

Report Title	Special Schools / Bases - top up moderation
Meeting	Schools Forum
Meeting Date	14 January 2025
Chair	Jenny Sims
Report Author(s)	Jack Cutler, Acting Head of Pupil Based Commissioning
Open/Exempt	Open

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the moderation of specialist provision within the borough, the outcomes of moderations completed to date, and recommendations from moderation activities for the forum to review.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To note the summary of the specialist provision moderation programme to date.
- 2.2. To agree to the proposed changes to the top-up funding for the Oakfield and Rainbows complex Autism primary specialist bases.
- 2.3. To agree to the introduction of a new pathway at Carew Academy with the introduction of a funding rate associated with the provision linked to this pathway.

3. Background and Key Information

- 3.1. In 2021, when the special school and bases funding model was introduced, a process to ensure the resourcing of provision could be updated should the complexity of pupil needs change, was also introduced. This process is referred to as the moderation process.
- 3.2. The moderation process consists of a visit to a school site by the SEND and AP Commissioning Lead and Head of Pupil Based Commissioning, a special school or base headteacher, and often a Head of School/ base lead at that school, and either the Principle Educational Psychologist or Head of SEND Support, at Cognus. The visit involves an observation of each of a selection of classes within the provision covering all the pathways available, followed by an in depth conversation with the school the needs of their pupils, resourcing and finances, and whether the school believes the provision statement, and associated funding should be updated to reflect a change in the complexity, or type of needs, their students have.
- 3.3. Following the moderation process a report is provided to the school which provides a summary of the visit, including moderation panel observations, and a proposed recommendation to be considered by the Schools Forum where necessary.

Oakfield resource base

- 3.4. Oakfield school was moderated on 11th July 2024. Following this moderation visit, a series of meetings were held with the school, and Greenshaw Learning Trust, the Academy Trust that oversees the school, to review the provision statement of the base, and the bases finances.
- 3.5. All special schools and bases in the borough are funded according to a locally agreed specialist funding model. This model includes a number of parameters, one of which is the ratio of pupils to teachers. The Oakfield and Rainbows bases are currently funded on the basis of 1.14 teachers to every 8 pupils (1:7 ratio); however following the moderation process it was identified that by in large, due to the complexity of the cohorts that the provisions meet, classes are taught at the ratio 1.33 teachers to every 8 pupils (1:6 ratio). Although there are occasions where either setting may have 7 children in a class, as a result of a direction to admit, both these settings have been operating on a basis of 6 children per class since the introduction of the funding model.
- 3.6. The Academy Trust has submitted evidence to the LA indicating that as it currently stands, the funding received by the Oakfield base is less than the costs of running the provision, hence the mainstream school is effectively subsidising the base.
- 3.7. The impact of this proposed change to fund on class sizes of 6, rather than 7, is to increase the per pupil top-up funding from £19,646 to £21,297. The proposal is for this change to apply from the start of the 25/26 financial year.
- 3.8. Given the Oakfield and Rainbows bases are equivalent provision, and that the Rainbows base also teaches in class sizes of 6, it is proposed the per pupil top-up rate for Rainbows is also increased from £19,646 to 21,297. It was agreed by the moderation panel that class sizes of 6 within Oakfield (and by proxy Rainbows) were reasonable, given the complexity of children's needs that were being met.
- 3.9. The impact on the high needs budget, assuming all places occupied by Sutton residents, would be £89,000 at Oakfield and £92,454 at Rainbows, a combined increase of £182k.
- 3.10. Should this change be agreed, the Trust has agreed to increase capacity of the base provision further, adding an additional 6 places for September 2025, and if needed, a further 6 each year until the capacity of the base reaches 84 places. To facilitate this expansion, the school has requested a further £891k in capital investment (to be funded through the special provision capital fund programme, which would be considered as part of the established Asset Management Plan Steering Group decision making process.

Carew Academy special school

- 3.11. Carew Academy currently operates 4 pathways (Skills for FE, skills for work and Skills for Life, along with a KS2 MLD pathway for children with complex behaviours).
- 3.12. The move to new premises in April 2025 presents an opportunity to introduce a further pathway, which in time is likely to replace the skills for FE pathway, which would be a skills

for learning pathway, which would meet pupils needs between the skills for life and skills for work pathways. This particular pathway would meet the needs of young people with speech, language and communication needs and /or Autistic spectrum conditions and ADHD, but when these begin to include complex needs, speech and sensory impairment alongside ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

Children would be taught in classes of 8, with 3 learning support assistants per class. Whilst the top-up funding rate required has not yet been agreed with the school, given the above values of teacher/ TA ratios, it is anticipated the top-up would be approximately £14k per pupil (compared with £12,429 for the schools for work pathway and £23,957 for the skills for life pathway).

4. Implications

- 4.1. The Council's High Needs Block budgets would be amended to reflect any changes in agreed funding.
- 4.2. As part of the DSG management plan, it is likely that a review of local funding arrangements will be undertaken over the course of this year ahead of future year arrangements, therefore it is possible that any changes made at this stage will be subject to further changes in future (subject to consultation). At this stage it is not possible to anticipate what those changes might be. Given that the moderation process was agreed by Schools Forum, arguably the outcomes of this process should be considered by Schools Forum until any further changes to our funding arrangements have been decided.

5. Appendices

Appendix Letter	Appendix Title
N/A	N/A