

BANDING INTO SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THE MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

Report By: Head Of Children's And Students' Services

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To consider the progress to date of extending banded funding, which has been available in primary schools since September 2003, into secondary schools and to consider the proposed development of monitoring arrangements.

Financial Implications

2. None – these developments will be met through the existing budget arrangements.

Report

Banded funding into secondary schools

3. There has been increasing pressure from Government agencies in the past two years to reduce reliance on the statutory assessment process as a mechanism for delegating SEN funding to schools. Herefordshire has, to an extent, anticipated these pressures and has adopted a banded funding model to reduce bureaucracy and give schools more flexibility in the way they use their funds.
4. A wide range of consultations, based on a banding matrix, started in the autumn term 2001 and a model was developed with a sample group of primary schools. After extensive training and further consultation, actual banded funding was started on a trial basis in primary schools in the summer term 2003, with full implementation the following autumn. No banded funding was allocated to Year 6 pupils in the summer of 2003 because there was no mechanism for them to take this funding into Year 7 at that stage. Even the following summer, there were very few children in this group across the County. However, with the potential reduction of children with statements moving to Key Stage 3 in the future, decisions were needed on a model for secondary schools. Consultations commenced in the summer of 2003 through the main Funding for Inclusion group and through a working party set up by that group with additional secondary representatives. It was agreed that a continuation of banded funding into the secondary sector was the best way forward.
5. Discussions continued into 2004, by which time it was possible to completely revise the matrix and protocols in the light of experience gained over the first year. As part of this revision, new guidance was issued and a further consultation conducted in the summer of 2004. The outcome was that a new panel was formed, with decisions being made exclusively by the teacher members. In addition, the new matrix broke the link with statutory assessment and clarified for schools their part in the process. The system is now working extremely well in primary schools and the rate of requests for statutory assessment has declined dramatically.

6. It was not possible, nor necessary, to start banded funding in secondary schools immediately in September 2004. However, the delay gave opportunities for wider consultation and the training of special needs co-ordinators. Because the large part of the funds for banded funding in secondary schools would only be available as young people with statements left school, it was decided to accept applications for Year 7 pupils as from November 2004, with commensurate progress in following academic years. There is, of course, secondary representation on the banding panel and the majority of high school special needs co-ordinators are very positive about the way banded funding will affect their practice. From the summer term 2005, secondary schools will be able to bid, in advance, for funds for children then in Year 6 who will transfer in September 2005. This will help with transition and it will also enable schools to capitalise on their close liaison with feeder primaries in developing individual education plans. From September 2005, banded funding will extend to Years 7 and 8 though, of course, it will not be until the end of 2008 that it will apply across the whole typical high school age range.

Monitoring

7. At the same time as introducing banding, the County has sought a mechanism to enable it to respond more effectively to the need to account for the effectiveness of delegated funds and pupils' progress. With large amounts of money being spent on provision for special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools, it is important to know that it is spent effectively. Effectiveness can be measured in terms of school improvement, individual pupil's outcomes and how well children with SEN do in terms of key skills such as literacy and numeracy.
8. Allocations of banded funding have monitoring built into them. Schools are asked to make clear how they will spend the money to move the child forward and targets are set, usually in the form of an individual education plan (IEP). Members of the support services, in their normal work with schools, assist special needs co-ordinators in assessing children's progress in meeting those targets and, where necessary, in adjusting programmes of work. In cases of higher levels of banded funding, usually where children have significant long-term needs, it is open to the banding panel to ask schools to set up a more formal annual review process, not unlike the one for children with statements of SEN.
9. Moves are in hand to improve the co-ordination of the data which arise from this monitoring. Colleagues in the School Improvement Service (formerly the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service) already work with schools in their evaluation of effectiveness. Aspects of school evaluation, which relate to SEN, will benefit from up to date information about individual pupil progress, which programmes are working well and how support staff are used effectively. Because banded funding is clear about the actual allocation of money to schools, it will be increasingly possible to decide whether pupil progress is commensurate with the investment.
10. Banded funding monitoring has also highlighted areas of the curriculum which may not be as effective for children with SEN as they should be across the County. In addition, it draws attention to common areas of concern, such as behaviour problems, or speech and language delay. It is important that the Council offers training to schools and encourages them to share good practice. In many instances, this can be more efficient than trying to address the needs of every child on an individual basis.

11. The Children's Services Management Team has approved, in principle, the new appointment of a monitoring officer. The role of the monitoring officer will be to co-ordinate the monitoring that is already taking place in schools, to ensure that the process is robust, to identify improvements that need to be made to the monitoring process and to work with the advisory teacher for SEN on future training needs. It is hoped that an appointment can be made to this post in the summer term.

Recommendations

THAT

- a) **the Committee consider, and comment on, the progress on banding as set out in the report and;**
- b) **the Committee support the development of the current monitoring arrangements.**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.