

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL**SCHOOLS' FORUM 17TH JUNE 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

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.
- 1.2 As detailed in the DSG outturn paper elsewhere on the agenda, the high needs block underspent by £2.676m in 2023/24 partly related to commitments yet to be realised. There is a favourable movement of £1.800m since the last forecast. This improved position reflects action taken to validate payment schedules for out of borough and post 16 placements relating to 2022/23 and delayed start dates for two independent placements. Some further historical charges are expected and this has been allowed for in the proposed allocation of the DSG surplus.
- 1.3 Schools' Forum in March 2024 noted a forecast in-year underspend and after taking account of the overall 2023/24 DSG underspend of £2.143m the 2023/24 year end cumulative deficit will be £4.128m.
- 1.4 Schools' Forum is requested to note the views of the High Needs Block Review Group (HNBRG) which met on 20th March 2024 and the resulting recommendations detailed in this report.

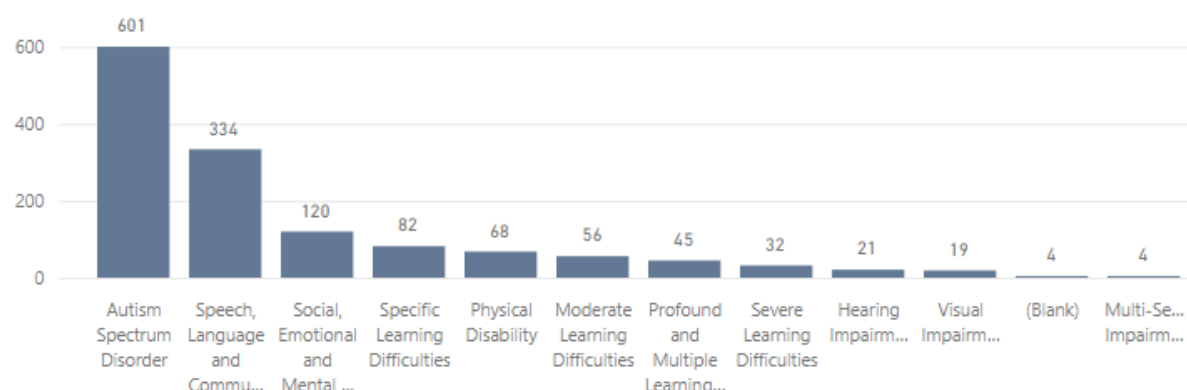
2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Having recovered a deficit position in 2022/23, the 2024/25 budget agreed by Schools Forum included affordable increases in top up funding from April 2024, alongside a review of the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with host mainstream schools for specialist resourced provision (SRPs).

2.2 The High Needs Block Reference Group (HNBRG) which was established to provide termly meetings for officers and headteachers continues to meet. At its meeting in May 2024, it noted that:

2.3 In December 2023 Westminster was maintaining 1413 EHC plans. As at May 2024 there are 1389 and 184 active assessments which may or may not result in a plan.

2.4 Nationally, 30% of EHC plans are for autism. In WCC, it is 43%.



2.5 The first quarter of 2024 saw a peak (92%) in referrals resulting in new assessments, significantly more than July to December (58%) and 2022 national average (78%).

2.6 In agreeing the HNBRG forward plan Forum noted pressure from Independent and non-maintained sector fees and agreed high needs developments to mitigate financial pressure.

3 SPECIALIST PROVISION

3.1 Supporting pupils in a local school offers better value for money than independent sector provision.

3.2 The average top up for College Park is £24,193. This excludes place funding of £10,000 per annum. Places typically cost £10,000 p.a less than independent sector provision (see para 3.9) and to meet local need, additional capacity has been established in satellite provision at Hallfield Primary School, and in Pimlico. Plans to address the growing demand for secondary aged (11-18) provision will see two additional year 7 classes in a satellite at George Eliot Primary School from September 2024 with further expansion e required from September 2025.

3.3 Forum earmarked £250,000 for an increase to the top up for Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Special School (currently averaging £26,746) pending the outcome of a cost pressure review, which officers are actively working with the school to complete with any increase backdated to April 2024. The school, which caters for children aged 5-19, does not have physical capacity to offer places to nursery aged children. A bulge class group will become leavers in July 2025

and a gap in provision for 19-25 year old provision will put pressure on the high needs block as residential college placements cost up to £500,000 p.a.

- 3.4 The average top up for St Marylebone Bridge Free Special Academy is £16,995. Currently, having consulted fairly on every place regardless of the student's home borough, it has filled all places (non-Westminster residents occupy half) and governors have been asked to consider establishing provision within the school for students whose communication needs are comorbid with learning, social and emotional needs as pupils whose needs overlap with its designation are transported out of borough.
- 3.5 Places at Beachcroft Alternative Provision are currently all filled.
- 3.6 Schools Forum approved an increase in top up funding for Specialist resourced provision (SRPs) and a review of the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with host mainstream schools. At the HNBRG's meeting in May, headteacher colleagues noted that this will provide Forum with assurance that SRPs are good value for money and suggested that the SLA should add clarity around what good inclusion looks like. It was agreed that inclusion into mainstream for pupils in SRPs should be linked to areas of strength, and not to any defined period of time. Most specialist resourced provisions (SRPs) are at capacity.
- 3.7 Special schools in the independent and non-maintained sector (INMSS) fill the gap when maintained specialist provision is at capacity but is more expensive and reducing usage where statutory duty allows is a priority. Around 6% of Westminster's pupils with EHCPs are in placements outside the maintained sector including joint funded (looked after/complex health) residential ones.
- 3.8 HNBRG discussed INMSS fees payments over the past three years, the designations (primary need catered for):

School	Designation	2021	2022	2023	Grand Total
Abingdon House	Autism	492,825	456,670	592,512	1,542,007
Acorn	SEMH	530,282	194,798	632,106	1,357,187
Aurora	Autism	349,433	- 152,345		197,089
Beyond Autism	Autism	276,532	168,337	200,213	645,082
Blossom House	SLCN	280,436	252,067	205,236	737,739
Burlington Hse	SpLD	163,298	121,461	156,540	441,299
Catch22	SEMH	69,395	112,899	75,057	257,351
Fairley House	SpLD	227,896	405,363	522,000	1,155,259
InFocus	Visual			131,660	131,660
Insights	SEMH	50,596			50,596
Kisharon	Autism		12,488	12,869	25,356
Kisimul	Autism	26,435	55,476		81,911
Langdon College	Severe LD	12,770			12,770
Mary Hare	Hearing	99,162	15,337		114,499
Moor House	SLCN	118,108	73,140	17,441	208,689
NAS	Autism	58,711	103,092		161,802

New Collg Wcster	Visual	133,359	144,159	128,101	405,619
Octavia House	Autism	70,000	14,500		84,500
Parayhouse	SLCN	144,642	166,623	198,864	510,129
Pield Heath Hse	SLCN			9,885	9,885
Royal Sch Deaf	Hearing	39,808	13,269		53,077
Snowflake	Autism	170,676	134,616	97,461	402,753
St Catherines	SLCN	100,895	70,370	206,387	377,652
The Holmewood	Other Dis	48,080	74,183	24,500	146,763
The Pace Centre	Physical Dis	40,768	73,837	19,478	134,083
TCES NWLIS	Autism	291,000	402,191	199,693	892,884
Grand Total		3,795,107	2,912,532	3,430,002	10,137,641

- 3.9 Four schools have five or more Westminster pupils currently funded from the high needs block. Three independent schools: Abingdon House (17 pupils with annual fees at £48,900 per pupil), Fairley House (11 pupils at £38,730 p.a) and TCES NWLIS (6 pupils £88,000. Annual fees for Parayhouse (10 pupils) which is a non-maintained school are £29,993 including £10,000 paid via the ESFA.
- 3.10 Review of historic placements provides evidence of some placements driven by lack of parental confidence, capacity in local schools or therapy services.
- 3.11 The HNBRG noted here is no standardised approach to the scale or timing of fee increases. WCC robustly challenges increases higher than inflationary increases for maintained schools, and pushes back on notice periods shorter than three months. The average increase this academic year has been 5.71%. The range, from 21 independent schools, has been 3% to 11.9%. 67% of proposed increases were above 5% although successful fee negotiations saw this reduce to 62%. Highest percentage increases were proposed by Beyond Autism.

4 HIGH NEEDS DEVELOPMENTS

- 4.1 The HNBRG noted that support for inclusion in mainstream schools has been increased by £266k and this will extend the roll out of training for our preferred approach to autism (SCERTS) and provide timely support to teachers of pupils with EHCPs, alongside SENCOs and teachers in charge of SRPs.
- 4.2 Plans are in place to increase the existing commissioning arrangements with Ormiston Academies Trust to provide an increased behaviour outreach offer as well as developing a SEMH SRP in a host school for 2024/25.
- 4.3 A small number of primary schools have reported significant costs in providing adult oversight for pupils with diabetes not yet able to test blood sugar and self-administer medication who arrive unexpectedly. HNBRG noted that diabetes and epilepsy are serious medical conditions and schools in deficit or at risk of deficit, may be driven to request EHCPs for pupils who may not otherwise have barriers to learning. Financial support for up to one year would allow schools time to plan ongoing support from their existing resources. The NHS Designated clinical officer has indicated that there are currently 5 children aged 1 to 5 with type 1

diabetes, of whom 3 have been diagnosed in the last 3 years. Epilepsy data has been requested but is not available currently. It is therefore recommended to provide up to £6k contribution to schools in deficit/at risk of deficit to support pupils with epilepsy in primary schools, for the 2024/25 academic year and monitor demand.

5 TEACHERS' PENSION EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION GRANT (TPECG)

- 5.1 On 22nd May 2024 the ESFA published the TPECG grant allocations which are shown below and will be paid to schools in termly allocations:

Establishment Name	2024/25 Allocation
College Park School	£95,156.60
Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School	£61,275.08
The St Marylebone Church of England Bridge School	£50,461.83
Ormiston Beachcroft AP Academy	£52,624.48
Chelsea Community Hospital School	£12,301.00
Independent Schools Addition to Budget	£47,578.01
Total Allocation	£319,397.00

6 TEACHERS' PAY ADDITIONAL GRANT (TPAG)

- 6.1 On 22nd May 2024 the ESFA published the TPAG grant allocations which are shown below and will be paid to schools in termly allocations:

Establishment Name	2024/25 Allocation
College Park School	£71,327.30
Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School	£45,930.46
The St Marylebone Church of England Bridge School	£37,825.08
Ormiston Beachcroft AP Academy	£39,446.16
Chelsea Community Hospital School	£10,764.00
Total Allocation	£205,293.00

7 FORWARD PLAN FOR HNBRG

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

Meeting	Forward plan
October	Top ups for post 16 provision

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Schools Forum is asked to:

- 8.1.1 note the £250,000 set aside for the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee school review with proposals to come to the November Schools Forum. (paragraph 3.3);
- 8.1.2 Agree recommendation for exceptional needs funding for pupils with diabetes and epilepsy (paragraph 4.3);
- 8.1.3 note the work of the HNBRG;
- 8.1.4 note the 2024/25 Teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) allocations for special schools and AP will total £319,397 (section 5);
- 8.1.5 note the 2024/25 Teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG) allocations for special schools and AP will total £205,293 (section 6); and
- 8.1.6 note the forward plan for the HNBRG (section 7).

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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)

Teachers' pension employer grant 2024-25

[Teachers' pension employer contribution grant 2024 for schools, high needs settings and local authorities: 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG)2024-25

[Teachers' pay additional grant 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)