

SLOUGH SCHOOLS' FORUM
September 2019

Directorate of Children Learning and Skills

First review of SEND Banding (top-up funding) Model

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an overview of what has been learned from an initial review of the new SEND Banding model, the cautious and phased implementation of which commenced on 1st April 2019. Specifically, the report presents:

- Data from SEND Panels in July and August
- An analysis of early trends, identifying encouraging signs, initial concerns and potential risks
- Action planned over the autumn term to build upon successes and mitigate potential risks

1.2 Background

At its March 2019 meeting Schools' Forum:

- Approved the proposed new Banding model for roll-out from 1st April 2019
- Agreed to receive further reports at key stages during the extended implementation period, specifically following key monitoring points scheduled for July and December 2019 and April and July 2020

The new SEND banding model is designed to deliver a fair and transparent funding structure and, specifically:

- Align more closely with the SEND Code of Practice
- Offer a common banding structure across mainstream, resource base and specialist provision
- Make transparent the Local Authority's assumptions in assigning monetary values at each Band
- Help shape how Local Authority officers and colleagues in schools understand SEND and specialist support/provision

2 INITIAL FINDINGS

2.1 Headline data from Panel meetings in July and August

Table 1 below provides an overview of Panel decisions – as they relate to new EHC Assessments - in July and August 2019 compared to the same period in 2018. It also compares Panel's decision with indicative bandings suggested by schools and SEN Officers.

Table 2 provides an overview of Panel decisions – as they relate to Year 5 pupils in advance of phase transfer

Implementation is at an early stage and the relatively small number of cases involved so far means that data can be skewed significantly by a single complex/high cost decision¹. Taking these limitations into account, the data suggests that some potentially important trends may be emerging.

1. The overall cost to the High Needs Block for the 2 months increased by over 35.6% (£68,500) compared to the same period in 2018.
2. Similarly, the mean cost per EHCP rose by 29% (£2,496), although this trend was probably exaggerated by a very high cost decision by Panel in August
3. The cost of Panel decisions to date relating to Year 5 pupils in preparation for phase transfer represent a modest saving of approx. 7.5% compared to current commitments
4. In July indicative bandings suggested by SEN Officers were broadly in line with the Panel decision. However, bandings suggested by schools were, on average, almost 85% (£8,448 per EHCP) higher.

Table 1

		2019			2018	Annual variation
July		Panel	Officers	Schools	Panel	
	Decisions	21	17	15	15	6
	Total cost	209,000	174,500	276,000	117,000	92,000
	Mean	9,952	10,265	18,400	7,800	2,152
	Variation from Panel		400 (4.0%)	8,448 (84.90%)		
August						
		Panel	Officers	Schools	Panel	
	Decisions	3	1	0	8	3-
	Total cost	57,500	6,000	n/a	81,000	23,500-
	Mean	19,167	6,000	n/a	10,125	9,042
	Variation from Panel		n/a	n/a		
Total						
	Decisions	24			23	1
	Total cost	266,500			198,00	68,500 (35.6%)
	Mean	11,104			8,608	2,496 (29%)

¹ E.G 1 of the 3 decisions in August was to allocate Band 11 (£40,000) funding to a pupil with particularly severe and complex needs

Table 2

Decisions	Current cost	Projected cost	Variation
34	459,982	425,500	34,482

2.2 Supporting information

- i. Some settings, especially PVI's were proactive in seeking support and guidance support in the early stages and reporting increased understanding and confidence as a result.
- ii. There are examples of collaborative dialogue between SEND Officers and schools around banding and individual cases contributing to mutual understanding and greater consistency.
- iii. Evidence from Panel discussions that the early variation between the banding levels suggested by SEND officers and, more recently, education settings is beginning to narrow.
- iv. The "Matrix calculator" has received positive feedback and has helped to reduce instances of miscalculations.
- v. Despite this, it is evident that some education settings have suggested banding levels that are significantly at odds/greater than that determined by Panel. Initial analysis suggests that in such cases settings tended to focus their attention exclusively or primarily on the Matrix front sheet, often failing to refer sufficiently to other contextual pages.
- vi. Advice from the SEND Team and ESEO SEND to refer first to professional reports and Matrix contextual pages before moving onto the front sheet has helped to address this issue and build practitioner understanding and practitioner confidence.

2.3 Initial conclusions

Encouraging signs:

Narrative feedback suggests that the confidence and consistency with which the Matrix is being used is growing as education and SEN professionals become more familiar with it. Particular encouraging have been examples of:

- Increasing rigour and professional decision making based on professional advice
- Strengthened collaboration between SEN Officers and Education settings

- Education Settings responding positively and improving practice in response to support and guidance, including requests for further support

Concerns and potential risks

Implementation is at an early stage and variations in understanding and practice are to be expected.

While data is needed over a longer period of time before trends can be identified with any confidence, initial signs of additional financial pressures within the High Needs Block, are of concern and require close monitoring

3 ACTION PLANNED

The following action is planned in response to feedback and learning to date:

- The Quality and Performance work stream will continue to monitor Panel decisions on a monthly basis, paying particular attention to any financial pressures that may begin to become established as more data emerges
- We will continue to offer regular briefings to internal and external partners²
- We will continued to offer individual visits to setting on request and use Panel discussions as an ongoing training opportunity
- We will make a minor revision to EHC request to assess documentation and guidance to make clearer where and how the Matrix fits within the overall procedures
- Work is planned with Educational Psychologists and members of BHFT to review and strengthen SCLN descriptors, with a view to inform and improve alignment with professionals reports

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Schools' Forum is asked to:

- Note initial findings and action planned in response
- Receive further reports following future key monitoring points scheduled in December 2019 and April and July 2020

5 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Introducing a new funding model of this kind is a complex undertaking. Close oversight is needed to:

² e.g., Early Years Advisory Teachers, 15.10.19

- Keep to an absolute minimum any financial risk to individual education settings and the High Needs Block
- Make sure that all those involved understand and are confident in using the model
- Use feedback and learning from the early phases to refine and improve the model further.