

BANDING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS – INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT

Report By: Head of Children's and Students' Services

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To consider the progress made to date with regard to the banding project in primary schools.

Financial Implications

2. None

Report

3. Prior to the introduction of banding in September 2003, resources for children with severe and complex special needs (those whose needs cannot be met by School Action or School Action Plus) were allocated through the statutory assessment process. This process is bureaucratic and long-winded, and the cost of implementing the procedure often exceeds the value of the resources allocated to the pupil at the end of it. To increase efficiency and flexibility, the banding project was devised as an alternative method of funding for pupils with severe and complex needs. It has the advantages of:
 - making it easier for schools to understand and to apply for funding;
 - access to appropriate resources more quickly;
 - being more flexible, allowing schools to decide how the money can be best spent to meet the needs of the child.
4. The new method of allocating resources was introduced as an outcome of the revised Special Educational Needs Policy and Action Plan, as outlined to the Education Scrutiny Committee on 3rd October 2002.
5. Banded funding is divided into 4 levels, each carrying a different monetary value:

Level 1	£1,500
Level 2	£3,000
Level 3	£6,000
Level 4	£9,000

Eligibility for funding at any level is determined by clear criteria. Schools must demonstrate at all levels how they have used their own resources to meet the needs of the child, and show why additional funding is required and how it will be used.

6. Following a pilot study, the proposal to introduce banded funding initially in primary schools was included as part of the LMS consultation that took place in January 2003. The results of that exercise were outlined to Education Scrutiny on 26th March 2003. Further meetings were held in the Spring to introduce the new system to schools, including governors, parents and other interested parties. As a result, banding was introduced for all **new** requests for additional funding in primary schools from September 2003.
7. As anticipated, with any new system, there have been teething problems and the procedures are being adjusted, where necessary, to take account of the feedback that has been received from schools. A question and answer booklet (now in its 2nd edition) is available for schools (Appendix A) and a parent-friendly version is being written by the Parent Partnership Officer.
8. The response from schools has generally been positive. A letter is being sent to all schools in January to update them about progress so far, and to identify any other further work that needs to be carried out.
9. A preliminary comparison of statistics is included as Appendix B. These give an early indication that the number of requests for statutory assessment (which is still an option open to schools and parents) is falling. This is a positive outcome as it releases valuable resources, including the support services, to be used more creatively in supporting a wider number of pupils.
10. The figures also demonstrate a healthy interest from schools in accessing banded funding. The feedback received from schools is proving valuable in producing an efficient and effective method of allocating resources to pupils with the highest need.
11. A working party is currently looking at the introduction of banding into secondary schools for September 2004. This will be a natural progression as primary pupils move at phase transfer and it will introduce the benefits of the banded system to secondary age pupils

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee considers the progress of the banding project to date and identifies any areas of concern that might arise in the future.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SEN Policy and Action Plan
LMS Consultation questionnaires