

Dorset Schools' Forum

Date of Meeting:	7th November 2025
Report Title:	SCHOOLS BLOCK TRANSFER 2026-2027 TO SUPPORT SAFETY VALVE
Executive Director:	Paul Dempsey, Executive Director, People – Children
Corporate Director:	Jen Furnell, Corporate Director – Education & Learning
Report Author: Title: Tel: Email:	Jen Furnell Corporate Director – Education & Learning 01305 224394 Jen.furnell@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Presenting Officer:	Jen Furnell, Corporate Director – Education & Learning
Report Status:	Public
Reason for Submission to Schools' Forum:	For APPROVAL Under Forum power/responsibility: 1(d) Authorising the movement of up to 0.5% from the Schools' Block to other funding blocks.
Recommendation(s):	That Schools Forum approves the transfer of 0.5% of the 2026-2027 Schools Block to the High Needs Block.
Reason for Recommendation(s):	To continue the contribution of mainstream schools to the high needs funding system in Dorset for 2026-2027 and to maximise the opportunity of receiving additional funding from the Department for Education (DfE) through the Safety Valve programme.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	Schools' Forum members are reminded of their responsibility to make a declaration of interest in any agenda item in which they have an interest, to the Chair or the Clerk, preferably in advance of the meeting.

1. Executive Summary

Dorset Council works in a strong partnership with schools and stakeholders to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The local area partnership's OFSTED

inspection in March 2024 found that “special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND” and Department for Education (DfE)’s advisers noted in October 2025 “the innovative and robust approaches you have in place to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND”.

In relation to mainstream inclusion, the local authority has worked in partnership with schools to create over 100 places in a network of nine inclusion hubs which provide targeted support for communication and interaction needs and social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs, with four new hubs having opened in September 2025 and proposals for further hubs to be brought forward. In addition, the education and learning team are working with education leaders and SENCOs in collaborative spaces at all levels from the Dorset Education Board to engagement in localities and schools to improve outreach, develop the use of tools (such as VSEND) and share information effectively to support inclusivity in mainstream schools. Pleasingly, Dorset Key stage 2 outcomes for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were higher than national in 2024/25.

The partnership approach extends to the financial resourcing of SEND provision. Specifically in relation to mainstream schools in the Safety Valve period this can be seen through a transfer of 0.5% (c£1.3m) of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block being approved by Schools’ Forum in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026, and investment from the High Needs Block in inclusive provision in mainstream schools increasing from £4.95m in 2022-2023 to £14.54m in 2025-2026, representing an increase per child with an EHCP in mainstream schools from £3,749 in 2022-2023 to £8,388 in 2025-2026.

As detailed in the *Dedicated Schools’ Grant (DSG) Monitoring 2025-2026 (Q2)* report on this agenda, the High Needs Block is in significant deficit and Safety Valve contributions from the DfE remain paused. Schools’ Forum is asked to continue the contribution of mainstream schools to the high needs funding system in Dorset for 2026-2027 and to maximise the opportunity of receiving additional funding from the DfE through the Safety Valve programme.

If approved by Schools’ Forum, the transfer will take place as part of the budget process in January 2026. The amount will be 0.5% of the 2026-2027 Schools Block which is to be confirmed in December 2025. For comparison purposes, 0.5% of the Schools Block was £1,313,318 in 2025-2026 and £1,231,990 in 2024-2025.

If a request for transfer is not approved by Schools’ Forum, a local authority can submit a disapplication request to the DfE to seek Secretary of State approval for decision to be set aside and the transfer to be made. Given the well-documented national and local challenges surrounding funding for SEND provision, the local authority will continue seeking strategic engagement with central government. In the event that the Schools Forum does not approve the proposed transfer, it may be necessary to pursue a disapplication with the Secretary of State. Should this be required, the views of Forum members will be fully reflected in any such request. This will help ensure that the engagement is informed by local perspectives and aimed at driving meaningful system change.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 For mainstream schools 0.5% will be transferred from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block of the DSG.

3. Well-being and Health implications

n/a

4. Climate Implications

n/a

5. Other implications

n/a

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: HIGH
Residual Risk: HIGH

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

n/a

8. Appendices

None

9. Background Papers

None

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.