

Update on HNB Invest to Save Projects

Report being considered by:	Schools' Forum on 18 th October 2021		
Report Author:	Jane Seymour, Michelle Sancho, Linda Curtis		
Item for:	Information	By:	Schools' Forum

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To update the Schools Forum on the Invest to Save projects agreed in 20-21 and 21-22.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the HFG notes this report.

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

3.1 In 2020-21, the Schools Forum agreed to transfer 0.25% of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for initiatives which were aimed at reducing spending in the longer term. The total value of this first tranche of invest to save initiatives was £274,000. The initiatives included increased investment in the Vulnerable Children Grant (a grant which schools can access for assistance with children who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties), the creation of a Therapeutic Thinking Officer post to oversee the roll out of therapeutic thinking approaches in schools and the recruitment of two Higher Level TAs in the Autism Team to work intensively with children at risk of placement breakdown or becoming emotionally based school avoiders. These projects were also approved for continuation in to 2021-22.

3.2 The Schools Forum also made a decision on 8th March 2021 that a further 0.25% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB, amounting to £274,000, could be made for a second tranche of invest to save initiatives. Officers had put forward a range of options, but as further information was needed it was decided at the Schools Forum that the decision on how to allocate this funding would be delegated to the Head of the Education Service, in consultation with the Heads Funding Group. Accordingly, a special meeting of the Heads Funding Group was held in March 2021 and further discussions also took place separately with secondary headteachers.

3.3 The HFG as a body agreed only one of the proposals for the second tranche of funding, which was to create a fund which schools could access in order to support children with autism. There were differences of view on the HFG on how the remainder of the funding would be used. It was therefore agreed that the sum needed to create an Autism Fund would be top sliced from the £274K and that half of the remaining funding would be allocated directly to secondary schools and the other half would be retained

centrally to fund Invest to Save initiatives on behalf of primary schools. Secondary schools were given the option of using the funding allocated to them to buy back in to the invest to save initiatives; one secondary school, The Downs, took up this option.

3.4 The 2021 -22 Invest to Save projects included the creation of an EBSA fund which participating schools can access through the Local Authority's EBSA Forum, creation of three part time EBSA posts (Education Welfare Officer, Educational Psychologist and mental health worker in the Emotional Health Academy) and creation of an ASD Fund which all schools can access through the Autism Team.

4. Therapeutic Thinking post and increase to Vulnerable Children Grant (2020-21 and 2021-22)

4.1 The annual allocation for this initiative was **£58,000** for the Therapeutic Thinking Lead post and **£129,000** increase in the Vulnerable Children Grant, to support the implementation of therapeutic thinking approaches and to facilitate successful transition of permanently excluded pupils to other mainstream schools.

4.2 The objectives of this project were broadly to support schools to manage behaviours in ways which reduced the use of permanent exclusions, alternative placements at I-College and specialist SEND placements.

4.3 The report attached at **Appendix A** sets out how these objectives have been achieved.

4.4 In summary, headteachers in a core group of 13 primary schools (who have completed therapeutic thinking training and changed their school policies to fully adopt this approach) estimated that the use of permanent exclusion, alternative provision (I-College) and specialist SEND placements had been avoided as follows:

Strategy	Number avoided	Average cost	Saving
Permanent exclusion	3	£20,000	£60,000
Alternative placement	3	£20,000	£60,000
Specialist SEND placement	2	£62,000	£124,000
Total	8		£244,000

5. Appointment of 2 x Teaching Assistants in Autism Team (2020-21 and 2021-22)

5.1 The annual allocation for this initiative was **£58,000**.

5.2 Two TAs were appointed using this funding and two separate projects were set up, one working with 4 primary schools and one working with 2 secondary schools and groups of identified children in each.

5.3 The objectives of the primary project were broadly to reduce anxiety of children supported and therefore reduce behaviours causing concern and the likelihood of exclusions or alternative placements.

5.4 The objectives of the secondary project were broadly to reduce anxiety of children who were showing emotionally based school avoidance in order to improve their attendance at school and reduce the likelihood of alternative placements.

5.5 The report attached at **Appendix B** sets out how these objectives have been achieved.

5.6 In summary, the anxiety levels of children participating in the primary project, in relation to a variety of situations which autistic children commonly find difficult, reduced in almost all cases, based on pre and post intervention questionnaires completed by pupils, parents and staff. In turn, parents saw reduced behavioural issues at home and schools saw a reduction in concerning behaviours in school.

5.7 This was a relatively short intervention (staff were not in post until January 2021 due to Covid) but it has shown very promising results. The primary reason for children with autism requiring specialist placements is that their anxieties escalate to a point where they begin to manifest in very challenging behaviours, including aggression and violence. If children can be taught strategies to manage their anxieties in the school environment, and staff can be taught, through modelling, strategies to help the child manage their anxieties, there is a real possibility that children can be maintained in a mainstream school rather than needing specialist placements. The sort of intensive, school based, anxiety management support offered by the TAs in the Autism Team is not replicated by any other service.

5.8 All of the pupils worked with in the primary project are still in school. None have become EBSA or moved to alternative placements or specialist SEND placements. The work with these specific schools and children was time limited, but the children remain on the caseload of the Autism Team so that they can be monitored and more intensive support from the TAs can be put back in if their anxieties and behaviours start to escalate again. It is difficult to assess which of the 15 children in the primary project would have needed a specialist placement without this intervention, but if even one placement has been avoided that represents an annual saving of **£62,000**.

5.9 The secondary project focused on pupils who were emotionally based school avoiders. In School T, the project worked with 3 students who were at EBSA Levels 1 or 2. In School X, the project worked with 6 students who were at EBSA Levels 3 or 4 and two of whom were not attending school at all.

5.10 In one case study described in the attached report, a student who had only been attending school for 1 to 2 hours per day started to attend full time within the first few weeks of the project. In the second case study a young person who was not attending school at all and was very isolated at home was able to go in to school to discuss a reduced timetable, has engaged with the timetable and is now attending most days for short periods.

5.11 Students who took part in the project rated their enjoyment of different aspects of school on a 1 to 10 scale before and after the intervention. In all cases, average scores increased. In some cases there were significant increases, including ability to manage transitions and ability to manage the environment / sensory issues. Teachers were also asked to rate their concerns about students' attendance and peer relationships before and after the project and in almost all cases levels of concern reduced.

5.12 Attendance data does not fully reflect the outcomes of the project as, for example, the student in case study 2 will still have low attendance figures but this level of attendance is a significant achievement for a young person was not attending at all and may lead over time to increased and possibly full attendance.

5.13 Two out of three students at School T had increased attendance after the project. One student had very marginally reduced attendance due to Covid bubble arrangements.

5.14 Two out of six students at School X had increased attendance after the project. In other cases it is more difficult to see a clear pattern of increased attendance (and this is complicated by Covid lockdowns) but some progress was seen in terms of engagement with reduced timetables and parents reporting less stress at home.

5.15 The difference in outcomes between Schools T and X suggests that this type of intervention may be more effective at EBSA Levels 1 and 2, to prevent students moving in to Levels 3 and 4, rather than at Levels 3 and 4 where patterns of non attendance have become very entrenched.

6. EBSA Fund & EBSA Posts (2021-22)

6.1 The annual allocation for this initiative was **£110,657** in total, broken down as follows:

- EBSA Fund **£56,157***
- 0.25 EP **£16,620**
- 0.5 EBSA Coordinator (EWO) **£20,675**
- 0.5 EHA worker **£17,205**

6.2 One secondary school chose to contribute its share of the funding distributed to secondary schools (£ 11,065 per school) to the project, which has increased the EBSA fund to **£67,222.***

6.3 The staff have been appointed and started work in September 2021. Multi-disciplinary monthly panel meetings have been set up to consider requests for the EBSA Fund and staff support. As part of the support for schools an innovative approach of using robots is being piloted. The mini robots are a completely secure tool that allows students to interact with their teachers and friends when they cannot physically be present in the classroom. The desktop robot sits in school and livestreams lessons back to the student at home or in hospital, all through a secure app on their tablet/smartphone.

6.4 Given that the staff have only started this month it is too early to report on impact. However, support given to one student already has already significantly impacted on attendance with attendance for the 5 weeks prior to the EBSA panel involvement at 0% moving to 83% following the EBSA panel support.

7. ASD Fund (2021-22)

7.1 The annual allocation for this initiative was **£52,685**. The fund is available to schools to support children with an autism diagnosis (or on the autism pathway) and can be accessed through application to the Autism Team.

7.2 The budget will be allocated through an application process which evidences need and demonstrates how the funds will be spent. Funding will be capped at a maximum of £2000 per child.

7.3 It is expected that the Headteacher, a senior leader or the SENCO, will complete the relevant paperwork for financial support. Where funds are allocated, school leaders will be expected to complete an 'evaluation of impact' document following the implementation of the provision.

7.4 Bids will be reviewed monthly by a panel consisting of the Learning Support Services Manager, the Autism Team Co-ordinator and a member of the Autism Team. Schools may seek support for provision which may include but is not exclusive to:

- Resources for therapies (ie Lego, Art, Sports)
- Sensory resources
- 1:1 time each day with a professional in school
- Online tutoring

7.5 Applications are particularly welcome where the intervention benefits groups of students and where the impact will live on beyond the intervention such as:

- Social skills groups
- Emotional regulation and mindfulness sessions
- Involvement of parents/carers

7.6 The first panel was held in July 2021. There were 12 applications (3 secondary, 9 primary):

- The amount requested varied between £720 up to the maximum £2000, with most applications requesting near to the full amount.
- The panel allocated £11,330 at the July panel.
- Some applications were not successful. This was mainly due to schools not providing the correct evidence and/or the support they were requesting was deemed to be part of provision which should be ordinarily available in a mainstream school
- The panel provided a good opportunity to link the funding being requested with the work the Autism Specialist TAs are carrying out. For example, where schools were asking for support to fund provision which should be ordinarily available, the Autism Team will allocate one of the specialist TAs to work with the school to further their practice.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The Invest to Save projects funded in 20-21 and 21-22 have achieved positive outcomes as set out above. The 2021 – 22 projects were not agreed until July 2021 and are therefore in the very early stages of development so it is not yet possible to demonstrate impact. Further data on these new initiatives will be brought to future meetings of the Heads Funding Group / Schools Forum.

9. Consultation and Engagement

- 9.1 Ian Pearson, Michelle Sancho, Linda Curtis, Karen Bartlett.

10. Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix A – Therapeutic Thinking
- 10.2 Appendix B – Impact report on teaching assistants in the Autism Team