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Guidance

Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund: funding for local authorities 2026 to 2027

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Applies to England

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Introduction

This grant is for local authorities, working in partnership with local system partners, to provide an offer of advice and direct support to:

- early years (EY) education settings
- mainstream schools
- further education (FE) colleges

This funding is for investment in services that individual EY settings, schools and colleges cannot commission alone, such as specialist health and education support, to improve the quality of inclusive education for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), in line with the [2026 Schools White Paper and SEND consultation document](#).

This document explains how we will allocate £429 million funding to local authorities in the financial year 2026 to 2027, the first year of this grant. Over the course of the 3 year spending review period the overall grant provides:

- £1.8 billion in Experts at Hand (EAH) funding
- a share of £200 million in transformation funding

In order to aid local authorities in delivering this support and writing their local area plan, we are providing an indicative funding profile. We expect the approximate scale of funding to be around:

- £750 million in 2027 to 2028
- £850 million in 2028 to 2029

Allocations will be reviewed in future years, ensuring resources continue to be targeted and deployed as effectively as possible.

Purpose

This grant supports 2 strands of local authority activity.

First and predominantly, it provides funding for local authorities to work in partnership with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to develop and deliver a new EAH offer for mainstream education settings. This new offer is designed to strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND more effectively and inclusively, by providing a new route to access expert advice and support from education and health professionals.

The Department for Education (DfE), in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) who contribute £25 million to this fund, will provide further guidance shortly developed with local partnerships and sector representatives, but we expect each local area's EAH offer to:

- strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND more effectively and inclusively through:
 - provision of additional education specialists (educational psychology services and specialist teachers)
 - additional outreach from alternative provision, special schools and post-16 institutions
 - additional clinical health professionals (speech and language therapists, occupational therapists)
- include new speech and language therapists advanced practitioners in every ICB area

Second, this grant funds the administrative costs for local authorities associated with:

- evaluating their existing SEND support services to mainstream settings
- developing and submitting local SEND reform plans

More information on local SEND reform plans can be found in the [Accountability section](#).

Local authorities will be aware that the above activities are not covered by expenditure from the Dedicated schools grant (DSG).

Distribution methodology

Eligibility for the grant

Upper tier local authorities, those responsible for education and SEND services, are eligible for this grant.

Paying the grant

The grant will be paid to local authorities in one annual instalment, at the end of June 2026.

Calculating the funding allocations

We have based the Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund funding rates on factors used in previous grants, a:

- basic per child or per young person rate
- per child or per young person rate for children or young people who are recorded as having been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years (FSM6)
- per child or per young person rate for children or young people who are recorded as having low prior attainment (LPA) in either:
 - early years (recorded in early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP))
 - primary school (recorded in key stage 2 (KS2) assessments)

Acknowledging that some children and young people are educated in a local authority different to their resident local authority, we are capturing per child or young person rates for each phase. For the per:

- pupil rate for schools, we use October 2024 school census
- child rate for early years settings, we use January 2025 early years census
- young person rate for FE settings we use individualised learner records (ILR) 2024 to 2025 from November 2024

To estimate the number of FSM6 children or young people, we have taken the

primary and secondary FSM6 proportions from the [2025 to 2026 local authority proforma data](#). We apply the:

- primary FSM6 proportion to the EY and primary pupil counts
- secondary FSM6 proportion to the secondary and 16 to 19 pupil counts

We apply an area cost adjustment (ACA) to the funding rates, below, to reflect geographical variation in labour costs. We have used the same ACAs as the schools national funding formula (NFF) for 2026 to 2027 as published in the [Area cost adjustment for national funding formula 2026 to 2027: technical note](#). We will multiply the base funding rates, below, by the relevant ACA to calculate the funding allocations.

The total funding is split between per-child or per young person: FSM6:LPA by 80%:10%:10%, and each aspect is distributed to local authorities by the proportion of the respective ACA weighted children or young people.

Base funding rates

The base funding rates for 2026 to 2027 financial year are equivalent to a:

- rate of £35 for all children and young people registered in education in the local authority
- FSM6 per-child or per young person rate of £16 per eligible person
- LPA per-child or per young person rate of £14 per eligible person (scaled for each phase)

Allocations

An impact table has been provided so local authorities can see:

- an estimate of their total funding allocation for the 2026 to 2027 financial year, for planning purposes
- how that estimate has been calculated

Final funding allocations will be confirmed and published in May 2026.

Permitted use of the funding

At least 80% of funding must be spent on EAH direct delivery for all settings, staff and their children and young people.

No more than 10% of funding can be spent on admin costs for delivering the EAH offer.

No more than 10% of funding can be spent on local authority transformation costs, including staff or other associated costs.

No funding can be used to provide:

- support named in children and young people's existing education health care plans (EHCPs)
- to make provision schools can or should make themselves
- assessment for EHCPs
- for wider social care or family support (for example, Family First Partnerships and Mental Health Support Teams as these are funded separately) - we encourage local areas to ensure these offers join up into an integrated support service.

This funding is not intended to fill existing gaps or replace current provision, including traded services. The EAH offer should build on and enhance existing local capacity and good practice.

Experts at Hand offer

The EAH offer is a core pillar of the SEND reform programme, as set out in [SEND reform: putting children and young people first](#). The aim is to strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND more effectively and inclusively. Local areas (local health, education and local authority partners) will work together engaging with parents and carers and local stakeholders to set out plans for the Expert at Hand offer as part of local SEND reform plans.

Local authorities should ensure that the EAH investment benefits all children and

young people aged 0 to 25. Local areas should also consider how they will develop this offer over time to ensure there is support and appropriate provision available across early years, primary, secondary, and FE settings.

Local area partnerships should start tilting local provision to focus on early support for mainstream education settings, so that staff are able to meet the needs of children more quickly and effectively within the setting. This will enable earlier, more effective support and help prevent needs from escalating wherever possible. This means mainstream education settings having access to expert professionals (both health and specialist education professionals) who can provide whole setting support, tailored guidance and strategic advice, as well as some group level interventions. The offer should be additional to existing statutory and 1:1 support.

Local areas should take a holistic view of the expertise they have in their areas to meet the needs of children and young people across their settings through the offer.

Local areas will define the exact offer and distribution of resources, according to local circumstances within national expectations which will be set out in forthcoming guidance. We expect that support will primarily come from expert education and health services and from expert outreach from specialist settings, including alternative provision (AP).

We will publish more detailed guidance in the spring, setting out further details of how local area partnerships should start to develop and deliver their offer of EAH from 2026 to 2027, including examples of practice and minimum expectations for this first year. We expect to update this guidance annually as we continue to learn from areas about what works best for their children and young people and educational settings.

Speech and language therapist (SaLT) advanced practitioners

Within this grant, we are providing funding to:

- establish new speech and language therapist advanced practitioners in every ICB geographical area
- support local reform and work with universities, education settings and local

speech and language services to get more speech and language therapists working directly with children and young people

Local areas will be expected to work together to recruit the new speech and language therapist advanced practitioners in every ICB area to operate over the next 3 years. The role will require registered SaLTs with significant experience of leading services to support children and young people in education settings.

This role will ensure that strong clinical knowledge and expertise inform the design and development of the speech and language and occupational therapy elements of the EAH offer. They will also help to ensure speech and language therapists gain meaningful experience in educational contexts during their training, and over time, enhance the longer-term development of a workforce committed to working in education settings with children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

In particular, we expect the SaLT advanced practitioners to:

- provide strategic leadership and oversight regarding the speech and language therapy and occupational therapy elements of the Expert at Hand offer
- build relationships between universities, education settings and speech and language therapy services, to foster a collaborative approach to growing the speech and language therapy workforce supporting children and young people in education settings over time
- develop a strategic approach to increasing speech and language therapy student placements in education settings
- promote the speech and language therapist degree apprenticeship to both potential apprentices and employers, to encourage growth of the speech and language therapy workforce in education
- support the promotion and uptake of opportunities for speech and language therapy support workers to increase their skills and make best use of this workforce in supporting children and young people and education settings

Further detail will be provided in the forthcoming guidance.

Transformation costs

Transformation costs are those that result from necessary administration costs

associated with:

- the evaluation of existing special educational needs (SEN) support services, in partnership with local education providers, young people and families
- preparing local SEND reform plans
- project management, administration and implementation of local SEND reform plans and deliverables agreed within that document

Accountability

Reporting

As already set out, grant recipients will be required to prepare and deliver local SEND reform plans, to be shared in June with DfE in line with the formal commission for the local reform plans, sent to local authorities alongside the publication of [Every child achieving and thriving](#). The planning requirements are intended to support strategic development of the EAH offer, not to set out granular decisions on how the funding allocation will be spent.

DfE will require grant recipients to provide assurance that the:

- grant funding is being spent in line with EAH policy objectives and guidance, and that local area partnerships are working together to co-design and implement the EAH offer as stipulated in the guidance, including the core minimum requirements
- implementation of the grant is delivering the anticipated changes and outcomes

Grant recipients are expected to work collaboratively with local partners including the ICB, the Schools Forum and representatives of early education providers further education providers and children and young people with SEND, to evaluate the health and performance of the existing SEND support offer and provide a robust plan to scale up the offer with the EAH grant. This should be included as part of the local SEND reform plan.

Future support for high-needs related DSG deficits that arise in 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028 will take into account local authorities successful delivery of their approved local SEND reform plan, including appropriate use of investment to

establish an EAH offer.

Local SEND reform plan and the Experts at Hand offer

Local area partnerships will be expected to clearly and succinctly set out in their local SEND reform plan:

- the delivery approach for this offer and the rationale for why the outlined approach is optimal for the local area - this will include setting out if delivery will be local authority-led, contracted to the ICB, in partnership with another area or through an external partner, and setting out the role of Best Start Family Hubs (where delivery involves an ICB or external partner, it should specify the partnership vehicle (such as a service level agreement (SLA) or memorandum of understanding (MOU)) and how performance will be assured)
- clear expectations for joint governance, monitoring and shared accountability across education and health partners.
- a summary of the partnership approach to agreeing an optimal delivery model, including how all system partners were engaged and how the approach was informed by needs-based data
- how the EAH funding will enhance existing routes to access specialist input, and how the delivery model will be integrated with other services or offers funded separately
- a proposal to collaboratively recommission alternative provision to align with the 3-tier model and best practice identified through Alternative provision specialist taskforces (APST) models
- where alternative provision capacity is constrained, whether the local authority will contract provision, partner regionally, or share expertise and the route chosen
- proposals for commissioning outreach from high-quality specialist providers, where appropriate
- a proposal for timely access to health and education professionals (for example, in educational psychology, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy) for early years, schools and colleges based on assessed local need
- a detailed year 1 implementation plan, including recruitment approach and success metrics (for example, coverage, scale of support available), and a high-level plan for years 2 to 3

- a proposed governance and accountability arrangement, as part of the Local Area Partnership Board, including oversight routes, budgets and funding arrangements, reporting cadence and escalation processes - this should include a single, named local authority based senior responsible owner (SRO) to drive improvement and reform
- the purpose of EAH is to provide a new offer to support children to thrive in mainstream, over above the statutory offer - as such local authorities should otherwise fulfil their statutory 'duty to secure' provision in existing EHCPs and use this funding instead to provide a new offer so that children can get support without having to fight for an EHCP
- a proposed approach to settings accessing support which ensures support is not disproportionately accessed by the most proactive schools and settings and includes out of area mainstream further education settings attended by local young people with SEND

DfE officials, health regional SEND leads, SEND and financial advisers will monitor the development and delivery of this offer as part of the monitoring of the wider local SEND reform plan delivery.

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