

Schools Forum Comments and responses

- There is a significant overspend in independent placements of £1.2m, despite there being 5 fewer placements. The increase in the average weekly cost has increased by 25%. Given that most of these are the same pupils as previously, how can this be justified, and who is sanctioning this?

All new placements in Independent or Non-Maintained Special schools are approved via the Multi Agency Review Panel (MARP) which is chaired by the Head of Integrated Children's Services or the Head of Education Learning and Skills. The panel review all requests for high cost placements to determine which is the most appropriate placement of those available. There has been an increase in the number of Looked After Children (LAC) placed in residential placements during the year and this has contributed to the increase in cost. It has been agreed that a review of MARP will be undertaken in 2020/2021 to provide assurance on the robustness of the decision-making process and associated financial arrangements.

- Stated support. The overspend here is £2.2m. How can the weekly average increase of 40% be explained/justified – not least given the assurance that the ready reckoner would reduce average costs?

The actual average weekly cost reported Quarterly is summarised below:-

Reports	Average Weekly Cost	Number of Placements Outturn based on
Quarter 1	£242.00	693
Quarter 2	£239.00	690
Quarter3	£234.00	715

The change between Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 is a reduction of £8.00 per week.

The funds available from the DSG High Needs Block do not fully support the current and forecast increased demand and cost of placements.

The Ready Reckoner is reducing average costs, these have been highlighted in previous forum reports (savings equate to approx. £1,700 per high needs pupil i.e. difference between the current matrix and the current RR). However the number of requests and approvals of EHCPs has not seen a reduction as originally planned when setting the budget due to the delay in the implementation of the Clusters across the LA. Any savings being made by the Ready Reckoner is currently outweighed by the extra cost due to the increase in the number of plans being approved in schools not in clusters. This will be addressed through the roll-out of the initiative in 20/21.

- Special schools (OLA). The average weekly cost has increased by 28%. Again, what is the explanation/justification for this, given that most of the pupils are the same, just a year older?

The actual average weekly cost reported Quarterly is summarised below:-

Reports	Average Weekly Cost	Number of Placements Outturn based on
Quarter 1	£541.00	60
Quarter 2	£512.00	55
Quarter3	£537.00	58

The change between Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 is a reduction of £4.00 per week.

The funds available from the DSG High Needs Block did not fully support the current and forecast demand or cost of placements when the budgets were set.

Additionally, special schools are requesting additional funding in order to retain pupils. A review of arrangements across special schools is planned for 20/21 which will also consider steps necessary to reverse the trend of increasing placements in independent sector.

- I welcome the fact that one sector has seen a reduction (P16)

Noted.

- Special schools/resource bases: per pupil weekly increase = 28%

The actual average weekly cost reported Quarterly is summarised below:-

Reports	Average Weekly Cost	Number of Placements Outturn based on
Quarter 1	£442.00	654
Quarter 2	£478.00	643
Quarter 3	£579.00	647

The change between Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 is an increase of £137.00 per week.

The funds available from the DSG High Needs Block did not fully support the current and forecast demand or cost of placements when the budgets were set.

In addition, there are a number of young people with EHCPs currently placed at Pathways Learning Centre whilst the LA finds a suitable placement locally for these young people instead of placing in expensive Independent placements.

A review of special schools in 20/21 will seek to address issues with financial arrangements and capacity in local maintained special schools to meet demand.

Following the Resource Base/Access Centre review it was determined that more work was required to ensure the correct level of provision to meet need in the context of a more inclusive education system across South Glos generally, and to address financial arrangements to ensure they are efficient. This is being taken forward with the schools involved and will be concluded in 20/21.

- PLC: 1m overspend – what does this equate to in per pupil terms, or is it more increase in numbers?

The Outturn at Quarter 3 was based on actual claims April to July 2019 and an estimate for September to March 2020. The predicted outturn of £2,944,000 was based on 180 learners being on roll as at March 2020 giving an average weekly cost of £313.67. The pattern of trend with PLC from September is that the number on roll tend to start of relatively low and increase monthly based on school / 0-25 team referrals and exclusions. The PLC submit claims based on the actual number of young people on roll each month and the actual costs associated with the each individual.

Finance colleagues are currently working with PLC to review the process to improve timeliness of claims and overall efficiency.

A task and finish group has been established to improve access to Alternative Provision within local areas, reduce dependency on PLC and reduce expenditure in this area.