



Reply to Paul Jacobs
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Our ref
Date 08 July 2015

Dear Colleagues,

Dedicated Schools Grant: Top Up Funding

I'm writing to you with the outcome of the recent local High Needs block consultation to all schools on Top Up funding. I am grateful to the working group of representatives from the Schools Forum and Top Up panel Headteachers, Inclusion leads and SENCOs for their contribution to shaping the consultation and the subsequent recommendations. This has been a very challenging piece of work.

As you are aware education is now facing very significant budget constraint from a range of directions, including the funding for children & young people with additional needs. In addition, the Government are currently consulting on the implementation of a National Funding formula to all schools. We expect the implementation of National changes by April 2018. In preparation for this, Dfe have issued guidance on each aspect of the review and changes taken to date. This currently relates to the schools block and high needs block only. A separate consultation on early years block is expected in the Autumn.

From April this year all 3 blocks of DSG funding have been "locked". This means that the previous flexibility afforded to schools Forum and the LA to balance budgets throughout the DSG has been removed. Each block is therefore required to be contained within the allocation set.

The context of the local consultation was the very significant pressure on the High Needs funding allocation reflected within the Top up budget. Top up funding is required to contribute to the total overall cost of making additional provision in both mainstream and special schools. There is an estimated annual overspend pressure of £2.9M in the current financial year together with a deficit carry forward of £1.8M from last financial year.

As outline above, the consultation document was developed with the assistance of a working group with representatives from the Schools Forum together with representative Headteachers, Inclusion lead and SENCOs involved in Top UP panels. This working group also reviewed the outcome of the consultation. This informed a Schools Forum report

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which was discussed at the Schools Forum meeting on 28th June. The Report and Consultation feedback are available at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/resources-professionals/schools-forum> .

The Schools Forum endorsed the following proposals:

Promoting Inclusion

1. Establish an Inclusion Reference group: This proposal had very strong support in the consultation. This group will act as a partnership mechanism for education providers in Bristol to work with the Local Authority to oversee Inclusion policy, practice and resourcing. The group will inform the work of the Bristol Schools Forum and the SEND Partnership Board which, in turn, reports to the Children & Families Partnership Board. It was agreed to use the current working group as a 'founders group' to develop Terms of Reference and a work plan for next academic year.
2. Develop an Inclusion Audit: The working group felt strongly that this has the potential to be a key tool in promoting inclusive practice in all our schools and in informing the monitoring and evaluation of practice across the City. The Inclusion Reference group will be asked to support the development of an audit along the lines of the online safeguarding audit and pilot it next academic year.
3. Top Up documentation: There was considerable concern about the bureaucracy involved in Top Up applications. The introduction of the Inclusion Audit and a refreshed approach to applications and funding provides an opportunity to revisit this. We will ask the Reference group to review this and advise on refreshed guidance in time for the autumn application round.
4. Inclusion clusters: The conclusion from the working group was that having effective clusters across the City was key and that there should be a review of current arrangements and how best to support and develop them.

Top Up Model:

5. Band descriptors: There was strong support for maintaining the current framework of universal banded descriptors to support transparency and equity across the city and between schools.
6. Band funding: The consultation feedback pointed strongly to introducing a focus on 'actual costs' within the Band descriptors.
7. Special schools and Resource bases: The consultation recognised the significant complexity of special school funding and the further work was agreed.

The working party have subsequently met again to review the final top up banding levels, agree the method and timings of applications, consider information and guidance to support schools and to form the terms of reference for the Schools inclusion reference group. As a result of the work of this group we are proposing the following approach:

Top up banding ranges and values

A funding range for each Band has been developed against the existing universal bandings. It does not include any contribution to management or facility costs. The funding range for each Band has been calculated using 'typical' elements of support for each Band of need:

Band	Group work hours	Group size (no.of children)	1-2-1 hours	Plus any SMSA time	Unsupported classroom hours	Total hours in school
Band 1	10	4	2.5	2.5	10	25
Band 2	12.5	3	5	2.5	7.5	25
Band 3	10	3	10	5	5	25
Band 4	10	2	15	7.5	0	25
Band 5	0	1	25	7.5	0	25

An 'average' TA scale of BG7 has been used as this was felt to offer a fair average cost across school staffing,(assuming term time only and including on costs and not including any contribution to management or facility costs). It was felt there should be recognition of the size of schools upon the impact of funding and banding levels reflect this. After, factoring in the expected school contribution of £6,000, the following funding ranges have been derived:

Relevant for Primary Schools

Band	Total cost (45.4 weeks)	Element 2	Proposed Top-up Range
Band 1	£4,352	£6,000	£0
Band 2	£6,972	£6,000	£0- - £1000
Band 3	£10,800	£6,000	£1001- £5,000
Band 4	£16,200	£6,000	£5,001 £10,000
Band 5	£19,344	£6,000	£10,001 - £13,500

Relevant for Secondary Schools

Band	Total cost (45.4 weeks)	Element 2	Proposed Top-up Range
Band 1	£4,352	£6,000	£0
Band 2	£6,972	£6,000	£0
Band 3	£10,800	£6,000	£1001- £5,000
Band 4	£16,200	£6,000	£5,001 £10,000
Band 5	£19,344	£6,000	£10,001 - £13,500

The advantage of this approach is that it retains the principle of providing 'top up' funding for schools to provide personalised additional support and removes the current 'hurdles' created by a single funding value for any Band.

The working party noted the costs of supporting children and young people who have physical daily care needs and who are currently funded at Band 3 within mainstream schools. It was agreed that for these children the cost of banding would be fully retained until review when actual costs would be implemented.

Method and timing of top up applications

It was felt that the recent top up pilot panel offered the best aspects of joint decision making while reducing bureaucracy and that bi-annual application opportunities would need to be retained. Schools who wish to apply for top up will be required to log “an expression of intent” at a panel of their choice and will be required to attend with relevant paperwork to support their application and to take part in joint decision making.

Information and Guidance for schools

It was considered essential to provide high quality support, information and Guidance to schools. It was agreed for immediate information to be issued in the SENCO newsletter, additional SENCO briefings to be offered in September and a model letter for schools to offer to parents should schools wish to use it. Early years and post 16 funding levels will now be subject to a similar costing review.

Implementation:

1. We propose to move all existing Top Up allocation to the maximum Band funding with effect from 1st September 2016
2. Existing review dates will remain in place and schools should plan for these. Where changes are required this will be notified to schools
3. New applications at November and subsequent panels will be assessed using these ranges of funding and will fund on individual pupil rates within the agreed range as identified on individual provision maps.
4. There will be two Top Up application rounds in 2016-17 Academic Years. These will take place in November and early May (date as yet to be set).
5. Any new allocations made in the autumn panel will be back dated to 1st September and new applications at the May panel will be dated from the beginning of term 4.
6. For those schools with children and young people who have physical daily care needs confirmation of their funding will be sent and will be reflected within their schedule.
7. All schools will receive notification of the changes via their monthly schedule.
8. An audit will be developed with the Inclusion reference group in the autumn, further details will be issued in the new Academic year.
9. SENCO briefings will be arranged for early in the autumn term, further details will be issued in the SENCO newsletter.

These actions will contribute to the overall savings required to an estimated £1.7m. I do appreciate that these new funding levels will present significant challenges especially in the climate of other funding pressures on schools. However, I hope that you will appreciate the need for us to manage within the budgets provided by government and that we have sought to develop an equitable and principled approach to awarding Top Up allocations.

Finally, I would like to thank again the schools and School Forum members who contributed to this process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Jacobs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Paul Jacobs
Service Director, Education & Skills