



Northumberland County Council

Agenda Item 9

Schools Forum: 01 July 2026

Mainstream Schools SEN Top Up Funding

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide an update in relation to the review of Mainstream School SEN Top Up funding, one of the workstreams overseen by the High Needs Spend Control Board. Previous reports have been received by Schools Forum and the High Needs Committee subgroup of the Schools Forum.

2. Recommendations

Schools Forum are recommended to :

- note the report, and
- encourage school to participate in the consultation exercise in the Autumn Term.

3. Background

The banding classification used for mainstream schools has not been reviewed for a number of years. However the numbers and complexity of cases this is being used to allocate resources for has increased significantly.

For comparative purposes the table below shows the number of pupils in mainstream schools in receipt of Top Up funding, as at the Spring Term 2019 and Autumn Term 2025:

Banding	Value	Numbers of Students in receipt of Top Up Funding		Change	
		Spring Term 2019	Spring Term 2026	Nos	%
Band 1	£0	12	5	-7	-58.3%
Band 2	£2,000	190	121	-69	-36.3%
Band 3	£4,000	322	739	417	129.5%
Band 4	£6,000	160	609	449	280.6%
Band 5	£8,000	40	168	128	320.0%
Band 6	£8,000	6	22	16	266.7%
Band 7	£10,000	6	79	73	1216.7%
Band 8	Var	7	58	51	728.6%
Total		743	1801	1058	142.4%

From the above it is evident that both the overall numbers, and average Top Up has increased, with greater increases in number being seen in the higher bandings. The number of bespoke packages (Band 8) has also increased disproportionately. It should also be noted that the current Bands 5 & 6 have the same financial value but were distinguished by different descriptors / requirements.

4. Objectives of the Exercise

As one of the workstreams arising from the High Needs Spend Control Panel, a review of the bandings was agreed, with the following objectives:

- Greater Clarity and Transparency in relation to the bandings, in order to reduce the discussion in relation to the banding applicable;

- Look to reduce the number of cases put forward for consideration of exceptional funding (ie Band 8)
- Ensure banding levels are evenly and fairly distributed to avoid significant changes between adjacent bands

In regard of work already undertaken in relation to special school bandings, it was considered that an “average banding” model was not appropriate for mainstream schools because of the significant variation in the number of EHCP & Top Up students between different schools, which could create volatility in any average between years.

5. **Proposal**

In conjunction with the SEN Team, the original descriptors were reviewed and revised proposals drafted, which can be seen at Appendix A.

The opportunity was also taken to review the financial allocations at each level. As identified previously, bands 5 & 6 within the current structure has the same financial value, and this seemed an appropriate opportunity to review this.

In addition, of the 58 Band 8 bespoke packages on variable levels of funding currently identified, 43 had values of £18,000 or less. It is proposed that the banding should be extended to £18,000. The basis for this figure is as follows:

A Staffing Band 3 Teaching Assistant working 32.5 hours per week on a term time only contract has an annual cost of £25,480 (after 5 years service) or £24,920 (before 5 years service). These figures include employers national insurance and pension costs. The value of £18,000 plus the Notional £6,000 was felt to approximate to the figure of £24,000, which has been used historically as broadly representative as a 1 to 1 rate.

6. **Implementation**

Following today's Schools Forum, the intention is to consult with schools at the start of the Autumn term. In order to minimise any complications around implementation, and avoid any reductions in funding to schools, it can be seen from the draft proposal at Appendix 1 that all of the actual values in the current system are available in the new bandings proposal which should facilitate an easier transfer between banding structures. As noted above this will also allow the majority of current Band 8s to be incorporated into the new bandings and not treated as bespoke.

7. **Financial Implications**

The implementation of the new banding proposals will not in itself have any immediate financial implications in terms of additional costs or savings arising, as the new bandings have been created to provide a seamless transfer between the system.

What cannot be easily assessed at this point is any additional costs arising if schools are able to request a student's banding be re-assessed whether this is via the Annual Review or any alternative arising from the High Needs Spend Control work streams.

8. **Summary and Conclusions**

While the review and implementation of a revised banding scheme for mainstream schools will not address the challenges provided by SEN to Northumberland and other local authorities alike, it is believed that the suggested changes will meet the objectives set out in section 4 of the report. This will in turn hopefully any delays and disagreements in the allocation of a funding band to a student with an EHCP.

Bruce Parvin
Education and Skills Business Manager
29 June 2026

DRAFT**SEND FUNDING FOR PUPILS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS**

Band	Funding £	In addition to Ordinarily Available Provision, the EHCP will identify examples of the following provision which schools are expected to follow:
Band 1	2,000	• Provide additional support as needed using existing school resources. • Ensure staff make reasonable adjustments and targeted responses to emerging needs.
Band 2	4,000	• Deliver multiple individualised and small group programmes (Up to 2 hours per week). Multiple programmes from the following examples: ○ Bespoke Speech and Language ○ Bespoke Occupational Therapy ○ Social Emotional Based Interventions ○ Literacy / Numeracy based Interventions ○ Communication and Interaction based interventions (e.g Talkabout) • Provide regular and targeted teaching in small groups or 1:1 in up to 40% of time in school or 1:3 support in all lessons. This would be provided by a Teaching Assistant (or Class Teacher when they are covered by the TA) • Ensure pupils have access to any specialist equipment necessary for learning.
Band 3	6,000	A combination of the below: • A high number of individualised and small group programmes (Up to 4 hours per week). A high number of programmes from the following examples: ○ Bespoke Speech and Language ○ Bespoke Occupational Therapy ○ Social Emotional Based Interventions ○ Literacy / Numeracy based Interventions ○ Communication and Interaction based interventions (e.g Talkabout) • In class support, which could include 1:1 support in up to 50% of time in school or 1:2 support in all lessons. • Additional support at specific times, for example, personal care or medical needs. • Provide additional and alternative learning activities, including opportunities for over-learning. • Ensure pupils have access to higher costing specialist equipment necessary for learning.
Band 4	8,000	• A high number of individualised and small group programmes (Up to 4 hours per week). A high number of programmes from the following examples: ○ Bespoke Speech and Language ○ Bespoke Occupational Therapy ○ Social Emotional Based Interventions ○ Literacy / Numeracy based Interventions ○ Communication and Interaction based interventions (e.g Talkabout) • In class support, which could include 1:1 support for up to 60% of time in school. • Additional support at specific times, for example, personal care or medical needs. • Work collaboratively with multi-agency professionals, ensuring their input informs provision. • Implement and review ongoing (at least annually) advice from specialist external agencies. • Provide shared supervision and support during unstructured times to ensure safety and well-being.
Band 5	10,000	• In class support which could include 1:1 support for up to 70% of time in school. • Additional support at specific times, for example, personal care or medical needs. • Provide highly individualised programmes, recognising that access to

		mainstream curriculum groupings may not be suitable in some areas. This will be completed by a Teaching Assistant with specific training in the targeted area. • Use specialist teaching techniques, alternative communication approaches, and appropriate resources as recommended by external professionals. • Implement ongoing direct support and advice from external agencies. • Provide shared supervision and support during unstructured times to ensure safety and well-being.
Band 6	14,000	• In class support which could include 1:1 support for up to 85% of time in school. • Additional individual support at specific times, for example, personal care or medical needs. • Provide highly individualised programmes, recognising that access to mainstream curriculum groupings may not be suitable in some areas. This will be completed by a Teaching Assistant with specific training in targeted area. • Use specialist teaching techniques, alternative communication approaches, and appropriate resources as recommended by external professionals. • Implement ongoing direct support and advice from external agencies. • Provide individual supervision and support during unstructured times to ensure safety and wellbeing.
Band 7	18,000	• 1:1 support for throughout the school day and within small group interventions to ensure safety and well-being of themselves and others. • 2:1 support at specific times, for example, personal care or medical needs. • Work within a coordinated multi-disciplinary framework to plan and review provision.
Band 8	Variable	• Implement provision that significantly exceeds the requirements of previous bands. • Respond immediately to serious health and safety needs, including situations where risks could become life-threatening without specialist intervention. • Work closely with specialist agencies to ensure robust risk management, supervision, and environmental adjustments.