offers a sense of longer-term entitlement, it is not dynamic and funding allocations tend not to be actively reviewed. This means that some pupils hold on to resources longer than they need to, while others miss out on funding that could have prevented escalation of issues, if it had been provided at the right time²².

²² The current system for funding early years settings is more responsive in this regard.

- 7.18** Statutory assessments are also susceptible to demand pressures, from parents who are more familiar with the system and have the personal resources to negotiate it, and from some schools that consider they have a particular funding need. Conventional decision-making processes do not adequately address differences in thresholds for cases being put forward, leading to a level of inequity.
- 7.19** This kind of funding system also promotes inflexible use of additional resources, with parents feeling that a high level of '1:1' support is required on an ongoing basis and limited incentives to promote a greater level of independence (Webster & DeBoer 2019).

Transitions

- 7.20** There was evidence from this review of problematic transitions for parents and schools as children move through the phases of education. Differing systems and funding expectations between early years settings and mainstream primary schools are leading to an increasing requirement for statutory assessment to support admission at that stage. Literal application of the EHCP consultation process at primary-secondary transfer is leading to a heavy administrative load for staff in secondary schools and negative experience for some parents who can experience several rejections. The system is heavily paperwork-based and encourages schools with no prior knowledge of pupil needs, to adopt a cautious position on their ability to address these.
- 7.21** While parental 'choice' has become an increasing feature in the education landscape, both for pupils with SEND and more generally, the current process does not support the development of greater familiarity and understanding which would help guide both parent and school decisions more effectively. It also encourages more last-minute planning when it is known that discussions are better informed and more positive if they happen well in advance of transfer.
- 7.22** Even where communication between schools and with parents has been reasonable, it is still important that transitions are more personalised from the child/young person's point of view. The most effective approach tends to be for next phase 'keyworkers' to be identified so that they can get to know pupils in advance and provide a clear point of contact for parents with regard to any emerging concerns.

8. SUPPORTING AND FUNDING PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM: ADDRESSING THE ISSUES:

- 8.1** Positive progress is already being made in addressing some of the issues identified above. However, some significant system and cultural changes are also needed to help improve practice and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs. These are set out below:

Transparency of school SEN funding

- 8.2** Information on notional SEN budgets should be more widely available and be a reference point for Heads, SENDCos and governors in schools and for key local authority services. Clearer mainstream accountability for SEND outcomes is likely to be a theme from the national SEND review²³ and for future inspection activity.

Support and challenge

- 8.3** Consideration should be given to further strengthening external support for pupils with ASD, given the growing pressures in this area and the high percentage of EHCPs where ASD is the primary need. Services will need to play a key role in helping schools better meet these needs and help manage levels of demand for additional resources and specialist/alternative provision.
- 8.4** Consideration should be given to the development of formal school clusters (involving both primary and secondary schools to support more effective transitions, and with the potential to extend to include representatives from local early years settings). These could be a strong source of peer support and challenge, as well as playing a role in the better targeting of High Needs resources²⁴.

Models for additional funding

- 8.5** There is no legal requirement that *any* level of additional funding has to be determined by EHCPs. Some LAs use systems which allocate resources through other means. The best of these involve schools more collectively in identifying priorities, through a structured process of peer moderation. This allows pupils with more complex needs to be targeted more consistently as well as offering the opportunity for support and advice from colleagues in other mainstream schools where this is needed.
- 8.6** A system that involves stronger cross-phase working also helps to improve communication at points of transition as children are already ‘known.’
- 8.7** There would be considerable advantages in the Hounslow context to move in this direction:
- i) It would build on existing strengths in relationships between schools and commitment to meeting the needs of the local community

²³ To be published late spring/early summer this year

²⁴ Some level of devolution of HN funding to clusters could be included, as has happened in some other Authorities, so that needs can be met more flexibly/without recourse to statutory processes. Service capacity (eg EPS; speech and language therapy) could also be deployed at this level, giving schools a more collective role in identifying priorities/focus

- ii) It would help extend good practice across all mainstream schools and achieve a more consistent and high quality 'mainstream offer'
- iii) It would provide a more dynamic system for additional funding, in which schools had a greater 'stake'
- iv) It would help identify more consistently those pupils with more significant/complex needs who should be a priority for additional support or placement in specialist provision
- v) It would strengthen relationships between local schools and support service practitioners
- vi) There is the potential for greater alignment over time between funding systems operating in different sectors (early years/school/FE college)

9. RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS

9.1 System change is a complex process and requires active engagement of all stakeholders, as well as strong and consistent leadership from the LA. It is recommended that, as an initial step, this report is shared with relevant parties, through a series of briefings²⁵.

9.2 Following consideration by key officers, a Task & Finish Group should be established involving mainstream Heads and SENDCos and relevant LA personnel (SEN and Schools Finance). Parents will be a group to consider in moving forward and it is recommended that they are represented through the involvement of SENDIASS/PCF.

9.3 The group should be established as soon as possible with a clear agenda and timelines. The aim should be to develop a new approach to mainstream funding that could be shared with all schools and other relevant stakeholders as a model to be decided.

9.4 Implementation would be likely to start from April 2022, although some steps could be taken before then. The Authority should plan to make some new money available for this development, given the likelihood that further budget increases may be forthcoming for 2022/23²⁶.

²⁵ Including Schools Forum and the Deficit Recovery Board

²⁶ Government funding increases were part of a 3 year DSG settlement, which ends in 2023. Further increases beyond that point remain very uncertain.

References:

Norwich, Gray and Webster (2021): Impact of mainstream inclusion on pupils with SEND and their non-disabled peers: summary available on the SEN Policy Research Forum website: www.senpolicyresearchforum.co.uk

Marsh, Gray and Norwich (in press): Analysis of factors underlying differences in High Needs Block allocations to Local Authorities in England

Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (2019): Contrasting responses to diversity: school placement trends for all Local Authorities in England: 2014-2017

Webster & De Boer (2019) Teaching assistants: their role in the inclusion, education and achievement of pupils with special educational needs, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 34:3, 404-407

Appendix 1: List of interviewees:

Director of Children's Services
Interim AD (SEN & Disability)
Chair of HN Deficit Recovery Board
Schools Finance Officer

SEND school improvement adviser
Head of SEND Casework Team
Principal EP
Head/members of SEND support service
Head of Early Years and Early Years SEN service
Head of Woodbridge Park
Inclusion/exclusions manager
Designated Clinical Officer (Health)
Children's therapy services manager

Group of primary heads
Group of secondary heads
Groups of primary SENCOs (x2)
Group of secondary SENCOs
Group of primary and secondary governors
Group of EYs providers
Principal and Learning Support: West Thames College

Initial interview with SENDIASS lead and chair of Parent Carer Forum
Interview with small groups of parents/carers (x2) of children in mainstream schools/settings

Documents and data:

Report to Schools Forum on High Needs expenditure: 10th December 2015

HN Block Recovery Planning: Findings and recommendations: AMEO: 4/2/2020

Powerpoint presentations: HN Recovery Programme; Transforming SEND and alternative provision in Hounslow: 2020

Budget statements: 2020/21: Mainstream schools SEN; EHCPs by school/type of provision/age; breakdown of HN spend by category of provision; HN spend on central services

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