



Exceptional Funding Policy

Date: July 2026

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Version: 1

Document Title:	Exceptional Funding Policy		
Version:	1	Last Modified:	
Status:		Review due:	August 2027
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Approved by:	Schools Forum	Date approved:	
Change log:			

1. Purpose statement

1.1 This policy sets out the framework for allocating Exceptional Circumstances Funding to mainstream schools in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP)

1.2 This policy has been written in accordance with the DfE High Needs Funding Operational Guidance (2026–27), which requires local authorities to define clearly when and how additional targeted funding is allocated, ensuring consistency and fairness. [High Needs Operational Guidance](#)

The purpose of this funding is to:

- Provide targeted financial support to schools experiencing disproportionately high levels of SEND need, particularly where this cannot be met through core funding
- Ensure that funding is fair, transparent and consistent
- Support delivery of an inclusive education system, in line with national SEND policy and local SEND reform priorities

The High Needs Guidance states that:

- Local authorities **may** provide additional targeted funding outside the formula where schools have disproportionate numbers of pupils with SEND or complex needs
- Funding arrangements must be:

- Transparent and simple
- Agreed with schools (via Schools Forum)
- Targeted to a minority of schools with exceptional pressures

This policy directly implements these requirements.

2 Who the policy applies to

2.1 This policy applies to:

- All mainstream primary and secondary schools within BCP
- Pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) on roll in those schools

In line with national guidance, this funding is separate from core school funding and top-up arrangements and is specifically designed to respond to exceptional concentrations of need.

3 The Policy Replaces

3.1 This policy has been developed from the Exceptional Funding Paper shared with the Schools Forum on the 22 June 2026.

4 Approval Process

4.1 In developing this policy, we have consulted with the Schools Forum on the 22 June 2026 where an Exceptional Funding Options Paper was discussed and three potential funding models. The Forum voted to implement Model 2 for exceptional funding, which sets the threshold at 6% and provides £275 per EHCP per term, affecting approximately 19 schools (14 primary, 5 secondary).

The new model will be implemented from September for the 26-27 academic year; the current policy remains in place for the summer term.

4.2 This policy will be shared with and approved by Schools Forum on the 21 September 2026.

5 Links to Council Strategies

5.1 The Exceptional Funding model is underpinned by the following principles:

- Equity and fairness – funding is directed to schools facing the greatest pressure

- Transparency – the methodology is clear, consistent and data-led
 - Targeted support – funding is focused on a minority of schools with exceptional need
 - Sustainability – funding is delivered within a fixed High Needs budget of £600,000
 - Responsiveness – allocations reflect current needs using up-to-date data
- This policy directly supports BCP Council's Corporate Strategy 2024–2028, A Shared Vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, and contributes to the vision of “where people, nature, coast and towns come together in sustainable, safe and healthy communities.” The Exceptional Circumstances Funding model helps deliver this vision by ensuring additional resources are directed to mainstream schools supporting disproportionately high numbers of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), enabling more inclusive education within local communities.
 - The policy aligns particularly with the Our People and Communities priority, which seeks to ensure that those who need support receive it when and where they need it and that all children and young people have the best opportunities in life and are supported to flourish and grow. By targeting funding towards schools experiencing the greatest concentration of SEND need, the policy strengthens the ability of mainstream schools to provide appropriate support, promote inclusion, and improve educational outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
 - The policy also supports the Council's Our Approach priority by using transparent eligibility criteria, objective census data and a simple allocation methodology. This reflects the Corporate Strategy commitment to being open, transparent and accountable, using data and insight to shape services and solutions, and putting people at the heart of service delivery.
 - In addition, the model supports the Corporate Strategy focus on intervening as early as possible to improve outcomes. By providing targeted funding to schools experiencing exceptional levels of SEND demand, the policy helps schools respond more effectively to emerging needs, sustain inclusive provision and reduce the risk of children requiring more intensive or specialist placements.
 - Finally, the policy contributes to the Corporate Strategy commitment to using resources sustainably to support our ambitions. By maintaining a fixed funding envelope and directing resources to a minority of schools facing genuinely exceptional levels of demand, the model ensures that High Needs funding is allocated fairly, transparently and in a financially sustainable way while maximising its impact for children and young people with SEND.

6 The Policy

6.1 Funding Framework (2026–27)

Total Funding Envelope

- A fixed annual maximum allocation of £600,000 for 2026 - 27

- Funded from the High Needs Block

6.2 Eligibility Criteria

Schools will qualify for Exceptional Circumstances Funding where:

- The proportion of pupils with EHCPs exceeds 6% of the school's number on roll

This threshold reflects a significantly higher concentration of need than the local and national average and ensures funding is directed to those schools under the greatest pressure.

6.3 Funding Allocation

- Eligible schools will receive £275 per EHCP per term
- Funding levels may vary slightly between terms depending on:
 - Census data
 - Number of eligible schools
- Funding will be:
 - Automatically allocated
 - No application or business case required

7 How to Use this Policy

7.1 Method of Allocation

- Allocations are calculated termly using School Census data
- Payments are pro-rated per term from the annual funding pot
- Funding is distributed across three terms per academic year with the decision to implement this from the Autumn term 2026

7.2 Use of Funding

Schools are not required to submit detailed spending plans; however, funding is expected to support:

- Additional staffing or interventions for pupils with EHCPs
- Specialist provision and resources
- Support to meet complex needs within mainstream settings

8 Roles and responsibilities

Job Title	Roles and Responsibilities
Jeanette Yorke	Head of Service SEND will oversee the implementation of the policy
Steve Wade	Principal Accountant, oversee funding arrangements

9 Enforcement and Sanctions

9.1 Governance and Oversight

- Schools Forum will:
 - Review the funding model annually
 - Review impact and sustainability
- The Local Authority will:
 - Monitor distribution within the £600,000 allocated
 - Ensure compliance with national High Needs guidance

9.2 Monitoring and Review

The model will be subject to ongoing annual review to ensure:

- It remains financially sustainable
- Funding continues to be appropriately targeted
- It supports improved outcomes for children and young people

The review will therefore assess:

- Termly vs annual allocation methodology
- Impact on schools with highest levels of need
- Affordability within the high needs block
- The policy remains in line with requirements in the DfE's High Needs Operational Guidance

9.3 Legal Context

This policy is delivered in accordance with:

- The Children and Families Act 2014
- High Needs Funding Operational Guidance (2026–27)
- Schools' Forum regulations

10 Further Information and Evidence

10.1 Equality and Inclusion

The policy supports the Council's commitment to:

- Meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND
- Promoting inclusive education

- Ensuring fair access to resources across the system

This policy has been written in accordance with the DfE High Needs Funding Operational Guidance (2026–27), which requires local authorities to define clearly when and how additional targeted funding is allocated, ensuring consistency and fairness. [High Needs Operational Guidance](#)

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