



# Early Years Step into School Funding

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## Introduction

As part of our shared commitment to Shropshire children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) being healthy, happy and safe and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life as well as having and expecting to have the same opportunities in life as other children and young people we have introduced the Early Years Step into School Fund with the aim of supporting children with complex Special Educational Needs (SEN) move from their childminder, group or school based early years placements into their chosen mainstream primary school. In some cases, it will also be appropriate to support children who have not attended an early years setting but present with complex needs when joining a mainstream primary school.

We aim to develop local, high quality inclusive provision with a strengthened graduated response and emphasise that children with SEND do not need an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to move into a mainstream primary school in their local community.

As Early Years Inclusion Funding (EYIF) ceases at the end of a child's time in their Early Years setting Early Years Step into School funding will support children with complex SEN transition into school. This will provide time for the completion of multi-disciplinary assessment (MDA) within the Child Development Centre (CDC) and allow the receiving primary school to build upon the initial graduated response started by the childminder, group or school-based setting through cycles of Assess-Plan-Do-Review creating a holistic picture of a child's needs.

Dovetailing the CDC MDA outcome with the ECHNA process will:

- provide time to establish if need is developmental or an ongoing SEN need that may require provision through an EHCP.
- provide holistic assessment leading to better information upon which to write an EHCP should one be needed.
- support a 'Tell it once' approach for children and families.

## Eligible children

- Children known to the CDC undergoing MDA on the Communication and Interaction or General Pathway.
- Children who have been in receipt of EYIF at a significant level; equating to 80-100% of their time in their early years setting having been supported through EYIF.
- Children who have received a MDA outcome suggestive that or recommending an ECHNA request be made who are currently in the ECHNA request process but have not yet received confirmation that a plan will be awarded.
- Children will have a combination of needs such as:
  - Non/ pre-verbal communication or significant expressive and/or receptive language needs,
  - Developing attention and focus or displaying high levels of focus on own self-chosen activity/ interests but still experiencing challenges with attending to an adult directed task,
  - Experiencing challenges with social interaction,
  - Sensory needs including those linked to PICA,
  - Self-care skills such as toileting still to develop,
  - Challenges with self-regulation that may lead to behaviours of concern.

*\*This is not an exhaustive list, and children may have other complex needs not listed.*

Children with an EHCP **will not** be eligible to receive Step into School funding. If it has been determined an EHCP is needed Step into School funding will be given ceasing at the 20-week date. EHCP funding will be backdated to the 20-week date once the plan has been finalised.

## **Making a request to present a child for Early Years Step into School Funding**

### **For children already attending an Early Years Setting**

Early Years Settings will need to work together with the child's allocated primary school to complete a request form within the two weeks following place allocation.

It is recommended that a PCP review meeting is held with the child's parent carers and school representatives in attendance. During this meeting the PCP smart targets, long-term outcomes and provision should be reviewed through collective working with parent carers and school and a new PCP written. This should bridge between the early years setting and school. The provision that is anticipated as being needed for the child in their primary school will need to be added to a weekly costed provision map.

Settings and schools should take into account research and guidance (EEF research and guidance contained within The Effective Use of Teaching Assistants (2021) and Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (2021)) that states small group, and one-to-one support can be a powerful tool but must be used carefully. Pupils who receive the most support make less progress than similar pupils who received little or no support. It is also recognised that the use of one-to-one Teaching Assistant support can result in a dependency effect. Settings and schools must be considerate to this and to how they will develop as much independence as possible when planning the support and intervention a child needs. Therefore, the expectation would be that the provision planned blends one-to-one, small group and whole group teaching and support, along with resources and other adaptations.

As usual with EYIF reviews, progress tracking for the last year should be submitted along with any external agency advice received during the last year. The three PCPs from the last year should also be sent with the request.

The early years setting and school should work with parent carers to develop an enhanced transition plan that will support transition into school over the summer term. This must be a plan that meets halfway between provision in the early years setting the child is transitioning from and the reception class they are moving to.

It may include:

- Extra visits to the early years setting by staff who will be working with the child in September to observe and play with the child.
- Extra visits to the child's primary school with support of the staff member working with the child in their early years setting.
- School providing advice on key aspects they need the early years setting to support with such as changing from lying down to standing up for nappy/ pull up changes or using a lunch box at lunchtime. These must be realistic and mindful of

the child's current developmental stage and practice in the child's current early years setting.

- School may provide photographs of the child's new key adults such as their teacher and Teaching Assistant. The early years setting could use these as mini-figures as part of small world play with parent carers using them over the summer for the child to become familiar with who their new key adults will be.
- Photographs or videos of the route into school, classroom and key areas of the school building.
- Suggestive weekly timetable of what the child might be doing each day.
- Other key resources, activities or communication that will enhance the child's transition into primary school.

The transition plan created should accompany the Step into School request when it is submitted to the LA.

The early years setting and/or school are able to request support from an Early Years SEND Support Officer to help with the review and/or transition plan development.

### **For children who have never attended an Early Years Setting or have not had their complex needs identified in their current Early Years Setting**

Schools will have identified children with complex need, who may or may not be under the CDC for MDA. These children should not have been known to the EYIF panel nor be under ECHNA request processes. They should generally have not attended an Early Years setting but may have with their needs not identified.

During the first four or five weeks of autumn term, schools should be getting to know child and if no onward referral through Health Visitor has been made support parent carers with this process. School should contact the EQA (SEND & AP) who leads on early years and request a visit. This may be by the EQA (SEND & AP) or one of the EY SEND Support Officers.

During week five of the autumn term, school should complete Step into School Funding request paperwork which should include:

- An initial assessment of the child through discussion with parent carer, observations and tracking on documents such as [Dingley's SEND Assessment tools](#) and use of Leuven scales and any external agency advice from the last twelve months.
- A PCP or school version of this detailing clearly outcomes and provision.
- A costed provision map.

## **The Step into School Funding Panel**

### **When will the request panel meet?**

Two Step into School panel meetings

- Summer 1, Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2026 with a second date reserved in case an exponential number of requests are received
- Autumn 1, Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2026

The first panel will meet to discuss funding allocation for children already attending an early year setting who are deemed to meet the above criteria along with any children not in setting that schools have become aware of since place allocation.

The second panel in the autumn term will be for any children who have not attending a setting and whose needs have shown to meet the complex needs criteria above. The school will be expected to have worked closely with parent carers to establish need and support with onwards referral for the child through the child's health visitor, if these have not already been made.

## Where will panel take place?

The panel will take place via Microsoft Teams.

## Presenting at the request panel meet

Representatives from both the early years setting and school are asked to attend the panel together and cases will **not** be considered if this is not possible.

You will have a maximum of 15 minutes to both present your application and for discussion with questions from the panel.

Please be prepared to talk about:

- The child's presenting needs
- The progress the child is making
- How the graduated response has been demonstrated
- How outside agency advice has been utilised
- The current provision in place within the early years setting and what this will need to look like when the child moves into their reception class
- How you will work together over the summer term to deliver an enhanced transition plan to support the child make the move to their reception class.

## Involvement of parent / carers

Parent carers **must be** involved in the whole process and consent to their child's needs being presented at the Step into School funding panel. Settings and schools must meet and plan with parent carers so that their views are represented in all decisions.

## Child's Voice

A golden thread through all outcomes and provision planned to support a child's needs must be the child's voice. This must be 'heard' when a request is made to the Step into School panel. When completing a Person-Centred Plan (PCP) for a child, settings and school must ensure they include the child's voice within the assess section. This maybe from conversation and discussion with the child, but also from observing them and developing good knowledge of their likes/ dislikes, interests and needs. Parent carer's conversation will be key to this, particularly for children who are new to your setting. It may take time and additional support to gather the views of the child meaningfully, but this is vital to planning support and intervention for them.

## Funding

The Step into School Funding awarded will be funded from the high needs block.

Decisions about funding are made collectively by the panel. An allocation will be made based on the evidence provided by the setting and school about the child's need and level of support, provision and intervention required. A funding award may not always be made and any funding awarded is not indicative of the banding level should an EHCP be subsequently awarded.

Agreement for funding, where agreed, will be given in an OUTCOME letter from the LA which will be emailed to the setting and uploaded to the SEND portal for the school within 10 working days of the panel's meeting. Funding will usually be awarded for one year from the start of Reception or until a yes to plan decision is received where a child currently has an EHCNA ongoing. Where Step into School funding is agreed there is no requirement for the LA to draw up a plan.

The funding awarded will not impact on the early years setting's EYIF award which will cease at the end of the academic year. School funding will begin from the 1<sup>st</sup> September. Schools will need to use the funding provided to put in place the support outlined in the Person-Centred-Plan (PCP) submitted with the request. Specific support strategies and evidence-based interventions with measurable outcomes need to be fully detailed to target the child's SEN/barriers to learning. Schools are responsible for ensuring progress towards outcomes.

Where funding has been awarded with no EHCNA request submitted, the school is asked to complete two terms of A-D-P-R before submitting a request unless the MDA outcome is received and indicates an assessment is recommended. Towards the end of the Step into School funding period, schools may wish to request funding for a further year through the GSP request process, if they feel this is more appropriate than an EHCNA request at this time.

GSP will not be awarded for children receiving Step into School funding.

## **Quality Assurance of the Use of Step into School Funding**

During the Autumn term, schools in receipt of Step into Schools funding will receive a visit from an EY SEND Support Officer to see how transition has gone; quality assure use of funds and offer support if required. In rare situations a review of funding allocation maybe considered.