
York Schools Forum

22nd January 2026

Report of the Assistant Director, Education and Skills

Review of special school banding

Summary

- 1 This paper provides the members of School Forum with an update on the work taking place to review the current special school banding banding structure. This work will result in a new streamlined banding structure to be introduced from September 2026.

Background

2. The work we have done through the Safety Valve programme identified a need to review the allocation of Element 3 top-up funding from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
3. The overall aim of this work was to review and develop new SEN top-up funding arrangements in York to create a single, “universal” approach to the allocation of SEN top-up funding that –

- ✓ applies to all phases and settings, ensuring that arrangements for agreeing and allocating SEN top-up funding are governed by a consistent set of principles and methodology;
- ✓ is easy to understand, fair and transparent (ensuring that there is a broad understanding of why the funding system operates in the way it does and how decisions are made), and effective (at targeting resources where they are needed); and
- ✓ is consistently applied across the city

4. Phase 1 of the banding review concluded in 2025 with the introduced of a new streamlined banding focused on provision to meet need in mainstream settings and schools. This revised banding started to be applied for new plans from September 2025 and is also used as part of the review of plans through the annual review.

5. Top-ups (Element 3) – the high needs block can be used to provide additional resource, over and above an education setting’s “core funding” (its delegated budget or place funding) for individual children and young people with high needs. It is good practice for LAs and settings to work together to agree approaches to organising top-up funding, but LAs have the ultimate responsibility for making decisions about top-up funding since they are accountable for the spend from the high needs block. While top-up funding must be sufficient to secure the special educational provision specified in a child’s or young person’s EHCP and decisions must be based on the assessed needs of individual children and young people, the DfE high needs operational guidance explains that having a

framework (often called “banding”) that indicate levels of top-up funding that might be allocated at different levels of need can be an efficient, fair and transparent ways for LAs and education settings to organise decisions about SEN top-up funding. (The high needs block also funds the cost of placements in the independent sector, which are not split into place funding and to-up funding.)

6. In line with best practice the local authority has had an initial meeting with representatives from the three state funded specialist settings in York to review the current complex banding structure following the principles being used in the revised mainstream banding. There is broads agreement that this work is needed and support for moving to a simplified and more equitable banding structure based on three banding descriptors focused on provision to meet need.

7. The current York special school banding provides descriptions of need – the purpose of the proposed revised banding is to focus on provision to meet need. Members of the sub-group felt that the current descriptions of need in the existing banding documents are useful however, the resourcing of education, health and care plans should focus on the provision needed to achieve outcomes in the plan.

6. The current specialist school banding values are shown below:

Alternative Provision (Danesgate)

Place funding	£10,000 per full-time pupil
Top-up funding	£6,300 per year
	PRU pupils
	£14,460 per year
	SEMH pupils

Special Schools (Applefields and Hob Moor Oaks)

Place funding	£10,000 per full-time pupil
Top-up funding	see table below (pro-rata for part-time pupils)

1	4,430	1+S2	9093
2	5,539	2+S2	10202
3	6,329	3+S2	10992
4	7,384	4+S2	12047
5	8,861	5+S2	13524
6	11,076	6+S2	15739
1+PC1	7,598	1+S3	11425
2+PC1	8,707	2+S3	12534
3+PC1	9,497	3+S3	13324
4+PC1	10,552	4+S3	14379
5+PC1	12,029	5+S3	15856
6+PC1	14,244	6+S3	18071
1+PC2	10,765	1+S4	18420
2+PC2	11,874	2+S4	19529
3+PC2	12,664	3+S4	20319
4+PC2	13,719	4+S4	21374
5+PC2	15,196	5+S4	22851
6+PC2	17,411	6+S4	25066
1+S1	6,761	1+S5	35841

2+S1	7,870	2+S5	36950
3+S1	8,660	3+S5	37740
4+S1	9,715	4+S5	38795
5+S1	11,192	5+S5	40272
6+S1	13,407	6+S5	42487

8. The next steps following the first meeting will be for the same group to meet again to work on the following:

- Sharing information about the number of children in each of the current bands to allow a projection of numbers to be made for each of the three new proposed bands. The financial impact of this can then be clearly mapped to ensure that the settings can continue to deliver good quality provision within the revised funding allocation. The aim is to achieve a more financially sustainable allocation of top up funding which does not create a detriment to individual schools and avoids top up funding resulting in high revenue balances being accrued by individual institutions which has an overall negative impact on the use of resources across mainstream and specialist settings;
- Agreeing the wording of the band descriptors with a focus on describing provision to meet need in the context of specialist settings.

9. The proposal would be to move all new EHC plans finalised from September 2026 on to the new bands. All existing plans would be reviewed and moved to the new bands through the processes of annual review and phase transfer.

10. The advantage of the new proposed banding system would be to provide settings, schools and colleges with greater certainty about the amount of Element 3 resource that they have to support children and young people with EHC plans. This will allow education providers to more effectively plan provision through aggregating resources to meet identified and predictable needs which would minimise delays in putting provision in place.

12. Where there is a medical / physical requirement for a one-off resource allocation for example specialist seating, specialist therapy or one-off intervention, the request will be submitted to the SEND caseworker for consideration and requests would be considered by the Resource Allocation Panel.

Next Steps and Recommendations

13. The local authority will continue to meet with representatives with the specialist settings to complete the work outlined in this report. The revised band descriptors will be shared with School Forum as part of the local authority's consultation process with the forum.

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