

# Concise Guide to SEN Funding in Sheffield

---



## History

In recent years, the system for funding pupils with additional needs in Sheffield's mainstream schools has undergone major changes. These changes saw Sheffield move from "devolvement" of funding to "delegation".

Essentially, this means that most of the funding for additional needs is now included in the general pot of money that a school receives from the Local Authority. This gives schools greater discretion with regard to how they use the money, e.g. they no longer have to spend funding for Special Educational Needs (SEN) on named children - or, indeed, on SEN, since the

money is not ring fenced! However, Sheffield is currently looking at putting in place procedures to ensure that money allocated for additional needs pupils is spent for this purpose and represents good value in terms of wider pupil outcomes.

Many authorities in England have chosen to delegate funding for "low severity, high incidence" needs. It is estimated that up to 21% of the school population has such needs, and this group includes a large number of children without SEN, such as pupils from deprived backgrounds.

However, Sheffield went a step further and decided to also delegate most of the funding for

"high severity, low incidence" needs (also known as "exceptional needs", which only applies to around 3% of the school population nationally; this includes most statemented children). This is NOT a common funding strategy.

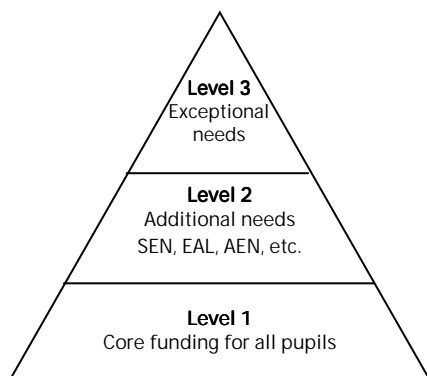
The main aim of this move was to break the link between statements and funding, in order to discourage schools from requesting (costly) statutory assessments just to obtain extra money. We have been informed by the Local Authority that "additional guidance issued to schools has now helped to stabilise requests and to ensure they are more appropriate". However, the number of statements issued in Sheffield continues to be on the increase.

In theory, delegation of SEN funds should enable schools to respond more quickly and more flexibly to pupils' changing needs, thus promoting early intervention. It should also enable support service staff to spend less time on assessments, and more time working directly with the children and thinking through strategies and interventions. This appears to have worked in some schools, but not in others.

It is important to note that, whilst Local Authorities can delegate SEN funds, they cannot delegate their SEN responsibilities - the legal obligation to "arrange" the provision specified in a child's statement always remains with the Local Authority.

## Current arrangements

The current formula used to fund additional needs in Sheffield is complex. It is useful to think about a three-tier approach to funding as shown in the pyramid below:



**At level 1** is the core amount of funding which is made available to schools by the Local Authority to teach **all** pupils.

**At level 2** schools receive extra money according to their relative needs for meeting their pupils' additional needs. Sheffield currently allocates funding to meet additional needs using a number of different headings:

**SEN** (Special Educational Needs)  
**AEN** (Additional Educational Needs - a rather confusing term which actually refers to social deprivation)

**EAL** (English as an Additional Language)

**Personalised Learning** (a new funding stream aimed at catch-up support for pupils falling behind, and stretch for the more able, using small-group and 1:1 teaching)

The amount of additional needs funding a school receives is largely determined on the basis of the following indicators: looked-after pupils, probability of living in a household on income support, entitlement to free school meals, entitlement to child tax credit, pupil mobility, number of KS1 and Reception pupils (these attract funding for early intervention), pupil attainment, and pupil progress. The number of pupils on a school's SEN register is NOT taken into account.

This will seem absurd to many parents, but is in line with national practice as many Local Authorities are moving away from pupil audit methods and towards the use of proxy indicators like free school meals. There appears to be a widespread belief that SEN registers are not a reliable indicator of a school's level of need. The main reasons for this are: a) the lack of consistency between schools when it comes to placing pupils into provision categories like School Action and School Action Plus, and b) the bureaucracy and cost involved in moderating the results of a pupil audit. Local Authorities also worry about the risk of creating "perverse incentives" (e.g. schools might inflate the numbers of pupils on School Action to get extra funding).

However, it is worth noting that, whilst some social deprivation indicators are correlated quite strongly to low-severity needs, the correlation to high-severity needs is weak. These indicators are also rather useless when it comes to predicting the level of a child's needs (and thus the cost of provision required to meet those needs). In practice, this means that schools in more affluent areas, which tend to attract very little funding for social deprivation and

low attainment, may struggle to find the funds needed to support pupils with more severe needs. This is especially true if a school takes on more high-need pupils than it had on roll in 2008, when the new funding arrangements were introduced (a safety net currently guarantees that no school will lose more than £3,000 from its additional needs funding compared to 2007/08).

**At level 3** of the pyramid the Local Authority provides additional resources which are targeted to those pupils with exceptional levels of need. This funding is allocated to special schools, Integrated Resources and to individual pupils with exceptional needs in mainstream schools. Many of these pupils will have a statement of special educational needs.

In order to receive exceptional needs funding for individual pupils, mainstream schools have to apply to a "Special Educational Needs panel". The amounts schools can receive out of the "exceptional needs pot" for mainstream are quite small, as the amount of money held back by the Local Authority is currently very small (around £410,000 in 2009/10). The allocations range from a few hundred pounds to several thousand. Amounts vary depending on the nature of the exceptional factors that apply to each child. This funding is intended as a "top-up" for pupils with the highest levels of need. It is not intended to provide ALL the support for these pupils, as most of the funding to do this has been delegated to schools (i.e. schools are expected to also use funding at levels 1 and 2 for such pupils!).

It is important to note that at levels 1 and 2 the funding is "delegated", which gives schools the freedom to spend the money as they see fit, whereas at level 3 the funding given to mainstream schools is considered "devolved". This means that schools can only spend it on the pupil(s) for whom it is intended.