

REPORT TO: School Forum

DATE: 20th January 2016

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision

SUBJECT: Review of Funding for Special Schools

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide to an update to School Forum on progress to date in revising the banding arrangements for Special Schools to ensure future funding is in line with the resources available.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That School Forum

2.1 Note the progress to date;

2.2 Support a budget reduction of £250,000 in 2016/2017 through revised banding levels; and

2.3 Support the disapplication request to the EFA for exemption to the MFG in 2016/2017.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At the October 2015 School Forum it was agreed that a review of special schools banding levels could be undertaken to bring funding in line with the resources available.

3.2 An initial briefing meeting was held with the four special school Headteachers/Principal on 5th October 2015 prior to the School Forum meeting. At this meeting the purpose of the review and the reasons it was necessary were outlined and discussed. Meeting dates were set so that the all schools could be involved in determining the revised arrangements.

3.3 Two meetings were held in November with meetings on the 12th and 25th and a third meeting on 8th December 2015. At these meetings the following issues were considered:-

- The current funding methodology;
- The rationale for the current two banding levels;

- Current school numbers;
 - The number of pupils funded at each Level;
 - Funding allocation, provision and pressures across the High Needs provision;
 - Level of base funding and how these figures were estimated;
 - Level of reduction required;
 - Number of banding levels for 2016/2017;
 - Criteria for revised banding arrangement;
 - Estimated reduction for each school; and
 - Option of reducing budgets over 1 or 2 years.
- 3.4 It was agreed that instead of having two banding levels from 2016/2017 there would be three banding levels with less differentiation between each of the funding levels. For each of the banding levels specific criteria has now been agreed by all four schools.
- 3.5 Each of the special schools was asked to use the revised criteria and then to identify which of the banding levels their current pupils would fall within. It was agreed that at the meeting scheduled to take place in January that options for revised banding levels could then be considered based on the reduced funding.
- 3.6 A detailed discussion was held on the level of reduction required to bring the overall level of special school funding in line with the funding available. It was agreed that although reductions were required the four special schools were not to be destabilised by the funding changes.
- 3.7 In order to provide each of the schools with adequate time to plan, the reductions will be introduced over the two funding years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. In 2016/2017 the total level of funding will be reduced by £250,000.
- 2.8 The High Needs Funding , Operational Guidance 2016/2017 issued in September 2015 continues to set special schools protection at minus 1.5% if numbers and types of pupils remain the same in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. A reduction of £250,000 to the banding levels will mean that the Minimum Funding Guarantee is breached. It is therefore proposed that a request is made to the EFA for an exemption to MFG through a

disapplication request. Any such request will require the agreement of School Forum and the four special schools. The four special schools have therefore been asked to support the disapplication. School Forum are also asked to agree to this request.

- 2.9 Further meetings have been scheduled to take place with the four special schools in the next two months to agree the final banding levels for 2016/2017. A further report will be provided to School Forum in March 2016 with the outcome of the disapplication and the final banding levels for 2016/2017.