

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM 18TH MARCH 2024

REPORT BY THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND ADMISSIONS, AND LEAD STRATEGIC FINANCE MANAGER – BI-BOROUGH CHILDREN'S SERVICES

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK REFERENCE GROUP

This report provides feedback from the High Needs Block Reference Group and recommendations for 2024/25 top up funding and high needs developments.

FOR DECISION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Schools' Forum (Paper A6 High Needs Budgets) on 17th January 2024 agreed the high needs block budgets for 2024/25.
- 1.2 The Schools' Forum is requested to note the views of the High Needs Block Reference Group (HNBRG) which met on 26th February 2024 and the resulting recommendations detailed in this report.
- 1.3 As detailed in the DSG monitor paper elsewhere on the agenda, the high needs block is forecast to underspend by £0.876m in 2023/24. This improved position reflects action taken to validate payment schedules, costs of independent school placements and an ongoing review of one-off costs below estimate relating to 2022/23.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The High Needs Budget Review Group (HNBRG), established to provide termly meetings for officers and headteachers from all ages, phases and provision schools/settings continues to meet termly to jointly monitor HNB funding. At its February 2024 meeting it noted that:
- 2.2 Having carried out 162 assessments in 2022, WCC had 1368 EHCPs in January 2023. This was despite ceasing 144. By December WCC was maintaining 1413 active plans.

2.3 The proportion of WCC residents with EHCPs who are autistic (42%) continues to be significantly above expected levels (32% nationally) whilst schools SEN registers highlight the most prevalent needs for earlier SEN Support are speech language and communication (SLCN) and social emotional and mental health (SEMH).



2.4 There are currently 383 WCC residents with EHC plans attending schools outside of Westminster. The majority (174) attend mainstream schools (108 in RBKC), 143 attend special schools and 61 who are pupils attending independent special schools. It must be a priority to include more pupils in local schools.

2.5 Growth in the number of EHCPs increases pressure on the high needs block. Indicators of future growth include the proportion of pupils subject to an EHCP nationally (4.3% in 2023) and an unprecedented increase in some mental health needs highlighted by NHS commissioners.

2.6 The HNBRG discussed proposals for earmarked funding to support inclusion and future cost avoidance.

3 TOP UP FUNDING FOR MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS AND EARLY YEARS

3.1 Top up for mainstream schools is determined using the Education Banding Tool (EBT) which has been recalibrated and moderated EBT since April 2022. In March 2023 Schools Forum approved capping of bands 8-10. It is proposed to increase the cap to £24,198 from April 2024 (equates to £30,198 with schools £6k contribution).

- 3.2 It is proposed to increase bands 1 – 7 from April 2024 to reflect the pay award (8.2% increase). This is estimated to cost £950,000 per year. The proposed mainstream and early years band values are shown below:

Band	Existing Early Years (15 hours) * From Sept 23 £	Existing Mainstream From Sept 23 £	From April 2024 Early Years (15 hours)* £	From April 2024 Mainstream £
1	3,607	1,214	3,657	1,314
2	4,380	2,760	4,493	2,986
3	5,180	4,360	5,359	4,718
4	5,981	5,961	6,225	6,450
5	7,968	9,935	8,375	10,750
6	10,451	14,903	11,063	16,125
7	12,383	18,766	13,152	20,305
8 (capped)	14,182	22,364	15,099	24,198
9 (capped)	14,182	22,364	15,099	24,198
10 (capped)	14,182	22,364	15,099	24,198

* Note Whilst schools are required by DfE to meet the first £6,000, Early years settings do not receive notional funding and top up includes £3,000 (pro-rate).

- 3.3 No changes were made to targeted funding; the safety net mechanism that provides additional funding (£6,000 for each EHCP) once schools 'first £6,000' contribution to existing EHCPs reaches 50% of their notional funding.

4 SPECIALIST RESROUCED PROVISION AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS

- 4.1 In response to demand for specialist provision in mainstream and with existing provision at capacity, we continue to review and increase the number of commissioned places in SRPs supporting pupils in local schools. They remain better value for money than independent sector provision.

- 4.2 Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are in place with all mainstream schools hosting specialist resourced provision (SRPs) setting out responsibilities and resources and these are due for review in 2024. Schools hosting SRPs and special schools were invited to provide evidence of cost of living pressures where top up is no longer fully funding provision. Schools provided details of their staffing structures and actual expenditure to evidence increases and the HNBRG reviewed the proposals in Appendix A totalling £89,000 additional funding in 2024/25 and £152,000 in a full year, to ensure school budgets are not expected to subsidise the specialist provision. It is proposed that where top ups increases are agreed, these take effective from September 2024 to ensure refreshed SLAs are in place.

- 4.3 Due to the complex nature of the school, it was not possible to complete the review for Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee school prior to the HNBRG meeting in February and officers are actively working with the school to complete this before April 2024. Appendix A includes provision of £250,000 for an increase in top up, subject to evidence in the final review. To further support evidence of costs and top up necessary, it is recommended that the school consider a school resource management advisor (SRMA) review via the DfE. The advisor spends two/ three days working on individual schools, providing impartial and expert business advice on making the best use of resources and dealing with financial challenges in the face of current and future deficits. The advisor then provides reports and recommendations regarding efficiencies and savings.

5 HIGH NEEDS PUPIL DEVELOPMENTS

- 5.1 We have forecast that WCC will be maintaining 1,670 EHCPs by the end of 2027 and most pupils will receive support in mainstream schools and settings. To meet the cost of this additional need in the financial year 2024/25 a budget of £356,000 was agreed at January 2024 and the HNBRG was asked to discuss priorities for development.
- 5.2 Proposals discussed include earlier support for mainstream schools, particularly for pupils with autism, SEMH and SLCN, creating capacity through workforce development and wider system resources to include more pupils with EHCP in local schools.
- 5.3 The HNBRG discussed and recommended increased investment in SCERTS® (**S**ocial **C**ommunication **E**motional **R**egulation and **T**ransactional **S**upport). SCERTS is WCC's preferred model of autism intervention because it is a holistic approach focused on the needs of child at home, school and community. Headteachers acknowledge the positive impact extends to pupils with SEMH and support for families. It is proposed to extend the existing SCERTS training programme (currently one school session and one parent session per term) to ensure a wider reach. It is also proposed to support the roll out through practitioners with extensive SEND knowledge to provide practical support to class teachers, modelling interventions for pupils with EHCPs and ensuring effective inclusion. Costs for this are estimated at £266k.
- 5.4 The HNBRG also discussed and recommended to put in place an enhanced level of behaviour outreach support for schools and it is proposed to increase the existing commissioning arrangements with Ormiston Academies Trust as well as developing new specialist resourced provision for pupils with SEMH, inviting expressions of interest in becoming a host school. Costs for this are estimated at £80k.
- 5.5 Although the HNBRG discussed increasing speech and language support, recent agreement with NHS commissioners will see a four year programme of SLCN intensive support commence in September 2024. The premise of this pilot programme is that investing in intensive SLCN support at an earlier stage, will

positively impact the number of pupils with whose needs can be met without needing an EHCP. As additional funding for Speech and Language Therapy has been allocated to deliver this support through the recently procured therapy contract, there are no recommendations at this time.

- 5.6 The HNBRG were asked to consider whether any additional diagnostic work would support them on behalf of the Schools’ Forum. Members suggested further analysis of children in the early years along with assessment which had been declined. It is proposed to scope and commission consultancy (approx. 10 days estimated at £10k.) to support this diagnostic work.

6 FORWARD PLAN FOR HNBRG

- 6.1 The forward plan for the HNBRG is proposed as follows:

Meeting	Forward plan
May	Independent school fees
October	Top ups for post 16 provision

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Schools Forum is asked to:

- 7.1.1 Approve the recommendations regarding increases to the capped bandings 8 – 10 and bandings 1 - 7 for mainstream and early years (section 3);
- 7.1.2 approve the proposed top ups for the SRPs and special schools. To also note the £250,000 set aside for the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee school review and the recommendation that the school consider a school resource management advisor (SRMA) review via the DfE. (Section 4);
- 7.1.3 approve the recommended proposals for development (section 5); and
- 7.1.4 note the forward plan for the HNBRG (section 6).

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Background papers:

EFSA – DSG Allocations 2023-24 and 2024-25 (Provisional)

[Dedicated schools grant \(DSG\) 2024 to 2025 \(skillsfunding.service.gov.uk\)](https://skillsfunding.service.gov.uk)

Budget Monitoring Reports 2022-23

Commissioning plan