

Division(s): N/A

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 04 JULY 2016

OXFORDSHIRE HOSPITAL SCHOOL

Report by the Director for Children, Education and Families

Context of the school

1. Oxfordshire Hospital School (OHS) is a maintained special school serving children aged 4 to 19 who are unable to attend school due to a their physical or mental health needs. OHS is commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to meet the requirements set out in 'Education for Children with Health Needs who cannot attend Schools (Department for Education, May 2013).
2. The school is made up of three sectors:
 - 1) The Children's Hospital section encompasses teaching at the Children's Hospital, the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre and Helen & Douglas House Hospice.
 - 2) The Highfield (an adolescent unit for the assessment and treatment of 11 – 18 year olds with a wide range of acute mental health issues) has 18 beds plus two high dependency beds. The Highfield serves children from Oxfordshire and nearby counties, and referrals are accepted from anywhere in England if an emergency bed is required.
 - 3) The Outreach Teaching Sector is based at The Harlow Centre in Oxford. OTS supports the education of children and young people in Oxfordshire unable to attend school due to their medical or mental health needs. This group of children are not in-patients but may attend a hospital as out patients.

Definition of hospital education

3. Hospital education is defined as 'education provided as a community special school or foundation special school established in a hospital, or under any arrangements made by the local authority under section 19 of the 1996 Education Act, where the child is being provided with such education by reason of a decision made by a medical practitioner'. Hospital education can be funded either on the basis of an amount per place, or as a centrally funded local authority service. Funded hospital education places can be found in maintained special schools (usually a particular type of special school known as a hospital school), maintained Pupil Referral Unit, Alternative Provision and free schools. Often these institutions will have a combination of hospital

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education places and other high needs (AP and SEN) places. The various arrangements across the country are varied making it difficult to benchmark and compare.

Financial context

4. In 2015/16 OHS had a budget of approximately £1.6m and end of year balances of £0.526m (32% of the annual formula funding).
5. Local authorities may advise the Education Funding Agency of changes to hospital education place numbers through the place change request process in October/November each year.
6. For 2014-15 an exceptional case was made to the EFA by the school, supported by the authority, and was accepted. One of the significant changes behind the case related to the new Highfield Adolescent Unit. This resulted in an additional £267,805 being received by the authority and allocated to the Hospital School. Therefore the school's budget allocation for 2014-15 increased to £1,606,831.
7. For 2015-16 an exceptional case was made by the school but was not accepted by the DfE, so the allocation for 2015-16 remained at £1,606,831.
8. Schools generally have not seen inflationary increases since 2011-12, and the funding source for the Hospital School and other High Needs provision, the High Needs block of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), has been frozen at 2012-13 budget levels with no adjustment for pupil demographic changes other than specific cases approved as part of the exceptions process mentioned above.
9. In relation to the proposed national schools funding reforms, the High Needs Funding consultation stated: *(3.28) We are exploring the possible use of hospital inpatient data to help inform the distribution of funding for hospital education to local authorities, and in particular to reflect year-on-year changes that impact on the number of children and young people for whom hospital education is provided. A similar method could be used to allocate funding to multi-academy trusts operating hospital schools. For the time being, however, we propose to continue to distribute hospital education funding based on information about local authorities' and academies' current spending levels, and any adjustments needed from year to year to reflect changes in hospital provision.*
10. The view of local authority officers is that referring to funding for a number of places is unhelpful and not relevant for hospital education. Currently the system of funding is not based on any proxy indicators or a formulaic funding system and so is not fit for purpose. It is based on historic levels of spend which does not encourage efficient use of resources. Members of Schools Forum consider that schools should not be charged for services for which OHS is being directly funded.

Current challenges

11. The school has an interim Headteacher with a substantive post holder beginning in September.
12. There are uncertainties about the existing accommodation in the Harlow Centre and the school is likely to move. The service also uses Early Intervention hubs for outreach work and they are therefore exploring alternatives, but new venues may incur some charges. OHS has over £50k devolved capital reserves , in addition to the 2015/16 balances. It is estimated that the likely move and costs incurred will be between £40k to £100k.
13. In terms of the outreach teaching sector 101 children were taught in 2014/15 (the children came from 1 special school, 7 primary, 26 secondary, 1 independent college). In 2013/14 OHS was allocated £450k to provide for children medically unfit to attend school. The hospital school supports children from neighbouring areas, including Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Bedfordshire and Warwickshire. There is no longer any inter-authority recoument.

Work in progress

14. A paper on OHS, setting out the current position and challenges, was discussed at Schools Forum on 15 June 2016.
15. A review of roles and responsibilities is being undertaken to clarify the legal position and charging arrangements. Relevant documents include: Section 19 of the Education Act, and statutory guidance 'Education for Children with Health Needs who cannot attend Schools' , DfE, May 2013 and 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions', guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England DfE 2014 .
16. The local authority will submit another exceptions case to the EFA in the autumn to highlight how the current funding approach is not fit for purpose.

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