

Report to: East Sussex Schools Forum

Date of meeting: 10 January 2025

Report By: Carolyn Fair

Title: High Needs (EHCP) Top-Ups 2025/26

Purpose: To agree the uplift for EHCPs top-ups for 2025/26 across mainstream, state-run special and FE providers

RECCOMENDATIONS

That Schools' Forum agrees the proposed uplifts to mainstream school, special school and FE College High Needs Top-Ups.

1. Background

- 1.1 Following discussions at Schools' Forum in the summer of last year, it was agreed that proposals for High Needs Top Ups for mainstream schools, special schools and FE colleges would be brought to Schools' Forum for consideration together.
- 1.2 A decision in respect to the top ups for Special Facilities attached to mainstream schools (resourced provisions) is still outstanding. Further work needs to be done on this and a decision will be brought to a future Schools' Forum with a view to agreeing top-ups in advance of next academic year.
- 1.3 The proposals set out below in respect of mainstream and special school top-ups have been discussed at the High Needs Working Group (a subgroup of Schools' Forum) and proposals relating to these sectors that are set out in this paper reflect the recommendations from this group.
- 1.4 There is ongoing work around the funding model for FE providers which will look across Sussex to develop some parity across LAs in the region. This is being overseen by the Post 16 Strategic Planning Group and is still underway. For this reason, the proposals in relation to FE relate to a 'holding position' for the 2025/26 academic year which will allow more time for this work to conclude.
- 1.5 It should be noted that East Sussex will receive a 7% uplift on the High Needs Block allocation in 2025/26 financial year, which will bring an additional £6.35m to the county. Despite this increase, East Sussex funding will remain below other LAs. The cost pressures in the Independent Non-Maintained Schools (INMS) sector will continue to have a disproportionate impact on the budget next academic year.

2. Supporting Information

Mainstream Schools

- 2.1 East Sussex has established a banding model for the funding of provision in mainstream schools. This was developed a number of years ago, in consultation with schools, and provides a transparent framework for funding children with SEND in mainstream settings. This approach is in line with many local authorities across the country.
- 2.2 Over the recent years, the funding allocations within the model have not kept up with the costs incurred by schools and a full review of this model has been undertaken. This review included:
- An analysis of the responses of the SENCO survey in July 2024
 - A review of the existing figures within the *Special Educational Needs Matrix Accompanying guidance on SEN costings*, including how well the salaries referenced are in line with current pay scales. New hourly rates have been calculated to ensure proposed rates are sufficient in line with current pay scales
 - An analysis of some costed provision maps, using proposed hourly rates.
- 2.3 As a result of the above, proposals have been made to update the mainstream bandings as set out below:

	Annual Funding (Current)	Annual Funding (from April 2025)
Targeted A	£1,779	£2,061
Targeted B	£2,313	£2,679
Enhanced A	£4,653	£5,389
Enhanced B	£7,312	£8,468

- 2.4 The methodology used to arrive at the above allows us to review future figures in line with any changes in salary scales. The Special Educational Needs Matrix Accompanying guidance on SEN costings document will be updated to include the proposed new figures and amended wording.
- 2.5 The projected cost of the changes proposed for mainstream school top-ups is £6.2m p.a.; an increase of £668k on 2024/25.
- 2.6 The above figures do not have an impact on the initial £6k of notional SEND budget which should be used to support pupils with EHCPs and forms part of all mainstream school budgets. This amount is prescribed nationally. We are acutely aware that there is a disproportionate impact on this allocation for small schools, especially those with a higher-than-average number of children with EHCPs. The HNB Subgroup agreed that this will need to be reviewed and further proposals may need to come back to Schools' Forum for discussion in 2025.

Special Schools

- 2.7 In order to determine a fair and transparent funding methodology for state-run special schools, we have commissioned the ISOS Partnership to conduct analysis at a national level and make recommendations for the determination of top-ups from 2025.
- 2.8 As part of this process, consultations were undertaken with representatives from all state-run special schools to understand the financial pressures that exist within the current system to inform any future model. Due to the benefits afforded for budget planning across the LA and special schools, the single value top-up (SVT) process will be retained. The proposals outlined below, therefore, represent uplifts to the current SVTs and associated school groupings associated with these.
- 2.9 The SVT is an aggregate model meaning that, although the needs of individual children will vary (some costing more, some less), the overall costs will balance out. For the purposes of transparency, all schools supporting children with similar needs have been grouped together. The level of funding is associated with the provision required to meet needs of children with those with more complex needs requiring a higher SVT.
- 2.10 As most costs in special schools are taken up with staffing, the variance in SVTs is based on the different pupil-to-staff ratios required for each level of need. In addition to complexity of need, organisational factors such as split site and the costs associated with running a hydrotherapy pool are also factored into the SVT.
- 2.11 In the case of Torfield, there is a variation in the needs of the children from the other two schools in group 1, as well as this school being on a split site and having a hydrotherapy pool. The proposed changes are set out in the table below:

Group	School	Previous Top Up Rate	New Top Up	New total per child
1a	Lindfield	6,325	8,311.00	18,311.00
	Saxon Mount			
1b	Torfield*	8,761	9,200.00	19,200.00
2	New Horizons	9,994	11,281.00	21,281.00
	Ropemakers			
	St Mary's	10,740		
	Cuckmere	11,538		
3	Hazel Court*	11,132	12,692.00	22,692.00
	Glyne Gap*			
	Grove Park*			
	Summerdown*			
	South Downs*			

* Includes needs based rate for split site, hydrotherapy, specialist access and adaptive equipment etc.

- 2.12 The total additional costs of this proposed model for the 2025/26 financial year for special schools will be £2m.
- 2.13 The HNB Subgroup were keen that, due to the significant investment in funding in this sector over the next year, that clear expectations are established around how Special Schools will also support the enhancement of the mainstream offer and how they will work to reduce any upward pressure on INMS costs.
- 2.14 Funding for mainstream schools who are supporting children with a Special School named in their EHCP, whilst awaiting a special school placement, will have their funding allocation updated accordingly.
- 2.15 As part of the review undertaken by ISOS, an additional recommendation was made to establish a peer-led process to consider requests for exceptional funding. Whereas most costs for individual pupils will be covered by the SVT rates set out above, there may be a small number of children whose needs cannot be met within these and consideration should be given for exceptional funding (e.g. where a child has a very bespoke provision within an EHCP which is not part of a school's offer, but by providing exceptional funding for it a placement in an INMS could be avoided). This needs further consideration and proposals for this will be brought to a future Schools' Forum for consideration.

FE Colleges

- 2.16 An uplift for Element 3 (High Needs Top-up) for the current academic year was agreed for FE providers in Summer 2024. Although it was hoped that we would be in the position to agree a longer-term funding model at this stage, the complexities of establishing this at a Sussex-wide level have meant that this is not possible. This work is still ongoing and will be brought to a future Schools' Forum for agreement.
- 2.17 Until this work is complete, we propose to apply the hourly costs that are associated with the staffing rates used to calculate the mainstream school and special school top-ups. This will create parity across all sectors and are set out in the table below:

Role	24/25 hourly rate	Proposed 25/26 hourly rate
Specialist Teacher	£49.63	£55
Unqualified teacher/instructor	£29.99	£30
Specialist TA (Nurture/ELSA) Based on SS9 – scale point 24	£23.78	£26
TA / LSA Based on SS3 - scale point 7	£18.46	£19

- 2.18 As the greatest amount of cost associated with children with EHCPs within FE colleges relates to 1:1 support, the proposed uplift for those children requiring specialist TAs will have a positive impact on revenue for FE colleges next year. Alongside this, we have also agreed new processes with College Principals that will allow for a more accurate reflection of Element 2 places in their commissioned numbers from September 2025.
- 2.19 Depending on the number of children who require either specialist or non-specialist TAs, this will result in an additional cost of between £200k and £250k next academic year.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Schools' Forum is recommended to:
- a) approve the proposed increases to mainstream school top-ups as set out in 2.3.
 - b) approve the proposed increases to special school top-ups as set out in 2.11.
 - c) approve the proposed increases to FE College top-ups as set out in 2.18

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