UNISON West Sussex Branch - Schools Forum Report

**14 March 2019 West Sussex Schools Forum**

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# Report.

Director of Education and Skills (ES) indicated that work continues on School Effectiveness and small schools working together towards federation. This is viewed as vital by the LA if many of our smaller schools are to survive, especially in rural areas. ES continues to offer Federation Support Packages, giving both legal and financial advice.

The IPEH review suspended during the OFSTED inspection is now resumed. There continues to be substantial pressures on the IPEH budget. Due to budget pressures on the IPEH Service, it has been considered that provision for the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme will be taken over by ES following consultation.

School Forum continue to raise concerns about the high SEND Transport costs. PW confirmed this is under review, options include travel/mileage payments to parents, increased travel training to encourage independent and cheaper travel for suitable students to school using suitable public transport options available. Also included is a review of costs and contracts to check that the LA is paying fair rates and receiving good value.

The High Needs Budget has a projected overspend of £0.360m, due to increased placements and higher than average costs in Independent non Maintained Special Schools (INMS). The average cost of an INMS placement having increased from £40k to £45k. With an increase from 17.1% to 27.7% for placements between £50k - £100k. This is an area of discussion that the SEND working group (in which we take part have significant concerns that the LA together with surrounding LAs take steps to control).

The discrepancy of cost between LA provision and INMS provision is significant. It is recognised there will always be some students that it would not be viable for the LA to seek to make provision for, as their needs are too specialised however there is a significant group that require mid to upper range support which the LA should and is considering how provision could be met within the LA at lower cost.

The General DSG reserves of £1.830m will be used to offset additional cost pressures as a contingency fund for 2019/20. The most volatile element within the DSG is the High Needs Block. A £2.4m transfer of funds from DSG reserves will help to meet the HNB cost pressures but the LA recognises that this is not sustainable. This issue has been reported on before. A further report will be brought before School Forum in June 2019.

208 Mainstream and Special schools have provided information to the LA which indicates that of those that responded to the budgeting exercise request 56 schools will potentially have difficulty in setting a balanced budget. It has been agreed that the 3 year budget returns from these schools do not give a complete picture, especially on how schools are trying to balance their budgets. It is proposed a further survey is undertaken in order to better understand the challenges schools face.

The LA requested that School Forum approved changes to sections 6 and 11 of the West Sussex Scheme for funding schools. These changes essentially shift responsibility back to the Schools Governing body, in situations where the LA incurs legal costs, in situations where the school has chosen to ignore the advice of the LA or not sought the advice of the LA. In these instances costs will be charged back to the school's own budget, if the LA considers it appropriate. This change was approved.

**Keith Manville.**

03.04.19

***West Sussex Unison SF Representative.***