

 Brent	Schools Forum December 2014 Report from the Director of Children & Families
For Review and decision	
Review of the DSG funded Schools Causing Concern Budget	

1 Consultation and Decision Making

The Schools Forum has decision-making powers on the budget covered in this report.

At its meeting on 18 September 2013, the Schools Forum asked for a series of reports to be prepared, allowing the Forum to review and challenge the spending on services provided by the Council and funded through DSG. The first report of the Schools Causing Concern budget in this series was given on 23 October 2013. It introduced a revised approach to school improvement support in Brent through what was termed a Core Offer.

This particular report provides an update on the Core Offer, the expenditure against the Schools Causing Concern budget and explains how the introduction of the Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness will secure greater accountability from schools in receipt of funding from the Causing Concern budget. It seeks an increase in funding to support the increased level of rigour which the Framework introduces and continued approval for the de-delegation of funding.

2 Support for Schools Causing Concern or Requiring Improvement

The Schools Causing Concern budget is used to support all maintained schools including nursery and special schools which are underperforming or at risk of underperforming and do not have sufficient funds in their own budgets to cover the necessary additional expenditure to increase capacity for improvement. The purpose of any activity funded through this budget should ultimately lead to sustainable improvements in outcomes achieved by children and young people at a faster rate than possible without such intervention. The budget currently stands at £184,800 which equates to £6.90 per pupil (a lower rate than requested in last year's report) following the reduction in pupil numbers

arising from the academy conversions in 2012/13 and 2013/14. The total budget has remained the same for the past three years.

The Local Authority, through the School Improvement Service, has a statutory duty to offer challenge and support for those schools failing to provide all children and young people with a good standard of education. The Core Offer for School Improvement introduced in September 2013, explained how Brent would meet its statutory duty by providing support to all schools in Brent in inverse proportion to success at no cost to the schools' budget. It also outlined how schools could receive additional funding through the Schools Causing Concern budget.

For schools which are judged as requiring improvement and those identified as a cause for concern by OfSTED, a one year cycle has been established to ensure rapid improvement or ultimately to trigger intervention. The role of a Rapid Improvement Group (RIG) is to monitor the implementation and impact of a school improvement plan. The headteacher, chair of governors or a representative, a School Improvement lead officer and other school improvement professionals are expected to attend half-termly meetings of the RIG.

The improvement plan is specifically tailored to the needs of the school to include support for leadership and management, teaching, learning, inclusion and governance. The plan includes the implementation of a support programme which is monitored and reviewed at each half termly meeting. The improvement plan could trigger external financial support funded by the Schools Causing Concern budget should the school's own budget not be able to support all elements of the plan. Historically, this has been agreed in discussion with the school's Link Adviser and the Head of School Improvement, or through direct bids for Schools Causing Concern budget funding, submitted in proposals made to the Head of School Improvement by either the headteacher and/or Chair of Governors.

3 Introduction of a Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness January 2015

Following a review of the impact of the Core Offer as we near the end of the one year cycle for ten schools with RiGs established during the autumn term 2013, it has become apparent that a more rigorous, robust and transparent approach to securing accelerated school improvement is required. The Core Offer whilst introducing a transparent approach to allocating resources to support school improvement is largely a reactive approach triggered by poor standards as opposed to an approach which promotes ongoing improvement and eschews underperformance. This has led to the introduction of a Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness which builds on the Core Offer and introduces an agreed local authority categorisation process.

Schools are responsible for their own improvement and must develop both their own capacity for improvement and, ultimately, their capacity to support others before they can be regarded as offering outstanding educational provision by Ofsted. The Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness embraces this principle and its aim is for all schools in Brent to be part of a school-led system for school effectiveness in order to secure ongoing improvements without necessitating support and intervention from the local authority. A school's local authority category expresses an entitlement to support. A local authority category of 1 or 2 is effectively a quality kite mark indicating a school's capacity to secure its

own improvement and/or that of others. The local authority categorisation process is also designed, in the case of schools categorised as 3 or 4, to anticipate underperformance and trigger support in the form of a RIG and access to the Schools Causing Concern budget to bring about rapid improvement in order to avoid an adverse Ofsted judgment. It should be noted that in the case of schools which have been identified as requiring an Interim Executive Board (IEB), the Board performs the functions of a RIG.

4 Expenditure against the Schools Causing Concern budget

The chart below shows how funding has been allocated and spent during the 2013/14 financial year and the amount allocated in 2014/15 to date. The final column indicates funding bids requested but which have yet to gain approval.

		Financial Year		
		2013-14		2014-15
Agreed Budget		184,000		184,000
Category of spend		Amount Agreed (£)		Amount Agreed (£) Outstanding Requests (£)
Additional advisory		17,678		28,850 1,600
Additional Finance/HR support		2,000		4,000 400
Additional SIP		4,000		
*Direct payment to schools		114,170		
External review of governance				921
IEBs		40,024		63,895
School to school support		1,600		1,600 10,000
Total		179,472		99,266 12,000
Balance of budget		4,528		84,734 72,735

Eight schools have been supported so far in this financial year and an additional school has an outstanding funding request for support. In total, eleven schools were supported in the academic year 2013/14. Three schools have received funding both in the current year and in 2013/4 due to their improvement programmes spanning both financial years. It will be noted from the above chart that, in the past, some funds were directly allocated* to schools. Whilst such funding requests required outline

proposals from the school before receiving approval from the Head of School Improvement, the detailed purpose and proposed outcomes from such funding and processes for monitoring impacts were not consistent or sufficiently robust.

In addition, during 2013/14, five schools which did not have a RIG in place received support funded by the Schools Causing Concern budget.

5 Impact

The transition of the Core Offer from a reactive to a preventative approach to school improvement has led to a higher number of schools with RIGs than the total number of schools judged by Ofsted either as causing concern or requiring improvement. During the course of the academic year 2013/14, twenty one schools have agreed to a RIG, of which twelve have received funding from the Schools Causing Concern budget. By the end of this term, (December 2014), ten schools will have completed a year's cycle, one having converted to an academy during the course of the previous academic year and another in September 2014. Funding has been used to provide additional support at leadership level including governors' reviews and the establishment of an IEB as well as support for teaching and learning. Small amounts of funding have also been used to support schools in addressing budget and employment issues which were deemed to be having an impact on school effectiveness. Three schools with a RIG have recently been inspected and judged as good by Ofsted, a fourth continues to be judged as requiring improvement.

Monitoring of funds allocated to schools from this budget has shown that both the way in which monies are allocated and the monitoring of their impact requires a more robust approach. This will ensure the school is held to account to secure the anticipated outcome.

The Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness, in addition, to introducing a local authority categorisation process tightens the processes in which funds from the Schools Causing Concern budget are accessed and their impact are subsequently monitored. From January 2015, schools which have accepted a RIG (i.e. agreed their local authority category of 3b or 4) will be entitled to access funds from the Schools Causing Concern budget. RIGs will be required to submit a formal application for funding, with the support of a school improvement professional, outlining the purpose for which the funding is required, the anticipated impact on pupils' outcomes together with information about the school's ability to fund the required support from its own budget. In exceptional circumstances, when an unforeseen emergency arises which causes a school's capacity for improvement to be jeopardised, a bid from a school without a RIG can be submitted for funding support.

Once a Strategic School Effectiveness Board is established, expenditure against the Schools Causing Concern budget will be agreed and monitored by the Board. Currently, this is done by senior school improvement officers and in the form of this report to Schools Forum.

There are a range of reasons why the funding granted by Schools Forum to support 'Schools Causing Concern' is currently insufficient to realise our ambitions limiting the support that can be provided to underperforming schools which slows the pace of improvement. There are still too many Brent schools in an Ofsted category of concern (4) and too many judged as requiring improvement (11). Furthermore,

there are some schools where there are concerns about performance which have not been inspected under the latest revision of the Ofsted framework for school inspections. Nursery and special schools fall within the remit of the framework and as such can be subject to a RIG and able to access funding from the Schools Causing Concern budget. The Strategic School Effectiveness Framework, in introducing a more robust approach to school improvement, in the short term, is unlikely to alleviate this position. We therefore seek continued funding from Schools Forum for Schools Causing Concern at a notional¹ rate of £10 per pupil (an increase in the rate per pupil agreed in 2013) in maintained schools for 2015-16. This increases the total budget requested to £250,000 based on the numbers of pupils currently confirmed as attending maintained schools.

The ultimate measure of the impact of this budget will be the improving profile of schools in Brent as judged through the OfSTED inspection process. As more schools are removed from categories of concern and more are judged as good, the need for this additional funding for a significant group of schools will be reduced. Any future proposal for additional funding should be proportionate to need and evidenced through the local authority categorisation process.

6 Risk Analysis

Without appropriate and timely monitoring, challenge and support, there is a risk that schools causing concern, those in an agreed LA category of 3b, and those requiring improvement will not have the capacity to secure fast rates of improvement to enable their pupils to realise their full potential ultimately leading to local authority intervention. Securing high quality education for all of Brent's children and young people is a statutory local authority responsibility and, more importantly, a moral imperative shared by all those responsible for educational provision in the borough. The improved transparency of the budget's allocation and the rigorous monitoring of its use as described in the draft Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness is designed to ensure all children and young people enjoy high standards of education achieving their maximum potential.

7 Proposed 2015/16 Budget

In order to support the approach presented in this report, Schools Forum is asked to approve a revised annual budget for the 2015/16 financial year of £250,000, which represents an increase of £74,000 over the previously agreed budget for 2014/15. This currently equates to a pupil unit value of £10.

8 Recommendation

Schools Forum is asked to:

- a) welcome a more robust and rigorous approach to both the allocation of funds from the Schools in Causing Concern budget and the monitoring of its subsequent impact;
- b) approve the continued de-delegation of the Schools Causing Concern budget for 2015/16.
- c) agree a Schools Causing Concern budget of £250,000 for 2015/16

¹ The final pupil rate will be confirmed once final pupil numbers for this year have been confirmed.

Sarah Conway

Strategic Coordinator for School Effectiveness

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