

Improved High Needs Matrix Proposals – April 2021 – Consultation

Consultation with all Herefordshire schools and colleges and parent and carer groups representing children with SEND. Consultation closes 1st March 2021.

All RESPONSES to HNMConsultation@Herefordshire.gov.uk by 3rd March 2021.

Summary

1. The High Needs Matrix (HNM) is the method used to calculate funding to support:
 - Children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Herefordshire.
 - Some children and young people without EHCPs who have a similar level of need, but have not been assessed for an EHCP.

Usually, funding for the second group is time-limited and in the first instance, an EHCP might not be necessary.

It was intended the HNM would be reviewed following its introduction in 2014.

Herefordshire Council has worked with a broad range of colleagues, parents and schools to review the HNM so that it accurately reflects the needs of the vast majority of children and young people with SEND in Herefordshire.

The HNM is used to calculate funding by professionals, who look at the descriptions of a range of special educational needs and disabilities, and select the one that best describes the child's difficulties. Each of these descriptors is awarded a score which can be seen in the left hand column of the HNM. The scores are added and the total corresponds to an amount of funding to be allocated.

2. Areas for improvement were identified by the working group, which included:

- Behaviours associated with autism and social, emotional and mental health were 'counted' twice as they appeared in two columns of the matrix
 - There wasn't a clear distinction between some descriptions of specific and general learning difficulties.
 - The description of some severe medical and physical needs were not clear or detailed enough to recognise how complex the needs might be. This meant that the matrix could not be used to calculate funding for too many children and young people and decision were being made on an individual basis.
 - The descriptions of need weren't detailed and were too ambiguous which meant people using the HNM were not clear how to score the needs of a child.
 - The funding levels (known as tariff boundaries) were not spread out consistently.
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3. The revised HNM addresses these issues. It has been tested both by the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Team and a number of schools (including special schools), for its usability, robustness and to ensure that it represents each child's needs and therefore the funding required to meet those needs. Comparison of the revised HNM alongside the original version was undertaken to ensure it gave a similar funding and that it reflected the level of need.
4. Financial testing indicates that the total expenditure using the revised HNM is broadly comparable to the existing arrangements; it is expected to be largely cost neutral.
5. The new high needs tariff matrix is set out in Appendix 1

Current Funding Levels and Tariff Boundaries

6. The current funding levels and tariff boundaries applicable for financial year 2020/21 are set out in Appendix 2.
7. In 2017, the local authority introduced the finer graded tariff levels (A1 – F4) to allow more recognition of the differing complexity of needs within a funding band. These were applied in all schools. However, the local authority had to pay regard to the Department for Education's guidance to ensure that no school would suffer financially due to the changes. This is called the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG). For this reason, pupils in special schools have continued to be paid the top of the relevant tariff band pending this revision of the HNM.
8. The original HNM was designed so that the same need would be funded at the same level, irrespective of school type (e.g., mainstream or specialist). The design of the new matrix is intended to maintain this principle.
9. The Local Authority is required to apply the MFG to special schools, however as new pupils arrive at the school, the guarantee provided reduces because pupils are placed on their actual band rather than necessarily being at the top of the band. Moderation and testing confirms that the existing structure of tariff boundaries in place remains appropriate; although the values attached to these may change marginally following consultation and final budget planning.
10. The following fundamental principles will continue to be applied to the new matrix
 - All pupils should be funded at the same level irrespective of the setting they attend (e.g., mainstream or specialist). The funding should reflect a child's need, not where they are educated.
 - We seek to minimise the impact of funding changes for individual settings; transitional arrangements will be applied.
 - Funding levels should be split as evenly as is possible across the tariffs to avoid substantial jumps between one tariff and the next, where this represents only a small change in need.
 - Tariff levels should be sustainable within the High Needs Grant provided by Central Government.

Illustrative Calculations for Funding from April 2021

11. Appendix 2 sets out illustrative funding values for each tariff which will be part of the consultation with schools and parental groups and subject to any necessary minor adjustments following consultations will be effective from 1 April 2021.

Proposals

12. From 1 April 2021 the new proposals will ensure that;

- All new Education Health Care (EHC) Plans will have funding allocated using the updated tariff levels, including those for children and young people attending specialist settings.
- All children and young people reaching 'phase transfer' points of Reception, Year 6 and Year 11 will be moved to the revised HNM with the appropriate tariff levels applied.
- All EHC Plans will be moved to the new funding matrix within five years.
- All non EHC Plan Top Up Funding applications will be allocated funding using revised HNM.

Following consultation, final proposals will be presented to Schools Forum on 19 March 2021 and thereafter to the Cabinet Member Children and Families for formal approval and implementation.
