
Impact of Covid 19 on HNB

Report being considered by: Schools' Forum on 8th March 2021

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Item for: Information **By:** All Forum Members

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To report on impact of Covid 19 on the HNB.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the report is noted.

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| Will the recommendation require the matter to be referred to the Council or the Executive for final determination? | Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> | No: <input type="checkbox"/> |
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3. Introduction/Background

3.1 The Heads Funding Group / Schools Forum has requested a report on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on High Needs Block expenditure.

4. Supporting Information

4.1 In the early stages of the pandemic, there was a reduction in the number of requests for Education, Health and Care assessments. However, since September 2020 the number of requests for EHC assessments has increased quite significantly. In the September to December 2020 period there were 41 requests, compared to 24 requests in the same period in the previous year. Formal requests for EHC assessment can be made by schools / educational settings and can also be made by parents / carers.

4.2 Not all requests for EHC assessment are agreed, as there has to be evidence of severe and persistent difficulty and lack of progress in spite of appropriate intervention through the graduated approach, making use of the schools' own resources. However, where assessments are agreed they usually result in an Education, Health and Care Plan, with associated costs.

4.3 It is difficult to ascertain to what extent this increase is related to Covid 19, as the number of EHC requests had been steadily increasing year on year since 2014 prior to the pandemic. More detailed analysis would be needed to show whether the number of EHC assessment requests is continuing to climb at the expected pre Covid rate, or whether the increase is greater than would have been expected and therefore likely to be attributable in part to Covid.

4.4 It is reasonable to assume that a least some of the increase in EHC requests is Covid related and could be related to the following issues:

- Children who were already experiencing difficulties with their learning falling further behind due to lockdown
- Parents becoming more aware of gaps in their children's learning as a result of home schooling
- Children experiencing increased levels of anxiety, potentially manifesting in social, emotional and mental health difficulties and challenging behaviours in school
- Children experiencing increased levels of anxiety, potentially resulting in emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)

4.5 In addition to increased EHC requests, there has also been an increase in the number of children who are emotionally based school avoiders and whose levels of anxiety are so extreme, and their pattern on non attendance so entrenched, that the only solution becomes a specialist placement offering very small classes and a high level of support. These children often, but not always, have a diagnosis of autism.

4.6 This increase had already been noted prior to Covid 19, so it is difficult to say to what extent the pandemic has contributed. However, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the pandemic has had an impact, as children who were already finding attendance very challenging will not have been helped by a period out of school due to lockdown.

4.7 It is not currently possible to quantify increases in cases of EBSA as this group of children has not previously been identified and monitored by the Local Authority as a specific cohort. However, measures to do so have now been put in place given the high level of concern about EBSA and its implications for children's long term life outcomes, in addition to the potential financial impact.

5. Conclusion

5.1 It is only possible to speculate at this stage about the impact of Covid 19 on HNB expenditure. Further monitoring is needed.