

**Title of meeting:** Schools Forum

**Date of meeting:** 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**Subject:** An evaluation of initiatives to manage the DSG's High Needs Block spending

**Report from:** Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education

**Report by:** Julia Katherine, Head of Inclusion, Education Service

**Wards affected:** All

**Key decision:** Yes/No

**Full Council decision:** Yes/No

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## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the impact of initiatives implemented with the aim of managing demand on the DSG's High Needs Block funding:
- 1.1.1 The establishment of a SEND 'Monitoring and Review' Hub to monitor the impact of element 3 funding attached to EHCPs and ensure value for money on behalf of Schools Forum.
  - 1.1.2 A pilot project to test the use of AV1 'No Isolation' robots to increase the inclusion of children who are unable to physically attend school, and thereby increase the value for money of the medical tuition offer.
  - 1.1.3 The Turnaround project, funded by a DfE grant which has now come to an end, and which focused on increasing the successful reintegration of children from Alternative Provision (AP) to mainstream schools thus increasing the availability of AP places.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Schools Forum note:
- 2.1.1 The progress the SEND Monitoring and Review Hub has made and that a full evaluation of the impact of the work after 18 months will be brought to Schools Forum in 2022.
  - 2.1.2 Continued funding of 6 AV1 'No Isolation' robots £15k per annum.
- 2.2 It is expected that Schools Forum approve:

2.2.1 Funding the Turnaround project circa £100k per annum with a minimum commitment of 3 years. Any future funding would be based on a full evaluation of the project.

### **3. Monitoring and Review Hub**

- 3.1 In February 2021, Schools Forum endorsed and the Cabinet Member approved the establishment of a SEND 'Monitoring and Review' Hub to work on behalf of Schools Forum to ensure value for money within the high needs provision both in the city and with Out of City providers. It was expected that this spend to save initiative would help to cap the increase in costs seen across the high needs sector by ensuring the appropriate level of funding to meet support requirements.
- 3.2 The initiative was expected to run for two financial years starting in April 2020 at an annual cost of £180,000, but due to the national lockdown the start date for the recruitment process was delayed until September 2020. The unspent balance has been returned to the DSG and will form part of the 2020-21 carry-forward balance.
- 3.3 The funding has enabled recruitment to four posts, two SEND Caseworkers and two SEND Advisers. These four new posts make up the Monitoring and Review hub and have now been recruited to. Two members of staff started in January 2021, the remaining two started after the February half term.
- 3.4 The purpose of these posts will be to focus on annual reviews of EHCPs to ensure that:
- The support specified within the EHCP is being delivered and is achieving the intended outcomes
  - The EHCP is being funded at the correct level, in line with the child's needs
  - Where there is evidence to suggest that the support required should be reduced or an EHCP should be ceased, then this is actioned
  - All out of city placements are proactively reviewed to ensure that plans are in place for when these children's needs can be met within the city.
  - Ensure timescales are met for responding to requests for changes in provision following annual review meetings, as well as amending or ceasing EHCPs, where this is appropriate.
- 3.7 The above actions will contribute to the increased accountability for DSG spending and the value for money assurance requested by Schools Forum. Given the delay in recruitment due to the pandemic, It is proposed that a full evaluation of the impact of the work of the Monitoring and Review Hub across a full year is brought to Schools Forum in early 2022.

### **4. AV1 'No isolation' robots**

- 4.1 The Local Authority commissions The Harbour School to provide tuition to those pupils who are in hospital, or unable to attend school due to a decision

made by a medical practitioner. The funding for 2021-22 remains at £660,000 for this provision.

- 4.2 In 2020-21 funding was included in the budget for a pilot using AV1 robots to support remote learning and engagement for pupils unable to attend school for medical reasons. A small pilot began in September 2020 and initial feedback was positive. All schools involved in the pilot have reported that they believe the AV1 devices to be a valuable tool as part of the medical continuum.
- 4.3 The pilot was paused due to the 'lockdown' restrictions between January and March 2021. This was at no cost to the LA as the cost of the trial is deductible from the overall cost of purchase. The trial was re-started once schools returned to full on-site attendance. £3,896 has so far been spent on the rental of the AV1 robots. Originally this was intended to cover the 3 month pilot, but the pilot has now been running for nearly a year at no additional cost.
- 4.4 The pilot has involved 6 AV1 devices, deployed across 5 schools, including primary, secondary and special schools. So far 7 children have been allocated an AV1 'robot'.
- 4.5 Feedback from schools and families involved in the pilot included the following points:
- Use of the AV1 by a child with a long term medical condition (heart related) has meant that during the Covid19 pandemic, she has been able to attend school throughout and spend time with her peers.
  - Feedback from pupils in school has been positive; they have liked the idea that they could keep in contact for the periods of time that the pupil was unable to attend.
  - Feedback from the pupils using the devices has been positive; they have really enjoyed still being part of the class, keeping up to date with topics, joining in with lessons and seeing their peers.
  - Parental feedback has been positive; they have reported being very happy with the way that it allows the child to stay in touch with the class and what is going on in school.
  - The benefit of the AV1s have been identified by schools as maintaining the child's engagement with the class, keeping up to date with the learning taking place in class, gaining the teacher's direct input, being able to get instant responses from the child and enabling the child to maintain relationships with their peers.
- 4.6 It is recommended that there is a continuation of the funding for AV1 devices in order to enable AV1s to become part of the offer of support for children who are unable to physically attend school for a period of time. Decision making about suitability of this approach for an individual child can be made by the Inclusion Support Panel (Fair Access Panel), where decisions are already made about access to medical tuition.

4.7 Between September 2020 and April 2021, there have been 20 new referrals for medical tuition. Having the option of providing an AV1 robot in response to referrals for medical tuition will enhance the offer by ensuring that the child remains more connected to their mainstream class and is therefore more ready for reintegration at the appropriate time. In addition, AV1 devices enable more hours of education to be delivered more cost effectively than individual tuition as well as ensuring the provision is more tailored to individual need. Currently, medical tuition is block funded and so increased demand can result in a reduction in the hours available for individual children.

## 5. Turnaround project

- 5.1 The Turnaround Project was funded by DfE grant money which ended in August 2020. Turnaround was focussed on Key Stage 3 pupils accessing Short Stay School as well as pupils at The Harbour School through Alternative Provision. The focus was on increasing the successful reintegration of pupils to their mainstream school - and evidence showed the project had significant impact on reintegration rates. Evaluation evidence points to a number of key factors including; retaining and building relationships between the pupil and their mainstream school, long-term wrap-around family-based support and the utilisation of the principles underpinning PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy).
- 5.2 The Turnaround approach included support for mainstream schools, one-to-one key working for the pupils and advocacy for the family. This approach enables better management of the system of accessing short episodes of Alternative Provision at The Harbour School, which in turn means an improved flow of children through the school, freeing up spaces for other children and reducing long-term Alternative Provision costs for schools.
- 5.3 Following the success of the Turnaround Project, we have consulted with The Harbour School and secondary schools about how best to build on this work to further increase successful reintegration of pupils from Alternative Provision at The Harbour School back to mainstream.
- 5.4 The evaluation of the Turnaround project has shown that the outcomes of the project included:
- Reintegration to mainstream - 85% of pupils successfully returned to their mainstream school.
  - Social and emotional skills - 100% of pupils evidenced an increase in their emotional literacy skills.
  - Support for families - 86% success achieved in at least 2 areas of Troubled Families outcomes. 38% of the families being supported had no other agency involvement in terms of Early Help. By the end of the project, 71% of these had Early Help Assessments and plans in place (36% had targeted Early Help or Children's Social Care involvement). As a result of the project, additional support was being provided to 19 siblings in addition to the pupils directly involved.

- Improved relationships within the home - 100% of parents reported relationships as 'better' or 'very much better'. 80% of pupils reported relationships as 'better' or 'very much better'.

5.5 Qualitative comments included the following:

- *'Constant communication from ...with myself and mainstream. Help from ..... During her CAMHS assessment' (Parent)*
- *'Being able to talk to someone about things made me buck my ideas up' (Pupil)*
- *'There's been a real transformation in ...' (Head Teacher)*

5.4 It is proposed that £100k (full year effect) High Needs Block funding is used to continue the work of the Turnaround Project. This would fund one band 8 and two band 6 workers. Funding would need to be agreed for at least 2 consecutive years in order to enable recruitment and training of staff with the skill set required.

5.5 The outcomes that can be expected from this investment are: increased successful reintegration from Alternative Provision to mainstream schools, ensuring that Alternative Provision places are available for those who most need them, as well as improved relationships with families.

5.5 One of the key factors contributing to the success of the Turnaround Project was the perception of staff as independent to both The Harbour School and the mainstream school. It is therefore proposed that this work is located as part of the Inclusion Outreach Service, alongside the Multi-Agency Behaviour Support Service, with accountability to the Inclusion Group.

## **6. Equality impact assessment**

6.1 An equality impact assessment is not required as the recommendations do not have a negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010.

## **7. Legal implications**

7.1 Local authorities are required to inform and consult with the Schools Forum in respect of financial issues relating to arrangements for pupils with special educational needs.

7.2 The high needs funding system supports provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from their early years to age 25, enabling both local authorities and institutions to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 (the Act).

7.3 Under section 27 of the Act the local authority is under a duty to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision made in its area for children and young people who have special educational

needs or a disability.

- 7.4 The recommendations sought in this report contribute towards monitoring the value for money provision in the High Needs Block and assisting the local authority in managing demand on the High Needs Block funding to ensure the LA can continue to meet its statutory duties.

**8. Head of Finance comments**

- 8.1 In February 2021, Schools Forum endorsed and the Cabinet Member approved the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget for 2021-22. The budget contained funding for both the SEND Hub and AV1 Robots as detailed in the report.
- 8.2 At the time of approving the budget a decision had not been made on the proposals regarding the reintegration of pupils from Alternative Provision back to their mainstream school. Should the proposals be endorsed by Schools Forum and subsequently approved by the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education, the DSG budget will be revised to include the part-year costs and brought to a future meeting for approval.

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Signed by: Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

.....  
Signed by: