

Summary of Mainstream Top-Up Funding Changes

March 2025

Information to be covered

- The purpose of this document is to summarise the financial changes for the payment of high needs top-up funding (also known as Element 3) for mainstream schools
- These changes are to support the wider ambitions of the CAtIE (County Approach to Inclusive Education)
- Further details on the background of these changes can be found on the Kelsi website

Finance Focus - What is changing?

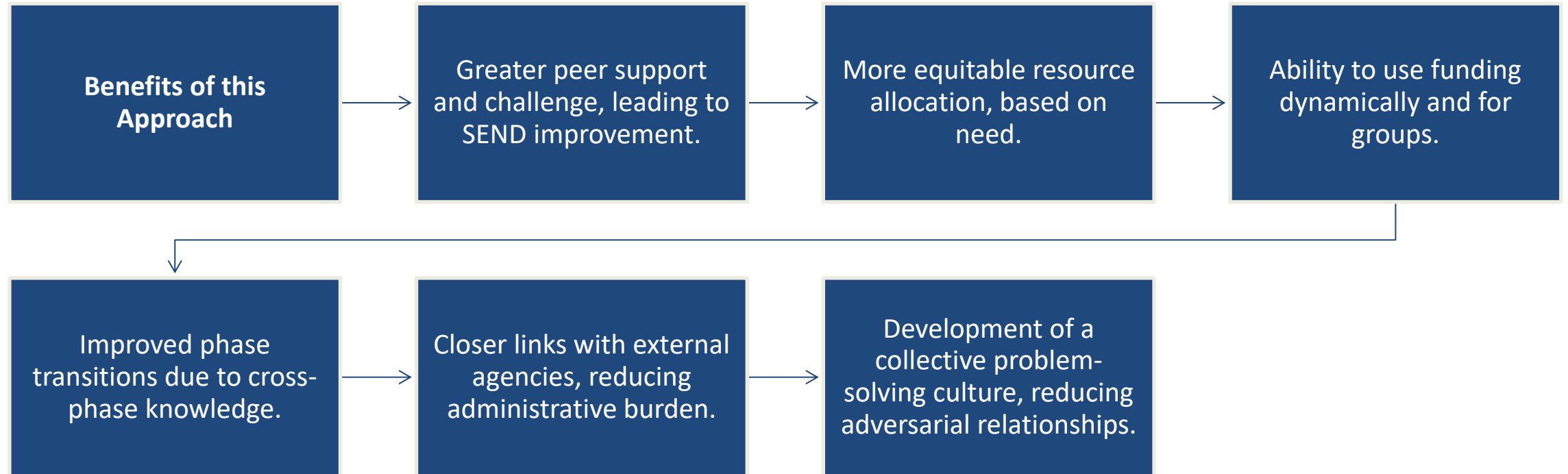
- Over the next 18 months we will be implementing the new SEN funding model for **Element 3 high needs top up funding** (additional support above the first £6k)
- This will determine the element 3 funding rates for Special Schools, SRPs and mainstream school top-ups (for children with high levels of support)
- In addition, roll out of the communities of schools' budgets for mainstream schools to support children on SEN Support and some children with EHCPs who can benefit from wider support & strategies in mainstream schools
- Mainstream schools will still be expected to fund the first £6k of additional support (this is equivalent to place funding for SRP and Special Schools).
- We are implying a phased approach to implementation

BACKGROUND SUMMARY TO COMMUNITIES

Describing the Changes – By Meeting Needs Locally

- This intent was first discussed with school reps in 2020 and published in the CATIE in 2023, it is agreed KCC policy
- Purpose :
 - devolve some decision making to a local level
 - empower headteachers/professionals to make evidence-based decisions about best use of HNF money in collaboration with peers
 - drive good practice and greater consistency through peer challenge and support
 - reduce bureaucracy
- Consultation attracted record engagement and responses

Benefits of the new Community of Schools Approach



What is a community?

- Groups of schools organised in line with the NHS primary care networks
- Each community has a chair, who is from outside their school's community
- Opportunity to address local needs, co ordinate allocation of specialist resources and support
- Enable schools to share best practice, discuss provision and agree coordinated approaches
- Process in which to request additional HNF for provision
- For further information and continued updates - [Locality Model for School Inclusion - KELS](#)

Meeting Needs Locally is intended to be met through 3 key structures: The Locality Model

The Professional Resource Group (PRG)

- can supply additional resources that schools may require in supporting their children and young people with SEN.
- Teams such as the Kent Educational Psychology Service (KEPS), Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS), Kent Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Attendance Service (KPAS), Family Hubs, Kent and Medway Communication and Assistive Technology Service (KM CAT) can be contacted and resourced by schools, or groups of schools, as required, without the need for formal diagnoses or lengthy referral applications.



Countywide partnership of local schools

- Best practice in improving quality first teaching, raising standards and narrowing achievement gaps
- Inclusive Leadership to develop and grow the inclusive nature of our mainstream schools
- A system of peer moderation to support the sharing and growth of inclusive practice in a non-judgmental manner
- Access to multi-disciplinary teams which will provide more targeted support for schools
- Reviewing how High Needs Funding (HNF) is distributed so that schools can have flexibility to plan a curriculum and/or therapies to meet ever changing needs and local priorities
- Developing Local Inclusion Plans in line with current government strategy to improve provision at all levels

Area Boards (AB)

- Designed to ensure there is robust system wide governance and accountability for Outcomes for Children and financial sustainability.
- Each board will report into the newly reformed SEND Partnership Board and Schools Funding Forum.
- Membership of the board is being developed, and it is anticipated that boards will begin operations in the academic year 2025/2026.

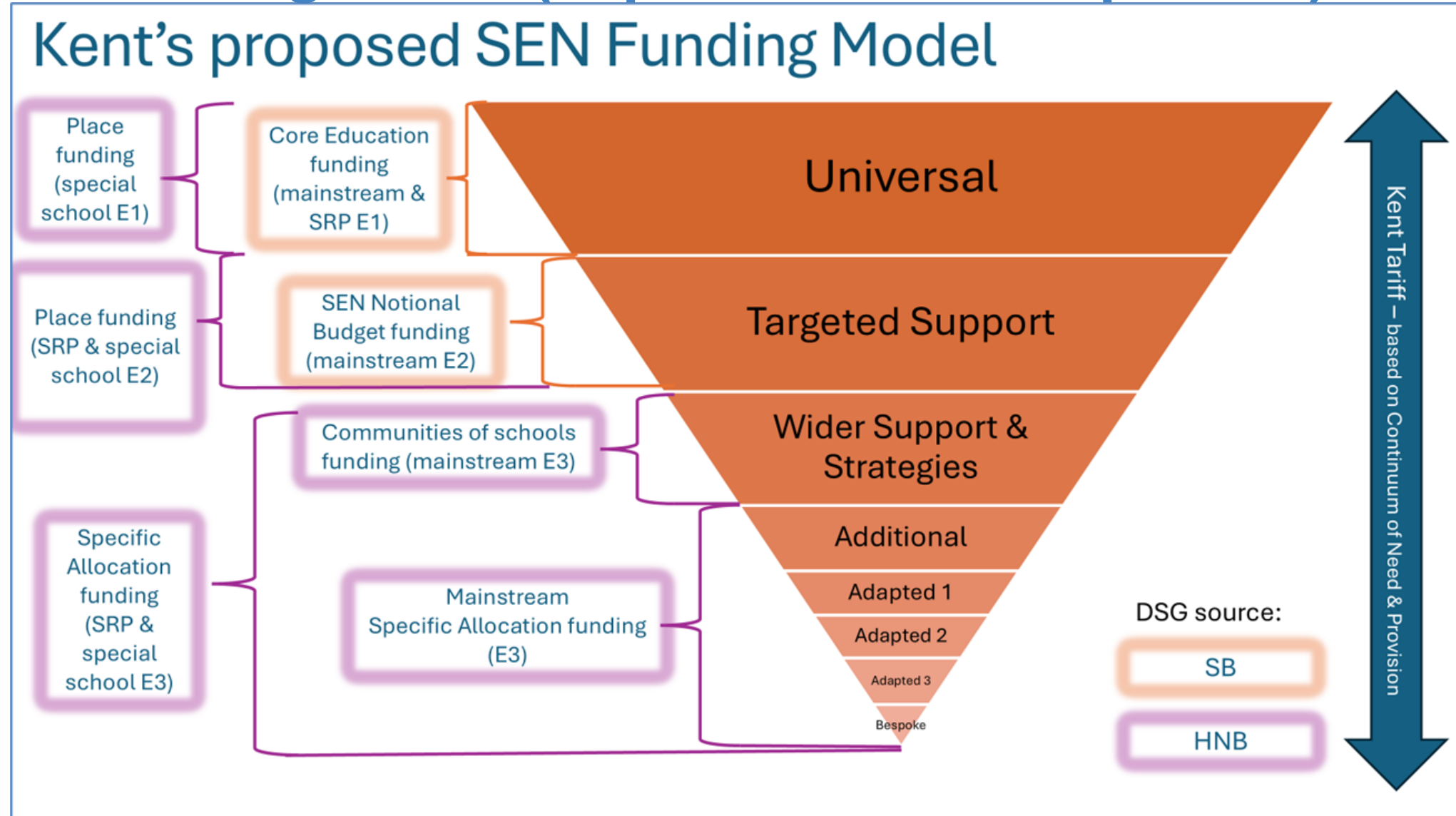
Locality Model - Updates

- **Schools HNF top-up Consultation:** completed, scrutiny call-in period on Key decision expired and decision published. New SEN funding model to be implemented over next 18 months.
- **Community Chairs induction meetings:** support from Croydon LA and SSCYP Senior Consultant. **Communities of Schools (CoS)** induction in April/May 2025
- **CoS Documents created:** to be finalised - Operational guidance, Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct, Declaration of Interests, Dispute Resolution Policy, Request for Resource
- **Continuum of Need & Provision:** continuing co-creation with schools, to be published May 2025
- **Funding Descriptors:** Specific Allocation Funding (Tariffs) being finalised, further decision in Spring 2026
- **Kelsi pages:** Updated, schools all directed to check here for info [Inclusion - KELSI](#)

SUMMARY OF NEW SEN FUNDING MODEL

The SEN Funding Model (implement from Sept 2026)

- Move from 3 different funding approaches for mainstream, SRP and Special based on "primary need type"
- Move to 1 overarching model with children with an EHCP mapped against a tariff using descriptors to determine funding source & rates
- Funding to continue for SEN Support



The SEN Funding Model Phased Implementation

- Change to Mainstream top-up process from 1st April
 - Ending current process for mainstream top-up during 2025-26
 - Interim payment process for mainstream top-up up to August 2026
 - Roll out of Community Budgets from September 2025
- No change to SRP and Special School Funding rates during 2025-26
- Finalisation, piloting and data collection for tariff rates during 2025
- Implementation of full new model from September 2026

SUMMARY OF CHANGES TO MAINSTREAM TOP UP FUNDING

Key Changes

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)2025-26

April 2025 to August 2025

- Current claim system for top-up funding will cease after 31st March
- No further claims will be accepted on the portal from 1st April
- Any applications received by 31st March will be assessed and notified by 31st May.
- All agreed claims will continue to be paid until 31st August 25
 - this includes claims that were due to renewed for the Summer Term (subject to the pupil still being at the school)
- From 1st September, the community of schools' budget will be introduced.

Key Changes

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)2025-26

September 2025 to August 2026

- From 1st September 2025,
 - the Community of Schools' budget will be introduced , and
 - an interim process for automatic allocations to schools for children with more complex support requirements.
- Notional top up funding (contribution towards first £6k) will continue to be paid until 31st Aug 26. The process will be adapted between April 2025 and August 2026 to accommodate changes to the mainstream top-up process.

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)

September 2025 to August 2026

Automatic Allocations to Schools

- Automatic allocations are for pupils with more complex support requirements (with an EHCP).
- From September 2026, eligible pupils for an automatic payment allocation will be determined through the new SEN tariff model and mapping of children to the relevant funding descriptors
- For the academic year 2025-26, an interim process will be in place and eligible pupils will be defined by the current value of their HNF top-up payment (as at 31st December 2024):
 - Existing top-up claims greater than £6,000 for children with EHCP (as at 31st Dec 24) will continue to be paid directly to the school the child is attending
- The money will follow the child – no need to reapply

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)

September 2025 to August 2026

Exceptional Pupil Claims

- Exceptional pupil claims (i.e. those outside of the current banding rates) will continue during 2025-26 academic year
- All existing claims are still subject to review and are not guaranteed (existing process for review to continue)
- For payments for children with an EHCP – the money will follow the child
- For children on SEN Support – community to review

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)

September 2025 to August 2026

Communities of Schools' Budget- 1 of 3

From 1st September, the community of schools' budget will be introduced. The intention is for the budget to support children on SEN Support or children with less complex support requirements (with an EHCP). For this interim year(25-26 academic year) this will be defined as:

- all children on SEN Support (as at 31st Dec 24)
- children with an EHCP where their existing top-up claim as at 31st Dec 24 is less than £6,000. From Sept 26, eligible children will be identified through the SEN tariff model & mapping children to the funding descriptors.

The Community of Schools will also have a responsibility in supporting requests for all new claims for children with EHCPs issued from 1st March 25
Community of Schools meetings will begin from April 2025

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)

September 2025 to August 2026

Communities of Schools' Budget 2 of 3

- To support transition to the new way of applying for high needs top-up funding, for the 25-26 academic year ONLY, the Community of Schools budget will be top sliced for protection payments
- CoS protection payments will ensure schools will continue to receive 75% of their existing eligible HNF payments for children (as at 31st Dec 24) between Sept 25 and August 26.
- This is subject to the child attending their school
- Protection payments will cease if the child leaves the school with the remaining funding returning to the Community of School budget (that the school is based in).
- Further payments will be subject to CoS decisions (see next slide)

Mainstream Top Up Funding (E3)

September 2025 to August 2026

Communities of Schools' Budget 3 of 3

How will the Community of Schools budget work?

- Groups of schools work together to allocate funding to meet support requirements in their area
- Attendees are SENCOs or other senior staff who have decision making authority.
- Schools will put forward "school based" applications to the community to consider (this may be for individual or groups of pupils)
- LA will make payments on recommendations from the Communities
- Full process to be shared with Communities from April (operating guidance, paperwork etc) - LA to produce

How will Community of Schools Budgets be calculated?

- The total community of schools' pot to be distributed is based the current allocation of mainstream top-up funding to schools (as at 31st Dec 24) less a contribution towards STLS (set at £2m for 25-26 academic year) and contribution towards the chair & admin costs (£0.3m).
- For Year 1 (25-26 academic year) – total pot is split between communities based on:
 - 75% Historic Allocations for SEN Support & EHCPs with low level support less than £6k (*as per 31st Dec 24*)
 - 25% A formula based on a combination of proxy indicators: Pupil Numbers (using 25-26 school budgets), IDACI (using school budgets), Looked After Children (between Apr 23 & Mar 24 plus Post LAC Oct 23), Low Prior Attainment (as per 25-26 school budgets). A weighting has also been applied to support our smallest primaries, with a lower weighting to non-selective
- The intention is to phase out the historic allocations by Year 3 but we are committed to review the Formula each year to assess impact. The STLS contribution will also increase in Year 2 (and further in Year 3) to cover the full cost (currently £5m)

Notional SEN Top Up Arrangements

April 2025 to August 2026

- Notional SEN top ups – additional funding to support schools with funding the first £6,000 of additional support
- Committed to continue to pay up to August 2026 – future arrangements will be subject to review (in line with new SEN funding model)
- To support stability in schools and certainty over payments between April 25 & August 26, eligibility and calculation of payment for SEN Notional top up will be based on HNF payment claims as at 31 Dec 2024

INFORMATION TO SUPPORT FUTURE PLANNING

Principles of Future Planning

- Implementing any new system comes with some uncertainty – we have put in place some protections to allow some initial planning & certainty
- School funding arrangements are rarely confirmed past the first year and schools must always make assumptions for future planning
- There has never been any certainty over mainstream top-up funding as it was claim based (also uncertainty over future children)
- Government direction of travel – SEN Support: but unclear what & how much? Kent has committed to continue funding but how this resource will be used is expected to change.
- This is a new process – moving from individual child-based applications to school-based (group) applications - Greater emphasis on whole school approach rather than individual 1:1 - Change in mindset for applying for funding
- Greater emphasis on use of notional SEN

SCHOOL FUNDING TEMPLATE

- On 29th March, an individual school level funding template was circulated to all schools to support with future planning
- The template set out key aspects of the new HNF arrangements from April 2025 to August 2026
- Included details of:
 1. **Estimated automatic payments to schools** (100% of existing allocation) between Sept 25 & Aug 26: Pupils with an EHCP with HNF claim greater than £6,000 (subject to child attending school)
 2. **Estimated school protected payments** (75% of existing allocation) between Sept 25 & Aug 26: All pupils on SEN Support & pupils with EHCP with HNF claims less than £6,000 (subject to attendance)
 3. **SEN Notional Top Up payments** April 2025 to August 2026
 4. **Pupil level detail of existing HNF claims (as at Dec 24)** to support calculations for points 1 & 2

Other Factors to consider

- Expectations of collaboration and peer to peer support and challenge to improve outcomes for children
- What are schools already doing with the resources they have available and how can effective practice be used across a wider range of schools.
- Therefore, over time you should start scenario planning for funding **and spending** to change – Schools need to look at their SEN offer - how flexible is it? What do they spend from their notional SEN budget? What do they need to budget for?
- Level of change will depend on community: for 25-26 Academic Year a series of protections have been given to support planning. Future years – harder to predict as this will differ by community and the mapping of children to the tariff. Protection for existing claims will cease from September 2026.
- Schools can take a variety of approaches in estimating the impact in year 2 & 3: you could decide to continue to use 25-26 academic year as an estimate, or a lower value. It is important to keep your assumptions under regular review.