

SCHOOLS FORUM



Report subject	Schools Forum Special School Banding Review
Meeting date	23 June 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	The report provides an update on progress made with the Special School Banding Review
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: Schools Forum are to note the contents of the report.
Reason for recommendations	To update School's Forum on the Special School Banding Review

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Information

Background from High Needs Funding: 2025 to 2026 operational guide

1. Local authorities are statutorily responsible for overseeing the local offer of services and provision to meet the special educational needs of children and young people in their area.
2. The High Needs Funding: 2025 to 2026 operational guide sets out the following funding streams for special schools' core staffing and other running costs:

Funding element	Value	Data used	Inclusion in 2025 to 2026 MFG
Place funding	Flat rate £10,000 per place	Number of places decided by provider local authority, in consultation with school	Yes
Top-up funding	Variable, may depend on local system of funding bands	Should reflect the cost of provision in excess of the place funding, necessary to make the provision that has been commissioned	Yes
Historic teachers' pay and pensions funding (previous TPG and TPECG)	Locked at 2020 to 2021 value per place	Number of places decided by local authority, in consultation with school	No, this is a separate high needs funding stream, not to be included in the MFG calculation
Additional 3.4% funding equivalent to mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG)	Locked at 2023 to 2024 value per place	Number of places decided by local authority, in consultation with school	No, this is a separate high needs funding stream, not to be included in the MFG calculation
CSBG (consolidated grant for 2025 to 2026, incorporating pay and pensions funding allocated as separate grants in the previous year) and NICs funding	Locked at 2024 to 2025 full-year value per place of combined TPAG, TPECG and CSBG, unless moving to national per-place rate following consultation, plus NICs funding block of CSBG allocated as above	Number of places decided by local authority, in consultation with school	No, this is a separate high needs funding stream, not to be included in the MFG calculation

3. Historical Context

4. The current funding system for Special Schools in BCP Council have been in place in largely the same format since the Local Government Review resulted in the formation of the unitary authority in April 2019.
5. Up to 2022-23 there was a wider variety of funded bands across the five special schools – a mixture of legacy council agreements and BCP 'add-ons' as below:

	No. Bands	Range	
	22-23	from	to
Linwood	7	302	22,880
Longspee	4	9,619	29,534
Montacute	7	3,824	29,677
Tregonwell	6	302	19,572
Winchelsea	6	1,696	27,695

6. In 2023-24, additional funding from the MFG was fed into the bottom of the bands to start bringing minimum funding more in line with the top up funding available in a mainstream school, as below:

	No. Bands	Range	
	23-24	from	to
Linwood	4	9,845	22,880
Longspee	3	13,318	29,534
Montacute	4	10,000	29,677
Tregonwell	1	19,483	19,483
Winchelsea	3	7,778	27,695

7. Ad hoc arrangements that make individual payments up to double some of the top band amounts are currently in place.
8. Special Schools in BCP have maintained a dialogue with the Local Authority for a number of years that current budgets are insufficient to deliver the provision they need to support the children attending their school and that a different system is required to update and recognise current positions.
9. Financially, the five special schools are in differing positions with some holding a financial surplus, and others holding a deficit or projected to be soon in deficit.
10. Benchmarking exercise
11. A benchmarking exercise was carried out by Bath and North-East Somerset across 11 Council Areas in the South West based on 2023/24 Banding rates paid to Special Schools in their areas. For information, the results of this are set out on the Slides in Appendix 1.
12. This exercise established that based on the figures provided, BCP pay the highest banding rate for children requiring the least amount of support i.e. the minimum top up amount provided, at an average of £12,084 per child. Values in other LAs range from £1,780 to £12,084, with the Average value being £4606 and the Median at £2,538.
13. In relation to the maximum top up amount provided, BCP pay the third highest banding rate for children requiring the most amount of support at an average of £25,853 per child. For this element, values ranged from £13,265 to £29,490, with an Average value of £21,845 and a Median of £22,734.
14. As an immediate neighbour, Dorset have recently set out their new model from September 2025. From this date, the funding envelope will be increased to allow for infrastructure to be increased by 3% and top ups by 6% giving a total formula funding increase of 3.2% on average (range 2.6% - 5.4% depending on locator mix; bearing in mind that place funding is not increased at all). This increase meets the DfE requirement of 0% Minimum Funding Guarantee (on like for like pupils.) The DfE

have stated that the place value will remain at £10,000 per commissioned place which is in addition to the figures in the tables following.

From September 25		Infrastructure				
Places		General	Split Site	Hydrotherapy		Locator >=7+, >25% per place
Beaucroft	230	386,439	164,907			2,397.16
The Harbour	140	386,439				2,760.28
Mountjoy	110	386,439		17,510		3,672.26
Westfield	230	386,439	119,480			2,199.65
Wyvern	90	386,439		17,510	154,500	6,204.99
Yewstock	165	386,439	132,977	17,510		3,254.10

From September 25		Infrastructure	Locator 2	Locator 3	Locator 4	Locator 5	Locator 6	Locator 7	Locator 7+	Locator 7++
Places	per place									
			793.68	2,915.29	5,567.04	8,492.99	12,190.58	19,328.99	30,150.76	46,390.60
Beaucroft	230	2,397.16	3,190.84	5,312.45	7,964.20	10,890.15	14,587.74	21,726.14	32,547.92	48,787.76
The Harbour	140	2,760.28	3,553.96	5,675.57	8,327.32	11,253.27	14,950.86	22,089.27	32,911.04	49,150.88
Mountjoy	110	3,672.26	4,465.94	6,587.55	9,239.30	12,165.26	15,862.85	23,001.25	33,823.03	50,062.87
Westfield	230	2,199.65	2,993.33	5,114.94	7,766.69	10,692.64	14,390.23	21,528.64	32,350.41	48,590.25
Wyvern	90	6,204.99	6,998.67	9,120.28	11,772.03	14,697.98	18,395.57	25,533.98	36,355.75	52,595.59
Yewstock	165	3,254.10	4,047.78	6,169.39	8,821.14	11,747.09	15,444.68	22,583.08	33,404.86	49,644.70

15. Work to date in BCP

16. Under the previous Interim Director of Education, a commitment was made to review the Special School Funding Model and implement a clear, transparent system for future funding allocation.

17. To this end, the special schools have been asked to provide a breakdown of their budgets for the 25-26 financial year, allowing for increases to NI, a 2.8% pay award and 2.8% inflation. The budget has been built based on the current cohort of pupils and class make up.

18. Information has then been collated to draw average costs for teachers, teaching assistants and other types of spend across the school. Costs have been collated under consistent categories to enable a reasonable comparison between schools. School returns were largely split by individual classes which helped form a view of the average costs of each class and the average level of need (based on band) in a classroom.

19. Average costs have been mapped against average needs and costs have been split against:

- a. 'child' – elements considered to be directly influenced by the pupils' needs and the classroom they need to be in. (Intention – to fund an amount per band (less any direct grants paid e.g. CSBG and historic grants like TPG, TPECG as would all be covered through this)).
- b. 'place' – elements considered specific to the broader school offer, premises and organisation (including costs not expected to change based on the needs of the child – and only the provision they attend). (Intention that anything over the £10,000 place funding would be covered by this element of top up).

Average 'Child' Costs:

	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Teaching Staff	£60,455	£79,052	£72,573
HLTA Staff	£0	£34,583	£33,475
TA staff (including 1:1)	£23,948	£31,579	£25,450

	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Therapies – SaLT	£232	£1,143	£464
Therapies - Occupational Therapy	£313	£1,143	£554
Therapies – Physiotherapy	£0	£934	£286
Therapies – Nurses	£0	£399	£122
Careers, IAG, Exams	£0	£2,279	£1,044
Medical Staff	£0	£825	£151
E19 - Learning resources (not ICT equipment)	£431	£3,570	£946
E20 - Variable - ICT Learning Resources - Variable	£15	£404	£91
E27 - Bought in professional services - curriculum	£0	£143	£26
E28 - Bought in professional services - non-curriculum	£0	£871	£159

These costs can be linked directly to the needs of pupils and show significant variation linked to average need.

Average 'Place' Costs:

	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Leadership	£3,046	£8,915	£5,565
Safeguarding	£0	£3,897	£1,352
Family Support Staff	£0	£1,949	£972
Pastoral staff	£421	£3,353	£1,562
Business, Finance, ICT & HR	£934	£6,196	£2,423
Premises & Catering	£1,176	£6,197	£2,477
Admin, Annual Reviews	£691	£3,644	£1,593
PE, Music, Dance, Swimming, Interventions	£0	£2,305	£600
Other staff	£98	£662	£327
E08 - Indirect employee expenses	£92	£498	£206
E09 - Staff development and training	£146	£826	£310
E12 - Building maintenance and improvement	£490	£3,494	£1,279
E13 - Grounds maintenance and improvement	£14	£206	£59
E14 - Cleaning and caretaking	£317	£1,724	£751
E15 - Water and sewerage	£39	£242	£100
E16 - Energy	£57	£1,418	£514
E18 - Other occupation costs	£26	£3,511	£767
E20 - Fixed - ICT Learning Resources - Fixed	£99	£537	£244
E21 - Exam Fees	£0	£218	£79
E22 - Administrative supply	£25	£800	£290
E23 - Other insurance premiums	£27	£284	£91
E24 - Special facilities	£0	£7	£2
E25 - Catering supplies	£167	£955	£459
Other Fixed Costs	£0	£606	£164
Other Variable Costs	£0	£126	£31

Variation of individual elements here potentially reflects the variation in current funding levels between schools and providers 'cutting their cloth' accordingly.

20. Next Steps

21. A meeting was held with Special School Heads and Trust representatives on 23.05.25 to present the findings to date and discuss next steps to move the position forwards with a stated aim of being able to implement a new model for September 2025.
22. It was agreed to proceed with modelling the proposed new system on the split 'place' and 'child' costs and to establish a banding approach that would fit consistently across all schools.
23. To provide an updated Banding framework it was agreed to obtain Dorset's current banding framework and explore its application across the BCP Special Schools to determine its suitability. This will then be applied to the child and place model split to provide a proposed new structure and funding amounts for consideration by Schools and the LA.

24. This framework has now been obtained and will be shared with BCP Special Schools in advance of a further meeting to discuss its applicability to a cohort of pupils in each school as a sample.
25. If required a further Schools Forum Meeting will be requested before September 2025 to discuss and seek approval of a new model, and then also taken through the appropriate internal Council approval processes.

Summary Financial Implications

26. The financial implications of the Special School Banding are not yet clear and will be set out in a future report once the exercise is complete.

Legal Implications

27. The Schools Forum regulations require Schools Forum to be consulted on arrangements for pupils with high needs.

Summary of human resources implications

28. There are no direct human resources implications from the recommendations in this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

29. There are no direct sustainability impacts from the recommendations in this report.

Summary of public health implications

30. The council is seeking to maintain appropriate services for the vulnerable as well as improve the sustainability of services important for the wellbeing of all residents.

Summary of equality implications

31. Budget holders are managing their budgets with due regard to equalities issues.

Summary of risk assessment

32. The overall high needs budget funding gap is an ongoing risk to the council's financial health. Government is aware of this national problem with an indication given that consultation on a way forward will be issued in due course.

Background Papers

33. High Needs Funding: 2025 to 2026 operational guidance
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026/high-needs-funding-2025-to-2026-operational-guide>

Appendices

Appendix A Benchmarking slides