

Banding – Why we are changing and how it works

Background

In October 2017, the county council introduced a new way to fund schools to help children and young people with complex special educational needs or a disability (SEND), and that have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Parents and carers were made aware of the changes, but some have said the new system is difficult to understand. The following information explains more about the changes and how it all works.

How do schools get funded for all children with SEND?

All schools get a set SEN Budget as part of the school's overall budget, which is there to fund the cost of provision for those children in the school who have additional needs. If a child has SEND and they need significant extra provision which requires funding on top of what the school is receiving, there is now 'banded' funding available for pupils. These pupils will almost always have an EHCP.

What is banding?

Before the banding system was introduced, an EHCP or SEN Statement usually described additional funding as 'the number of hours' that a child has access to a teaching assistant (TA) each week. With the banding system, instead of TA hours, the funding is based on 'bands' which describe the levels of increasing need of the child and the kind of support required. The school, the local authority and specialist professionals who know the child, look at the banding document and agree with which band the child is best matched. This could happen when the EHCP is first written, or at the annual review.

Why change to a banding system?

With the banding system, schools now have greater flexibility to work with parents and carers to try different approaches to meet the child's needs. The EHCP won't specify TA hours, so the school could include different group activities, specialist support, training, or keep the one-to-one support with a TA. This is called an 'outcomes' approach as the description of support is tailored to suit the individual child's outcomes on the EHCP. This means that the school doesn't need to wait for the annual review but can meet with you at any time in the year and try different strategies/approaches.

My child has TA hours specified in their EHCP. If a reference to TA hours is removed from the plan, will the TA that works with my child be removed too?

Banded funding gives schools greater flexibility to try other ways to support a child or young person, as it provides details of specific interventions rather than just providing a TA. Research has shown that some pupils with TA support alone do not make as much progress as they should, and can be less independent than their peers as they come to rely on adult support. The school will need to consider each individual child and ensure what is provided meets the desired outcomes in the EHCP. That may mean a change from specific TA support to other types of intervention, or it may mean that the support of a one-to-one TA is still necessary.

My child's Statement/EHCP still talks about TA hours. When will the description change?

The changes are happening gradually, usually at the Annual Review meeting, so you may not notice any change for a while. The Annual Review meeting is an opportunity for you to be

part of the discussions about the banding to consider the right description of provision for your child.

How is the banding described in the EHCP?

We have a duty to be specific and detailed about the type of support and help each child will receive, so in the EHCP you will see the description of the type of support your child will get and the 'band'. The school has duty to discuss this with you so you are clear about what your child is getting, both in terms of support and the expected outcomes.

Are there other ways schools can access high needs funding, apart from the banding money?

Schools can apply for funding from something called the Dorset County Council Specialist Advisory service. This is a pot of money specially to support high needs in schools. There is also the Outreach Service - an advisory service for complex needs delivered by the five Dorset Special Schools. To find out more about these services please ask your school SENCo or visit the Dorset Local Offer website.

What if my child lives in Dorset but goes to a school outside Dorset?

The amount of money received by the school is decided by the Local Authority where the school is based. So, for example, if your child goes to a school in Somerset but lives in Dorset, then Somerset County Council will decide how each school is paid the additional high needs funds, and Dorset County Council then pays the same amount, as the Local Authority responsible for the child.

We will continue to monitor the introduction of bands, and will provide updates later in the year.