

Committee:	School Forum
Meeting Date:	13 th October 2014
Title:	Special School Places
Author:	Michael Quinton
Decision making / consultative / information:	Information

What is the Forum being asked to decide?

1. To note the continued pressures and demand on Special School places in Suffolk.

Reason for recommendation

2. To highlight the continuing pressures on Special School places, due to a number of different factors highlighted in the main body of this report. This report will act as a high level prelude to a more in depth analysis being undertaken by the Local Authority to be reported at the next Schools Forum meeting.

Alternative options

3. n/a

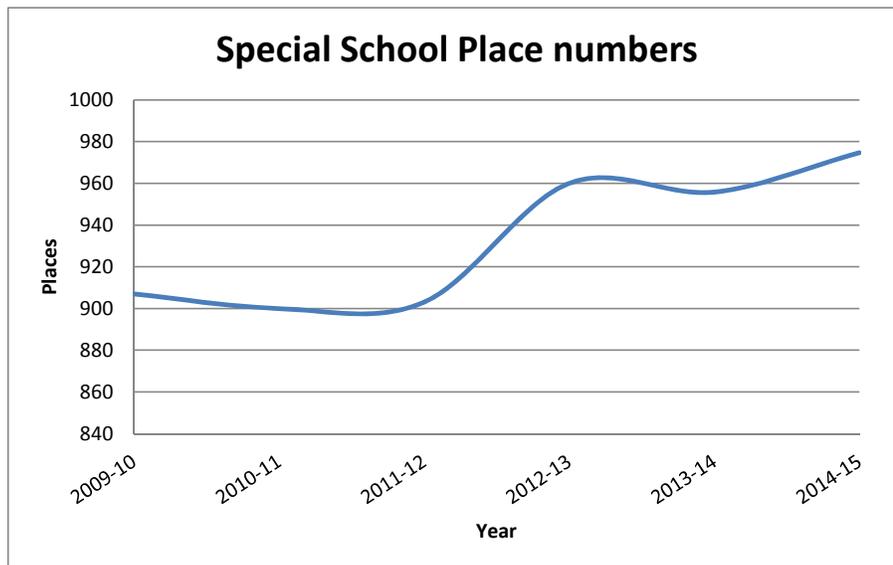
Who will be affected by this decision?

4. n/a

Main body of the Report

5. During recent years Suffolk has seen an increase in the amount of actual places required at our Special Schools. This is for a number of reasons which will be looked at in a little more detail in the paper. **Table 1** below illustrates the increase.

Table 1



6. This isn't isolated to Suffolk. Nationally an increase in the number of pupils in special schools has provided evidence of a reversal of a 30-year trend towards inclusion.
7. In monetary terms, based on the 'Place Plus Top Up funding' model (introduced in 2013-14) this equates to approximately £1.2m of additional funding required for Special School places, when in fact, although Special Schools have not had their funding reduced through MFG, the budgets have not increased over the period.
8. It should be noted that approximately £0.4m of the increase is in respect of Suffolk's 3 Special Academy schools.

Specialist Provision

9. There are 8 Special Schools in Suffolk, (including provision at Suffolk One) in Ipswich, Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds and Sudbury for children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).
10. There are also a number of Specialist Support Centres (SSCs), units for children with severe hearing impairment at Hearing Impairment Units (HIUs) and units for those with speech or language difficulties, Speech and Language Units (SLUs).

Possible reasons for increasing numbers

11. Since 2007 research shows there has been an increase of 8,475 in the number of pupils in special schools nationally, reaching 101,590 last year (10.9% increase). Suffolk, since 2009-10 has seen a 12.9% increase, approximately 70 pupils.
12. It's reported that a number of local authorities have embarked on an expansion of special school places, citing the increased survival rate of

premature babies as a reason for the growing demand and these children presenting more severe and complex needs.

13. Our Special schools would currently agree that this is the case. There has been a marked increase in the number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). These pupils need 1 to 1 support, sometimes greater with 2 or even 3 to 1 dependant on their condition. This puts a greater financial strain on the school in terms of organising the school, increased staffing and training etc.
14. There are also pressures relating to current gaps in our provision, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The LA however is already looking at options on who potentially could offer such provision and in turn reducing some of the expensive out of county placements.
15. However it is reported that the increase in recent years correlates to the political climate away from inclusion. Schools are coming under greater pressure to raise standards, leaving less room for children with special needs.
16. The added pressure to raise attainment or 'Raise the Bar' shows that there is a balancing act to be found between inclusion and raising attainment levels.
17. With the new SEND reforms parents will also have a greater say in the education of their child but the reforms are there to support both inclusion and listening to parental choice.
18. With the additional funding for the High Needs Block, (as already reported at the July Forum) an element of this will be used for the growth in numbers at Special Schools.
19. The continuing Foundation Learning issue at Suffolk One will also have an impact on numbers, however not increasing overall numbers in Suffolk but adding increased pressure at our existing Special Schools. At the start of the autumn term there is already evidence that pupils who were once at Suffolk One are now being placed / accepted at some of our Special Schools.
20. The total cost of Special Schools and the Specialist Units based on 14-15 current spend and forecasting for the remainder of the year to Suffolk is:
 - Special Schools - £13.710m
 - Specialist Units - £2.170m
 - **Total - £15.880m**
21. This is approximately 33% of the total High Needs Block funding for Suffolk.
22. The review that will now take place will look at:
 - Various statistics e.g. population, SEN
 - What is the 'Local Offer'
 - Existing provision and any gaps
 - Options for future provision
 - Financial analysis and modelling
 - Role of support services (LA etc.)
 - Any recommendations and conclusions

