

Devolution of funding for education other than at school provision to schools

Summary

Increasing referrals of young people to County Council education other than at school services were creating growing budget pressures and an increasing disconnect between this cohort of young people and mainstream education. In response, funding for all education other than at school provision has been devolved to schools operating in Behaviour and Improvement Partnerships. The devolution prompted a significant overhaul of referral processes and an ongoing restructuring of services. The number of pupils receiving alternative provision has reduced and there are a greater range of school based services.

Authority/partner organisation(s):	CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
Improvement East theme:	PERFORMANCE
Improvement East initiative (workstream):	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Author:	ADRIAN LOADES, SERVICE DIRECTOR: STRATEGY AND COMMISSIONING
Date:	MARCH 2010

Main messages

The case study reports the devolution of local authority held funding for Education Other than at School (EOTAS) services (e.g. Pupil Referral Units etc) to secondary schools working within Behaviour and Attendance Improvement Partnerships.

The purpose of the devolution was to:

- address the issue of year on year increases in referrals to EOTAS from schools
- create capacity within schools for earlier intervention to reduce referrals
- improve the level of the reintegration of pupils from EOTAS services to schools
- address the major organisational and cultural “gaps” between EOTAS provision and secondary schools

Case study

EOTAS services within Cambridgeshire reflected the development of arrangements over time with consequent inconsistencies in approach and geographical coverage. The major challenge faced was a year on year increase in referrals from schools which was being managed through reducing the allocation of teaching time to pupils and service overspends.

As a result the call on the Dedicated Schools Grant from the service was increasing annually. The EOTAS services were generally remote from schools organisationally and operationally with low levels of reintegration. Pupil Referral Units (PRU) existed for KS4 pupils, with Support and Tuition services providing KS3 facilities. As a result of pressures on PRUs a number of KS4 pupils were taught in Support and Tuition services. Referral patterns from schools were inconsistent and did not align with indicators of need with variable thresholds at school level being applied for referral.

A project was established in 2007 to oversee arrangements for the devolution of funding for EOTAS provision to secondary schools. The financial arrangements for the devolution of funding were agreed relatively early, including the quantum of funding held by the local authority to be devolved (£7m), along with a needs based funding formula to distribute this funding.

Headteachers were involved in the project from its inception and there has been strong engagement throughout. All schools were required to be a member of a Behaviour Improvement and Attendance Partnership (BAIPs) before funding would be devolved. Five BAIPs were formed based on the five District Council areas within Cambridgeshire.

The BAIP provides a forum for decision making in terms of the use of devolved funding. Schools use the devolved funding to either purchase places at the County Council operated EOTAS provision or to invest in additional in-school support arrangements. Any overspends on the devolved funding are the responsibility of the BAIP to address.

Funding was devolved to schools with effect from September 2009. In the lead up to the devolution of funding, the following activities were undertaken:

- Agreement of funding arrangements and the creation of a partnership agreement for BAIPs that covered issues such as decision making arrangements and individual school responsibilities
- The development of funding and operational arrangements for BAIPs and EOTAS services.
- The agreement of arrangements so that every young person, regardless of circumstances, would be allocated to the responsibility of a BAIP.
- The production of a revised protocol for managed moves to create better consistency in arrangements
- The creation of a new protocol for registration arrangements for EOTAS to address inconsistencies
- The creation of a new protocol for medical needs referrals
- The development of quality assurance arrangements for the County Council

In addition each BAIP, at varying pace, has developed its vision of the range of central services that it wants to see available. This has led to a fundamental restructuring of services in Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and East Cambridgeshire, including the closure of some provision. Reviews are underway in the other two BAIP areas. Funding has been deployed to increase school capacity to support pupils without referral to EOTAS and three BAIPs are also using funding to access provision at local FE colleges.

Key Issues and Risks

The delivery of this project has required considerable engagement on the part of secondary school head teachers. The County Council has been clear on the issues and risks attached to devolution from the outset. It was also clear that the only alternative was to continue the top-slicing of the Dedicated Schools Grant,

The scale of work and issues that would need to be addressed by the project was not fully appreciated from the start. Funding arrangements were agreed relatively early. However, the project necessitated a fundamental revision and clarification of arrangements for managed moves, medical needs referrals and the registration status of students. The work for BAIPs was underestimated and there is now a need for the BAIPs to increase their capacity, probably through the appointment of a partnership manager.

The project necessitated major change in the organisation of EOTAS provision, prompted by the requirements of schools that were purchasing the provision. This involved the development and implementation of new structures. Posts were deleted and there has been a net reduction in staff numbers. This has been a period of uncertainty and concern for staff and in some instances performance has suffered during this period. The changes also meant that EOTAS provision has less certain funding prospects as it now essentially trades with schools. BAIPs have been encouraged to develop longer term plans to enable EOTAS services to plan.

There have been tensions and strains within BAIPs as schools have developed their individual and collective objectives for the future. Differing levels of referral to EOTAS services has been a particular point of contention. Some concerns were also raised by voluntary sector providers who previously support EOTAS services but have been less likely to be engaged by BAIPs.

Quality Assurance arrangements have been problematic. National Strategies have published self assessment material for BAIPs. Attempts to focus local quality assurance arrangements on this material foundered as it was considered to be too focused on the workings of the BAIP rather than outcomes. A fresh start on quality assurance was made. Arrangements now specifically focus on the risk that as a result of the devolution of funding students will not receive the education and support that they individually need.

The arrangements are based on using currently held information such as complaints, attendance data, exclusions as well as information from staff working with schools eg EWOs, In School Support Teachers and the County Inclusion Officer to develop an overview of practice and risk for individual schools. The arrangements have had to have regard to the fact that as the new arrangements takes affected the cohort of pupils considered to be EOTAS will be come less identifiable as more support is provided in school. The quality assurance arrangements have recently been agreed with schools.

Key outcomes

Devolution only took place from September 2009 so there is limited information available on impact. As at January 2010, the number of pupils enrolled at EOTAS services had reduced by 80 from the year before. Reintegration levels have also increased compared to monthly levels in 2008/09. Budget overspends relate to the period prior to September 2010 and it would appear that the risk of overspending has reduced.

Learning

Key learning points from the project were:

- The need for strong and active engagement from schools
- The need to better scope what was a fundamental change in arrangements
- The importance of openness in respect of difficulties and issues
- The need to ensure that devolution also provides operational freedom in terms of developing new approaches and arrangements and recognising and accepting that this will threaten existing arrangements.
- The importance of good communication particularly with parents, carers and students during a period of structural change

Contact details

Improvement East contact:	Lynsay Cook, Programme Manager Lynsay.cook@improvementeast.gov.uk
Authority contact:	Adrian Loades, Service Director: Strategy and Commissioning adrian.loades@cambridgeshire.gov.uk , 01223 727987
Other partner organisations:	