

Schools Improvement and Brokering Grant (Government consultation)

London Borough of Haringey Response

This consultation focuses on the plan to scrap the £50 million improvement monitoring and brokering grant, providing a 'smoother transition' to its longer term goal for all schools to join multi-academy trusts (MATs). The consultation, announced on Friday 29th October (half-term), will run until Friday 26 November 2021, with a government response promised in December or early January.

The consultation puts forward two proposals:

Proposal 1: remove 50% of the grant in 2022/23; then remove 100% in 2023/24

Proposal 2: to allow councils to de-delegate from the DSG the funding to carry out the core statutory school improvement functions

The government believes the overarching policy will ensure maintained schools and academies are funded on an equal basis.

Background

The council receives £240k School Improvement and Brokering grant of which it contracts Haringey Education Partnership (HEP) for the full amount to provide School Improvement services to Haringey schools. The HEP provides a range of services on behalf of the council and receives a total of £705.5K per annum, passported through the Council. The contract between HEP and the Council was extended in July 2021 by Haringey's Cabinet for 3 years from September 2021, taking this school improvement function up to August 2024. Table 1 shows the funding allocation to the HEP and table 2 goes into further detail regarding the Central School Services Block funding.

Table 1: HEP services as per July 2021 Cabinet report to extend the services

| Funding | Source of funding | 2021/22 (7 months) | Indicative 2022/23 (12 months) |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Dedicated Schools Grant Funding (Council retained funding) | | | |
| School Standards | Central Schools Services Block | £173,833 | £298,000 |
| Governor Services | Central Schools Services Block | £75,833 | £130,000 |
| Schools Forum | Central Schools Services Block | £5,833 | £10,000 |
| High Needs Block funding for school improvement | High Needs Block | £5,250 | £9,000 |
| Total DSG | | £260,750 | £447,000 |
| Specific DfE grants subject to grant awards | | | |
| School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant | DfE specific grant | £145,088 | £248,723 |
| KS2 moderation and KS1 | DfE specific grant | £5,711 | £9,791 |
| Total specific grant subject to awards | | £150,800 | £258,514 |
| Total indicative value of services contracted | | £411,550 | £705,514 |

Table 2: Haringey's CSSB block allocation:

| Central school services block | Revised 2020-21 | Proposed 2021-22 | Inhouse / Commissioned Split | |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| | | | LA | HEP |
| ESG - Other Statutory and Regulatory Duties (Includes £25K SACRE) | 377,851 | 377,851 | 352,851 | 25,000 |
| ESG - Statutory Education Welfare Service | 172,000 | 172,000 | 172,000 | |
| School Standards | 273,035 | 273,035 | | 273,035 |
| Looked After Children Placements | 768,000 | 694,277 | 694,277 | |
| Early Help | 350,000 | 350,000 | 350,000 | |
| Servicing of Schools Forum | 10,000 | 10,000 | | 10,000 |
| Admissions | 300,000 | 300,000 | 300,000 | |
| Governor Support | 130,000 | 130,000 | | 130,000 |
| Music & Performing Arts | 168,000 | 168,000 | 168,000 | |
| Support Costs | 192,000 | 192,000 | 192,000 | |
| Copyright Licences | 205,000 | 205,000 | 205,000 | |
| Total budget allocation for Schools Block | 2,945,886 | 2,872,163 | 2,434,128 | 438,035 |

Question 1: We believe that instances of councils exercising formal intervention powers remain relatively low, and that since its introduction, this grant has primarily supported improvement functions such as early support and challenge to improve individual school performance, which overlaps with wider (non-core) improvement provision.

Do you agree that this is the case? If not, please explain.

Response

No we do not agree. The council has not exercised formal intervention powers for a significant period because of our continued investment in early intervention before crisis, prevention of standards slipping and the provision of specialist independent advice as a result of early support and identification. This is further reflected in the Ofsted outcomes for Haringey schools which are some of the best in the country.

Councils, quite rightly, are expected to be responsible for school improvement duties and Haringey passports the funding to HEP which is discharging these duties, under contract with the Council, to a high standard through a schools-led model. It is our strong belief that the grant should not be removed, and funding continued to be provided by the DfE.

Question 2: We are proposing to (i) remove the Grant (Proposal 1), and (ii) enable councils to de-delegate funds via their schools forum to ensure they are sufficiently funded to exercise all of their improvement activities, including all core improvement activities (Proposal 2).

Do you agree that, taken together, these proposals will allow councils to continue to ensure they are adequately funded for core improvement activities; and therefore do not impose a new burden? If not, please explain.

Response

No we do not agree. If councils are expected to be responsible for school improvement duties, then we maintain that the grant must not be removed but retained, fully funded by the DfE and spent on wider improvement activity that prevents schools reaching crisis. Through SR21, the DfE do not appear to have provided additional funding through existing funding mechanisms i.e. DSG to meet the additional costs of school improvement if the grant is removed. It is unfair to ask schools to pick up these costs, which were previously funded by the department. Schools continue to face significant budget pressures as school funding has not kept pace with increasing pupils and inflation and, further, there is a yearly increase in the number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), falling primary roll numbers as birth rates fall, Brexit impacts the capital and the recovery following the pandemic remains uncertain and has further exacerbated declining rolls.

These proposals will impact the ability of the council to effectively monitor school performance, be responsive to schools' needs and reduce flexibility to work together. This will also damage our maintained schools' understanding of the council/school relationship and confuse wider stakeholders of the role of the council in school improvement. None of this is in the best interests of school effectiveness.

We want to continue to act as facilitators in bringing schools and wider stakeholders together to drive local school-led improvement systems. This will deliver better and improved outcomes for Haringey children and young people as had been evidenced in recent years which have seen significant outcomes for children in our borough.

Question 3: Bearing in mind Proposals 1 and 2, are there any aspects of our guidance to councils on their role in school improvement which could usefully be clarified to aid understanding of what councils are accountable for with respect to improvement and how it should be funded? (For example, our Schools Causing Concern guidance.)

Response

Below are the core and additional activities of councils in supporting our schools

- understanding the performance of maintained schools
- identify underperformance
- work with schools to support progress
- work with the Regional School Commissioner (RSC) and diocesan boards to ensure that schools receive support
- issue warning notices if necessary

- ensure that good and outstanding schools take responsibility for their own improvement – support other schools and enable other schools to access support
- Provide access to school improvement support (via HEP)
- Offer traded services

It is critical to clarify the accountable body for overseeing school improvement and standards in maintained schools if the grant is removed. A large proportion of our schools are maintained by the local authority and the lack of clarity on the role of local authorities will bring uncertainty to the system at a time when it least needs it

If local authorities are to carry out their duties in relation to understanding the performance of schools in their own area, identifying and working with schools at risk, challenging provision for vulnerable children, those with SEND and school safeguarding practice, they must be properly resourced to do so and failure to provide this funding will ultimately hurt our children and young people and threaten their outcomes and life chances.

Question 4: The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires that public bodies consider the potential effects of key decisions on groups with protected characteristics. The relevant protected characteristics for the purposes of the PSED are: sex; race; disability; religion or belief; sexual orientation; pregnancy or maternity; gender reassignment; and age.

Please let us know, providing evidence where possible, if you believe any of the proposals set out in this consultation will have the potential to have an impact on specific groups, in particular those with relevant protected characteristics

Response

The proposals remove the critical element of local accountability for ensuring that education provision meets the needs of every pupil. By holding local data sets and through understanding patterns of disadvantage, achievement, inclusion and progression to employment and training, local authorities can effectively tackle inequality and challenge those schools where there are indisputable trends in the underachievement of groups with key characteristic, in particular race, disability, gender and religious faith. Local authorities, unlike MATS, are positioned to tackle the impacts of social inequality at a local level: never has this been more evidenced than in the recent pandemic when the strength of local government kept families alive and resourced at the most challenging of times. Having strong, rigorous systems for challenging schools in this way can only be achieved through proper resourcing. The advantages of a system that holds local knowledge and influence at its heart has enabled a system within Haringey that responds to the wide range of characteristics of our children and our families.