

## **Consultation Outcome Report:**

**Transfer of funding from the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant to the High Needs Block in the Financial Year 2025/26**

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## 1. Executive Summary

This summary highlights the key outcomes of the consultation on the transfer of funding from schools block to high needs block in 2025/26. The consultation was held between 17 October and 21 November 2024 and sought the views of headteachers, governors and senior leaders from Wiltshire's mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts. 61 responses were received, one of those responses was from a special school and this has not been included in the analysis as special schools are not funded from the schools block.

**The majority of respondents were in support of a transfer of funding from schools block to high needs block.** 66.7% of respondents supported the proposal for a transfer of funds from schools block to high needs block.

**Of those respondents who supported a transfer of funding, the majority were not in support of the proposal to transfer 1% of schools block.** 60.0% of respondents who supported a transfer of funding did not support a transfer of 1%. Comments provided by those respondents indicated majority support for a transfer of 0.5% or a value that would not impact on NFF formula rates.

The majority of comments from respondents who voted No to a transfer of funding referred to the financial impact on their schools. Comments also noted existing cost pressures and wider concerns relating to the SEND system.

The majority of respondents took time to provide additional comments to support their responses. These are all included in this report.

There were a number of comments relating to the format and distribution method for the consultation. These are noted and will inform any future consultations.

## 2. Background

The schools block is the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) that is allocated to fund the National Funding Formula (NFF) for pupils aged 5 to 16, in mainstream schools. The high needs block is the amount of DSG that is allocated to support pupils aged 0 to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Whilst the schools block is ring-fenced in line with the DSG conditions of grant, local authorities can transfer up to and including 0.5% of their schools block funding into another block, with the approval of their Schools Forum. Where a local authority wishes to transfer more than 0.5% of their schools block funding into another block, and/or where agreement has not been reached with Schools Forum, the local authority must seek the agreement of the Secretary of State.

In Wiltshire, Schools Forum has recognised the pressures against the high needs block and a transfer of funding from the schools block has historically been agreed, following consultation with schools, each year, where this has been affordable within the 'cash envelope' for school funding and the NFF has been applied. In 2024/25 a transfer of £2m, or 0.55%, from the schools block to the high needs block was agreed by Schools Forum and confirmed by the Secretary of State. This was in line with the proposals in the council's High Needs Sustainability Plan.

The council's DSG deficit is supported by a High Needs Sustainability Plan and a safety valve agreement is in place with the DfE. Within that plan the council commits to eliminating the in-year deficit on high needs spend by the end of the 2028/29 financial year. The Safety Valve agreement includes a clear condition on the maximum level of deficit allowable in any financial year and the plan is supported by investment from the high needs block, the council and a transfer from the schools block. The high needs block deficit remains the most significant financial risk for the council.

The High Needs Sustainability Plan prioritises investment in early support for schools and families and an increase in specialist provision across special schools and resource bases.

The plan approved by the DfE, the council and by Schools Forum, includes an assumption that a transfer of 1% will be made from the schools block into the high needs block for the next 4 financial years, starting from 2025/26. The transfer is part of the investment required to support the delivery of the plan and support required to reduce the high needs deficit. Whilst the block transfer is built into the agreed plan, it is recognised that it must be the subject of an annual consultation with schools and Schools Forum, and agreement by the Secretary of State. It is also recognised that this is in the context of an increasingly difficult financial environment for schools.

For this reason, the council made the decision to consult with schools on a transfer of 1% of schools block funding into the high needs block for the 2025/26 financial year. The consultation opened on 17 October 2024 and closed on 21 November 2024.

### **3. Consultation Objectives**

The consultation sought the views of schools on a proposal to transfer a total of 1% of schools block funding to the high needs block.

The aim of the consultation was to hear the views of schools on the proposed transfer and to inform the discussions at Schools Forum on 12 December 2024.

### **4. Consultation Process and Communications**

In June 2024 a report was taken to Schools Forum confirming the council's intention to consult on a 1% block transfer, in line with the High Needs Sustainability Plan, and seeking the views of Schools Forum members on what information needed to be included in the consultation to enable schools to make an informed response.

The consultation went live on Right Choice on 17 October 2024. The consultation document included a summary of the expected changes to services proposed in the High Needs Sustainability Plan, and an indicative financial impact for each school. The financial impact was modelled based on 2024/25 figures as no provisional allocations have been received for the 2025/26 financial year.

A briefing was given to the WASSH Conference on 11 October highlighting the key issues within the consultation document and the indicative impact on schools.

An online briefing was held for Primary Head Teachers on 5 November. 9 Head Teachers attended and a recording of the briefing was made available.

A briefing was sent to governors on 11 November.

A brief summary of the consultation was presented at the Head Teacher briefing on 12 November.

All questions submitted by e-mail on the detail of the consultation were responded to.

Feedback has been received from some respondents that the method of distributing the consultation via Right Choice made it difficult to access and respond to. Whilst Right Choice has been used previously for the annual finance consultations, this feedback will inform the method of any further consultations.

### **5. Summary of Consultation Responses**

In total 61 responses were received, broken down as follows:

- 15 Mainstream Secondary Schools
- 42 Mainstream Primary Schools
- 3 Multi Academy Trusts
- 1 Special School

This compares to 16 responses to the block transfer consultation last year.

The Multi Academy Trusts provided a trust wide response and between them covered 28 schools. There was a small level of duplication where 6 of those schools also submitted an individual response, however, adjusting for that, 79 schools in total were represented in the responses to the consultation.

The response from the special school has not been included in the analysis of responses as special schools are not funded from the schools block. It should be noted that responses from special schools have been included in previous years.

The consultation questions are attached at Annex 1 to this report.

Responses to the consultation are summarised as follows:

**Question 1(a) Do you support a transfer of any funding from the schools block to the high needs block?**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	40	66.1%
<b>No</b>	20	33.9%

This is split between different phases as follows:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Primary	28	14	42
Secondary	11	4	15
MAT	1	2	3
	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>60</b>

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Primary	67%	33%	100%
Secondary	73%	27%	100%
MAT	33%	67%	100%

The responses can be analysed by size of school using the DfE criteria for small schools (as defined by the sparsity factor in the NFF). Primary schools with fewer than 75 pupils are considered to be “very small” and primary schools with fewer than 150 pupils are defined as “small”. For secondary schools the pupil numbers for “very small” and “small” are 350 and 600 respectively.

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
V Small	3	0	3
Small	8	4	12
Other	29	16	45
	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>60</b>

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
V Small	100%	0%	100%
Small	67%	33%	100%
Other	64%	36%	100%

**Question 1(b) If you support a transfer, do you support the proposed transfer of 1%?**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	16	40.0%
<b>No</b>	24	60.0%

This is split across different phases as follows:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Primary	12	16	28
Secondary	4	7	11
MAT	0	1	1
	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40</b>

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Primary	43%	57%	100%
Secondary	36%	64%	100%
MAT	0%	100%	100%

The split across very small and small schools compared with other schools is as follows:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
V Small	2	1	3
Small	5	3	8
Other	9	20	29
	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40</b>

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
V Small	67%	33%	100%
Small	63%	38%	100%
Other	31%	69%	100%

**Question 1(c) If you are in support of a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, but not in agreement with a transfer of 1%, what level of transfer could you support?**

There were **26** comments in response to this question.

The majority of responses stated a preference for a transfer of 0.5%.

The second most popular suggestion was for a transfer of 0.55% or a transfer that did not affect NFF rates for schools.

Two schools stated a preference for less than 0.5% and two suggested up to 0.75%

**Question 1(d) Please give your reasons for saying no to a transfer from the schools block to the high needs block.**

There were **16** comments in response to this question which can be grouped under the following headings:

***Direct Financial Impact on Schools***

- Many schools highlighted existing budget pressures and low levels of funding
- Cost of living pressures on school budgets
- A small number of schools highlighted that they were in a deficit position which would be further impacted by a reduction in funding.
- A number of schools highlighted the potential direct impact of the proposed transfer on their ability to employ staff, in particular support staff who would be directly supporting pupils with SEND
- Potential inequity in impact on schools due to the protections in the formula for schools on MFG or MPPFL meaning that some schools would not have their funding adjusted

***Wider SEND System***

- Some respondents commented that they understood the rationale to reduce the deficit but questioned the sustainability of using a transfer from schools block to reduce the high needs deficit.
- Comments highlighted wider concerns with the SEND system as a whole and questioned the difference that the schools block transfer could make versus the impact of the loss of funding at school level.
- Concerns that reducing funding for mainstream schools would reduce capacity for early intervention at school level.

***High Needs Sustainability Plan***

- Concern that the plan has already been reported as off track. One respondent stated a lack of confidence that the plan could be brought back on track.
- Concern that the plan does not fully recognise the challenges facing schools and that the transfer would erode trust between schools and the council.
- At least one response highlighted that in their view support for schools is limited.

## ***Government Funding/Reform***

- A number of comments highlighted the possibility of further government reform or funding in this area.

## **Question 2 – If you do not agree to the transfer of funds or the reduction of top-up funding levels, do you have any further suggestions to enable the delivery of the proposals in the High Needs Sustainability Plan?**

There were **23** comments made in response to this question. These can be grouped under the following themes:

### ***Funding***

- Explore external funding streams
- Some respondents expressed the view that we should await the full detail of the autumn budget announcements before reducing funding for schools.

### ***The High Needs Sustainability Plan***

- Review existing proposals.
- Lack of clarity about the proposals in the plan.
- A number of respondents identified specific areas for review or change within the plan including:
  - Review the investment and savings in Workstream 2 where costs in 2025/26 exceed savings
  - More SEND team members going into schools or a bank of TAs
  - Realistic funding to support children
  - Staff to work alongside schools to support mental health or SEMH
  - Increase the focus on early intervention
  - Maximise the use of local provision rather than external placements
  - Review commissioned services

### ***SEND Processes***

- Rationalise and streamline EHCP process
- SEND professionals to work directly with children
- Streamline processes for accessing support

### ***Financial Processes***

- One respondent suggested that school balances should be taken into account in calculating the transfer adjustment.

## **Question 3 - Do you have any further comments that you would like to make in response to this consultation?**

There were **46** comments made in response to this question and they can be grouped under the following themes:

In general respondents stated that they understood the need to address the high needs deficit.

### ***Consultation Process***

- A few respondents commented on the consultation process including:
  - The consultation felt “hidden” and was difficult to search for on Right Choice
  - Difficult to respond because of the format of the document
  - Delay in sending the document direct to Governors
- A number of respondents commented that they were unclear as to why the indicative figures showed that some schools would not be required to make a contribution.
- One respondent expressed concern that money could be taken from schools without the consent of Schools Forum and that this raised issues of trust.

### ***Financial Impact on Schools***

The majority of responses to this question were in this category and are summarised as follows:

- Financial pressures affecting all schools and concerns that a relatively small percentage reduction in school budgets could compound existing challenges faced by schools in managing their budgets.
- Comments expressed the view that the proposal did not sufficiently recognise the financial pressures being faced by schools.
- Inequity in the distribution of reduction in funding due to the protections in the NFF
- Wider cost pressures faced by schools including recruitment and staff costs, falling rolls and high maintenance costs. Academies not able to set deficit budgets.
- For many schools this would potentially result in staff reductions.

### ***High Needs Sustainability Plan/Local SEND System***

- A number of comments recognised the need to invest to better support pupils with SEND however did not support that investment being funded by reductions from school budgets.
- Concerns that the plan is off track
- Concerns that funding in schools is insufficient to meet the needs of pupils with EHCPs
- Mismatch between needs and provision across the county
- While the High Needs Sustainability Plan aims to reduce deficits through early intervention and increased local provision, schools are not yet seeing these benefits.

### ***National SEND System***

- A number of comments related to the potential impact of government reforms to SEND and wider school structures and uncertainty about how this would impact on schools.
- This is a national issue that really needs a national response with adequate funding being provided from central government



**Annex 1 – Consultation Response Form**

**Transfer of funding from the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant to the High Needs Block in the Financial Year 2025/26**

<b>School</b>	
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**Q1 a) Do you support a transfer of any funding from the School Block to the High Needs Block?**

<b>Yes</b>	
<b>No</b>	

If you have answered “yes” please answer question 1(b)  
If you have answered “no” please answer question 1(c)

**b) If you support a transfer, do you support the proposed transfer of 1%:**

<b>Yes</b>	
<b>No</b>	

**c) If you are in support of a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, but not in agreement with a transfer of 1%, what level of transfer could you support?**

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**d) No transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2025/26.**

**This decision has been made on the understanding that High Needs funding and support, currently provided to schools, may have to be reduced to help towards balancing the High Needs Block budget?**

<b>Confirm NOT to transfer funds</b>	
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**Please give your reasons for saying no to a transfer from schools block to high needs block**

**2) If you do not agree to the transfer of funds or the reduction of top-up funding levels, do you have any further suggestions to enable the delivery of the proposals in the High Needs Sustainability Plan?**

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**3) Do you have any further comments that you would like to make in response to this consultation?**

Return Signed off by:

Name:	
Position:	
Date:	

## **Annex 2 – List of Respondents**

Sarum Academy  
St Joseph's Catholic School  
Matravers School  
The Trafalgar School at Downton  
Bishop Wordsworth's Church of England Grammar School  
Abbeyfield School  
Lavington School  
Devizes School  
The Stonehenge School  
Melksham Oak Community School  
Hardenhuish School  
St John's Marlborough  
Wyvern St Edmund's  
Sheldon School  
Royal Wootton Bassett Academy  
Luckington Community School  
Broad Hinton Church of England Primary School  
Heddington Church of England Primary School  
Oaksey CofE Primary School  
Whiteparish All Saints Church of England Primary School  
Morgan's Vale and Woodfalls Church of England Primary School  
Chilton Foliat Church of England Primary School  
Wootton Bassett Infants' School  
Baydon St Nicholas Church of England Primary School  
Semley Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School  
Hullavington CofE Primary and Nursery School  
Kington St Michael Church of England Primary School  
Crudwell CofE Primary School  
Marden Vale CofE Academy  
St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Porton  
The Holy Trinity Church of England Primary Academy  
Durrington Church of England Controlled Junior School  
Preshute Church of England Primary School  
Woodlands Primary School  
Princecroft Primary School  
St Michael's CofE Aided Primary  
Cherhill CofE School  
Holy Trinity Church of England Academy  
Amesbury Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School  
Bemerton St John Church of England Primary  
Charter Primary School  
Mere School  
Holbrook Primary School  
Wellington Eagles Primary Academy  
Colerne CofE Primary School

Noremarsh Junior School  
Walwayne Court School  
Longleaze Primary School  
Ludgershall Castle Primary School  
Priestley Primary School  
Redland Primary School  
Kings Lodge Primary School  
Kiwi Primary School  
St Mary's Church of England Primary School & Nursery, Purton  
Lyneham Primary School  
Marlborough St Mary's CE Primary School  
Fynamore Primary School  
Magna Learning Partnership  
DSAT  
Pickwick Academy Trust