

Have your say on our proposal to transition to a banded model for EHCP funding

1. Leicestershire County Council is consulting schools within the County on a proposal to move to a banded model for determining top-up funding for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This will replace the existing system of top-up funding for EHCPs which currently expresses support requirements in terms of funded hours.
2. A two-stage consultation process will be used to ensure schools can fully consider the proposals and help to shape the approach to implementation if agreed. **This consultation is stage 1** which will include a six-week consultation on the proposed needs descriptors and approach to banding which will run from early September to mid-October 2025.
3. Stage 2 will consider the funding to be applied to each band and is proposed to run from late autumn/early Spring.
4. The proposed banded model aims to replace the funded-hours-based approach with a transparent, needs-led system using needs descriptors aligned to the four categories of SEND: Cognition and Learning, Communication and Interaction, Social, Emotional and Mental Health, and Sensory and/or Physical Needs.
5. Adjustment of the existing top-up funding model for EHCPs will enable educational settings to offer more flexible, creative, meaningful and relevant support options which can be tailored to an individual child's needs or to a group of children with similar needs.
6. Details around the proposed model and implementation approach are set out below. Your views will be used to support decision making around the final model used and implementation approach.

Our Proposals

Needs descriptors

7. It is proposed that a standard set of needs descriptors are used to determine top-up funding provided to schools to support the needs of children and young people with EHCPs. Banding using needs descriptors offers a transparent methodology to families, schools and practitioners on support required to help children and young people with an EHCP to meet their educational, health and social care needs and how funding for this support will be allocated. This approach also enables a move away from a system that describes prescribed 'hours' towards a system that provides schools with a flexible pot of funding to support the child to achieve the outcomes identified in their EHCP in the way that best meets their needs.

8. Draft needs descriptors have been developed working with colleagues across Leicester City and Rutland County Councils to build in best practice learning through the Change Programme Partnership. The proposed Leicestershire needs descriptor model has been co-produced with schools to ensure it closely matches need types and appropriate support offers as they are available within the County. Leicestershire's proposed needs descriptors are largely aligned to those developed for Leicester City.
9. Needs descriptors will be reviewed annually to ensure they continue to appropriately describe and categorise needs.
10. The proposed needs descriptors are appended to this paper.

Approach to implementation

Funding

11. Proposed funding will be considered in more detail in Stage 2 of the consultation with schools, however the approach being proposed is included for initial consideration.
12. It is proposed that the move to a banded model will simplify the existing top-up funding models across mainstream, enhanced resource bases, specialist units and special schools into a common banding system which will operate for all education providers. This will improve the consistency and efficiency of funding and offer greater flexibility and economies of scale for schools.
13. The banded model proposes a set amount of top-up funding for each of the proposed new bands (A-G) which would be applicable regardless of the setting the child is educated in.
14. It is intended that the implementation of banded EHCPs will be cost neutral overall. The amount to be paid for each band is proposed initially to be based on the current average cost for support provided to children and young people with equivalent needs and support requirements based on the current funded-hours-based model.
15. On this basis, there may be a small increase or reduction in funding for each existing EHCP as it is aligned to the current average cost. Funding for each band will be reviewed annually.
16. In order to ensure individual schools do not experience significant in-year changes to funding as a result of the introduction of banding, it is proposed that any changes to funding resulting from transitioning individual EHCPs from the existing LSA hours model over to needs-based banding will be made from the start of the following academic year rather than at the point of the annual review of the EHCP. This includes where funding would increase as well as decrease to maintain the overall cost-neutral principle of implementing a banded model.

Phased implementation of changes, initially focusing on Mainstream

17. As Leicestershire has around 8,200 EHCPs as at August 2025 which will all need to be transitioned to a new banded model, it is proposed that implementation will be through a phased approach in order to stagger the additional work for case managers within the SENA service.
18. Phase 1 will focus on EHCPs for children and young people within mainstream educational settings. Phase 2 will focus on children and young people within specialist educational settings including enhanced resource bases, units and special schools.

Phase 1 – Mainstream – From Spring 2026

New EHCPs

19. It is intended that all new requests for EHCNAs from Spring 2026 will use the new needs descriptors to identify the most appropriate banding to provide support. Banded funding will be paid from the point of EHCP issue for children and young people in Mainstream educational settings.

Existing EHCPs for children in mainstream schools

20. It is proposed that existing EHCPs for children and young people in mainstream schools will be transferred to the new banded model at the point of the annual review of their EHCP from Spring 2026 onwards for both Primary and Secondary pupils. Any changes to funding as a result of applying banding will be made from the beginning of the following academic year in order to minimise in-year impacts on school budgets and staffing.

Phase 2 – Specialist – From Autumn 2026

New EHCPs

21. It is intended that all new requests for EHCNAs from early 2026 will use the new needs descriptors to identify the most appropriate banding to provide support. Existing agreed funding arrangements will determine the level of funding paid to specialist settings including enhanced resource bases, units and special schools until banded funding is rolled out to specialist settings through Phase 2, proposed to commence from Autumn 2026. Dual banding against the existing specialist bands may be necessary until the wider rollout of banding to specialist settings in order to maintain existing funding arrangements with special schools.

Existing EHCPs for children in specialist settings

22. Some EHCPs for children in specialist settings are already based on an existing banded model, however this is not directly aligned with the new

proposed bands and needs descriptors. Therefore, all existing specialist EHCPs will need to be updated through annual reviews.

23. It is intended that existing EHCPs for children in specialist settings will be transferred onto a new banded model as part of a second phase of implementation from Autumn 2026. Any changes to funding as a result of applying banding will be made from the beginning of the following academic year.