
Meeting: Schools Forum

Date: 23 January 2012

Subject: Advanced Skills Teachers [ASTs]

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services

Summary: To ask the Forum to note the contents of this update and the proposal to continue with AST funding arrangements for 2012/13 to enable school-to-school support to continue to be provided in line with the recommendations in the Education Act 2011.

Contact Officer: Sally Dakin, Learning Services
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Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

Reason for urgency
(if appropriate)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the current arrangement to fund Advanced Skills Teachers is maintained for 2012/13 through the allocation of £40,000 to retain this high quality support.

Background

1. Advanced Skills Teacher [AST] posts were originally created to enable excellent practitioners to support colleagues in other schools. The Council has a strategic role to determine the areas of expertise/subjects for posts across the Local Authority. When posts became available, schools requested LA support for funding. Once approved potential Advanced Skills Teachers were externally assessed against national criteria. Once accredited the ASTs are deployed by the LA for one day per week.
2. Schools have also been able to create, appoint and fund their own AST posts; the schools are responsible for the co-ordination of their work both within and beyond their base school.
3. The Advanced Skills Teachers [AST] funding has been allocated to schools with LA ASTs to fund support to other schools. The deployment of ASTs was co-ordinated by National Strategy Strand Leaders up until the end of March 2011. Schools in Ofsted or LA categories of concern were prioritised to receive AST support in the first instance.

4. To ensure that all schools have access to this knowledgeable resource there has been an expectation that all ASTs offer three Professional Study Groups (PSG) each year to share their knowledge and expertise. These PSGs have been organised by Redborne Upper School as part of the LA's Service Level Agreement with the Training Schools since July 2010. The sessions are available to all schools/academies via a small subscription to help meet administrative costs. The full PSG details area available on the Learning Portal.
5. A specific number of AST posts were funded through the former Standards Fund grant which ceased to exist from August 2011. At its meeting in November 2010 the Schools Forum resolved not to change the methodology in applying funds to previous grant allocations and therefore the LA continued to support the AST programme.

Update

6. The deployment of ASTs since June 2011 has been in consultation with the Advisers within the Learning Service. The ASTs are allocated to maintained schools in an Ofsted or LA category of concern in the first instance. The ASTs liaise with the Local Authority and senior leaders in schools to identify clear objectives which are documented in an AST Outreach Plan. On completion of their work an evaluation form is sent to the senior leader to evaluate the success of the AST in supporting the relevant colleague, any issues encountered and the ultimate impact on standards.
7. Funding is only released to schools at the end of each term when the relevant outreach calendars, plans and records of visits have been received by the LA.
8. Professional Study Groups are provided by ASTs and outstanding practitioners. In 2010-11 a total of 89 schools, including 7 from another LA, subscribed to the PSG programme. 70 meetings took place with 887 attendees from 125 schools. This represents a 36% increase in attendance from the previous year. In 2011-12 a total of 100 schools, including 7 from other LAs, have subscribed to the current PSG programme, again indicating an increase in demand. A proportion of the PSGs are quality assured by Central Bedfordshire Training School Partnership [CBTSB] leads, and all sessions are evaluated. The feedback is used to shape the following session. The PSG programme would not be financially viable without the contribution of LA funded ASTs.
9. The number of LA ASTs has reduced for several reasons and consequently this has led to a reduced requirement for funding. Schools with ASTs that have become academies receive their funding directly from Central Government and some academies have decided to retain the use of their ASTs within their own academy. Three academies have continued to release their ASTs to offer outreach on behalf of the LA and receive the equivalent outreach costs.

10. The LA has not recruited additional ASTs due the creation of Teaching Schools and the new posts of Specialist Leaders of Education [SLEs]. SLEs will be deployed by teaching schools to provide school-to-school support. The proposal to replace the Advanced Skills Teacher Standards with the new Masters Standards has contributed to the continued uncertainty of the future of ASTs. The ASTs have been fully briefed on the details relating to the SLE posts as soon as they have been published. It is critical that a good resource of specialist, locally recognised, tried and tested school-to-school coaches exists within Central Bedfordshire to be called upon to meet needs. ASTs will fulfil this role.

Proposal

11. Schools Forum is asked to provide a reduced amount of £40,000 to maintain the AST programme to provide school-to-school support until Specialist Leaders in Education posts have been created to support the work of the Teaching School.

Appendices:

None