

Schools Forum Supplementary Questions / Queries

Questions which were asked repeatedly by Heads were:

1. Where is the contribution from Health in reducing the high needs deficit?
2. How many years is this a commitment for - or is it only for this year? If for 15 years, this is a substantial cut.
3. If it is only for this year, what happens in the following years to ensure there is a reducing/no deficit?
4. If schools are making greater contributions, what assurances will there be that SEND services and provision will improve?
5. Are EYFS also contributing as they also benefit from the HNB?
6. What option does BCP intend to propose to the DfE if schools' forum votes no transfer?
7. Is the LA view that this is caused by schools? If not, why are schools paying for it?
8. What does 'safety valve' refer to? Please explain the terminology.
9. Were schools consulted about BCP's sign-up to Safety Valve and how were the risks related to funding top-slices shared with schools prior to the decision being made to join SV?
10. Is this proposal legal?
11. How does this set of options fit within the broader picture of other measures to reduce the deficit and achieve a sustainable future for High Needs funding? How can we make a decision on which option when we don't know the rest of the plan?
12. Will schools be supported if they have to submit deficit budgets to the ESFA?
13. Even if BCP use Options 2 or 3, the money they take will be a 'drop in the ocean' in the bigger picture of debt they have. Will it really justify the impact on our schools?
14. Are post 16 providers contributing too as EHCPs go up to 21? If yes, can we see their % contribution, if no, why not?
15. The safety valve program also limits the number of new EHCPs to 20 a month - this will lead to many more children with high needs in mainstream schools without any additional funding and we will have less funding anyway due to a top-slice - how will we be supported by the LA with this issue?
16. Query whether BCP are suggesting a contribution from their own reserves to help resolve this issue, in partnership with the Schools?
17. The NFF is the amount calculated that schools need to operate safely and to meet children's learning needs. How will BCP ensure that schools can exercise their duty of care to **all** children?
18. What has happened to discussions around exceptional funding above 3%?
19. Have BCP investigated what others (e.g. Dorset) have done to make their SV arrangement workable?
20. For schools that have falling rolls (e.g. some maintained Christchurch schools) how will BCP protect these schools if budgets won't stretch after the transfer?
21. Why can't schools with capacity and falling rolls be used to support AP etc to save costs?
22. Why has all the discussion and documentation around the proposals not been shared with school leaders when it is them it affects the most? This is not in the interest of open and transparent collaboration, which keeps being mentioned.

The three main thoughts and feedback from mainstream primary heads is:

1. With the SEND and Social care systems in BCP already struggling, schools are relied on for their role in filling all the gaps. By cutting funding to schools, the situation won't improve for our families, and will just create more problems with less funding to solve it. If services were better, it would not be as difficult.
2. School budgets have been hit hard by falling pupil numbers, recent unfunded support staff pay increases & no guarantees that the teacher pension increase will be funded from April. This has massively impacted school budgets and BCP do not seem to acknowledge the concern over this that exists.
3. One of the biggest strains on our budgets at the moment is SEND. Improving SEN provision is also the timeliness / ease of accessing the SEND funding we are entitled to. Schools are expected to pay out the costs of supporting the SEN children whilst awaiting, for a lengthy amount of time, EHCPs to be agreed & then funding is not backdated. We are constantly having to chase for funding that has been agreed to hit our HNB schedules & this often takes months. Whilst I appreciate it may add to their SEN deficit, it is clear that BCP are under-resourced in this area.

Feedback / queries regarding the submission of the safety valve plan.

Point 9 - 36.9% in BCP (lower than national) are accessing mainstream with an EHCP. Maybe this is actually lower because a higher number of children who SHOULD have an EHCP in mainstream schools have not been awarded them.

Point 10 - the post 16 provision is a massive gap - not much has been said about this though. We need more info on the plan for this, too. Are colleges contributing and also are EYs? They also use the high needs block?

Point 12 - of the 118 permanent exclusions, how many were from primary schools and is this fair?

Point 12 - do the figures of £3.7m and £5.8m for the cost of alternative provision also reflect the returned AWP that schools who exclude have to repay to the borough? Is this taken into account when providing these figures and deducted from these totals.

Point 15 - unrealistic that EHCP numbers will be able to fall when they are rising nationally post-Covid. Mitigation for this? How do they intend to make this happen?

Point 17 - IS IT a credible plan? I am not sure that it is....

Point 18 - this is not possible for schools already on tight/deficit budgets.

Point 26 - wider supporting services - what are they and how do we access them??

Point 28 - in my experience, often schools tell parents that their child won't meet the threshold but they apply anyway - hence why so many are turned down.

Point 30 - when?

Point 31 - January? When?

Point 32 - will this also include primary schools, as many of them are dealing with children who instantly get excluded in Year 7, but that we have 'coped with' until they leave year 6. Violence in primary schools is extremely common.

Point 34 - the plan discussed at schools' forum - is this the updated one?

Point 38a - what percentage is being discussed and does this also include special schools?

Point 42 - concern shown here of possible serious threat to the financial stability of the council, but what about the threat to the financial stability of schools?

Point 46 - the council will be insolent!

Point 47 - massive ignorance shown here - the impact on HR is immense for schools, who will probably need to make redundancies due to further transfers, especially if made over 15 years. Insultingly ignorant. How can you have point 47 and then follow it with the contradictory point 48?

Point 51 - there ARE implications for health and safety. Primary schools, in particular, have higher staff ratios and the loss of staff would directly impact the health and safety at schools.

Point 52 - the EIA is ALWAYS meant to be completed BEFORE the plan is made - not after. In the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting (3rd Jan) it was stated that it would be done afterwards, but this goes against the principle of an assessment. These proposals will negatively impact on ALL school children this has been overlooked.

Point 53g - what is the invest to save plan? Is this referring to investing capital etc into new resource bases etc?