

SEN Funding Guidance - Mainstream Schools and Academies

Introduction

This document sets out the SEN funding arrangements for mainstream schools and academies (referred to as 'schools' for the purposes of this document). It aims to provide clarity and consistency in the SEN funding process.

Background

All mainstream schools are provided with resources to support those with additional needs. This includes pupils with SEN and disabilities.

The SEND Code of Practice (6.97) says:

Schools have an amount identified within their overall budget, called the notional SEN budget. This is not a ringfenced amount, and it is for the school to provide high quality appropriate support from the whole of its budget.

It is for schools, as part of their normal budget planning, to determine their approach to using their resources to support the progress of pupils with SEN. The SENCO, headteacher and governing body or proprietor should establish a clear picture of the resources that are available to the school. They should consider their strategic approach to meeting SEN in the context of the total resources available, including any resources targeted at particular groups, such as the pupil premium.

This will enable schools to provide a clear description of the types of special educational provision they normally provide and will help parents and others to understand what they can normally expect the school to provide for pupils with SEN.

SEN funding received by mainstream schools and academies is made up of 3 elements:

- **Element 1: Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU)**
- **Element 2: Notional SEN Funding**
- **Element 3: Top Up Funding**

Element 1: AWPU

Per Pupil Funding

All schools get an amount of money for each pupil at the school. This is called the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) and it is part of schools' delegated funding. Some of this money is to make general SEN provision. This might, for example, include the cost of providing the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and some other resources. The AWPU varies depending on whether the school is primary or secondary.

Element 2: Notional SEN budget

The notional SEN budget is specifically for providing SEN support for children who need it. This support that is additional to, or different from the support that most other children and young people get. Government guidance says schools should provide up to the first £6,000 (on top of the AWPU) of additional or different support for those children who need it. This includes those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This does not mean that the school will spend £6,000 on every child with SEN. Some children will need less help and some children may need more. Sometimes schools use funds to help groups of children.

Using funds from the schools' block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG), local authorities are responsible for calculating the amount of this notional budget using their local mainstream schools funding formula factors. The notional SEN budget is not a budget that is separate from a school's overall budget. It is an identified amount within a maintained school's delegated budget share or an academy's general annual grant. It is intended as a guide for a school's spending decisions, and is neither a target nor a constraint on a school's duty to use its 'best endeavours' to secure special provision for its pupils with SEN.

A wide range of factors can be used to construct the notional SEN budget and most authorities use a combination of factors as opposed to a single factor. The most popular combination is a mixture of prior attainment, basic entitlement and deprivation, although the proportions of factors used can vary significantly. For Cumberland this is calculated as follows:

- **AWPU 5%** (i.e. 5% of a school's AWPU allocation forms part of that school's notional SEN budget). Based on the assumption that all pupils will have a very small element of individual needs.
- **Deprivation 50%** Based on the assumption that deprivation can be used as a proxy indicator of SEND.
- **Prior attainment 100%** Based on the assumption that all pupils not achieving age appropriately will have some level of SEND.

Element 3: Top Up Funding

Some children and young people have such complex needs that the school may request some additional funding to 'top-up' Elements 1 and 2. The local authority is responsible for managing Element 3 funding (sometimes called the 'high needs block'), which can be used to make specific provision for an individual child or young person with an Education Health Care Plan.

Schools in Cumberland are expected to make provision for pupils as identified in Bands 1 and 2 below from their notional SEN budget. For pupils with high needs identified in Band 3 and above schools will be expected to make provision of up to £6,000, as explained above.

Band	Funding
Band 1 - Mild SEND	School Budget
Band 2 - Moderate SEND – Early Help	School Budget
Band 3 - Severe SEND - EHCP	School Budget plus (if EHCP in place) top up £497 - £5,695
Band 4 - More severe SEND	School Budget plus top up £5,695 - £8,293
Band 5 - Profound SEND	School Budget plus top up £8,293 - £11,524
Band 6 - Exceptional SEND	School Budget plus top up for bespoke programme in excess of £11,524

Top-up funding for mainstream schools and academies in Cumberland is currently based on an annual rate of £650 per additional hour of support identified in an EHCP above the £6,000 notional SEN budget threshold.

Who manages the school's SEN resources?

SEN Panel

Top Up funding will be subject of the agreement of an SEN Panel, or equivalent body. This Panel has a key role in ensuring fairness and consistency across all schools in the provision of appropriate support, whether in terms of funding or specialist resources (e.g. specialist staffing or equipment).

The SEN Panel also has responsibility for ensuring the review of EHCPs and Top Up payments to ensure that the assessed level of support remains appropriate.

The SEND Code of Practice (6.97) says:

It is for schools, as part of their normal budget planning, to determine their approach to using their resources to support the progress of pupils with SEN. The SENCO, Principal, Headteacher and governing body or proprietor should establish a clear picture of the resources that are available to the school. They should consider their strategic approach to meeting SEN in the context of the total resources available, including any resources targeted at particular groups, such as the pupil premium.

School governors are responsible for the school's policy on SEN and how the resources are used. The Headteacher and the SENCO ensure that the policy is put into practice. The SENCO organises support for individual children, but every teacher is responsible making sure that a child's special educational needs are met in the classroom.

The school has a responsibility to address the needs of individual pupils and the notional SEN spending is a fund to enable this across the school. It is from this notional budget that mainstream schools are expected to:

- Meet the needs of pupils with low cost, frequently occurring SEND (e.g. learning and cognition).
- Contribute, up to at least the first £6,000 of the costs of provision for pupils with additional needs (most pupils with SEND will not require this full amount of funding).

How should the SEN notional budget be used?

Schools have a duty to identify, assess and make special educational provision for all children and young people who have SEND. From the SEN notional budget, schools must make provision for all pupils to enable them to access the school's teaching and learning offer.

It is called 'notional' because no-one tells schools exactly how they should spend this money - they can spend it in the way they think is best.

The SEND Code of Practice (6.2) says schools must:

...use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEN gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet children and young people's SEN

Schools should use some of their budget to buy resources and make provision for children who need additional help. This can take many forms. For example, children with SEN might need:

- Some changes to the curriculum.
- Special equipment or teaching materials.
- The use of additional information technology.
- Small group work.
- Support in the classroom.
- A base to work in or have quiet time.

Sometimes schools use funds to help groups of children. Some children will need less help – and some children may need more.

The LA has a duty to set out what schools are expected to provide from their delegated budget and to publish this information in the Local Offer (Ordinarily Available Provision).

Whilst it is important that the level of resource is taken into consideration, it is more important to demonstrate the actions that the school has taken for an individual pupil that are reasonable and proportionate. This means that we should always be assessing the impact of an action/intervention for a pupil and what progress has been made.

How should schools measure the impact of additional support put in place?

The SEND Code of Practice clearly sets out the expectation for schools to plan how to support each of the four key areas of need (Communication and interaction, Cognition and learning Social, emotional and mental health and Sensory and/or physical) and ensure that their staff have relevant training and are equipped to respond.

That the focus needs to be on additional resource as opposed to the commonly available support for all pupils (sometimes known as 'ordinarily available provision').

The school should use a graduated approach following the cycle of 'Assess, Plan, Do and Review':

- **Assess:** The class teacher or subject teacher (working with the SENCO) is responsible for carrying out a clear analysis of a pupil's needs, drawing on teacher assessments and experience of the pupil.
- **Plan:** Where it is decided to provide a pupil with SEN Support, the parents must be notified. All teachers and support staff who work with a pupil should be made aware of their needs, the outcomes sought, the support provided and any teaching strategies that are required.
- **Do:** The planned interventions should then be put into place. The class or subject teacher should work closely with any teaching assistants or specialist staff involved and the SENCO should support the class or subject teacher.
- **Review:** Reviews should take place and inform feed back into the analysis of the child's needs. The Code is not prescriptive about how often reviews should take place, but given the Code suggests schools should meet with parents three times a year, good practice would indicate that such reviews will be at least termly. The decision to involve specialists can be taken at any time and should always involve parents

The SEND Code of Practice clearly states (section 9.14) that where, despite the school having taken relevant and purposeful action to identify and meet the pupil's needs, the pupil is still not making expected progress, the school should consider requesting an Education, Health and Care needs assessment.

Education, Health and Care needs assessment

A local authority has a duty to make a decision within 6 weeks from the date of a request for an EHC needs assessment. When applying for an EHC needs assessment, the key focus is understanding what resource has been put in place to address the assessed need and what progress has been made.

The question is not just whether the funding has been or is planned to be spent but whether the spending is appropriate and impactful. This needs to be demonstrated in an EHC needs assessment request, as a clear part of the Assess-Plan-Do-Review (APDR) cycle.

It is important therefore that the evidence received as part of the request for a needs assessment includes the APDR cycle of support and, to evidence impact, a local authority would expect to see at least two cycles (two terms) of ADPR inputs and outcomes.

Making best use of the child or young person and family's resources. Before exploring outside sources of support it is essential to consider with the child or young person and family the resources they have, i.e. their 'real wealth'.

This will help identify the strengths the family have, their networks and connections with people, their skills and knowledge and their own resilience. This includes:

- **People:** friends, extended family, work colleagues, social friends and neighbours.
- **Access:** local resources, shops, health services, schools, leisure facilities, and community activities.
- **Assets:** any resources given specifically to meet a child's disability, e.g. benefits, personal budget.
- **Skills and knowledge:** strengths, abilities, knowledge, experience and decision-making skills.
- **Resilience:** well-being, the inner strength that keeps people going when times get tough, physical and emotional well-being, and for some, a faith, belief system or religion.

Helpful flowcharts to illustrate the process

The following flowcharts have been developed in partnership between Special Needs Jungle and the Department for Education. They are aimed to be easy to follow and understand so they are also suitable for sharing with young people as well. They are meant to be a 'headline' overview, not a deep dive into the legalities of SEND:

SEN Support in Schools

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SNJ-DFE-SEN-SUPPORT-FLOWCHART-1.1-.pdf>

Requesting an EHCP Needs Assessment

<https://specialneedsjungle.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SNJ-FLOWCHART2-2018.pdf>

Conducting an EHCP Needs Assessment

<https://specialneedsjungle.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SNJ-FLOWCHART3x-2018.pdf>

Further SEN Funding Guidance

The following sets out how the high needs funding system works for all types of provision:

High Needs Block Operational Guidance

High needs funding: 2023 to 2024 operational guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)