**Wiltshire Governors Association – nasen/WSS presentation 31/03/21, Alex Grady**

**Responses to questions, and links referred to in the session**

‘There was a push a few years ago that parents could manage their child’s education budget, has that now been abandoned?’

You are quite correct – the SEND Code of Practice (2015) specifies that young people and parents of children who have an EHC Plan have the right to request a Personal Budget, which may contain elements of education, health and social care funding. You can find out more detail by going to page 48 of the Code of Practice: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf>

It is worth noting that this is only for those who hold an EHC Plan, and not for all children with SEND.

The take up of personal budgets has been low, however, which is why you may think this strategy has been abandoned, but it is certainly still available.

‘Do you have any particular messages for governors of an SEN school?’

A special school does not have to have a SENCO (though some do); in some special schools, each subject/phase/area leader has a link governor, which can work very well.

The principles are the same though – the importance of high quality teaching, effective interventions, effective deployment of staff to ensure impact, coproduction/person centred working, focus on mental health and wellbeing, strong leadership.

Budgets work differently, as pupils are funded via the High Needs Budget at a higher rate than in mainstream schools; it is still usually possible to apply for ‘top up’ funding for those pupils who need more than the per pupil funding can offer (the process will vary between LAs).

As governors of a special school, your role is essentially the same – support and challenge, ask the questions, have high expectations. The Review Guides are designed to be used in special schools as well as mainstream, if you think this would be useful to you.

‘Do Ofsted understand this need?’ and ‘Do Ofsted understand this need stepping back from academic focus?’ and ‘Would Ofsted penalise schools for reduced academic focus?’

The Ofsted Framework 2019 (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf>) states ‘Inspectors will use all available evidence to evaluate what it is like to be a learner in the provision.’ Children who are stressed and anxious do not learn – a school which does not address this, at least in the short term, is likely to have learners whose experience of school is not positive. It also states under ‘Intent’, ‘The provider has the same academic, technical or vocational ambitions for almost all learners. Where this is not practical – for example, for some learners with high levels of SEND – its curriculum is designed to be ambitious and meet their needs’; again, it could be argued that for some pupils, the presenting primary need is currently social, emotional and mental health need – this would of course be strengthened by knowing that this was agreed with parents/carers, under the remit of the ‘special provision’ by which SEN is defined. There is a further section in the Framework on ‘Personal development’, which states that inspectors will evaluate the extent to which ‘the curriculum and the provider’s wider work supports learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy.’

This is not to say that no learning will take place – schools can have a focus on mental health and wellbeing while continuing to teach the curriculum effectively. It is about all staff having an understanding and awareness of potential issues to look out for, and to take action over any concerns; for the focus on wellbeing to come from the top and filter all the way through the school, so that the wellbeing of staff is as important as that of the children; adult wellbeing will support child wellbeing, which will in turn support learning and development. It is about an ethos.

Some things to consider – how much/how stressfully are we assessing children? Is this having a negative impact on them? Are there other ways of finding out what they know and where any gaps might be (observation, using regular classwork, discussion etc)? Are we offering high quality opportunities for all children to learn and make progress from where they are now? Do we give enough opportunities for children to talk, both to adults and to each other, about how they are feeling and thinking? Do we genuinely listen to what children are telling us, both through their words but also through their behaviours (which communicate what children are not always able to express through words)? Are we involving parents, particularly of children with SEND, in our thinking and decision making?

Ofsted full inspections will resume from September – children who by then are feeling secure, confident and settled are likely to be able to learn and ‘catch up’ much more than if their emotional needs have not been addressed.

As with any strategic decision that governors take along with the senior leadership team in school, what is crucial is to have a rationale, an ethos and moral purpose, and an understanding of the likely outcomes and implications for the children for whose education you are responsible. If you are confident and comfortable with this, particularly for those children who are the most vulnerable or disadvantaged (which includes many children with SEND), then it is the right decision for your school and you should be able to justify it to Ofsted.

**Links**

To sign up for nasen/WSS membership: [www.nasen.org.uk/membership](http://www.nasen.org.uk/membership)

To find Whole School SEND information and resources: [www.sendgateway.org.uk](http://www.sendgateway.org.uk)

The South West regional page: <https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/page/sw-region>

DfE SEN data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-special-educational-needs-sen>

SEND Code of Practice 2015: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf>

‘Happier in his own clothes’ research: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=happier-in-his-own-clothes-march2021-final.pdf&site=319>

SENCO workload survey: <https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/senco-workload/>

Identifying pupils with SEND report: <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SEND-Indentification_2021-EPI.pdf>