

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

ESTABLISHMENT OF ADDITIONAL POSTS IN APRIL 2024 REQUIRED TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS TO MEET INCREASED DEMAND FOR SUPPORT FOR PUPILS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM CONDITION, NEURO DIVERSITY, ANXIETY AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS.

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for the establishment of
 - 2 full-time equivalent (FTE) Teacher (mainscale-UPS3) posts within the Health Related Education Team
 - 1 FTE Secondary Partnership Lead Officer post (Grade D) within the Education Partnership Team.
 - 4 FTE Specialist Autistic Spectrum Condition Teachers within the Communication and Interaction Team.

Information

Health Related Education Team

2. The Local Authority has a statutory duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to make educational provision for pupils who for health reasons are unable to attend school and for whom provision is not being made. These arrangements are provided by specialist teachers and teaching assistants from the Health Related Education Team which up until 31st March 2020 formed part of the extended services at Fountaindale School. On 1st April 2020, they became part of the Council's Education, Learning and Skills division. Pupils remain on the roll of their school throughout their provision. There are two main categories of pupils in receipt of provision:
 - (1) Those with a physical or medical condition which prevents them from attending school. This could be due to post-operative recovery or life limiting conditions (such as cancer) or an illness lasting more than 15 days.
 - (2) Those experiencing severe anxiety about attending school. This might include those with a psychological, psychiatric or mental health issue where school requires support and guidance to put appropriate provision in place.

3. The Health Related Education Team has reported considerable pressures in providing guidance to schools and supporting pupils. This year so far 232 pupils have required direct support in comparison to 106 in the year 2020-2021. The number of requests for advice and guidance have also increased. The Health Related Education Team is increasingly having to work with young people for longer due to the complexity of cases. Last year 40% of pupils needed more than 15 weeks provision, some significantly more, whereas the year before 17% had 15 weeks of support.
4. The pressures on the Health Related Education Team mean that they are now operating a waiting list for pupils requiring support. This is a statutory responsibility for Nottinghamshire County Council so it is essential that we respond to this new level of need.

Education Partnership Team

6. The Local Authority Partnership Team work with school leaders in both Primary and Secondary settings through the locality based School Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships. School Leaders work collaboratively to maximise the effectiveness of the devolved partnership Funding to meet the needs of pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs who might otherwise face suspension and exclusion.
7. Nottinghamshire schools have worked collaboratively to ensure that wherever possible pupils needs are met and they are successfully supported to remain in mainstream schools. Schools have reported to the Local Authority that they are facing increased challenges from pupils exhibiting dysregulated behaviours that impact upon the learning of others and create significant health and safety risks. There has been an increase to both suspensions and permanent exclusion rates

Permanent exclusions and suspensions in Nottinghamshire schools

	Academic year					2022/23 Autumn term only
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2021/22	
All pupils	117,421	119,043	120,243	121,957	126,300	126,244
Permanent exclusions (number)	38	53	48	44	59	65
Permanent exclusions (rate)	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.05
Suspensions (number)	6,298	6,550	6,531	5,551	9,478	4,156
Suspension (rate)	5.36	5.5	5.43	4.55	7.5	3.29
Pupil enrolments with one or more suspension (number)	2,509	2,629	2,540	2,418	3,725	2,155
Pupil enrolments with one or more suspension (rate)	2.14	2.21	2.11	1.98	2.95	1.71

**Figures for academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 have been removed as while suspensions and permanent exclusions were possible throughout these years, pandemic restrictions will have meant only critical worker children and vulnerable groups*

were eligible to attend schools. Exclusions recorded during this period would not be a true reflection of the total school cohort and are therefore not comparable when comparing across years..

The table above is based on validated data only, however unvalidated data for the full 2022/23 academic year currently stands at 122 permanent exclusions (or a rate of 0.10 of the school population) and 13,817 suspensions (rate of 10.83). Unvalidated permanent exclusion data is usually lower than final validated data as schools are only required to provide data about a permanent exclusion once it has been upheld by the governing body or independent review panel. This process can cause a delay especially when the exclusion is towards the end of a data reporting period. Suspensions remain broadly unchanged between unvalidated and validated datasets.

8. The cost of commissioning education other than at school for pupils who have been permanently excluded or who for other reasons are unable to access a school place has increased from £1,433,000 in 2022-2023 to a budget of £3,306,000 in 2023-2024 with a predicted overspend of £400,000 by the end of March. Commissioning such provision is a statutory duty on the Local Authority so successful intervention work to reduce exclusion will impact positively on the cost of funding education other than at school.
9. Supporting schools to access appropriate agency support, to share good practice and to develop effective personalized learning plans for individual children and young people is essential. The Partnership Team only has 2 dedicated Secondary Lead Officers who support schools to meet the needs of pupils otherwise at risk of suspension and exclusion. Schools are asking for greater levels of support from the LA than the team can currently provide so increased capacity is required.
10. When pupils are permanently excluded the Local Authority has a statutory duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to make educational provision. There are clear processes in place in Nottinghamshire to ensure that alternative education is commissioned for pupils who do not have a school place, and for those pupils for whom a placement in a mainstream or specialist school environment would currently be inappropriate.
11. In February 2022 there were 286 pupils accessing Education Other than at School (EOTAS), In February 2024 that number has risen to 531. These places are funded through the High Needs Block and can cost as much as £76,805 for an individual placement. It is therefore essential that places are only commissioned when absolutely essential to ensure that the High Needs Block funding can be allocated cost effectively to support schools to meet pupil needs.

Communication and Interaction Team

12. There are increasing numbers of pupils in Nottinghamshire who are known to be neurodiverse. Neurodiversity describes differences in brain function from person to person that affect daily mental functions. For some children and young people this can impact upon their ability to learn effectively in mainstream school environments without support being provided or action being taken to mitigate environmental and social pressures. Some neuro diverse pupils have diagnoses such as dyspraxia, autistic spectrum condition (ASC/ASD), and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADD/ADHD) whilst others may be perceived as having social emotional and mental health needs such as anxiety.
13. When children and young people's needs are not understood, and schools and families cannot access the support that they require in a timely and accessible way it is recognised

that relationships between pupils, parents and schools can be adversely impacted. This is highly stressful for all involved. Nottinghamshire is committed to enabling children and young people to access an inclusive mainstream education wherever possible, preferably in a school within their own community. At present there are increasing numbers of families experiencing challenges in accessing support for their neurodivergent children. Data provides confirmation that there are greater numbers of children in our schools identified as being autistic and of having social emotional and mental health needs. Increasing numbers of families are resorting to seeking an Education Health and Care Plan because they do not have confidence that their child is understood and supported in their mainstream setting and there is a significant increase in requests for additional funding, Special School or Independent Special School places.

14. There is clear evidence of the increased level of support required.

2019

Phase	All SEN Pupils	Social, emotional and mental health		Autistic spectrum disorder	
		Number	% of education phase	Number	% of education phase
Primary	7,831	1,392	17.8%	1,122	14.3%
Secondary	3,866	997	25.8%	718	18.6%
Special	1,007	46	4.6%	384	38.1%
Nottinghamshire	12,704	2,435	19.2%	2,224	17.5%

Source: School Census January 2019

2023

Phase	All SEN Pupils	Social, emotional and mental health		Autistic spectrum disorder	
		Number	% of education phase	Number	% of education phase
Primary	8,314	1,671	20.1%	1,220	14.7%
Secondary	5,818	1,668	28.7%	1,333	22.9%
Special	1,198	79	6.6%	673	56.2%
Nottinghamshire	15,330	3,418	22.3%	3,226	21.0%

Source: School Census January 2023

This latest data provides evidence that in 2019 there were 4229 pupils in mainstream schools who had communication and interaction needs. In 2023 that number has risen by 39.8% to 5912 pupils. There has also been a significant increase in the number of pupils with communication and interaction needs accessing specialist settings in 2019 there were 430 pupils accessing specialist provision whilst in 2023 that has risen by 74.88% to 752 pupils.

The increased number of pupils accessing specialist provision has a significant cost implication. The cost of the additional 322 specialist places required for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties will on average fall between an additional

£8,372,000 and £17,114,622 depending upon whether they are placed in a Special School or an Independent Special School setting.

15. Nottinghamshire County Council has been able to assess the learning from the recent Department For Education(DFE) funded Early Identification of Autism Project which took place in Nottinghamshire in 2022. This project was aimed at working with schools to identify communication and interaction needs in 7–11-year-olds, in order to reduce waiting lists and promote early intervention. The project was part of a larger DFE initiative which had already been trialled and proven in other parts of the country. The Project Leads met regularly with Project Leads from other areas to share good practice and to be at the forefront of future national policy changes.

The project focused upon the following:

- Developing early intervention that identifies need and offers early support to mainstream schools to meet these identified needs, as part of the assess, plan, do and review cycle
 - Reducing the number of parents requesting EHCP's because of a lack of confidence in mainstream settings as schools will be recognising and meeting the identified needs before children/young people reach crisis point
 - Reducing the number of requests for special school or specialist school places when children and young people should be supported to attend their local mainstream school
 - Reducing urgent referrals to support services ie SFSS, EPS, Family Service through early intervention rather than at the point where a child is in crisis (risk of Permanent Exclusion, Anxiety Related Non-Attendance)
 - Offering support for parents through on-line courses and support groups facilitated by the local mainstream school.
 - Developing greater parental confidence in schools' ability to meet need
 - Encouraging schools to work towards the National Inclusion Award – kitemark for excellence in Autism provision.
 - To enable schools to receive up to date regular nationally accredited training through the Autism Education Trust Training Programme funded by the DfE
 - Reducing waiting lists for assessments
 - Bring together professionals with families in their local mainstream schools
16. Two Nottinghamshire families of schools, Samworth and Kirkby, participated in the project and 67 pupils were initially identified. After the initial screening process 56 pupils were put forward for assessment and of those pupils 83.6% were subsequently diagnosed as autistic. Schools and families of all the pupils were able to gain greater clarity about the children's needs and how they could best be supported.
- 16.1.1 The outcomes of the project work successfully demonstrated that the existence of a targeted and effective 'early help' model for children, schools and families when communication and interaction needs become a concern provided reassurance that pupils needs were understood and that their needs could be met. The early help approach devised led to a reduction in the diagnostic pathway to a minimum (6 weeks) and to the development of an early screening tool (Needs based).
- 16.2 There has been very positive feedback from both parents and schools to date and 1 year on from project all of the pupils involved in the project
- Remain in mainstream.

- With no additional funding requests.
- With no additional EHCP requests
- And with the increased confidence of parents

17. The Communication and interaction Team is currently a small team comprising of 5.6 FTE Teachers and 5.6 FTE Teaching Assistants 5.6. The Team are managing approximately 500 open cases and providing surgery work to schools in relation to pupils who have not yet been formally referred. The Team are also delivering the AET Making Sense of Autism Training to schools with the intention that all schools in Nottinghamshire need this access to this opportunity. In addition the Team offer schools some bespoke training programmes where there have been specific issues.

18. The current pressures on the existing Communication and Interaction Team include:

- The increasing number of pupils who have communication and interaction needs in KS2-4 as a result of neurodiversity including those who are autistic or have social emotional and mental health needs.
- The increased volume of requests for additional funding for pupils with communication and interaction needs.
- The increased volume of EHC requests for pupils with communication and interaction needs.
- Increased training requests from other Local Authority teams where there is acknowledgement that there are gaps in knowledge and understanding.
- An increase in emergency requests for support through surgery work, and from parents, and other Local Authority Teams.
- An increase in the number of requests made through meetings such as triage, placement Education Health and Care panels, and HLN panel where it is clear there is a lack of understanding of need and pupil in crisis.
- The increase in the number of Early Years Service pupils with a complex Communication and interaction profile (3/4 of KS1 EYS team are now communication and interaction pupils).
- The increase in the number of secondary transitions that require communication and interaction support to ensure sustained attendance in Yr7.
- When needs are not effectively identified, and supported, pupils are increasingly becoming highly anxious and unable to attend school. Emotionally Based School Avoidance is a significant concern and leads to additional funding requests from schools who develop personalized education packages, an increased need for schools or the Local Authority to provide education other than at school, increased EHC requests and creates higher demand for special school or independent special school provision.
- Where there is not an early identification of need and a clear understanding of the support required there is an increased demand on CAMHs from the families of highly anxious communication and interaction pupils with a deterioration of school attendance and mental wellbeing.
- There is an increased need for early identification which helps to develop positive relationships between schools and families, rather than waiting for lengthy diagnostic pathways.

- There is a correlation between neurodivergent children and neurodivergent parents/carers. Schools and families can find effective communication and interaction a challenge leading to misunderstandings and breakdowns in relationships and placements.
19. Having analysed the capacity of the existing team to provide the early intervention, the work with families and children and the training to school staff across the County it is clear that the current demand significantly outstretches capacity whilst the cost of not meeting demand impacts adversely upon children's well-being and educational engagement, family well-being, school staff well-being and Local Authority budgets.
 20. The recommendation is to Increase the staffing of communication and interaction teacher team from 5.6 to 9.6. This would give the team the opportunity to address the pressures listed above, increase the training offer to schools to include follow up visits, and to check implementation of reasonable adjustments. This additional capacity would ensure that the Communication and Interaction Team could meet the demand of the increased Early Years Service transitions to Communication and Interaction Team and that they could support schools in early identification of need using the tools adapted for schools from DfE project .
 21. By developing a more effective early offer of support to children, families and schools the team would foster the confidence of schools and parents confirming that the majority of pupils with communication and interaction needs can successfully access learning in a mainstream school.
 22. The higher level of staffing will also allow the development of an Intensive Support Programme to support highly anxious pupils with communication and interaction needs engaged in emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) to transition back into an education setting.
 23. The Communication and interaction Team will also support schools to recognise the needs of neurodiverse parents and to develop effective systems of communication.
 24. It is anticipated that this increased level of early help for children, families and schools will result in greater confidence in mainstream education pathways for pupils with communication and interaction needs, less requests for additional funding, less requests for Education Health and Care Plans and less need for Special School and Independent School Placements. The early identification approach will improve the mental well-being of all involved.

Funding for these posts

22. The allocation of an additional £421,060 High Needs Block funding (part of the Dedicated Schools Grant) to Nottinghamshire County Council for the financial year 2024-2025 provides an opportunity for the Local Authority to create these 7 additional posts.

Other Options Considered

23. The current structure remains in place which would:
 - a) mean either that Nottinghamshire County Council could not fulfil the statutory duty to meet the needs of pupils with Health Related Education needs as demand is

currently at risk of exceeding the support available, or that Health Related Education support would have to be procured on an ad hoc basis by commissioning the additional provision from agency staff which would create additional expense.

- b) the increased levels of suspension and permanent exclusion would not be addressed meaning that increased numbers of vulnerable pupils with social emotional and mental health needs would be unable to access the many benefits of mainstream learning, and a greater proportion of High Needs Block funding would need to be allocated to commission provision to ensure access to education.
- c) A higher than necessary proportion of pupils with communication and interaction needs would find accessing mainstream education challenging, leading to pupil and family distress, high levels of absence from school and increased demand on additional funding, and alternative or specialist provision.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

24. The addition of these 7 posts uses an element of the additional High Needs Block funding in a way that:
- provides timely support and advice for schools, pupils and families in terms of how to meet communication and interaction needs, social, emotional and mental health needs and physical health needs meaning that the majority of children and young people will be enabled to access, and flourish in mainstream settings wherever possible
 - that the additional High Needs Block Funding is allocated to the areas that school leaders are identifying as a concern where we are assured that the intervention will have a cost effective impact.

Statutory and Policy Implications

25. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

26. The cost per post of the 2 FTE Health Related Education Team Teacher (mainscale-UPS 3) posts is £129,906 per annum, the 1 FTE Secondary Lead Partnership Officer (Grade D) post is £63,090 and the 4 FTE Specialist Communication and Interaction Teachers (UPS 1-3) is £228,064

The total funding of £421,060 (this takes into estimated pay inflation for 24/25 & 6% Vacancy Level Turnover (VLT) required is available within the 2024-2025 High Needs Block Funding allocation of £120,240,624.

Human Resources Implications

27. The staff would be appointed subject to the Council's recruitment process.

RECOMMENDATION/S

28. That Early Years and Schools Forum note and support the proposal to use High Needs Block Funding to enable the establishment of an additional 2 FTE Health Related Education Team Teachers (Mainscale- UPS3) posts ,1 FTE Secondary Lead Partnership Officer (Grade D) and 4 FTE additional Communication and Interaction Teachers from April 2024 subject to the approval of the consequent structure changes by the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND.

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