

SCHOOLS FORUM AGENDA ITEM

For Action



For Information



Brief Description of Item

This report provides an update for the Schools Forum on the application in the 2019/20 financial year of the Schools Block Falling Rolls Fund for mainstream primary phase maintained schools and mainstream primary phase academies.

Date (s) of any Previous Discussion at the Forum

The addition of a Falling Rolls Fund to our Schools Block DSG arrangements was closely considered by the Schools Forum across 2018, including by a sub group of Forum Members. A Fund for the primary phase was established by the 2019/20 DSG decisions, which were made by the Forum on 9 January 2019. The criteria to assess eligibility were also established at this meeting, following consultation with schools. Following our most recent consultation, on 2020/21 arrangements, the Falling Rolls Fund has been agreed to continue next year on the same basis as originally established and at a continuing annual value of £250,000.

Background / Context

The establishment of a Falling Rolls Fund within the Schools Block for the primary phase came out of the Forum's consideration of the impact of 'under-subscription' in primary schools. A key report was presented to the Forum on 19 September 2018 (Document JE). This report provides useful background.

Within its discussions, the Forum stressed the importance of resolving these situations as far as possible (and where evidenced by forecasted data) through PAN adjustments rather than via on-going financial support. The Authority is actively engaged in PAN management.

The Forum however, also considered the two ways direct financial support could be provided from the DSG:

- The establishment of a Falling Rolls Fund for both maintained schools and academies.
- The use of the exceptional circumstances de-delegated fund only for primary maintained schools.

The Falling Rolls Fund is the mechanism through which support can be provided to both maintained schools and academies and both are required to contribute to the cost of the Fund. This is the only route through which financial support can be provided locally from Bradford's DSG to under-subscribed academies. The value of a Falling Rolls Fund can be quite limited however, when looking purely at under-subscription. This is because the DfE has set strict eligibility criteria. Its primary purpose is to protect schools against short term 'blips' in numbers. One of the major restrictions is the mandatory requirement that only good or outstanding schools are eligible, meaning that a number of schools and academies that are currently under-subscribed will currently not be eligible. Another main significant restriction is the requirement that funding can only be allocated where under-subscription is demonstrably a 'blip' and not the result of a longer term and on-going change in demographic distribution.

We explained in Document JE in September 2019, under the existing de-delegated exceptional circumstances fund, we could allocate monies via a different route to eligible maintained primary schools. Academies however, would neither contribute to nor access this funding. The cost of the fund would be purely met from maintained primary schools. Unlike the Falling Rolls Fund, we could establish criteria that would enable funding to be allocated to support schools in Ofsted categories and could target funding more closely to the actual cost to the school (rather than basing this on a simple formula or on thresholds). However, funding would cease when a school converts to an academy and the number of schools that are supported would reduce as more schools convert to academy, which also may result in a disproportionate cost to remaining maintained primary schools. Although the Forum did give a clear steer – that DSG funding should not be allocated to support on an on-going basis any circumstance that does not have a resolution (such as PAN adjustment) - the Forum hasn't yet come to a final view about the use of the exceptional funding route for maintained primary schools. This is something that is likely to need to be concluded following consideration of this report.

Details of the Item for Consideration

Our Falling Rolls Fund is set out in Appendix 1.

We are now applying the criteria set out in this document to determine eligible schools and academies and values of funding to be allocated for the 2019/20 financial year up to 31 March 2020.

Details of the Item for Consideration Continued

The position is as follows:

- No maintained schools or academies qualify for funding from the 2019/20 Falling Rolls Fund.
- There are 29 primary schools and primary academies (out of 160) that had a number on roll at October 2018 that was not at least 90% of their Published Admission Number (PAN) capacity. This is trigger 2. The occupancy of 18 of these was between 85% and 89%; 10 was between 70% and 84%; 1 was lower than 70%.
- For 27 of these 29, the latest forecasted pupil intake data indicates that their surplus capacity will not be needed within the next 3 years. This is trigger 4. Many of these 27 are also ineligible as a result of other triggers.
- The remaining 2 from the 29 are not eligible as a result of other triggers, but both including the requirement to be good or outstanding. This is trigger 3.

On this basis, the Forum is asked to note that the sum of £250,000 is unspent within the Schools Block and is carried forward into 2020/21 as a ring-fenced sum.

The Forum may wish to consider this outcome / the calculations in more detail. If it does, we would suggest that the Forum's sub-group is re-convened. The Forum may also wish the sub-group now to further consider the use of the exceptional circumstances route for providing financial support to maintained primary schools only that are under-subscribed and that are not eligible for Falling Rolls funding.

Implications for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) (if any)

The Forum set aside £250,000 for the Falling Rolls Fund within the 2019/20 DSG. This is unspent and is carried forward into 2020/21 as a ring-fenced sum.

Recommendations

Recommended –

- (1) **The Schools Forum is asked to note that there are no allocations to be made from the Schools Block Falling Rolls Fund in 2019/20.**
- (2) **The Forum is asked to note that the sum of £250,000 is unspent within the Schools Block and is carried forward into 2020/21 as a ring-fenced sum. This means that, added to the new budget of £250,000 set within the 2020/21 DSG allocation, £500,000 in total is now identified for the Falling Rolls Fund within the Schools Block. The Forum will be asked to decide within the 2021/22 DSG budget round on the uses of the £250,000 carry forward (whether it remains ring-fenced for Falling Rolls or whether all or a proportion of it is released back to formula funding for schools and academies in 2021/22).**

List of Supporting Appendices / Papers

Appendix 1 – Falling Rolls Fund 2019/20

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