

Email Response 1

The concerns raised include the Local Authority's effectiveness in managing SEND provision, the financial impact on schools, and the fairness of the proposed funding deduction. Many respondents highlighted issues such as delays in EHCP processing, inadequate SEND budgets, and the potential disproportionate effects on schools with higher SEND needs. There is also a call for more details and transparency regarding how the funds would be managed and utilized to ensure they benefit the schools equitably.

Overall, the feedback suggests a need for a more comprehensive approach to address systemic issues in SEND provision, with a focus on ensuring that any changes support schools and their most vulnerable students effectively.

The consultation responses can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Concerns Over Local Authority (LA) Effectiveness and SEND Provision:**
 - There is a general lack of confidence in the Local Authority's SEND initiatives, with respondents questioning the evidence for any positive impact. Delays and inefficiencies in EHCP processing, coupled with inconsistent decision-making, have created significant challenges for schools.
 - The existing SEND budgets are already inadequate, and schools are struggling to manage the increasing number of students with complex needs. Many fear that reducing funding would further compromise their ability to meet these needs.
- 2. Financial Impact on Schools:**
 - Schools are concerned that the proposed 0.5% block funding deduction will disproportionately affect those with higher levels of SEND needs and low Free School Meal (FSM) percentages, which are often small, rural schools.
 - Respondents argue that taking more money from schools, which are already under financial strain, would exacerbate the problem. They suggest that the LA's proposal does not account for the financial reality facing most schools.
- 3. Fairness and Equity Issues:**
 - There is a perceived disparity in the proposal's financial impact across schools, with some facing significantly larger deductions than others. Schools serving vulnerable populations or with higher SEND needs feel particularly disadvantaged.
 - Some responses suggest that schools with lower attainment outcomes and higher FSM levels would be unfairly burdened, while others would be minimally affected.
- 4. Inadequate Detail and Lack of Confidence in LA's Plan:**
 - Several responses indicate that the proposal lacks sufficient detail on how funds would be used to benefit schools. There is also skepticism regarding the LA's capacity to manage additional funds effectively, given past issues with SEND administration.

- The absence of a clear business case, accountability measures, and impact assessments raises doubts about whether the initiative would bring any real improvements.
- 5. Alternative Approaches and Need for Further Information:**
- Some respondents suggest that focusing on inclusion in mainstream schools and addressing systemic issues would have a better long-term impact.
 - While there is recognition that SEND requires more resources, many stakeholders need more convincing evidence and details before supporting the proposed changes.
- 6. General Skepticism and Calls for Broader Reform:**
- Many believe that the proposal merely shifts the problem rather than addressing the root causes of inadequate SEND funding. There is a call for broader reforms to the current SEND funding system.
 - Respondents emphasize that schools should have more autonomy in deciding how to allocate funds to support their pupils effectively.

Overall, the responses highlight deep concerns about the proposal's financial implications, equity, and the LA's ability to deliver improvements in SEND provision.

On the survey, in response to the question, “Do you have any other feedback on either the school block transfer or our forum in general that you would like me to work on/improve?”, the feedback highlighted several key areas for consideration:

1. Timing and Distribution of Paperwork:

- Multiple respondents indicated dissatisfaction with receiving meeting documents on the morning of the meeting, as this does not provide sufficient time to review and engage meaningfully.
- It was strongly suggested that paperwork, especially for substantial items like the block transfer proposal, should be distributed at least a week in advance.

2. Meeting Format and Accessibility:

- While remote meetings were considered convenient, there was a preference for in-person meetings, at times, as they were seen as more productive potentially.
- Suggestions included making the chair's and vice chair's contact details available to facilitate discussions before meetings.

3. Attendance and Engagement:

- Concerns were raised about member attendance, suggesting a policy on how many times a member can miss or send apologies before further action is warranted, given the forum's limited annual meetings.
- Positive feedback was also given for the increased clarity and focus of recent meetings, with appreciation expressed for the chair's leadership.

4. Impact of Funding Decisions:

- There were concerns about how funding changes might affect the most vulnerable groups, questioning whether targeting schools could contravene the Equality Act.
- Calls were made for a plan based on impact and evidence before committing to decisions involving funding reductions.

5. School Forum's Effectiveness:

- Some respondents felt the forum was functioning as a "tick-box exercise," with little effect on decision-making by the Local Authority (LA).
- The need for a space that allows more robust discussions was emphasized, as some felt feedback was met with defensive responses from the LA.

6. Recommendations for Future Actions:

- The possibility of seeking independent advice, especially from other local authorities experienced with similar challenges, was suggested.

7. General Appreciation:

- Despite concerns, there was acknowledgment of the chair's efforts in enhancing meeting quality and focus.

The feedback indicates areas for potential improvement while also recognizing progress in specific aspects of forum operations and leadership.

Email Response 2 – Multiple Copies Received

To Whom it May Concern,

We are writing to you as concerned members of the xxxxxxxx in response to the consultation whereby Leicestershire Local Authority is seeking to transfer 0.5% of the DSG into high needs. We wish to express our disagreement with this proposal in the strongest possible terms and believe that it will be detrimental to all pupils, but particularly to our most vulnerable students who need the support the most.

Xxxxxxxx has always tried to work productively and harmoniously with the LA running various specialist provisions including an SEMH Unit, Language and Interaction Unit and Hearing-Impaired Unit. We have recently opened an Alternative Provision Centre at significant cost to the Trust, showing our commitment to inclusion and SEND. Whenever we have been asked to support or contribute to best practice, we have done so willingly. We are therefore saddened that we have reached this stage.

We vehemently object to the proposal for the following reasons:

Per capita, Leicestershire receives lower funding than any other authority. Consequently, and mindful that the authority cannot fund below the minimum national funding level, the LA have disproportionately targeted schools with the highest number of challenging pupils to pay most towards the 0.5% top slice. This is neither fair nor equitable and we note with dismay that there is a strong correlation between schools with the highest level of free school meals having to pay more. We are concerned that the LA have not considered an impact risk assessment on the vulnerable groups in the schools affected by the transfer. If one has been considered then we would question why it has not been shared.

Within the consultation you ask for our input into the delivery, monitoring and governance of this fund. Surely this should have been provided and shared before this consultation so that any decision can be made based on detailed information. The LA plans are ill defined and opaque, and it has been impossible to get an understanding from officers as to what this means.

For some years, the Local Authority has not met its statutory duty regarding SEND, but particularly when dealing with high needs. Current waiting times for an EHCP are over a year. We all acknowledge there is a national problem with how SEND is funded and that the system is in crisis, but it is worse in Leicestershire due to the authority's lack of capacity in this area.

For the past two years, the authority has worked through the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme. Despite repeated questioning, the LA has been unable to demonstrate any evidence of successful impact. As users of the system, all we can see are longer waits for EHCPs and greater disarray and dysfunction than there was before TSIL.

Providing more money, through taking it away from those schools that need it the most, is not the answer for a broken system, nor do we believe that the LA has within it the experience, capacity and structures that would enable transformational change. Instead, this request has the appearance of desperation from an LA that has overspent and underdelivered on SEND.

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