

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL**SCHOOLS' FORUM 11TH NOVEMBER 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 REVIEW GROUP**

This report provides feedback and recommendations from the High Needs Block Review Group. It also provides an update on forecast growth in Education Health and Care Plans over the next three years.

FOR INFORMATION AND 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. Schools Forum approved an increase in top up funding from April 2024 for mainstream schools through the banding tool and for Specialist resourced provision (SRPs).
- 1.2 Schools' Forum is requested to note the views of the High Needs Block Review Group (HNBRG) which met on 14th October 2024 and the resulting recommendations detailed in this report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Having recovered a deficit position in 2022/23, the 2024/25 budget agreed by Schools Forum recognises that supporting pupils in a local school is better value for money than independent sector provision; top up costs (and transport) are lower; resources and workforce development benefit more local pupils. Affordable increases in top up funding were agreed from April 2024.
- 2.2 The High Needs Block Reference Group (HNBRG) was established to provide termly meetings for officers and headteachers to focus on high needs developments, mitigate independent and non-maintained sector costs and address root causes of pressure. At its meeting in October 2024, the group reviewed and updated (appendix A) the terms of reference for its meetings
- 2.3 Westminster is maintaining over 1400 EHC plans and pressure from 180 active assessments which could result in a plan. Nationally, 30% of EHC plans are for autism. In WCC, it is 43%.

3 SPECIALIST PROVISION

- 3.1 Schools Forum earmarked £250,000 from the budgets for 2024/25 to increase the top up for Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Special School (currently averaging £27,563). Following a cost pressure review which has confirmed this increase in top up is necessary, 11.2% increase in top up funding is proposed, backdated to April 2024.
- 3.2 Demand for places at Beachcroft, Ormiston Academies Trust's (OAT) Alternative Provision during the summer term saw it operating at capacity. All places were filled. Schools Forum accepted recommendations for investment in primary behaviour outreach and agreed to increase the existing commissioning arrangements with OAT.
- 3.3 As part of the range of interventions for children aged up to 14 who are at risk of exclusion, 10 places are commissioned at Pears Family School, an out of borough alternative provision. The funding agreement in place until 2025/26 secures fixed price, £21,000 per place p.a. including transport, which compares favourably with Pears Family School standard fee, £45,000.
- 3.4 Primary Heads participating in a Behaviour Working Party highlighted challenging behaviour in early years and meeting complex needs of neurodiverse pupils and asked that these been considered as areas for high needs development. The working party identified cost neutral and minimal cost action schools can take as well as target areas for interventions and approaches to create capacity. The HNBRG which met in October discussed headteachers request for financial investment in training for staff, behaviour champions and establishing nurture provision across schools. The HNBRG acknowledged the added value from effective off site intervention, such as WEC (OAT). HNBRG recommended establishing budget resources to enable pilot work to test approaches and putting in place a process to invite bids, targeting particularly age, phase and intended outcomes. It is recommended that £250,000 from the budget set for 2025/26 is earmarked for this pilot.

4 NATIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS

- 4.1 National data shows EHCPs across London increased by 29.5% since 2021. If this continues, it will outweigh GLA's projected 6.6% fall in population. Although Westminster's growth (3.3%) was below national (11.4%) demand continues.
- 4.2 Continued falling rolls across London mean we are forecasting 3% overall increase in EHCPs year on year, to 2028, an increase 147 additional EHCPs. The forecast model assumes a modest increase in EHCPs in mainstream reflecting falling rolls, and an increase in specialist provision (including those in mainstream SRPs) from 33% to 39%.

	Jan actual 2024	Forecast 2025-28				change	from	to
		2025	2026	2027	2028			
Specialist	462	525	570	595	616	154	33%	39%
Mainstream Sch	729	735	743	766	760	31	52%	49%
Post 16/FE	222	194	190	188	184	-38	16%	12%
Total EHCPs	1,413	1,460	1,503	1,549	1,560	147	100%	100%

4.3 Average maintained sector costs (place funding and top up) are £35k for special school, and £28.5k for SRP costs, compared with average independent sector costs of £55k. The forecast model assumes an increase in take up of lower cost maintained specialist provision and a reduction in independent sector specialist placements:

Forecast	Special primary	Special secondary	SRP - primary	SRP - secondary	Indep - primary	Indep - secondary	Other	specialist
2024/25	110	207	80	37	20	56	15	525
2025/26	135	231	84	41	10	59	10	570
2026/27	138	262	88	41	10	51	5	595
2027/28	141	281	88	41	11	51	3	616
change 24/25 to 27/28	31	74	8	4	-9	-5	-12	91

4.4 The estimated increase from 2025 and 2028 is £2.58m per annum. Estimated independent sector costs for 91 additional placements would be £5m per annum.

Forecast	Special primary	Special secondary	SRP - primary	SRP - secondary	Indep - primary	Indep - secondary	Other	specialist
2024/25	3,850,000	7,245,000	2,280,000	1,036,000	1,100,000	3,080,000	825,000	19,416,000
2025/26	4,725,000	8,085,000	2,394,000	1,148,000	550,000	3,245,000	550,000	20,697,000
2026/27	4,830,000	9,170,000	2,508,000	1,148,000	550,000	2,805,000	275,000	21,286,000
2027/28	4,935,000	9,835,000	2,508,000	1,148,000	605,000	2,805,000	165,000	22,001,000

4.5 London's EHCP cohort is younger than elsewhere, resulting in a primary school age EHCP cohort consistently larger than outside London, This is likely to be an indicator of effective early intervention, particularly as outcomes for pupils with EHCPs remain much stronger than elsewhere.

4.6 In October, the National Audit Office published findings from its review of the SEN high needs funding system reported that the increase in EHC plans,

means that in real-terms funding, per plan fell by 35% and revealing DfE predicts council's cumulative deficit will be about £4.6 billion by March 2026.

- 4.7 In the budget announcement on 30 October, government announced £1 billion extra high needs funding to plug councils' SEND deficits, describing it as a 6 per cent real-terms increase and stating councils will have discretion on how it is targeted. Further details are anticipated.

5 TOP UP FOR POST 16

- 5.1 HNBRG discussed the affordability of post 16 provision following the decision of Schools Forum that this should be an autumn term priority, noting that the cost of independent sector post 16 provision is reducing.

Post 16 Expenditure	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
FE College	477,372	178,562	250,898
In-borough Y12-14	1,329,140	877,743	970,568
Independent	3,922,612	2,982,986	2,838,493
Total	£5,729,124	£4,039,291	£ 4,059,959

- 5.2 Whilst each student is funded on an individual basis linked to their EHCP, there are challenges as the system operates with multiple providers and LAs responsible for commissioning and funding places leading to a plethora of systems and associated paperwork.
- 5.3 Recognising the importance of this area, the council has temporarily strengthened casework capacity. Work to validate payment schedules, particularly in relation to FE Colleges has identified one-off savings and remains ongoing.

6 CORE SCHOOL BUDGET GRANT (CSBG) ALLOCATIONS

- 6.1 The DfE announced almost £1.1 billion through the CSBG to support schools with their overall costs in the 2024/25 financial year, in particular following confirmation of the 2024 teacher pay award. This funding is being split between mainstream schools, special schools and alternative provision (AP). The split reflects relative pupil and place numbers, and core funding amounts, across these different types of provision.
- 6.2 In 2024/25, funding through the CSBG covers the 7-month period from September 2024 to March 2025. Local authorities will receive funding which they will then allocate to special and AP schools, except for NMSS, which will receive their allocations directly from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

6.3 The ESFA have provided local authorities' first allocations of CSBG funding for special schools and AP schools, based on place numbers published and available to ESFA by July 2024, with the relevant area cost adjustment applied. Local authorities will receive a second allocation of CSBG funding for special schools and AP schools in March 2025, using updated place number data. It is proposed to follow the DfE criteria, based on place numbers, for allocating the grant which results in the following allocations for September 2024 to March 2025:

Establishment Name	2024/25 Allocation
College Park School	£97,555
Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School	£62,820
The St Marylebone Church of England Bridge School	£51,734
Ormiston Beachcroft AP Academy	£53,951
Chelsea Community Hospital School	£13,532
Allocation for Independent Special School increases	£48,778
Total Allocation	£328,370

6.4 In financial year 2025/26, the following will be combined into a single grant to local authorities, the CSBG, teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG), and teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG 2024) allocations for special and AP schools and hospital education.

7 FORWARD PLAN FOR HNBRG

7.1 The forward plan for the HNBRG is proposed as follows:

Meeting	Forward plan
February	Top ups for post 16 provision

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Schools Forum is asked to:

8.1.1 Agree the HNBRG refreshed terms of reference for the HNBRG (paragraph 2 and Appendix A) and note the forward plan (para 7.1);

8.1.2 Agree £250,000 set aside for the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee school can be used for 11.2% increase in top up funding, backdated to April 2024. (paragraph 3.1);

8.1.3 Note the funding agreement with Pears Family School (paragraph 3.3);

- 8.1.4 Agree the recommendation to establish £250,000 budget in 2025/26 for pilot work and putting in place a process to invite bids, (paragraph 3.4):
and
- 8.1.5 Agree to allocate the Core School Budget Grant (CSBG) for SEN/AP in line with the allocations from the DFE which total £328,370 (section 6).

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Background papers:

EFSA – DSG Allocations 2024-25

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

Core School Budget Grant (CSBG)

[Core schools budget grant \(CSBG\) 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2024-to-2025)