



MPCF Funding Consultation responses

Do you agree that DfE should allow local authorities to increase the share of funding mainstream schools receive upfront to support their pupils' special educational needs (SEND)? This would involve local authorities funding a change to the amount schools are expected to fund from their core budget before accessing high needs 'top-up' funding.

The responses indicate a majority view against the proposed change, with **60% of respondents not supporting** an increase in the proportion of SEND funding provided upfront to mainstream schools. However, a substantial minority, **40%**, were supportive of the proposal, suggesting there is recognition among some respondents that additional upfront funding could help schools meet pupils' SEND needs before accessing high-needs top-up funding. These results suggest mixed views, with concerns or reservations outweighing support overall, and may warrant further exploration of the reasons behind both perspectives.

Explain your answer

Responses to this question reflected differing views on whether mainstream schools should receive a greater share of SEND funding upfront.

Among the **40% who supported** the proposal, respondents highlighted the increasing demand on mainstream schools as more children with SEND are being educated in these settings. They felt that SEND needs are often underestimated and that delays in assessments, support applications, and funding processes create significant barriers to timely support. Respondents also noted that schools and teachers are under considerable pressure, with limited capacity to navigate complex top-up funding arrangements, and argued that schools should receive funding more quickly and through the simplest possible route.

Among the **60% who opposed** the proposal, concerns centred on whether additional funding would directly benefit the children who need it most. Some respondents felt that mainstream schools are not always able to meet the needs of children with more complex SEND requirements, pointing to the experiences of children who cannot access suitable support within mainstream settings. Others raised concerns about accountability, noting that SEND notional budgets are not ringfenced and therefore do not guarantee that funding will be used specifically for individual pupils with SEND. There were also concerns that some schools may not consistently direct additional funding towards the children for whom it is intended.

Overall, responses suggest a recognition that SEND funding needs to increase and be made more accessible, but there are differing views on whether providing more funding directly to mainstream schools would be the most effective way to ensure children receive the support they need.

If this policy is introduced, how should local authorities decide the new amount schools are expected to fund from their core budget before accessing 'top-up' funding?

Responses to this question did not identify a clear preferred method for setting a new threshold before schools can access top-up funding. A significant proportion of respondents were either uncertain or did not provide a specific recommendation.



Among those who expressed a view, there was concern that schools should not be responsible for determining funding thresholds themselves. Respondents highlighted the need for a fair and transparent approach that ensures funding decisions are made according to pupils' needs rather than school budget pressures.

Several respondents felt that any funding threshold should be determined on an **individual case basis**, reflecting the varying levels of need among children and young people with SEND. Others suggested that funding should be allocated proportionally, taking into account both the number of pupils with SEND and the level of provision a school can demonstrate it is delivering. This was seen as a way to ensure resources are directed appropriately and reduce the risk of funding being diverted away from SEND support.

Overall, the responses suggest that respondents favour a needs-led approach, with funding decisions based on the complexity and prevalence of SEND needs within schools, alongside clear accountability for how funding is used to support children and young people.

Should there be a maximum amount that local authorities can ask schools to fund from their core budget in 2027-28 before accessing 'top-up' funding? If so, what should it be? (This is set currently at £6,000 per pupil)

Responses were evenly divided on whether there should be a maximum amount that local authorities can require schools to fund from their core budgets before accessing top-up funding.

- **60% of respondents agreed** that there should be a maximum threshold.
- **40% of respondents disagreed** that a maximum amount is needed.

Those who supported having a maximum threshold generally appeared to recognise the importance of limiting the financial burden placed on schools when supporting pupils with SEND. A defined cap could help ensure that schools are able to access additional funding when the cost of meeting a pupil's needs exceeds a reasonable level.

Those who disagreed did not provide further explanation regarding their views. As a result, it is not possible to determine whether their opposition related to the current £6,000 threshold, the principle of setting a cap, or a preference for a different funding approach.

Overall, the responses indicate moderate support for retaining a maximum amount that schools are expected to contribute from their core budgets before top-up funding becomes available. However, none of the respondents suggested a specific monetary value, meaning no clear consensus emerged regarding what the threshold should be set at in 2027-28.

If you think there should be a maximum amount, what should it be (£per pupil)?

Responses to this question did not identify a clear alternative maximum amount that schools should be expected to fund before accessing top-up funding.

Of the respondents who answered:

- **20% suggested retaining the current £6,000 threshold.**
- **20% felt that any maximum amount should be determined on a bespoke basis**, reflecting the individual needs of each child rather than applying a fixed figure.
- **20% commented that schools should not be expected to provide additional support from already limited resources**, indicating concern about the adequacy of current funding arrangements.
- **40% did not provide a specific answer.**



Overall, respondents did not reach a consensus on an alternative monetary threshold. The feedback suggests that while some support retaining the existing £6,000 limit, others believe funding arrangements should be more closely aligned to individual levels of need. There was also concern that increasing expectations on schools without providing additional resources would not address the underlying challenges of SEND funding.

Please explain your answer

When explaining their views on the maximum amount schools should be expected to fund before accessing top-up funding, respondents highlighted concerns about both the diversity of SEND needs and the financial pressures facing schools.

Several respondents emphasised that **a single fixed amount may not be appropriate for all children**, as SEND needs vary considerably between individuals. They felt that funding arrangements should reflect the specific level of support required by each child rather than applying a uniform threshold.

A recurring theme was concern about **insufficient school funding**. Respondents noted that schools are already operating within constrained budgets and may not have the financial capacity to increase their contribution towards SEND provision. There was a view that expecting schools to do more with limited resources would not address the underlying challenges within the SEND system.

Some respondents also stressed that the focus should remain on **meeting children's needs**, suggesting that schools should provide whatever support is necessary rather than being constrained by funding thresholds. This reflects a preference for a needs-led approach to funding and provision. Overall, the feedback suggests that respondents' views were influenced by two key considerations: the recognition that SEND needs differ significantly from child to child, and concern that schools currently lack sufficient resources to absorb additional financial responsibilities without affecting the support available to pupils.

What is important for DfE to consider, when reviewing proposals from local authorities, to make sure proposed local funding distribution takes into account variation in levels of need and the costs of supporting those needs?

Respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that local funding arrangements are based on a comprehensive assessment of need, are sufficiently flexible to reflect individual circumstances, and include clear accountability for how funding is used.

A key theme was the need for funding decisions to take account of the **complexity and severity of individual needs**, rather than relying solely on diagnosis or overall SEND numbers. Respondents suggested that a structured assessment or points-based system could be developed, drawing on factors such as communication needs, physical disabilities, social disadvantage, English as an additional language, and other barriers that may increase the level of support required. There was also recognition that some groups, including girls and children from global majority communities, may have unmet or undiagnosed needs that should not be overlooked.

Several respondents stressed the importance of drawing on a wide range of evidence when assessing need. This could include **medical evidence, counselling records, and parental views**,



ensuring that funding decisions are informed by both professional assessments and the lived experiences of children and families.

There were also concerns about how funding should be managed when a child's circumstances change. Respondents felt that the DfE should consider what happens to funding if a child moves school or is unable to attend due to illness or other factors, to ensure resources continue to be used appropriately.

Another recurring theme was **accountability**. Respondents emphasised that the DfE should ensure funding is being used for its intended purpose and is directly supporting children and young people with SEND, rather than being absorbed into wider school budgets or general staffing costs.

Overall, respondents felt that funding distribution should be **needs-led, evidence-based, proportionate to both the number and severity of SEND needs, and informed by parental input**, while also including robust mechanisms to ensure funding is used effectively to support the children for whom it is intended.

Would you prefer that the funding formula to distribute this funding from the high needs budget directly to school budgets is (i) set in line with nationally consistent factors or (ii) set at the discretion of each participating local authority?

Responses were divided between a preference for a nationally consistent funding formula and allowing local authorities discretion to determine their own approach. Of the respondents who expressed a preference:

- **50% preferred funding distribution to be set at the discretion of local authorities.**
- **50% preferred a nationally consistent funding formula.**

Those who supported **local authority discretion** felt that councils are best placed to understand local circumstances, patterns of need, and the specific challenges faced by schools and families in their area. This approach was seen as offering greater flexibility to respond to local priorities and variations in SEND demand.

Those who supported a **nationally consistent funding formula** favoured a standardised approach that would ensure greater consistency and fairness across different areas. A national model was viewed as a way to reduce variation between local authorities and provide a more uniform basis for funding decisions.

Overall, there was no clear consensus among respondents who provided a view. The responses reflected a balance between the desire for national consistency and fairness on the one hand, and the need for local flexibility to respond to differing levels of need and local circumstances on the other.

Please explain your answer

When explaining their preferences for either a nationally consistent funding formula or local authority discretion, respondents highlighted the importance of balancing fairness, consistency, and flexibility to meet individual needs.

A key theme was that **children with the same diagnosis do not necessarily require the same level or type of support**. Respondents felt that funding arrangements should be flexible enough to reflect individual circumstances rather than relying solely on broad categories of need. This perspective supported the view that local authorities should have some discretion to respond to local and individual variations.

However, there was also strong support for **consistency and fairness across the country**.

Respondents noted that a nationally consistent approach could help prevent different local authorities



from interpreting funding rules in different ways, reducing potential inequalities between areas and ensuring that families have more equitable access to support regardless of where they live.

Some respondents suggested that the most effective solution would be a **hybrid approach**, combining a national funding framework with flexibility for local authorities to provide additional funding where particular circumstances or levels of need require it. This was seen as a way of maintaining consistency while still allowing local responsiveness.

Respondents also highlighted the impact of **local economic circumstances**, noting that levels of deprivation and community need can vary significantly between areas. They felt that funding arrangements should recognise these differences, while also acknowledging that financial pressures and the rising cost of living are affecting many families across all communities. Concerns were raised that schools must be adequately resourced to ensure that children with SEND can access education and receive the support they need.

Overall, the responses suggest support for a funding system that is **fair and consistent at a national level while retaining sufficient flexibility to reflect local circumstances, varying levels of need, and individual pupil requirements**.

What safeguards do you think we should put in place within this policy to ensure that all children in mainstream schools, irrespective of their geographical location, have adequately funded SEND support?

Respondents identified several safeguards that they believe would help ensure children with SEND receive equitable and adequately funded support in mainstream schools, regardless of where they live.

A key theme was the need for **transparency and accountability**. Respondents felt that funding arrangements should be open and clearly communicated, with a robust complaints process and access to independent review mechanisms where disagreements arise. This would help ensure that families can challenge decisions and seek resolution when concerns about support or funding are not addressed.

Several respondents highlighted the importance of **monitoring and oversight**. Suggestions included regular audits to verify that SEND funding allocated for individual pupils is being used for its intended purpose and directly benefits those children, rather than being absorbed into wider school budgets or general provision.

There was also a strong view that **local authorities must receive sufficient funding from the DfE** to meet identified levels of need. Respondents felt that effective safeguards would be difficult to implement if local authorities and schools do not have adequate resources in the first place.

Some respondents emphasised the need for stronger support and monitoring of vulnerable children, particularly those experiencing school-based anxiety or difficulties attending school. They felt that safeguarding services should play a greater role in checking on children's welfare when they are unable to access education as expected.

Finally, respondents advocated for the introduction of a **national minimum standard of SEND provision**. They felt that all children should have access to a baseline level of support, regardless of geographical location, and that expectations for SEND provision should be raised to ensure greater consistency across the country.

Overall, respondents favoured safeguards that combine **adequate funding, transparency, independent oversight, accountability for spending, robust complaints procedures, and a guaranteed minimum level of SEND provision**, helping to reduce geographical variation and ensure that children receive the support they need wherever they live.



Do you have any other comments on this proposal?

When invited to provide any additional comments on the proposal, respondents focused on the importance of consistency, timely funding, accountability, and ensuring that support reaches children as quickly as possible.

A key theme was that **access to SEND funding should not vary according to the financial circumstances of individual local authorities**. Respondents felt that children and young people with SEND should receive equitable support regardless of where they live, with funding arrangements applied consistently across the country.

Several respondents emphasised the need for **funding to be provided promptly when needs arise**, rather than schools having to wait extended periods before receiving additional resources. They argued that delays in funding can result in children not receiving the support they need at the right time, potentially affecting their educational experience and outcomes.

There were also calls for **stronger accountability measures** to ensure that funding is used appropriately. Respondents felt that SEND funding should be monitored and reviewed so that it is spent directly on supporting the children for whom it is intended.

Finally, respondents stressed that the most important consideration is ensuring that schools have access to sufficient resources to support children with SEND effectively. Regardless of the funding mechanism adopted, respondents wanted to see a system that enables funding to reach schools quickly and efficiently so that children can access education and receive the support they need without unnecessary delays.

Overall, the responses suggest that respondents are less concerned with the specific funding route and more focused on achieving a system that is **fair, timely, accountable, and able to deliver effective support consistently for children with SEND across all areas**.