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# Early Years SEND inclusion fund

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## Introduction

All children are entitled to an education that enables them to achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, and to become confident young children with a growing ability to communicate their own views and ready to make the transition into compulsory education.

Building on existing good practice in early years settings, and as part of the graduated approach, the SEN Inclusion Fund provides support to early years settings to address the needs of individual children who have emerging and identified special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and to promote and support inclusive practice in settings.

Early Years providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities. These arrangements should include a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN:

They should:

- use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEN gets the support they need
- ensure that children with SEN engage in the activities of the setting alongside children who do not have SEN
- designate a practitioner to be responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision (maintained settings MUST have this in place)
- inform parents when they are making special educational provision for a child

Early years providers should regularly review and evaluate the quality and breadth of the support they offer or can access for children with SEN or disabilities.

## What is the purpose of the Inclusion Fund?

Local authorities are required to have an Early Years SEN Inclusion Fund to support them to work with providers to address the needs of individual children with SEN who are taking up their funded early years entitlements.

Most children with emerging special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) do not require specialist resources or enhanced levels of staffing to access and be included in their local early years setting. With an inclusive approach to implementing the EYFS and in line with their duties under the Equality Act (2010), most early years settings are able to successfully include and address the needs of children with a wide range of SEND.

However, it is recognised that there may be times when a short term, targeted and measured intervention, or additional resource would support a child to make progress and improve outcomes. Where this is beyond the provision expected to be ordinarily available within an early years setting, support may be available through the Inclusion Fund.

The fund is available to ensure the inclusion of children with additional needs in early education / childcare.

“Additional needs” includes a physical, sensory or learning disability, difficulties in areas such as communication, attention or behaviour and learning difficulties resulting in global developmental delay.

The funding is provided for children in Early Years provision who have been assessed as having a significant difficulty in one or more Prime Areas of learning which means they need provision that is significantly different from and additional to what is normally provided to other children of the same age. This will be in excess of what can reasonably be expected to be provided to meet the needs of a

broad range of children (eg. First Concerns sections in EY Graduated Approach document, targeted SLC interventions, approaches set out in Wellbeing Toolkit). The setting will already be supporting these children and monitoring progress through the SEND graduated approach. These children will be in receipt of support from one or more education and/or health professionals beyond the setting specifically for the emerging SEN. This will be in addition to universal services. For children under the age of three, this will require continued involvement of specialist health professionals such as paediatricians.

It is recognised that children develop and progress in different ways and at different rates, and have different needs at different times. Not all children who are not meeting typical developmental milestones will have an emerging or low level special educational need. The Inclusion Fund should usually only be applied for when the setting have identified the child's needs and are clear about approaches and strategies they have already used and that they intend to use to support the child to make progress towards identified outcomes. Settings should be clear about how this provision is above and beyond that which is expected to be ordinarily available within an early years setting and exceeds the expectations for reasonable adjustments. For a child with previously identified needs who may need additional support in the short term when first starting to attend an early years setting, applications may be made to support this transition into a setting. These applications would need to include information from a service such as Portage or from a specialist health professional.

The inclusion fund is not available for building adaptations associated with the child's admission into an early years setting.

## What can the fund be used for?

The Inclusion Fund is intended to support settings with additional resources over and above what would be reasonably expected as part of everyday inclusive practice for the age range of children usually attending the setting, and is significantly different from what is normally provided as part of the quality early years provision and practice for other children of a similar age with a range of strengths and difficulties.

Use of other sources of funding where applicable must be considered prior to application for inclusion fund, including:

- Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)
- Disability Access Fund payments (DAF)
- Disadvantage supplement paid in addition to funding base rate
- Any specific SEND EY funding allocated by the DfE / LA (TBC)

For children under the age of 3 applications will need to include significant evidence of an emerging special educational need which is different to a developmental delay as a result of other factors such as limited opportunities or adult interactions.

It is expected that any applications for funding would complement the undertaking of any training ordinarily available such as:

- training provided by partners in Health (for example specific, individual health care needs such as training in tube feeding or epilepsy management)
- training, workshops or clusters provided by the Early Years Quality and Inclusion Team
- free e-learning such as that available via Nasen or PDNet

An application for inclusion funding can also be made to contribute towards additional costs such as:

- delivering specific support or interventions and/or provision identified to address specific needs and work towards identified outcomes for individual/groups of children with additional needs
- additional SENCo time to attend meetings, work with staff members and other professionals and complete related paperwork where there is a higher than usual proportion of children with special educational needs attending the setting (PVI's only)
- for children with pre-identified needs who are newly accessing their Early Years provision and require time-limited support during the early stages to ensure a smooth transition into the setting
- in exceptional circumstances, to provide temporary support for a child whose placement is at risk of failing, and is likely to need an Education Health and Care Plan (where this cannot be provided by via another route, for example an EY Support Worker)
- resources not ordinarily available which are linked to an individual child's specific area of need such as a sensory need or impairment, or specialist teaching resources. In the case of a setting registered for children aged 2-4, additional resources for children working at a significantly younger level of development. These will need to be itemised on the application.

Any request for resources must be accompanied by information outlining why the resources would not be reasonably expected to be part of the setting's universal provision, and how these are linked to the specific needs of the child/children concerned.

## Value of the Inclusion Fund

The Local Authority has an identified EY Inclusion Fund which is made available through the Early Years Block of the Designated Schools Grant. For the financial year 2026-2027, the fund has been identified as £110,000 for 3&4 year olds. A further £60,000 has been

identified for 2 year olds, and £30,000 for 9m to 2 years.

## Who can apply?

The funding is available for the following group settings if they are in receipt of early entitlement funding:

- Day Nursery
- Pre School
- School Nursery Class
- Childminder

You must have discussed your application with your Early Years Advisory Teacher before submission, and evidence this either by obtaining their signature before submission to the Service Manager, Early Years, or by emailing to them for them to review and send on to the Service Manager.

The funding is not available to providers with an Ofsted grading of Inadequate (pre November 2025) or of Urgent Attention in the areas of Inclusion or Leadership and Management, or Safeguarding Not Met under the current Framework.

### Applications must:

- be an outcome of a review/Team Around the Child meeting for the child
- have support from a member of the Early Years Quality and Inclusion team
- be fully completed including information about what steps have already been taken in line with graduated approach and why the application constitutes provision over and above what would be reasonably expected to be in place in the setting
- where the funding is for resources, include information about what specific outcomes the resources will support, and how the resources are additional to what would ordinarily be in place as part of good quality, inclusive provision
- contain details about what impact the setting expects this funding to have on outcomes for children, and the processes in place to evaluate this

## Factors that will be considered by the panel

Each application will be considered on an individual basis. It is very important that the application is completed fully and accurately, indicating exactly how much is being applied for. All applications are presented to a panel for a decision on their suitability. If an application is incomplete or it is unclear why the request is over and above what would be reasonably expected, further information will be sought and this may delay the decision / payment of funding.

The following factors will be considered:

- Does the application support inclusive practice and enable children to access their early educational entitlement alongside and with their peers?
- where funding is for specific training, is this training already provided free of charge locally, for example by Blackpool Council, local Health Services or other providers?
- Is the provider accessing and using all other possible sources of funding such as EYPP and DAF?
- Where funding is for non-specialised resources, would these be expected to be provided as part of everyday good quality provision?
- Does the application give sufficient explanation as to how the funding would be used and why this would not be considered to be within reasonable expectations as part of ordinarily available provision in an early years setting?
- Is the application form complete, easy to read and does it clearly identify the amount of funding being requested for each applicable element and overall?
- Have all applicable sections been completed and required supporting information provided?
- Has the application been completed with the agreement of an Early Years Advisory Teacher and been sent to them for review prior to submission?
- Is there an RFI in place for any named children on the application?

NB. There is a reasonable expectation that costs will first be funded from the Disability Access Fund (if the family is in receipt of DLA) where appropriate. To request DAF, settings should contact [freentitlement@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:freentitlement@blackpool.gov.uk)

## How do I submit my application?

If you have a printed copy that an advisory teacher signed, you can send by post to the address below, or scan and send by email (password protected if personally identifiable information is included) to [kate.barker@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:kate.barker@blackpool.gov.uk)

Kate Barker Service Manager, Early Years

SEND Service, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Bickerstaffe

PO Box 4

Blackpool

FY1 1NA

If you are completing electronically, you can email to your Advisory Teacher for review who will then send on to the Service Manager.

Please ensure you keep a copy for your own records.

## What happens once I have submitted my application?

All applications must be submitted using the Early Years Inclusion Funding application form and will be considered by a monthly panel, so should be submitted to the Service Manager by the last working day of the month for consideration at the meeting in the following month (for September, applications submitted no later than the end of the first week of the Autumn term will be discussed at September panel). If you are emailing to an Advisory Teacher, you must make sure you allow enough time for them to review the document and forward on before the last working day of the month. Applications other than for specific resources should normally be made on a termly basis.

If funding continues to be required for the same purpose the following term, the Review Form at the bottom of the application should be used – the information from the original application should ideally be included, but there is no need to complete a new application unless there are any significant changes to what is being requested.

Applications are assessed by a panel comprising of members of the Local Authority SEND Service. This will ordinarily include the SEND Head of Service, Finance Officer, EY Service Manager and SEN Manager, and may include other members of the SEND Service. The Panel's decisions are based on the information received in the application form and supporting evidence. Following each panel meeting, the Early Years provider will be informed of the panel's decision in writing, usually via email. Providers are asked to inform parents/carers of the panel's decision where applicable. Outcomes of the panel decision are not able to be provided verbally to ensure information governance policies are adhered to.

Late applications will be presented at the following month's panel meeting. In such cases funding will not be backdated. All panels take place on a Thursday, funding will be payable no earlier than the beginning of the week following the panel decision. Providers will be required to submit an invoice for payment to be made – further information regarding this will be provided on confirmation of the panel outcome.

Where a provider has been awarded Early Years Inclusion Funding for a named child and the child reduces attendance hours the provider will be expected to notify EYQI Team and adjustments will be made accordingly. The provider will also be expected to inform EYQI Team if a child ceases to attend during the period for which funding has been awarded and return the remaining balance of the funding. If a setting is not able to secure the additional support outlined in the inclusion fund request, invoices should not be issued to the LA for the payment of monies, and if money has already been paid and the support / resources are not subsequently provided, the setting should take steps to arrange the repayment of unused funding to the LA.

If Inclusion Funding has been paid in respect of an individual child who subsequently is in receipt of an EHC Plan and the setting receives associated funding which covers staffing / resources previously covered by the inclusion fund payment, any unspent monies will be returnable. Any equipment purchased through the Inclusion Support Fund would be passed on where possible if the child moves to another setting and it is still needed to support their additional needs.

## Panel Dates 2026-27

07/04/26 19/05/26 16/06/26 14/07/26 11/08/26 08/09/26

(applications received in the first week of September will be discussed on 22/9/26)

23/10/26 17/11/26 15/12/26 12/01/27 09/02/27 09/03/27 06/04/27

If you are applying for funding to start at the beginning of a term, particularly if you are renewing a previously agreed application and want to ensure there is no gap in funding, please ensure you have submitted in time for it to go to panel before the start of the new term. For example for funding to start at the beginning of January, you will need to request by the end of November for discussion on 15/12/26. For new applications you can submit at any time, subject to end of month deadlines. If agreed, funding would ordinarily be payable from the start of the week following the panel decision.

## Procedure for appeals

Any appeal must be made in writing to the Head of SEND service within 28 days of notification being sent out. It is important that the specific reasons for the appeal are stated clearly. The purpose of the appeal is to review if all the guidance and procedures were followed and adhered to during the panel process. Additional information relating to the child's needs should NOT be enclosed in an appeal request as this process is to review the decision of the panel, based on the original information provided within the application. If new information, evidence or documentation is now available this should form part of a new application.

## Audit

Inclusion Fund payments to settings may be subject to audit. This may take the form of a discussion with an EY Advisory Teacher/LA EY SENCo as part of a regular SEND support visit regarding how the funding is being used and how and when additional support for specific children is being provided and by whom, observation of the support provided, and discussion about the impact on the child's outcomes of the additional funded resources or support. This may also include questions about staffing numbers / deployment to ensure that the funding is being used for staffing over and above the EYFS minimum ratios.

Where funding has been provided for additional SENCo time, consideration of timeliness of meetings, APDR paperwork etc may be made.

The Inclusion Fund may also be included alongside the general audits of the Early Years Free Entitlement Funding where applicable / appropriate.

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