



executive summary

changes to the funding of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision: views of lead members

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Special educational needs and disability (SEND) were the focus of the 2011 Green Paper: *Support and Aspiration: a New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. A Consultation* (DfE, 2011b).

The Local Government Association commissioned this research to gather the views of lead members for children's services on the implications of the changes proposed in the 2011 Green Paper (DfE 2011b). Specifically, the research looked at the proposed introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan and personal budgets for children and young people with SEND.

The project also gathered lead members' views on some of the proposed changes to school funding recently outlined by the Department for Education (DfE, 2011a and DfE, 2012a). In particular, views on changes related to children and young people with high needs and changes to the way special schools are funded.

Lead members were consulted through round table events and individual interviews in February and March 2012. In total, nineteen lead members took part. At the time of the sessions, the Green Paper proposals were still at consultation stage.

Key findings

In principle, lead members welcomed the Education Health and Care Plan as a replacement for the statement of SEN. They highlighted a number of practical issues that would need to be resolved including funding and ensuring that all agencies are engaged with this way of working. Particular elements of the Plan that were welcomed included: closer multi-agency/partnership working; the introduction of a single assessment; having a system covering birth to 25; and single case conferences attended by representatives from all relevant agencies.

Lead members were generally in favour of personal budgets, although there tended to be more questions than answers about how they would be implemented. Areas for clarification included: what is in scope and out of scope for personal budgets; whether personal budgets would take the form of a 'menu' of services or direct payments; and how personal budgets would be calculated and funded.

Lead members felt that it would be important to learn from similar initiatives such as the implementation of personal budgets for disabled adults and from other multi-agency initiatives such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the accompanying 'team around the child' approach. Although generally in favour of the changes, some lead members felt that increased personalisation would make planning provision more difficult for LAs.

There was a general view that parents would have a stronger role in the new system; overall this was perceived to be a good thing, although lead members clearly felt that there remained an important role for professionals to guide and support parents and families.

Lead members felt that it would also be important, where possible, to include the child or young person's viewpoint, and for them to be encouraged and supported to articulate their preferences for support.

Lead members also talked about the impact of the increase in the number of academies and free schools in their areas on supporting children and young people with SEND. In some LAs, difficulties had arisen relating to strategic planning of provision for this group of children and young people due to the reduction in the influence of LAs in academies and free schools.

The current review of school funding (DfE, 2011a and DfE, 2012a) asks whether main-stream and special schools should be brought in line in a 'by pupils' model; that is that both types of school are funded according to the number of pupils they have enrolled. The lead members consulted were generally not in favour of changing the funding model for special schools to one based on the number of pupils. They were concerned that this change would negatively impact the sustainability of the provision offered by special schools. In particular, they cited the difficulty of maintaining and replacing specialised support (including staff, equipment and the adapted environment).

Conclusion

Lead members consulted during the course of this project generally felt that the ambitions of the SEND Green Paper were good. They had concerns, however, about how the Education, Health and Care Plan and personal budgets would work in practice and were therefore keen to learn from the pathfinder LAs currently 'testing out' the Green Paper proposals. Funding of the changes was an issue highlighted again and again by lead members.



This project was funded by the Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme



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