

The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust Response

A Consultation of School Funding Reform: Rationale and Principles

25th May 2011

1. Do you agree with the stated characteristics of an ideal school funding system? (Section 2)

All. It is clear that the current funding system is complex and not uniform. The DST welcomes a system which is flexible enough to ensure children and young people with special educational needs can access additional funds to meet their specific needs at any point in their education, be it early years or later.

2. Are there further characteristics the system should have? (Section 2)

Yes

If 'Yes', what are they?

As stated in question 1 the DST recommends that within the proposed funding system there should be a mechanism whereby extra resources are readily available to those children and young people with specific needs at any stage in their education. This would include calling on experts or specialists to offer advice to a school on their policies and strategies for managing their children and young people with dyslexia/SpLD. The DST recommends that school staff training in SEN should be given high priority. The system should also include making available funds for individual assessments and tuition for those not making progress or whose difficulties are severe enough.

3. Do you agree with the analysis of how the current system falls short of these aims? (Section 3)

The current system is complex and not easy to follow. The DST can report back from our teachers, parents and specialist stakeholders who are involved in the current system. They tell us that what is essential to ensure more transparency about funding and choice within the system for parents/ key workers is:

Accountability for use of SEN budgets, including:

- Ring fenced SEN budgets
- not cutting budgets in 'achieving schools' to give to 'failing schools'
- Include Value for Money in Ofsted inspections
- Schools to publicly publish annual accounts to show SEN budget use

4. Do you agree with the case for reforming the system? Yes

The DST welcomes the idea of improvement and change for the better. The proposed characteristics as set out in section two sound positive.

5. Do you agree that the aim of ensuring all deprived pupils get the same level of funding no matter where they live is the right one? (Section 4)

The DST note the working definition of deprived children as set out in section four. This does not seem to include our children with SEN, specifically those with SpLD/dyslexia who may be neither looked after or eligible for free school meals. In our experience every child will have individual needs and the amount of funds that they may require at any one time may vary. In essence we believe that the funding system should allow for every child to be able to access additional funds according to their needs at that time. An example of this is that you may have a child in year 1 who has been assessed as being dyslexic whose needs are adequately met within school by means of effective intervention, resources, quality first teaching and sound SEN/dyslexia whole school strategy. You may also have another child in year 1 who has not been assessed but is not making progress. This child may require an assessment and specialist intervention outside of the classroom setting by a specialist teacher or psychologist. Our aspiration is that these two situations happen seamlessly without undue delay.

11. How do you think SEN support services might be funded so that schools, Academies, Free Schools and other education providers have access to high quality SEN support services? (Section 7)

The DST have previously commented in relation to the Green Paper on the need to avoid systems which promote parental frustration and increase the likelihood of appeals and legal challenges. We caution against a funding system which creates, or give the appearance of creating, a substantial resource for a select minority whilst the majority have to simply take the best that the school can offer. To this end, we recommend that SEN support services have a role both in supporting and advising professionals within the school settings and in those more costly and complex kinds of provision that more often will be obtained elsewhere. We also advise that, whilst a 'banding system' may have value in planning funding levels on an average basis, it should not be applied in a formulaic way to individuals. Individual responses are highly variable and depend on many factors, not all of which can be identified at the stage of planning provision.

The SEN Green paper also highlighted a possible role for the Voluntary and Community Sector in providing SEN services. We believe that such a role would be useful in many ways, but it will not completely replace the need for statutory bodies who will carry the overall responsibility for ensuring that special needs are identified and met. Such bodies should, on our view, be required to work closely with VCS organisations who should have a significant role in allocating resources. Although the VCS is efficient and draws on volunteer support, the kind of professional role just described would need to be properly funded. We suggest that the infrastructures of the DfE's SEN Strategic Partners and VCS Trusts could provide the infrastructure to enable VCS expertise to be included – and funded – within the overall SEN system.

A further idea which we believe merits development concerns the separation of the process of identifying and advising on SEN with the process of meeting those needs. As the Green Paper noted, and other reports such as Brian Lamb's, have highlighted there is a logical problem with need being identified only in accordance with the provision that is available. If this idea were developed, the assessing body could provide independent advice as to needs which parents, advised by professionals, could then match against the local offers of different schools. The independent assessing body could also monitor the use of the funds 'claimed' in relation to those needs.

12. How do you think a national banded funding framework for children and young people with SEN or who are disabled could improve the transparency of funding decisions to parents while continuing to allow for local flexibility? (Section 7)

We have substantial concerns about the implementation of a national banded framework. Such a system may have value in planning funding levels on an average basis, given what is known about the incidence levels of SEN, but it should not be applied in a formulaic way to individuals. Individual responses are highly variable and depend on many factors, not all of which can be identified at the stage of planning provision. Rather we believe that schools and Local Authorities should publish their 'offers' describing the provision that would be expected to be made for 'typical' Special Needs but it must be expected that sometimes there will be additional needs and costs and sometimes 'savings'.

13. How can the different funding arrangements for specialist provision for young people pre-16 and post-16 be aligned more effectively to provide a more consistent approach to support for children and young people with SEN or who are disabled from birth to 25? (Section 7)

The suggestion from the SEN Green Paper, that we have developed further in this response, which allows for a separation of the assessing body and those making SEN provision would address this question very well.

17. Should the formula include only pupil led factors or also school led factors? (Section 9)

Our experience tells us that children's needs may vary throughout their education, especially those with SEN. It would seem difficult to attach a prescribed level of need in respect of funding to any one child because of the potential fluctuation in rates of progress. As noted earlier the Pupil Premium does not include our children with SEN. There is reference in the consultation document (9.6) to other proxy measures for additional or special educational needs. To meet our children's needs at any time

throughout their education there needs to be a pool of money set aside for SEN only which can be accessed readily by every school. This should not be in competition with any other issue. This may take the form of a 'lump sum' as referred to in 9.4. It is essential that this is factored in to any new formula.

18. What factors should be included? (Section 9)

See 17

19. What is the right balance between simplicity and complexity? (Section 9)

Comments:

Our feedback from stakeholders suggests that parents and teachers want clarity of provision for those children with specific learning difficulties, which provide value for money.

They also ask that all necessary information on available funding be compiled in one document which is the same and available to both parents and key workers.

23. Have you any further comments?

We have experience in supporting and talking with parents of children and young people with SpLD/dyslexia and teachers supporting them in school. They tell us collectively and vociferously that what they need is the ability to access additional expert advice and resource to support those children and young people with specific needs. They all talk about 'ring-fencing' SEN budgets as essential. They tell us that this money should be available to all schools and should not be in competition.

We believe that the availability of high quality expert advice in SEN to schools is imperative. We also see that money for staff training in SEN should be available to ensure teachers are updated regularly. Following the Rose Report (2009) there has been an increase in specialist teachers being trained to support and assess those children with SpLD/dyslexia (funded by the government). The fair funding formula should make allowance for this expertise to be accessed by all schools readily.