



Listening to schools,  
Shaping the National Agenda

# Special Schools' Voice

www.specialschoolsvoice.org

17<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Dear Stuart,

I trust you are well and enjoying Watford's great start to the season.

As chair of SSV, I have been asked to drop you a quick line to keep you apprised of a worry that many schools and school leaders have.

Last week I was asked by a colleague, based in London, to seek views from across the country with regards to the potential reduction in funding going into special schools. This is what I was asked to circulate:

*"Whitefield Academy is situated in the borough of Waltham Forest NE London. Last month the borough announced a deficit of the High Needs Block of £1.7 million and is seeking to balance this budget.*

*One of the measures they propose is a claw back of funds from schools this financial year: mainstream schools 0.5% of their budget and for special schools 1.5%. This is of great concern to all the schools in Waltham Forest. Longer term measures involve a reduction in pupil banding amounts.*

***Does anyone know of other boroughs who have demanded money back from schools due to an overspend of the High Needs Block?"***

The response from the sector has been really significant with over 30 schools replying within the hour!! The responses have also been overwhelmingly similar:

- *Yes, last year Cheshire West demanded the following from all special schools including academies:*

*1.5% from special schools under 50 pupils  
3% from special schools between 50 and 100 pupils  
6% from larger special schools over 100 pupils*

*CWAC did not get it approved by the ESFA and were told that all the heads of the special schools would need to agree. Two refused, but a lot of extra pressure was put on us.*

*The previous year they took 1.5% and again they wanted another % in 2019.*

- *I am aware that Manchester LA is in consultation about clawing back 0.5% from schools' budgets for this same reason. When we were told about it we were told many other LAs were doing the same.*





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- *Torbay are in a similar position, but over £3m! Similar measures being taken in the medium term, but no 'in year' clawback!? Reduction in banding values imminent though? Will definitely be an impact from April 2019.*
- *Thurrock are discussing clawing back 1.5% - we are obviously fighting against the proposal. In the summer they had proposed 1.5% from our top up funding – now they are proposing 1.5% off our whole budget!*
- *A similar solution was proposed by North Somerset last financial year. In the end the local SSF decided not to follow that path but it is likely to propose it again this year. Special schools can only prepare by trimming their staff and by increasing TUF by accepting children with highly complex needs onto their roll....this is not always in the best interests of children already on roll and leads to other issues for the school. North Somerset is one of the lowest funded local authorities in England. The NNF has done little to ameliorate this, so schools in this area find it even more difficult.*
- *Worcestershire are looking at the possibility of top slicing all school budgets to meet the deficit, very unfair on maintained schools. Please note this has not been agreed yet.*

We have been contacted by many other schools up and down the country who are facing similar challenges.

If possible, we'd really welcome a view from the Department as to whether the practices mentioned above are legal. As you are aware funding elements 1 and 2 are set at a specific amount by central government (for the last 7 years £10K). We'd appreciate clarity as to whether local authorities have the powers to reduce an amount that has been agreed at a central level.

Schools are well aware that many LAs are facing significant overspends on their high needs budgets and are exploring ways of improved financial management. However, we would argue that this "arbitrary cost saving measure" has the potential to undermine years of good work and progress within the sector.

I think it is important to place all of the above within the context of the last few months, where special schools have been significantly financially disadvantaged as a result of the support staff pay rise (it disproportionately affected special schools) and the recent decision to apply an "average teacher formula" for the pay rise for staff on teachers' pay and conditions.

I know we have a meeting on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November and I would really welcome a discussion.

I am looking forward to seeing you next month so that we can get your views of all the above. We are also looking forward to sharing, with you, some of the innovations taking place across the sector.

Warmest regards,

Graham

