

Report to: Schools Forum

Date of meeting: 9 July 2021

Report By: Director of Children's Services

Title: School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant

Purpose: To provide an update on the DfE's proposed changes to the grant and the potential impact of these changes in East Sussex.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Schools Forum are asked to note the proposed changes to the grant and the potential impact of these changes in East Sussex

1 Background

1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) launched a consultation on 28 April seeking views on proposed changes to the local authority (LA) School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant. The consultation ended on 26 May 2021. The proposed changes are focused on attaching conditions to the grant.

1.2 The School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant is provided to LAs to support them in fulfilling their school improvement functions. The grant is not currently ring-fenced. The LA's school improvement functions are as set out in Part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which provides LAs with a range of powers to first warn, and then intervene in, maintained schools where they have significant concerns relating to performance, governance or pupil safety. Further to this, the Schools Causing Concern guidance states that LAs should act as champions of high standards of education across their schools, and in doing so should:

- Understand the performance of maintained schools in their area, using data as a starting point to identify any that are underperforming, while working with them to explore ways to support progress;
- Work closely with the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), dioceses and other local partners to ensure schools receive the support they need to improve;
- Where underperformance has been recognised in a maintained school, proactively work with the relevant RSC, combining local and regional expertise to ensure the right approach, including sending warning notices and using intervention powers where this will improve leadership and standards; and
- Encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to take responsibility for their own improvement; support other schools; and enable other schools to access the support they need to improve.

1.3 The DfE consultation document also sets out the crucial role of the LA in supporting schools through the return to school period. It highlights the importance of ensuring government resources are targeted towards this national effort, in order to ensure that those schools and pupils who require the most support are able to receive it.

1.4 The proposed changes are to ring-fence the grant by attaching three conditions:

- the grant to only be used to fund the LA's school improvement functions, for which the grant is intended
- in using the grant LAs to take active steps to support the successful and sustained return of all pupils to school and in addressing any adverse impacts of the pandemic on their education
- to enable the Secretary of State to enforce these conditions in the event of non-compliance with these conditions, including, as a last resort, the right to claw back grant or withhold future funding, where it is deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

1.5 The consultation proposed that for financial year 2021/22:

- the first instalment is paid as usual in April, on a non-ringfenced basis and without conditions
- the second payment made in July would, subject to the outcome of the consultation, be paid on a ring-fenced basis, with the conditions of payment attached.

1.6 From October 2021, the DfE intend to reduce the amount of the grant paid to LAs to reflect the reduction in the number of maintained schools since the grant was introduced in 2017. Funding will therefore revert to being based on per school funding levels in 2017 when the grant was established.

2 Supporting information

2.1 East Sussex LA already uses the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant to fund our school improvement functions and activities. The proposed condition around spend of this grant does not represent any risk or change to the LA's current activity.

2.2 The LA has worked collaboratively over the last year, with schools and teams across the Council, to support the return to schools for pupils. The LA has worked with the Primary and Secondary Boards to identify priorities and plan support for pupils to ensure sustained and successful engagement in education as we move beyond the Covid 19 pandemic.

2.3 The Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service that leads for the LA on our school improvement functions, has a range of responsibilities and is supported by funding from a range of sources, including government grants and LA funding. Figures have not been provided by the DfE at this stage but funding changes from previous years are shown as follows:

- 2017/18 academic year: £447,082
- 2020/21 academic year: £477,439

These figures represent a small reduction in funding of £30,357. We await the outcomes of the consultation for confirmation of the funding change. If it is at these levels, then the reduction in funding would be managed across SLES with limited impact on the delivery of our school improvement functions in the next academic year.

2.4 The DfE consultation states that the performance of the grant and its future beyond March 2022 will be kept under continual review. The LA will continue to monitor any further changes and will keep Schools Forum up to date with any further proposed changes.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The proposed conditions to ring fence the grant as set out in 1.4 do not represent a risk to the current delivery of the school improvement functions by East Sussex local authority at the current time.

3.2 As set out in 2.4 the grant will be kept under review by the DfE, any further changes may have a greater impact and will need further consideration.

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