

Frequently Asked Questions –

High Needs Mainstream Top Up Funding

General and School Level Template Queries:

Are all existing High Needs Funding claims guaranteed?

To support the transition to the new SEN high needs funding model and the introduction of the community of schools meetings, the following existing high needs claims will continue to be paid to mainstream schools up to August 2026:

- All HNF funding claims agreed as at 31st March 2025, will continue to be paid to schools up to August 2025.
- From September 2025, the following payments will continue to be paid to your school until August 2026 (subject to the child still attending your school):
 - Existing High Needs funding claims as at 31st December 2024 for children with an EHCP whose claim was greater than £6,000 (per annum).
 - 75% of existing high needs funding claims as at 31st December 2024 for children with an EHCP whose claim was less than £6,000 per annum.
 - 75% of existing high needs funding claims as at 31st December 2024 for children on SEN Support

What is the purpose of my school level template?

Your school level template issued on 28th March was intended to support schools to understand the changes and the interim process for any guaranteed payments up to August 2026. The information was taken at a point in time to support with planning. Changes in circumstances will affect your final allocations.

Are the payments on my school level template guaranteed?

Payments detailed on the school level template are guaranteed for 2025-26 academic year, dependent on children continuing to attend your school, this includes 75% protection payments and 100% automatic payments.

Guaranteed payments will cease after August 2026. All funding will be administered through the new SEN funding model from September 2026. There will be no protection for existing High Needs Funding claims for EHCP children (greater than £6,000) after September 2026, allocations will be determined through the new SEN funding model, either as a specific allocation (determined by the funding descriptors) or community.

The community budget will be recalculated each academic year.

What happens if I have a child level query on my school level template?

Please notify schoolfunding@kent.gov.uk if you believe a child with an existing claim (as at December 2024) has been miscategorised (i.e. EHCP or SEN Support). For child level queries raised by 17th April, you will receive an acknowledgement/response by 28th April. For any queries received after this date we will aim to respond within 5 working days.

How should I forecast high needs mainstream top up funding in my 3 year plan?

Suggested steps for forecasting High Needs Funding Top Up:

1	April 2025 to August 2025	<p>All claims agreed up to March 2025 will continue to be paid at the current rate (no need to reapply for applications that were due to end in the Summer 25 Term). Please note, this is dependent on the child still attending your school.</p> <p>There is normally a 2-month delay in processing claims therefore you will need to estimate if you have an outstanding claim.</p>
2	September 2025 to August 2026	<p>The school level template provides you with the estimated minimum payments for 25-26 academic year assuming no child leaves your school (see below for further details).</p> <p>For maintained schools: you will need to split these payments into financial years – 7/12ths for September 2025 to March 2026; 5/12ths for April 2026 to August 2026.</p> <p>It is your choice if you wish to include any extra funding from the community pot (or as an automatic payment if you are aware of children that are due to join your schools with an EHCP where they are in receipt of an existing HNF top payment of over £6,000) based on local knowledge or expectation, however, this will not be guaranteed.</p>
3	September 2026 onwards	<p>The new SEN funding system is expected to be fully rolled out by September 2026. Protected payments are in place until August 2026. From September 2026 - funding resources will be determined by the funding descriptors for children with an EHCP. Community funding will continue to be available for children on SEN Support and for children with EHCPs who would benefit from wider support & strategies (as identified by the funding descriptors).</p> <p>When forecasting, budget figures should be based on the best information available at the time and regularly reviewed and updated as more detail becomes available. This is the same approach as schools have historically used, and we would expect schools to continue to use, when setting 3-year budget plans going forward. Your school level HNF template will give an indication of the amount of funding you may expect to receive up to the end of 2025-26 academic year, and you could consider forecasting a similar amount in future years, <u>or</u> reduce it to help plan for changes in practices and lower dependence on extra funding. Schools are encouraged to scenario plan taking into account anticipated changes to their whole school SEN offer.</p> <p>As usual, no funding forecast is guaranteed and schools are encouraged to periodically review their 3 year plans as further information becomes available.</p>

Does the school level template provide 2025-26 academic year or 2025-26 financial year information?

Information provided on the school level template for the 2025-26 academic year except the SEN notional top-up budget which is provided in financial years.

For budgeting purposes, maintained schools will need to split the 25-26 academic year payments into the 2 financial years by taking 7/12ths for September 2025 to March 2026 and 5/12ths April 2026 to August 2026.

An example is below:

Current High Needs Pupil Data						
As at 31st December 2024			ESTIMATED		ESTIMATED	
			Automatic Payments to School		Schools Protected Payments (75% existing allocation)	
	£	HNP	£	HNP	£	HNP
Pupils with an EHCP (greater than £6,000)	£64,726	6				
Pupils with an EHCP (less than £6,000)	£0	0			£0	0
Subtotal number of payments (EHCP)	£64,726	6				
Pupils on SEN Support (greater than £6,000)	£0	0			£0	0
Pupils on SEN Support (less than £6,000)	£5,633	1			£5,633	1
Subtotal number of payments (SEN Support)	£5,633	1				
Total current payments	£70,359	7				
Subtotal estimated payments 2025-26 academic year			£64,726	6	£4,225	1
Total estimated payments for 2025-26 academic year (prior to additional community allocations)					£68,951	

For maintained schools (assuming all children are expected to remain at the school):

Sept 25 – Mar 26: 7/12ths x £68,951 = £40,221

Apr 26 to Aug 26: 5/12ths x £68,951 = £28,730

The template also provides child level data so you are able to match these totals to your local records and exclude children who you are aware will be leaving.

How do I forecast SEN Notional Top Up funding between April 2025 to August 2026? And what do I forecast for September 2026 onwards?

Please note the SEN notional top up figures on your template supersede the previous arrangements. The allocation you received in your April advance will be received each month through to August 2026.

Funding arrangements for September 2026 are still to be confirmed within the new SEN funding model, therefore schools should continue to forecast based on the best information available at the moment and kept under review. This could include assuming funding outlined in your school level template will continue for the 3 year period or you could assume it will reduce to help plan for changes in practices and lower dependence on extra funding.

How do I complete my school budget template for Mainstream High Needs Top Up Funding?

The school budget template for 2025-26 was issued on 28th February 2025. The “Mainstream High Needs” tab continues to allow you to record individual child level information for the period April 2025 to August 2025. For additional funding estimated for the remainder of 2025-26 financial year (September 2025 to March 2026), and then for year 2 and year 3, please record the total on “Other Grants” tab (under the additional grants section as High Needs Top Up Funding using I03 code). This will then feed through into the BPS summary.

If applicable, adjustments to your 2025-26 SEN notional top up should also be recorded on the "Other Grants" tab (under the additional grants section as SEN Notional Top Up Funding using I03 code), along with an estimate for year 2 & 3.

What is happening to Exceptional Pupil Need from April 2026?

The process for applying for HNF Funding Exception Pupil Need will continue. The school level template did NOT include information on these payments. For the very small number of schools receiving these payments will continue to invoice separately for exceptional pupil support, until informed otherwise. We are working to move this onto the same system as other high needs top up payments over the next 18 months.

Will the automatic or protected payments be uplifted for 2025-26?

No uplift will be applied to the automatic and protection payments.

I have forgotten to re-apply for an existing HNF claim which expired prior to 31st December, can I apply retrospectively?

There will be no back dating of claims to the 31st December unless the application was submitted and/or accepted by this date.

Will the council make any retrospective changes?

To ensure funding is reaching the correct school, we encourage schools to notify us of any changes in circumstances such as pupils leaving or joining the school (by emailing schoolfunding@kent.gov.uk including the reference "HNP Update" in the title) . The LA will also use their internal records to check funding is being paid to the correct school. The LA will back date recoveries of funds should we subsequently identify overpayments have been made.

Scenarios

We have received a number of queries regarding a range of scenarios. Please see below:

A child is due to join my school from another Kent school where they were in receipt of High Needs Funding top up as at December 2024. Will I receive either an automatic payment or a protected payment?

For children with an EHCP (where the funding claim was greater than £6,000) the automatic payment will continue to follow the child until August 2026 (payments will cease in the current school on the last day of month the child leaves and, will start in the new school in the following month). There is no requirement for a new school to provide an individual costed plan. From September 2026, funding will be determined through the new SEN model system.

For all children on SEN Support or a child with an EHCP with a current funding less than £6,000, funding will NOT follow the child. The protected payment will cease for the current school on the last day of the month the child leaves. If the school was in receipt of a protected payment (equivalent to 75% of current funding claim) the money will cease (at the end of the month the child leaves) and the remaining funding will be returned to the community pot. The new school will need to consider their whole school offer and if required, an application for additional assistance could be made to the community.

The same principles will apply for the period April to August 2025 (prior to the establishment of the community), where a child at a school in receipt of high needs funding transfers to a new Kent school, if the child has an EHCP and the existing allocation is over £6,000, the funding will follow the child with the funding ending at the current school, and transferring to the new school. For all other existing high needs payments, the payment will be ceased at the current school at the end of the month the child leaves, there is no automatic transfer to the new school. Schools are expected to review their whole school offer and if additional resources are required, an application from September 2025 can be made to the community for consideration (there will be no retrospective applications for support provided during the Summer Term 2025).

What happens to protected payments if a child moves between Kent schools (i.e. a 75% payment for existing HNF claims for children on SEN Support and Children with an EHCP less than £6,000)?

Protection payments will not follow the child. The payment will cease at the existing school (on the last day of the month the child leaves). The new school will need to consider their whole school SEN offer, and if required, will need to contact their community to confirm whether the 75% payment received by the previous school can continue.

What happens to automatic payments if a child moves between Kent schools (i.e. existing HNF claims for children with an EHCP greater than £6,000)?

If you have child transferring to your school with an EHCP (with an existing allocation greater than £6k) then the funding will continue to follow the child. Funding will cease at the current school on the last day of the month the child leaves, and will start at the new school the following month.

We are planning on re-issuing the templates once we have confirmation of both primary and secondary offer day, however due to the constant moving of children we are conscious these templates will never be 100% accurate. They are intended to give you an idea and enable you to make further estimates.

What happens if a child leaves a Kent mainstream school in receipt of a 75% protected payment?

Protection payments will not follow the child. The remaining funding allocation for this child will be returned to the community pot for the school the child attended.

How do we apply for High Needs Funding for year R children arriving in September 2025?

For children with an EHCP, the LA will undertake an initial assessment to confirm either an automatic payment to the school or whether schools should be considering their whole school offer and if required, seek additional resources from their community. This will take place during the Summer Term.

For children on SEN Support, the school should consider their whole school SEN offer and if required, seek additional resources from their community.

Community Chairs will have access to SENIF data to understand the demographics and previous allocations for children who attended an early years provider.

How do we apply for High Needs Funding for new children entering our schools, who previously attended Other Local Authority (OLA) school or SRP/Special School?

For children with an EHCP, the LA will undertake an initial assessment to confirm either a specific payment to the school or whether schools should be considering their whole school offer and if required, seek additional resources from their community from September 2025.

For children on SEN Support, the school should consider their whole school SEN offer and if required, seek additional resources from their community.

How do I access funding for a child with an EHCP from Other Local Authority?

There is no change to the current process. Schools should seek funding from the Local Authority responsible for the EHCP.

What funding should a school expect for a child who is issued with an EHCP during 2025 and how do we access it (up to 31st August 2026)?

The determination of whether a child has an EHCP or not for existing claims as at 31st December 2025 was taken on 1st March 2025.

For new EHCPs issued after 1st March 2025, if the school was already in receipt of HNF top up funding for the child (as SEN Support) either through a protection payment (for existing claims as at December 2024) and/or through an agreed community payment (either as further top-up or new request), it is expected the payments received will continue. Any review will be subject to a further community discussion.

For children with an EHCP, who were not previously in receipt of HNF top up, an initial assessment will be undertaken by the LA as to whether the mainstream school should receive a specific allocation, or whether schools should first consider their whole school SEN offer, and if required, seek further support from their community (funding will only be applicable from September 2025, there will be no retrospective funding claims to the community for the Summer Term 2025).

Currently, schools do not require additional resources or funding for every child with an EHCP, therefore we are not expecting this practice to change. Schools should only seek additional resources where the support required exceeds the mainstream school standards and exceeds at least £6,000 of additional cost.

How do I access funding for a new child (or children) on SEN Support?

Schools are expected to review their whole school offer and if additional resources are required, an application from September 2025 can be made to the community for consideration (there will be no retrospective applications to cover support for the Summer Term 2025).

Schools are encouraged to consider whether offers currently funded from either existing school resources or from existing high needs top up funding can be adapted to accommodate additional children rather than assuming additional funding must be required, this principle should extend to all SEN children regardless of whether they have an ECHP.