



2022-0040011SoSPO

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education

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Councillor Alex Dale, Chair of f40
Cabinet Member for Education
Derbyshire County Council
By email: karen@dtw.co.uk

30 January 2023

Dear Cllr Dale,

Thank you so much for your letter of 19 October, about the work of f40. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I appreciate the important work f40 are carrying out and share your commitment to educational provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Autumn Statement announced significant additional investment in core schools' funding: the core schools budget will increase by £2 billion in each of 2023-24 and 2024-25, over and above totals announced at the 2021 Spending Review. Of this £2 billion additional funding, £400 million will be allocated to local authorities' high needs budgets – with the rest being allocated to schools through a new grant and boosting the pupil premium.

As a result of this £400 million increase, high needs funding is increasing by £970 million (10.6%) in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23. This takes the total funding for high needs for 2023-24 to £10.1 billion.

Alongside increases in high needs funding and targeted intervention, the department has published a research report, available at: tinyurl.com/bdhubkes4 and accompanying guidance, available at: tinyurl.com/2n89ab9n. This draws on good practice in local authorities who are managing their high needs budgets sustainably, and the department's ongoing intervention work. We encourage every local authority to consider the guidance in full, regardless of their deficit position, and apply the advice in the most suitable way to their local context.

The high needs national funding formula, introduced after extensive consultation for the 2018-19 allocations, was a significant step forward to make the allocation of funding fairer for children and young people with complex SEND. The generous protections in the formula, mean that local authorities' historic levels of spending and funding are still partially reflected in their allocations, but over time, as funding levels increase, any continuing historical element will reduce.

We are continuing to review the high needs funding formula (NFF), to ensure that our funding system is kept up to date in a way that is fair and is allocating funding where it is needed most. More information on the formula is available at: tinyurl.com/Yc4nsf7s.

At the 2021 Spending Review, the department received £2.6 billion high needs capital funding, part of which will help to deliver 60 new special and alternative provision (AP) free schools. This will be in addition to the 90 special free schools that are currently open, and the 48 special free schools already in the pipeline.

Investing in more new special free schools will ensure the most vulnerable young people are provided with the best education and support, whilst reducing the use of more expensive provision, helping to deliver a local system which meets needs and is financially sustainable.

The department always aims to minimize the amount of time that any free school project spends in development. Where a commercial site is required for the school, the time it takes to identify and secure the land required can be adversely impacted by conditions in the property market. Even where a site is brought forward by the local authority, detailed survey work must be undertaken to confirm that it is suitable by identifying any abnormal elements including ground contamination, flood risks, and the presence of protected species. The design of a special free school is more complex because there are additional requirements to meet the specific needs of the pupil cohort.

The procurement of the contractor must deliver value for money and is more challenging with smaller projects, particularly with current inflationary pressures affecting all construction clients. There are numerous statutory consultees involved in the planning process and local residents must be given the opportunity to comment on the application. The How to Apply Guide, available at: tinyurl.com/muxxrkk4, for the next wave of special free schools includes additional requirements and measures intended to speed up the delivery process.

The SEND and AP Green Paper, published in March this year, set out our plans to improve the experience and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and those who need alternative provision, within a fairer and more cost-effective system.

The SEND and AP Green Paper, the Schools White Paper and wider reforms to health and social care offer a suite of reforms that seek to create a coherent education, health and care system that works in the interests of all children and young people in England and supports them to realise their potential. We will continue to support the system in the immediate term to deliver change, and continue to improve the experience and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and those who need AP.

In March 2022, we announced High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA) amounting to a new investment of over £1.4 billion. This funding is to support local authorities to deliver new places for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, and to improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who require AP.

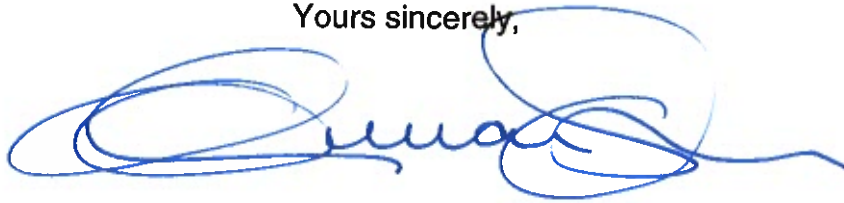
This investment is alongside the increase in high needs revenue funding – this is rising by £1 billion in 2022-23 compared to 2021-22 and follows an increase of more than £1.5 billion over the previous two years. This brings the total high needs budget to £9.1 billion.

This funding forms part of the £2.6 billion we are investing between 2022 and 2025 and represents a significant, transformational investment in new high needs provision. It will support local authorities to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings, and will also be used to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings.

I was grateful to receive your kind request for a meeting. Whilst unfortunately diary pressures preclude such a meeting in the immediate future, I have passed your invitation to meet on to Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools, and his office will be in touch if he is able to meet.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a large, stylized flourish on the right side.

**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education**