

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



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| Date of meeting: | 16 July 2025 |
| Title of Report: | SEND Capital Programme |
| Lead Member: | Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) |
| Lead Strategic Director: | David Haley (Director for Childrens Services) |
| Author: | Amanda Davis, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills |
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| Your Reference: | ADa |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Confidentiality: | Part I - Official |

Purpose of Report

To describe the SEND Capital Programme.

Recommendations and Reasons

It is recommended that committee note the progress made in allocating SEND Capital to enhance the educational offer in Plymouth for children and young people with additional needs.

This describes how we have committed capital grants from the Department for Education based on our improved understanding of need in the city.

Alternative options considered and rejected

1. Alternative options considered and rejected

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This aligns with the corporate plan in terms of managing money and resources effectively and efficiently and elements of our approach supports prevention and early intervention.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

There are implications for spend from the High Needs Block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and for our management of the DSG Plan. Using the capital grant effectively will be key to reducing spend on education outside of the city.

Financial Risks

As above and there are additional opportunities to avoid costs to the Home to School transport budget.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Children who are entitled to specialist education may travel outside of the city if we do not have sufficient specialist places within Plymouth.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

| Ref. | Title of Appendix | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i> | | | | | | |
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| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| A | Briefing report title | | | | | | | |

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

| Title of any background paper(s) | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i> | | | | | | |
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Sign off:

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|---|--------------------------|-----|-----|------------|-----|----|-----|------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Fin | OW. 25.2 6.02 3 | Leg | N/A | Mon Off | N/A | HR | N/A | Asset s | N/A | Strat Proc | N/A |
| Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Amanda Davis, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date agreed: 08/07/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Cresswell approved via email | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date approved: 08/07/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |

Introduction

This paper sets out our broad plan for children with special educational needs and disabilities. It details the drivers for our strategy and what has been achieved to date, and describes the need for an increase in maintained specialist provision within Plymouth alongside creative use of existing space across our education estate.

Nationally there is what is reported to be a 'SEND crisis' with significant increase in the needs of children and young people. There have been notable factors impacting this such as the aftermath of the pandemic, the breakdown of parental trust and increased preference for more bespoke placements. The heavily increasing costs for Local Authorities are significant and this has been reflected in the recent ISOS report which showed:

- More children and young people than ever before are being identified as having SEND
- There are more children and young people than ever before whose needs are not being met in mainstream education and thus require specialist provision.
- More money than ever before is being invested in SEND
- Despite rapidly rising expenditure, outcomes of children and young people with SEND and families' day-to-day experiences of the system have not improved rapidly enough.

Locally, the ambitious SEND Strategy of our Local Area Partnership has six priority themes.

The first is Early Identification and Support which is a commitment to identifying and meeting the needs of children earlier, to avoid late and often more costly intervention.

The second area, Inclusion, takes a systems approach to enabling our communities and mainstream settings to ensure children can access, meaningfully engage and thrive, wherever possible.

The third area is SEND Pathway, which seeks to ensure children, young people and families have clear pathways of support when SEND is identified.

The fourth area of SEND Sufficiency and Provision looks at our education offer and ensures there is enough provision to meet the needs of our children. This considers every element of need, including bespoke provision for some children who may have specific needs that cannot be met within Plymouth (for example, a school for the deaf).

The fifth focuses on Transitions. These are points of change in a child or young person's life that often require specific planning and attention, to ensure success and a smooth path into next steps.

The final element of our strategy and plan is Managing Money and Resources, which recognises our duty to seek cost effective solutions and make best use of the public purse, whilst meeting children's needs.

The Local Area Partnership has been on an improvement journey in SEND and is making good progress, as evidenced through our SEND Improvement Board and Self Evaluation which has been independently tested. This means that the strategy described above is being delivered well, through a detailed plan, and that children, young people and families are feeling a positive impact of the work of the partnership.

As a result of establishing the needs of children and finding suitable educational establishments, we have also increased the amount we spend from the High Needs Block element of the Dedicated School's Grant (the DSG), with a projected overspend of £45, 509, 000 by the end of financial year 25/26. The costliest element of spend is on independent special schools that are often outside of Plymouth, resulting in additional spend on Home to School Transport.

We now know and understand our children's needs much better and can shape the system and provision we need, based on more robust evidence.

Our evidence shows us that, alongside earlier intervention and prevention of escalated need, and improved inclusion in mainstream settings, we also need to expand specialist provision in the city.

Our aims and actions taken to date

We want to ensure that inclusion and SEND is supported at all levels within our mainstream and specialist settings in Plymouth, whilst recognising that a very small number of children may need bespoke provision that is not available in the city. Most of our children and young people with SEND can thrive in mainstream settings, close to home.

There are national changes that we hope will help to boost the impact of our strategy. From November 2025 a new inspection framework for schools, with a renewed emphasis on inclusion, will come into effect. A curriculum review also commenced in July, and the most likely implementation date will be September 2026. SEND reforms are also due to be announced in Autumn and indications are that the ISOS Report (July 2024) and the National Audit Office Report (October 2024) will inform these.

To meet children's needs at the earliest point possible, and in line with our strategy, we have developed a graduated approach to inclusion. This has allowed us to enhance the mainstream school offer with support guidance and resource. We have also created a wraparound team of specialist education experts to support mainstream settings, through outreach services: www.plymouthgati.co.uk. It is highly regarded both by schools and parent carers and evidence of impact of the outreach offer was shared at Schools Forum in June 2025.

We have also introduced a targeted funding model to meet needs early and enable settings to support cohorts of children well, helping them to thrive and avoiding the need for later and more costly intervention. Our early evaluation of these approaches is that they are providing good value for money and our schools are finding innovative ways to meet children's needs, without the need for an EHCP.

In addition to this and in recognition of the need for additional approaches and specialist places in the city, we are focused on making best use of the unallocated SEND Capital funding (which as of 30th June 2025 totalled £14,344,529) from the Department for Education. We have established a SEND Delivery Board to ensure sound decision making within a strong governance framework to expand specialist provision and to serve our strategy.

There has been significant work with special school Head Teachers across the last year, and the team has developed an additional 34 spaces within schools for September 2025. This includes additional places at a special school satellite and has allowed expansion of 84 places for children and young people so far.

We have calculated the total number of specialist places needed for a sustainable system. Currently we have 205 children and young people within independent specialist placements with an average cost of £68,000 per annum. Now that we have expanded our special school estate to its limits; we are currently forced towards independent provision for any CYP in need of higher levels of support beyond mainstream.

We currently receive approximately 12 requests per week for specialist placements, and this is now increasing due to the pace at which the officer team are processing documentation and requests. Each request is considered through a panel with robust oversight and decision making. Around 70% of the requests are approved on average. The need of our children and young people is rising and the requests for specialist places has been exacerbated by previous delays for support for children and young people.

There are currently 205 Children and Young People in independent specialist placements, at an average cost of £68,000 per annum. The average cost of mainstream specialist is £31,395. Therefore, the additional 84 places we have already delivered is avoiding costs to the DSG of approximately £3.074m per annum.

We currently receive 69 new requests on average per month for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) with 45 (65%) on average agreed to assess. Of those assessments, 76% are approved to issue leading to 34 new plans in process each month. Of those plans, an average of 12 request specialist provision and so across the next two years we may see up to an additional 360 requests for specialist placements. With an average 70% approval rate, this means 252 specialist placements will be required.

This does not account for annual reviews whereby children and young people may request specialist if there is evidence this is required for the outcomes of a child's EHCP to be met. Therefore, although some children move out of maintained specialist at the end of their schooling, or at point of transition, we maintain that 252 places are required for the city.

There are no current windows of opportunity for funding large projects or whole schools through the Department for Education, but the Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills has proactively requested information regarding any imminent or future opportunities through her regular meetings with the regional team. The recent spending review and forthcoming SEND White Paper may lead to further funding opportunities being released, but this is uncertain. There is no guarantee of future capital funding.

The SEND Delivery Board enables feasibility studies and takes forward business cases on a range of options. The current agreed projects total £5,461,000 for additional specialist provision. There are eleven proposals we are currently working through which could provide a maximum of an additional 218 places or a minimum of 88. Each option would provide additional spaces for the most currently under-resourced types of need in the city. These are communication and interaction, and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) as outlined in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). In addition, feasibility is currently being undertaken to support SEMH and neuro-diversity on a mainstream primary site and we are actively seeking a mainstream secondary to ensure stable transition for the pupils who will attend.

To further strengthen our efforts, we now have a Designated Schools Grant Management Group (since June 2025). This group is undertaking in depth analysis of need and placement mix in the city to ensure we maximise opportunities that are the most impactful and cost effective for children and young people. It will enable workshops and events with relevant stakeholders to harness opportunities to expand the positive impact of capital projects to provide educational places within our city.

Conclusion

As many local authorities, we are experiencing deep challenges in meeting the needs of children with SEND. We continue to champion and lead for inclusion, with schemes that are showing evidence of positive impact. Whilst this positive impact is evident and reform is planned, there are children in our city who require or will require specialist education and there are not yet enough places to meet these needs, therefore we sustain pace with our SEND Capital planning to make best use of the funds available and deliver a city-wide sustainable offer for now and for the future.