

Special school funding review, personal response.

The review itself is most welcome, however the inequalities in the system have meant that the best funded schools were able to accrue the best staff, systems and solutions. This in turn further allowed them to innovate and expand attracting further high funding. The smallest and worst funded schools struggled to keep up. Certainly for West Gate School action needed to be taken and still does due to our underfunding.

I am only one voice, but it would be remiss of me not to fight for every penny for our children to provide them the provision they need. So please bear with me while I explain my response to the consultation.

Under this new proposed system, the funding is still not equitable. The old matrix system (Pre 2013) was fairer if you had the same level of need in any city special school you got the same funding regardless of setting. This funding was moderated by schools and case workers together who often attended any contentious annual reviews, in turn limiting tribunals. Schools were able to plan staffing and new funding well in advance due to the allocated banding of pupils and the lower bands were diverted to the old LSUs (now the equivalent of the new DSPs) where their lower levels of need could be met.

I also understand that there is only so much money to go around and that this is a redistribution. But I am unclear as how schools can manage again on an aggregate per place fee when we know that this system doesn't work? Also, you are working on 2019 student and not the current cohort.

From an individual point of view, it feels to me like West Gate are being set up to fail. I cannot understand why West Gate are penalised because we have a lower starting point than the other schools, excluding Ellesmere in terms of funding. By this I mean that you are purposefully and knowingly proposing allocating a level of funding that means our base costs will not be covered. This shows a complete disregard for the professionalism of leaders in the running and management of the school, and for all of the staff working hard to turn around West Gates previous trajectory and stop the academisation process. When you look at our projected costs and staffing structure you can see how few non classroom staff we have. When I am talking about staffing cuts, I mean in a child's classroom directly effecting their provision.

I appreciate that you may perceive that we have too many staff or too many expensive teachers, but you do not get NQTs in inadequate schools (we are not allowed them), no matter how positive our next Ofsted is under the new leadership. When we need to fill a post, we have to recruit the best candidate from the available applicants. The last two rounds of teacher recruitment have seen school only receive applications from UPS teachers (Because of the extremely challenging nature of the setting and the relentless challenge of rapid improvement). I also appreciate that you may perceive that we have too many SEND Teaching Assistants. I am an educationalist of some 15 years, with SEND specialism, therapeutic training and teaching experience. I would never dream of telling you how to allocate your councillors via wards or run your accounting systems because I do not know and understand how to do this effectively. Yet persons who have never worked in or even visited our settings are now judging how we work with severely disabled, complex and challenging children and young people. How valid are opinions

on school staffing without understanding the safeguarding/medical and pedagogical motivation behind it? I understand that you worked with the CLASS Heads on the initial banding system, but this work was then not used in its entirety and stymied. The work that followed was diluted at best.

In my time working in SEND I have had a broken arm, a hairline fracture to my jaw, stitches to my face, my teeth put back in and numerous hospital visits and bruises. All from SEND children. I have never complained, sued the work place or been off work for long periods of time (my largest absence ever being 2 weeks with my broken arm). I understand my purpose here, the needs, reasons and pressures of the role. I say this to highlight mine and others in my position's passion for the work that we do. **We love our school and the children.** They deserve a good quality education and a well-resourced provision providing for their care needs. They should not be sat in their own excrement because we do not have the funding for enough SEND TAs to take them to a hygiene suite to clean them. I simply have no faith that you understand the pressures and demands of the setting at West Gate.

Sadly, I no longer believe that this is a consultation, but a done deal. By moving school's forum back to the final day, you give schools no right of reply or the ability to reflect. By continuing this during the largest Covid upsurge in the city when schools are on their knees is questionable morally. Why not consult with your Special School Heads and extend the deadlines?

Improvement requires investment. In your own Appendix 2 comparison of costs, you identify West Gate's costs as £26,389 per place and for example and comparison Ellesmere's costs are £19,344 per place highlighted below.

Appendix 2 – Comparison of unit costs and funding rates for 2019/20

DESCRIPTION	UOM	OAKLANDS	ELLESMERE	NETHER HALL	WEST GATE	KEYHAM	MILLGATE
2019/20 unit costs							
Non teaching costs							
Leadership cost	£/pupil	£2,616	£2,110	£2,875	£2,034	£5,501	£6,815
Other staff and non staffing costs	£/pupil	£4,375	£5,717	£6,762	£5,856	£10,270	£9,176
Transfers to capital	£/pupil	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total non- teaching	£/pupil	£6,990	£7,827	£9,637	£7,889	£15,771	£15,990
Teaching costs	£/pupil	£16,918	£13,017	£16,443	£20,000	£20,318	£23,201
Other income	£/pupil	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)
Net Costs	£/pupil	£22,409	£19,344	£24,580	£26,389	£34,588	£37,691
2019/20 standard funding rate	£/pupil	£20,144	£18,252	£21,100	£22,074	£31,125	£37,137
2019/20 standard funding rate plus specific	£/pupil	£22,050	£18,429	£22,346	£22,074	£31,125	£37,137

Therefore, it would make sense that they would fund us around £26k - Yes? and Ellesmere around £19 (rounding down on both). Surely this is common sense?

Appendix 3 – Proposed unit funding rates and resultant single weighted average funding rate per school and comparison to current rate

DESCRIPTION	UOM	THURSTON	OAKLANDS	ELLESMERE	NETHERHALL	WESTGATE	KEYHAM	MILLGATE
Revised 2020/21 funding rates								
Non teaching								
Leadership	£/pupil		£2,745	£2,215	£2,745	£2,134	£2,745	£2,745
Other staff and non staffing	£/pupil		£5,677	£5,677	£5,677	£5,677	£5,677	£5,677
Transfers to capital	£/pupil		0	0	0	0	0	0
Total non- teaching	£/pupil		£8,423	£7,892	£8,423	£7,812	£8,423	£8,423
Band 1 teaching	£/pupil		£12,211	£12,211	£12,211	£12,211	£12,211	£12,211
Band 2 teaching	£/pupil		£13,890	£13,890	£13,890	£13,890	£13,890	£13,890
Band 3 teaching	£/pupil		£14,427	£14,427	£14,427	£14,427	£14,427	£14,427
Band 4 teaching	£/pupil		£15,569	£15,569	£15,569	£15,569	£15,569	£15,569
Band 5 teaching	£/pupil		£18,927	£18,927	£18,927	£18,927	£18,927	£18,927
Band 6 teaching	£/pupil		£25,643	£25,643	£25,643	£25,643	£25,643	£25,643
Teaching - weighted average	£/pupil		£16,237	£14,984	£16,337	£17,226	£21,565	£22,091
Other income	£/pupil		(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)	(£1,500)
Net Funding from LAs	£/pupil		£23,159	£21,376	£23,260	£23,537	£28,488	£29,014
Increase/(Reduction) in funding rate compared to 2019/20	£/pupil		£1,109 5%	£2,947 16%	£914 4%	£1,463 7%	(£2,637) -8%	(£8,123) -22%
2019/20 Current funding rates (including specific)	£/pupil		£22,050	£18,429	£22,346	£22,074	£31,125	£37,137

Instead, West Gate receives only a £1,463 increase per place (7%) yet Ellesmere and Oaklands will be able to accrue money to invest in additional staff, being funded above the level required in the LAs own breakdown. West Gate in comparison will still be in deficit losing out to the tune of:

23,537 (funded place)

26,389 (Cost of place)

-£2,852 x 180 places = £513,360.00 approx. Shortfall in funding yearly

Obviously, I'm not an accountant but this seems to me to be a huge problem to say the least.

Please don't set us up to fail.

We are working relentlessly to improve so why will the LA not support us in this?

Why keep ignoring the elephant in the room? I cannot help but believe that this is politically motivated to stop the MAT order. But the best way to do this is fund is appropriately so we can get an Ofsted good and get out of category this way.

I am concerned that the banding system does not actually allow for when many of our students genuinely need 1:1 or 2:1 in the classroom or for toileting and/or behaviour.

We simply cannot provide 1:1 or 2:1 supervision on this per place fee. Yet we have many EHCPs that say 1:1 at all times and many students who are 2:1 at all times for medical or behaviour needs. This make it impossible to toilet them easily and makes interventions/trips/moving them to safe spaces impossible.

West Gate were rapidly improving but this comes at a cost; Staffing levels had to be raised to ensure safety, safeguarding and for teaching and learning to be effective, Administration staff were added to ensure compliance, specialist staff to support mental health, medical, OT, physio and care needs we bought in on an hourly basis. I feel that we have one arm tied behind our back all the time now and all of this will have to go.

West Gate School will have to restructure, yet the timeline for this and the cost of additional HR support with the smallest (and cheapest) leadership costs in the city special schools means that again we will have to focus on the distribution of resources not the business of school improvement to benefit children. Just damage limitation.

When we arrived staffing levels were not safe, they had to be increased. Tribunals were already running and parent relationships were fractured due to poor safeguarding, service and care from 'Old West Gate' that era was put to bed by robust leadership and an increase in staffing deployed appropriately.

Again, we are affected by the legacy of underfunding. Specifically relating to a poverty of opportunity in terms of evidence. Other schools will I'm sure be quoting FFT or comparative dashboards (all pay for subscriptions), chronologies of expenditure and lovely shiny pieces of evidence from fancy additional software. They I suspect have sent staff out to support parents in filling in forms online via work iPad's and other such devices or offered support over the phone. We have no such opportunities as we have no such resources to spare from the day to day running of the school. In my humble opinion we have no political links or motivations here at West Gate School. Just children at the heart of everything we do.

Therefore, I implore you to look again. Address the funding inequalities. I ask you to review the huge uplift to Ellesmere despite them:

- a) having a less complex cohort
- b) not needing this huge increase as they have no deficit
- c) not needing the investment to function at a basic level
- d) D)having expansion plans that will increase their funding anyway

- e) needing lower classroom staffing levels due to less complex cases meaning they are able to offer additionality that already supports the ability to improve in line with the Ofsted framework (Impossible when you have no funding to improve)

Why is this additional nearly £3000 going to them and not West Gate School who are dire need? This seems rather short sighted to me as without proper funding West Gate School will sink further into deficit and been seen to have failed families, be judged by Ofsted and criticised for this; as a best-case scenario. As a worst-case scenario, a child/member of staff will be hurt due to poor supervision/staffing levels. This is despite independent investigation highlighting that we are underfunded and our pleas for additional monies.

For the schools who are losing out or those who will need to restructure (like West Gate) what will be in place to support us?

Instead of being able to address students needs we have to say; what's the bare minimum we can afford to do to scrape by safely?

£26,389 is what you yourselves have identified as our net costs yet this is not the funding offered? Why?

I know school have already not re-appointed to vacant posts, re-arranged staffing, made cuts to cover and cut other costs to the bone. **There is no more to cut without drastically reducing staffing and levels of supervision. Which will in turn effect children's safety, development and wellbeing.**

At a time of a national mental health and wellbeing crisis we will have to cut the additional support that we buy in as we cannot afford base staff costs let alone this

additionality and at a time of mass unemployment we will be restructuring out truly needed and valued colleagues at the lower paid end, although much of our costs is from experienced teachers. This experience is devalued by being boiled down to a cost teaching price.

We are now in our third academic year (2018/19, 2019/20 and now 2020/21) where school staff have no idea of our future with regards to MAT. The situation is intolerable and good staff have left because of this uncertainty. But worse than this I can see the trauma and distress caused to children on a daily basis as we try and transition them through busy corridors full of additional and unnecessary sensory stimuli to toilet them because the capital investment allocated to West Gate cannot be accessed as it's caught up in the MAT issue. I see early years limited to two small classrooms because we have no external canopies and worst of all I have had to physically restrain children jumping the fence to stop them running into the road (one time in front of very grateful parents) because they have no sense of danger and the fence is so low its unsafe. Despite all of this being highlighted frequently. We are in limbo stuck. I came to the school in this period of crisis to help lead them out of it, and I have the emotional resources to do so, I'm here every day, working hard and effectively for you and the families. I just need you to allocate the physical resources to my school and free our amazing headteacher's hands up to do what she is eminently capable of doing really well for you.

Children are in the heart of everything we do. Every decision we made is linked to a disabled child and their family and this **MUST NOT** be forgotten. The Effect of this review on West Gate Schools children will be profound.