

**Written evidence submitted by LTE Group to the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): October 2019**

**Executive summary**

- We have seen a significant increase in SEND needs in recent years but this is not reflected in Element 2 'place' funding because DfE allocations are often based on incomplete data.
- The availability of Element 3 'top-up' funding often relies on the strength of relationships and trust between colleges and local authorities. There is no systemic approach. Each local authority has different bid application forms, funding thresholds and approaches to high needs. This creates time-consuming paperwork for colleges and a postcode lottery for students with high needs. It is especially problematic for students from outside area, including looked-after children with high needs.
- Colleges are impeded from strategic planning that would enable them to ensure funding and support is in place when students start their course. Better information-sharing, transparency and coordinated planning between schools, colleges and local authorities would result in better outcomes for students and more effective use of resources.
- Families need greater clarity on the 0-25 entitlement and the benefits of students progressing towards a positive outcome such as university, employment or independent living before they reach 25, rather than falling off a cliff-edge when SEND support ends at 25

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 LTE Group is the UK's largest social enterprise dedicated to learning, training and employment. We provide a wide range of education and training to 100,000 learners annually and employ 4,200 people.
- 1.2 We are submitting evidence based on our extensive experience of delivering education and training to young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). LTE Group comprises five business units:
- The Manchester College: Greater Manchester's largest FE college, rated Good by Ofsted and providing high-quality courses from entry level to Level 3+. The college is also sub-contracted to run several pupil referral units (PRUs) in Manchester.
  - UCEN Manchester: Higher education from Level 4 upwards, with a focus on higher technical qualifications and access to HE.
  - Total People: One of the North West's top apprenticeship providers.
  - Novus: Education, support and opportunity for 60,000 adults and young people across England and Wales in more than 50 secure settings.
  - MOL: blended CPD for professionals from Level 2 to Level 7.

**2. Rising demand**

- 2.1 We have seen a significant increase in SEND needs in recent years. Six per cent of The Manchester College's current student cohort is identified as high needs. This doesn't include the large proportion who need some form of SEN support but fall beneath the high-needs threshold. There is some variation in how the high-needs threshold is applied by different local authorities.

### **3. Static funding**

- 3.1 Post-16 providers including FE colleges receive three forms of funding for high-need provision:
- Element 1, based on the national 16-19 funding formula (core funding);
  - Element 2, based on the number of places being funded (core funding); and
  - Element 3, agreed per-pupil top-up paid by the relevant local authority (top-up funding).
- 3.2 One of our biggest challenges is the Element 2 place funding. Despite growth in SEND demand of 20%-25% per annum, our Element 2 allocation has not increased since 2014. Over that time, the number of our students identified as high needs has increased from 166 in 2014 to an estimated 425 in 2019. (We anticipate funding will be confirmed for c400 of this year's students.) That means we have to go back to the relevant local authority to seek additional funding for high-needs students above the numbers funded under Element 2.
- 3.3 The current system for determining the number of places that need to be funded under Element 2 is not working. It relies on local authorities providing information to the DfE in November about the number of students with high needs and/or EHC plans that they expect to progress to sixth-form, FE colleges, and so on. However, this information may not be comprehensive and DfE therefore relies on incomplete data. In addition, the information is not shared with colleges and other providers, which impedes our ability to plan provision and ensure the proper funding and support is in place for these students at the start of their studies.

### **4. Liaison with local authorities**

- 4.1 We often find it more effective to negotiate directly with local authorities on SEND funding. However, this relies on the strength of individual relationships and there is variation between the many local authorities we work with – 10 in Greater Manchester and a number elsewhere. This unfairly disadvantages some students through a postcode lottery based on their own local authority's approach.
- 4.2 A number of our students are looked-after children with high needs who are being cared for within Manchester's care system but come from outside the area. Their home local authority is responsible for their Element 3 top-up funding, and each local authority has different thresholds and different paperwork/application processes.
- 4.3 Further, each student needs a personalised plan and therefore a personalised funding bid, based on detailed background research such as the support they have received previously. Schools are not always willing to make this information available, due to concerns over GDPR. Writing funding bids can involve a considerable amount of work for colleges. We do it because we care for our students and are determined to provide the support they need but the system could be much more efficient if there was some consistency between local authorities and better information-sharing between schools, colleges and others involved in supporting young people with SEND.
- 4.4 There is also huge variation in local authorities' willingness to provide top-up funding. We know what level of support students need but we do not know whether their local authority will fund it – the success rate for bid applications varies from 100% to just 16% of the funding requested to meet a student's SEND needs.

- 4.5 Students can be caught in disputes between local authorities due to the unfortunately-named ‘import-export’ approach to funding learners who study in a neighbouring area. Local authorities sometimes decline our applications for funding to support students with high needs from their area because they say they are already funding equivalent demand for students from Manchester who are studying in their area. Greater transparency is needed here because colleges only have information about the students who come to us; we have no information about Manchester students who go to study in other areas.

## **5. Barriers to strategic planning**

- 5.1 The current system impedes strategic planning and provision because colleges have no oversight of future cohorts’ needs or the high-needs funding they will get beyond this year. As a result, we are disabled from developing a strategic view that could deliver better services. We would like to see schools, local authorities and colleges working together on coordinated planning, based on trends data and information about the current Y12 and Y13 cohorts. For example, if colleges knew that a number of high-needs students are likely to choose a particular course with them next year, we could recruit additional teachers and support staff for that course before it starts.

## **6. Training & professional standards**

- 6.1 As stated above, the current system often relies on relationships and trust between individuals in different organisations. We would like to see resources and investment aimed at raising professional standards and behaviour and encouraging collaboration by raising awareness of SEND. SEND training should be included as part of the PGCE. We would welcome a suite of national SEND training resources to support schools, colleges and others in the education sector in a standardised, quality-assured way.

## **7. Clarity on 0-25 entitlement**

- 7.1 Students’ families often misunderstand the current age 0-25 entitlement to SEND support. The extension to age 25 was introduced for students who would benefit more time for their learning, not as a basic entitlement for everyone. There is a strong case demonstrating that students who receive appropriate high-needs funding and support can make rapid progress and achieve an agreed outcome, whether that’s progressing to university, employment or independent living.
- 7.2 Some families would prefer students to progress less quickly and remain in education until they are 25. This is exacerbated by concerns about the lack of adult social care and community support for adults with SEND. However, it can be the worst possible outcome for SEND students because they fall off a cliff-edge in support at age 25. In our view, we should be no less ambitious for SEND students than those without special educational needs or disabilities. Colleges should support each student’s progression towards a positive outcome, whether that be continuing their studies, a supported internship, apprenticeship, employment or independent living.

## **8. About this inquiry**

- 8.1 We welcome the Public Accounts Committee’s inquiry into this important topic and thank you for the opportunity to submit this evidence. We would be happy to provide further evidence or clarification.