



Schools Forum

Date: 18 March 2021

Time: 8:30 to 10.20am

Venue: Virtual Microsoft
(MS) Teams

Paper

B

Public

SCHOOLS' FINANCES AND COVID-19

Responsible Officer Phil Wilson

e-mail: phil.wilson@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: (01743) 254344 Fax: (01743) 254400

Summary

Reports were presented to Schools Forum at their meetings on 25 June, 17 September and 5 November 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Shropshire schools' finances, outlining the issues that had emerged and were being faced by schools and academies. As the anniversary of the initial lockdown of education settings is approached, this paper seeks to provide a summary of the financial support that has been provided to schools.

Recommendation

This report is for information only.

REPORT

Background

1. Schools were closed from 20 March 2020 as the Government escalated its efforts to curb the increasing spread of coronavirus across the country. Schools remained open, however, for the supervision of the children of critical workers and for vulnerable children. From 1 June primary schools were able to extend opening to children in nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, while from 15 June, secondary schools were able to welcome back students in Years 10 and 12. From the beginning of the Autumn term there was a full reopening of schools, operating within the Government's COVID safe guidelines.
2. A further lockdown to school-based education to all but vulnerable and critical worker children was reintroduced from 4 January 2021 and lifted on 8 March, with a staggered return for secondary schools as they carry out lateral flow testing of their pupil population.

3. Schools Forum has received reports at their meetings on 25 June, 17 September and 5 November 2020 on the impact on schools' finances at each stage of the national crisis and the issues that were emerging in the education sector at that time. This report summarises the range of financial initiatives that have been introduced in the last year.

COVID-19 Emergency Schools Fund

4. The COVID-19 Emergency Schools Fund provided support for exceptional costs associated with coronavirus for the period March to July 2020 only. These costs were for:
 - increased/additional premises related costs associated with keeping schools open during Easter and/or summer half-term
 - support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school where these are not covered by the free school meals national voucher scheme
 - additional cleaning required due to confirmed or suspected Covid-19 cases.
5. Three rounds of payments have been received by the local authority for passporting to maintained schools – payment of academy school claims have been paid direct. The table below summarises the approved claims for maintained schools:

	August 2020	October 2020	February 2021	Total
Number of maintained schools receiving payments	32	21	23	76
Total payments to these schools	£84,711	£57,319	£95,648	£237,678
Analysed as:				
• Premises	£45,953	£22,403	£55,790	£124,146
• Free school meals	£23,495	£18,695	£7,930	£50,120
• Additional cleaning	£15,263	£16,221	£31,928	£63,412

6. While not specifically part of the COVID-19 Emergency Schools Fund, the Government has recognised the additional cost of provision of free school meals for pupils who were learning at home between 4 January and 5 March 2021 (excluding Spring half-term week).
7. Schools will be able to reclaim funding of:
 - £3.50 per eligible pupil, per week, where lunch parcels were provided
 - £15 per eligible pupil, per week, where vouchers for local shops or supermarkets were provided.

The period for reclaiming the cost of lunch parcels has been extended to the end of the spring term.

8. The claims window for schools will open in April 2021, with details yet to be published.

COVID-19 Catch-up Premium

9. On 20 July the Government announced £1 billion of funding to support children and young people to catch up. This included a one-off universal £650 million catch-up premium for the 2020 to 2021 academic year 'to ensure that schools have the support they need to help all pupils make up for lost teaching time'.
10. Catch-up premium has been calculated on a per pupil basis as follows:
 - £80 per for each pupil from Reception through to Year 11 in mainstream
 - £240 for each place in special, alternative provision and hospital schools.
11. Schools will receive the funding in three tranches: autumn 2020, spring 2021 and in the summer 2021. The autumn and spring payments will total £46.67 per pupil/£140 per place, and the summer payments will be £33.33 per pupil/£100 per place. The spring and summer term payments will be based on the October 2020 census data.
12. Shropshire schools will be receiving a total provisional allocation of £2,880,840 for the academic year 2020 to 2021. The payment for the autumn term 2020 was £720,210. The spring term payment for Shropshire has been confirmed at £1,030,410.

National Tutoring Programme

13. The balance of the £1 billion announced on 20 July - £350 million – has been earmarked for the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). The NTP is made up of at least three parts in the 2020 to 2021:
 - a 5 to 16 programme making high-quality tuition available to disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils in primary and secondary schools, from the second half of the autumn term
 - a 16 to 19 fund for school sixth forms, colleges and other providers
 - a reception year early language programme that will make training and resources available at no cost to schools.

Schools are able to use their catch-up premium to cover the subsidised costs of the programmes.

COVID Winter Grant Scheme

14. Shropshire Council was allocated £841,634 through the Government's COVID Winter Grant Scheme, with the majority of the funding used to support those children across the county in need of support with the cost of food during the school holiday periods. An estimated £560,000 was earmarked for this provision.

15. The grant has been used to support with the cost of food for disadvantaged children in education settings over the following holiday periods, totalling 5 weeks:
 - Christmas 2020/New Year 2021 (2 weeks)
 - Spring half-term 2021 (1 week)
 - Easter holiday 2021 (2 weeks).
16. The Government added a further £53.1 million nationally to the £170 million they had originally allocated to the scheme, primarily to support those local authorities who – unlike Shropshire - had not used the funding to support the provision of food over the Easter holidays. Shropshire was notified at the end of February of a further allocation of £292,592. Following a brief consultation with senior school leaders, it has been agreed that a significant part of this funding will be allocated as a ring-fenced grant to schools at the beginning of April to secure uniforms, shoes and stationery for their most disadvantaged pupils, who have generally been most impacted by the pandemic.
17. Shropshire Council has recently announced its commitment to extend this arrangement to cover the Whitsun half-term week in May, with the costs underwritten by the local authority.

COVID Workforce Fund

18. This fund aims to support state-funded schools and colleges who experienced high staff absence rates and significant funding pressures during the period 1 November to 31 December 2020. These will have been linked to positive COVID cases resulting in the partial or full closures of schools.
19. In order to secure funding schools have to demonstrate that they have taken a number of steps to manage absences using their existing staff and resources, including:
 - altering the way in which schools deploy their staff and using existing staff more flexibly
 - making best use of teaching assistants
 - hosting initial teacher training (ITT) trainees
 - using volunteers
 - engaging supply staff using in-year allocated budget
 - seeking support from the local authority or trust.

Having demonstrated that these options have been used, schools are then able to apply for support through the Workforce Fund.

20. Schools have until 23:59 on 31 March 2021 to submit claims for the COVID workforce fund, using the Department's online claim form.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

21. This is more commonly referred to as the furloughing scheme. The guidance for schools indicated that there 'was an expectation that schools would not furlough staff'. However, it was acknowledged that some schools would be impacted by a reduction or loss in separate private income streams (for example, catering, breakfast and after school clubs and sports facilities lettings) and that staff paid from these private income streams may be furloughed. However, the guidance states that schools should first seek to make the necessary savings from their existing budget or consider options for redeploying these staff, before considering furloughing.
22. As the furlough claims for maintained schools are made by the local authority, there is data on the numbers of schools claiming and the sums recovered.

Month	Number of Schools Claiming	Amount Claimed
May to August 2020	9	£45,479
January 2021	17	£25,573
February 2021	19	£25,184

Free School Meals: Supplementary Grant 2020 to 2021

23. The Government is providing financial assistance to state funded schools in the form of a free school meals: supplementary grant (FSMS) for the financial year beginning 1 April 2020. Funding of £450 per pupil based on the variation in FSM pupils from the October 2019 census to the October 2020 census, will be paid into school budgets in the current financial year. For Shropshire this will see 115 schools receiving an aggregate total of £481,950, with 9 schools receiving over £11,000 each (3 primary schools and 6 secondary schools).

New Education Recovery Package

24. On 24 February 2021 the Government announced a new £700 million plan to help young people in England catch up on lost learning due to the pandemic. The new package includes:
- a one-off £302 million Recovery Premium, building on the pupil premium, to further support pupils who need it most – the average primary school will receive around £6,000 extra and the average secondary school around £22,000 – this will 'help schools bolster summer provision for their students, for example laying on additional clubs and activities, or for evidence-based approaches to supporting the most disadvantaged pupils from September'.
 - £83 million expansion of the NTP, £102 million extension of the 16-19 Tuition Fund and £18 million to support language development in the early years.

- £200 million for secondary schools to deliver face-to-face summer schools, with suggestions that they target this initially for incoming Year 7 pupils.

The details on this new package will no doubt follow in due course.

25. It is worth noting that this year the pupil premium allocations are being made using the October 2020 school census last year, rather than based on January as they were in previous years. This means that the allocations won't take into account those who have become eligible between the two census dates. For Shropshire, the estimated loss of pupil premium grant is £473,470 – £1,345 per pupil loss for 264 primary aged pupils, and £955 per pupil loss for 124 secondary aged pupils.