

23 March 2017

## **Education update**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and noting.

### **Summary**

The LGA has been contributing to the Department for Education (DfE) review of the local authority role in education (the review was originally due to look at children's services as well), through the External Advisory Board (EAB), chaired by Alan Wood.

As a result of the discussions that have taken place at EAB meetings, the Children and Young People Board lead members jointly wrote to the Secretary of State for Education at the start of January, setting out proposals for four key areas, including a 'reset' in relations between central and local government on schools. The full letter is attached at **Appendix 1**.

The paper also provides a summary of the points made in our responses to the Department's consultations on the proposed introduction of a national school funding formula and proposed changes to high needs funding.

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to consider how proposals set out in the letter to the DfE Secretary of State can be developed further.

### **Action**

Officers to take action arising out any discussion, as directed by members.

**Contact officer:** Clive Harris  
**Position:** Senior Adviser  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3207  
**E-mail:** [clive.harris@local.gov.uk](mailto:clive.harris@local.gov.uk)

## **Education update**

### **Background**

1. The LGA welcomed the Department for Education (DfE) review of the local authority role in education and children's services and supports its aim of establishing a clear and sustainable future role for councils. In our Autumn Statement submission we asked that councils be given a clear and strategic role in overseeing local schools systems, accompanied by appropriate resources, powers and flexibilities.
2. Councils have responded positively to increasing school autonomy and increasing expectations that schools should become responsible for their own improvement. Using a variety of models, they have worked with schools to establish authority-wide school improvement partnerships and have encouraged and supported schools to work in local clusters, federations, Multi-Academy Trusts and Teaching School Alliances.
3. The LGA has been contributing to the Department for Education (DfE) review of the local authority role in education, through the External Advisory Board (EAB), chaired by Alan Wood. As a result of the discussions, the Children and Young People Board lead members jointly wrote to the Secretary of State for Education at the start of January, setting out proposals for four key areas, including a 'reset' in relations between central and local government on schools. The full letter is attached at **Appendix 1**.

### **A 'reset' in relations between central and local government on schools**

4. There is a cross-party view within the LGA that the current debates about school structures are increasingly a distraction from addressing the very real challenges in our education system. While the evidence can be presented to support a number of different arguments, councillors believe that structural reforms are only a limited part of the answer to raising educational standards in England.
5. We believe that the appointment of Justine Greening as Secretary of State for Education and the move away from forced academisation of schools, present an opportunity for a 'reset' in relations between central and local government.
6. We are clear that local councils support the desire for an autonomous school-led system, but have not considered themselves as 'providers' of education since the introduction of Local Management of Schools in 1990. However, we do believe that local government plays an essential role in the strategic oversight of the local schools system but currently lacks the powers to be truly effective at this job.
7. We would like to see a 'reset' that acknowledges that local councils aren't providers of education but, in return, allows us to have the powers to effectively shape and commission provision, place plan and champion the interests of the most vulnerable pupils. Councils should be freed up to convene links between schools and other key partners in an area such as employers. We want to move the debate on school structures into a place where central and local government can better work in partnership to tackle

the big questions our education system faces in delivering the best outcomes for children and young people.

### **Responses to the national schools and high needs funding consultations**

8. The LGA has submitted responses to both the national schools and high needs funding consultation, which closed on 22 March.
9. Our response to the national schools funding consultation focusses on the following areas:
  - 9.1 Concern that the proposal to only have one year of the 'soft' formula in 2018/19 (and not two as proposed in the stage one consultation) will give schools and councils facing budget reductions insufficient time to make the necessary cuts. We believe that the proposed changes need to be phased in gradually to protect those facing a reduction in budgets.
  - 9.2 We have serious doubts about the effectiveness of the proposal for maintained schools being asked to fund, from their own budgets, council statutory duties, particularly around school improvement, that are currently funded from the Education Services Grant (ESG) (recently cut by £600 million or 75 per cent). We do not believe that schools should, or will, be willing to fund council duties from their own resources.
  - 9.3 We believe that there is a clear, continued council role in distributing funding at a local level, in partnership with schools and head teachers. We do not believe that school budgets should be set by the Department for Education alone, without some input which takes local needs and priorities into account.
10. Our response to the high needs funding consultation focusses on the following issues:
  - 10.1 Concern that the proposed High Needs National Funding Formula is not sufficiently responsive to changes in need, partly because a significant proportion of the funding will be locked into historic spend factors, and partly because there is too great a time lag in the data that will be used.
  - 10.2 Concern that the proposed proxy measures and weightings do not fully reflect the needs of children and young people with SEND, representing a striking departure from the ISOS recommendations and research commissioned by DfE to inform the development of the formula.
  - 10.3 The DfE has acknowledged rising needs in SEND by allowing a limited facility for councils to transfer funding from other blocks in 2018/19 and for schools to pool their budgets from 2019/20 to provide for increases in complex needs. The extent to which this is possible could vary, depending on the impact of the Schools National Funding Formula in different areas.

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10.4 After a virtual cash freeze in recent years, we are clear that the government needs to give careful consideration to the High Needs quantum each year, informed by statistical evidence of trends. If rising needs are not catered for, it will add to existing disincentives from the high stakes accountability system for schools to be inclusive.

### **Implications for Wales**

11. As education is devolved there are no implications for Wales arising.

### **Financial Implications**

12. None.

### **Next Steps**

13. Members are asked to consider how proposals set out in the letter to the DfE Secretary of State can be developed further.