

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS FUNDING IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Information for Parents and Carers

Frequently Asked Questions (September 2007)

This information has been developed as a result of a number of parent/carer workshops held across the authority in February 2007 about the introduction of revised funding arrangements for special educational needs in mainstream schools.

We are grateful to all parents who participated in these meetings and who have contributed to the development of this guidance.

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Contents

1	Background	Page 3
2	Brief outline of new system	Page 4
3	Predictable and exceptional needs	Page 5
4	Statutory assessments and statements	Page 6
5	Local Clusters and District Support Groups	Page 7
6	Transition / transfer	Page 8
7	Monitoring and budgets	Page 8
8	Training	Page 9
9	Dealing with concerns	Page 9
10	Glossary	Page 10

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1. Background

In 2004, the government published guidance recommending that local authorities delegate more of their SEN funding to mainstream schools for the majority of pupils. It also recommended that authorities had clear arrangements for allocating additional resources for the pupils with the most severe and complex needs.

In order to respond to these recommendations, a detailed independent review of the existing mainstream SEN funding system in Hertfordshire took place to see how things could be improved. This review took place in 2005 and included talking to a large number of professionals and other interested parties, visiting schools and looking at case studies.

Why have changes been made?

The independent review found there were a number of common concerns about the way the funding system worked. Resourcing issues were highlighted in our SEN & Inclusion Strategy and we wanted to improve our arrangements for supporting children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

A group of headteachers, SENCos, and officers worked together for a year to develop a better system and all schools were consulted about the proposals before a new model was introduced.

We believe the changes will support schools in developing their inclusive approaches to teaching all children

2. Brief Outline of the New System

The new system for funding SEN in mainstream schools has been in place since April 2007. To support the new system there has been a significant increase in SEN funding for mainstream schools. The vast majority of SEN funding is now provided through a formula to schools in their budgets at the beginning of the financial year. They do not have to apply for this, which means schools can spend less time on form filling and more on meeting children's needs.

Funding for a small number of children with the most severe and complex needs in mainstream schools is not distributed in this way, but held in an *exceptional* needs budget. Schools are working together in local groups (known as clusters) to consider which schools may require *exceptional* funding for individual pupils and decisions are being made through District Support Groups (see Section 5).

What are the benefits of this new system?

- Schools now have budgets that are more stable from year to year and this will help them plan their resources and staffing better to meet children's needs
- Schools and support services will be able to spend their time on meeting the needs of the child rather than on administration and form filling
- The system is fair, easy to understand and allocates the budget where it is most needed.

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- It helps with early identification – funding can be available quickly
- Schools have more opportunities to work together, share ideas and be involved in decisions
- It builds on schools’ good practice and knowledge of their pupils and families
- It helps schools to make reasonable adjustments for pupils under the Disability Discrimination Act.

15% Number of free school meals

15% Number of pupils on the school roll

Different options were looked at but these are the ones most schools agreed with when consulted.

Why not use schools’ SEN registers to allocate the predictable needs budget?

Schools’ SEN register are not a consistent and reliable indicator of the needs of children across the county because they are not moderated. Therefore other indicators had to be used.

3. Predictable and Exceptional Needs

The majority of funding is provided to schools through a ‘predictable needs’ formula. This refers to children whose needs are significant but occur regularly in most schools across Hertfordshire, even though the number of pupils in any school will vary from year to year.

The ‘exceptional needs’ budget is for a smaller number of children whose needs are more complex and do not occur routinely across schools. These pupils are not distributed evenly amongst schools, but can appear in any school.

Some schools will have no children with exceptional needs.

How did you decide on a formula?

The formula is made up of a number of indicators of SEN. The formula uses information that is easy to gather and does not cause schools additional work. The indicators are:

70% Prior attainment

How many children will have exceptional needs funding?

There is not an exact number, but there will be approximately 600 pupils across the county with exceptional needs funding in mainstream schools.

Will money be allocated specifically for individual children with SEN?

If a child has exceptional needs, the money for the child is *earmarked* and so it is specifically for the child. If the child moves to another mainstream school, the money moves with them.

The predictable needs budget is devolved to the school. This means it is earmarked for SEN and cannot be spent on other things. Allocations of exceptional funding are provided to support specific children. This may not necessarily be used to provide individual support, but may be used in different ways depending on the particular needs of the child.

4. Statutory Assessment & Statements

Under the new system, it is not necessary for a child to have a statement in order for them to receive additional support within

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a mainstream school. Resources will therefore be available more quickly, and when children need them, rather than having to wait for a statutory assessment to be completed.

However, where it is considered that a statutory assessment may be required, the school or parent has the right to request this. The new funding arrangements do not change this.

There is no intention to get rid of statements although they may reduce as the new system is put into practice.

Where a child currently has a statement, this will remain in place and will continue to be reviewed at least annually as before.

My child has a statement but attends a school in another authority, how will their support be funded?

The new funding arrangements apply to mainstream schools in Hertfordshire. The arrangements for funding Hertfordshire children with statements educated in other authorities are not affected.

I am moving to Hertfordshire and my child has a statement, what will happen?

This remains unchanged. As before, parents of children with statements moving into Hertfordshire make contact with the local authority to discuss their child's needs and the appropriate provision. The Special Needs Officers will explain how the funding system works.

If the child joins a Hertfordshire mainstream school, their needs will either be met from the predictable needs budget devolved to the school or, if it is considered that their needs are exceptional, through an allocation from the exceptional needs budget.

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My child has SEN and needs more support, should I still request a statement?

It is no longer necessary for a child to have a statement in order to access additional support within a mainstream school. Therefore, if the sole aim of applying for a statement is in order for the school to receive additional resources to support the child, this will no longer be necessary. A statement will continue to be required where a resource such as a specialist unit or special school is likely to be needed. Advice from the local SEN team or support service should be sought in individual cases.

My child has a statement which specifies a number of teaching assistant hours, what will happen now?

A statement of SEN is a legal document that describes:

- All your child's SEN
- What will be provided to meet these
- Any relevant non-educational needs and provision (e.g. occupational therapy)

This remains unchanged.

5. Local clusters and District Support Groups

Every mainstream school is now in a *local cluster*. This is a group of approximately 8-12 local schools and may include primary, secondary and middle schools. We believe that there are enormous benefits for schools working together in this way. Services such as educational psychologists and specialist teachers, will be linked to clusters and attend meetings to provide support and advice. Each school is expected to send a representative to each meeting and a

sum of money has been provided to each school to support this. These meetings will take place in the first half of each term.

There are 60 local clusters across the county. Here is an example of one cluster in the Broxbourne District.

SEN cluster 1	
341	Goffs
344	St Mary's CE VA High
355	Goffs Oak JMI & Nursery
361	Flamstead End
363	Bonneygrove Primary
372	Andrews Lane
373	St Pauls Catholic
374	Woodside Primary
377	Fairfields Primary & Nursery

Each local cluster sends one representative to the *District Support Group* meeting where applications for exceptional needs funding in the district are discussed and decisions made. Senior officers and support service managers attend these meetings so that appropriate support and advice can be provided to schools.

What happens at a Local Cluster meeting?

The school representatives (usually headteachers or SENCos) and support services meet during the first half of each term. Any school may bring a case to discuss with the group.

If the cluster agree an application for exceptional funding is necessary, this will be sent for a decision by the District Support Group. If not, the cluster will make suggestions for the next steps for the school, which might be advice from another school or a support service.

What happens at a District Support Group meeting?

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6

One school representative from each cluster, senior officers and support service managers meet in the second half of each term. Exceptional funding applications from schools in the district are discussed and decisions made at this meeting about what support should be provided to the school in terms of funding and for advice, guidance or training. The aim is to find the best way to help schools with cases they find difficult or challenging.

My child is currently at a primary school, will they have to go to the secondary school in its local cluster?

No, the secondary transfer systems remain unchanged by the cluster arrangements.

6. Transitions / Transfers

Throughout children's schooling transitions and transfers between settings take place, for example:

- Pre-school to Nursery
- Nursery to Infants
- Infants to Junior
- First to Middle
- Middle to Upper
- Junior to Secondary

Research shows that these may be worrying times for children and their parents, particularly for children with SEN who may need very careful plans and support to make their transition / transfer a success.

The new funding arrangements, particularly with schools and services working together in local clusters, aim to support the transition process and early planning for children with SEN.

My child is moving schools, how will they be supported in their new school?

It is good practice for schools to work together closely when children move schools and exchange information to help plan the support a child needs. The new school may have lots of information already but would welcome discussions with you.

7. Monitoring and Budgets

Schools are responsible for meeting the needs of pupils with SEN within their delegated and devolved budgets. Monitoring happens at different levels.

The Head Teacher and ultimately the Governing Body are responsible for monitoring all aspects of the school's budget. All schools are provided with clear information about their budgets for SEN to assist headteachers and governors with these responsibilities.

All schools carry out a process called self evaluation and complete a Self Evaluation Form (SEF). We have provided schools with support materials to help them monitor their SEN arrangements. External professionals, including Ofsted and School Improvement Partners, regularly monitor each school's Self Evaluation Form.

What happens if my child's school runs out of money for SEN before the end of the year?

Schools have to plan how they use all their allocated budgets across the year and this includes SEN. The new arrangements mean schools have more

stable SEN budgets and this will assist them in their planning.

What happens if the District Support Groups run out of money for children with exceptional needs?

District Support Groups, like schools, have a known budget at the beginning of the year and will plan their spending across the whole year.

8. Training

Training and support for schools on SEN and inclusion issues is given a priority in Hertfordshire. All schools in each district are now offered regular training that they do not have to pay for. Initially these are centrally planned but in the future it is envisaged that these will be able to respond to needs in each district. These sessions are organised by support services but school staff contribute and share good practice.

There are also further training opportunities for school to buy. All schools receive funding for training in their budgets.

It is the responsibility of the Head Teacher and Governing Body to ensure that all staff are adequately trained.

What sort of training is available to schools?

A whole range of training is available to Hertfordshire schools. Some of the training aims to help schools in their general planning for children with SEN (eg. provision mapping, working with parents) and there is specific training about different types of special need (eg.

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hearing impairment, autism). There is training for headteachers, teachers, governors and teaching assistants.

9. Dealing with Concerns

If a parent has any concerns about arrangements for meeting their child's SEN in any school in Hertfordshire, it is usually best if they discuss these issues with the school in the first instance contacting the class teacher / form tutor, the SENCo or the INCo. Parents can also discuss these concerns with the external professionals involved with their child such as the Educational Psychologist, the Advisory Teacher or SEN Officer. If the issues are not resolved, parents can discuss these with the Head Teacher and then the Governing Body.

Who should I speak to if I am unhappy with the support my child is receiving from the school?

Most concerns or complaints are likely to be resolved through discussion with your child's class teacher or the school's SENCO. Your discussions may also involve the headteacher.

You may wish to discuss your concerns with other professionals involved with your child, such as the educational psychologist or specialist advisory teacher. If your child has a statement contact the Special Needs Officer responsible for your child's case.

The Parent Partnership Service has written a booklet called 'What if we cannot agree?' To get a copy of this booklet ring the Parent Partnership Service office on 01992 555847. Parent Partnership Advisers in your area are available for you to talk to if you have any concerns or need advice and contact numbers are at the back of this booklet visit

www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership

In the event that things cannot be resolved and you remain unhappy, you can make a formal complaint to the governing body of the school. The school will be able to advise you about their complaints procedure.

You can also contact the Complaints Team in Children Schools and Families on 01992 588542 or E mail cft.csf@hertscc.gov.uk for advice if you have a disagreement with the school or the local authority.

If the local cluster or district support group decide that my child does not have exceptional needs, can I appeal?

There is not an appeal process specifically for parents or schools around exceptional needs. However, there will be a countywide moderation process to make sure that decisions across the 10 districts are consistent. If an exceptional needs application is turned down at a local or district level, feedback and recommendations for follow up action and support will be made to the school.

Parents' rights of appeal to SENDIST remain unchanged.

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10. Glossary

SEN	Special educational needs
SENCo	Special educational needs coordinator
INCo	Inclusion coordinator
SENDIST	Special educational needs and disability tribunal
LA	Local authority
SEF	Self evaluation form
SIP	School improvement partner
CPD	Continuing professional development

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