Report to the Lancashire Schools Forum Meeting to be held on Friday 10 January 2025



Item 6

Schools Budget 2025-2026

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Brief Summary

This report has been prepared following receipt of pupil data and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation information from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The report sets out the budget proposals for 2025/26 across the four funding blocks.

A meeting of the Forum Chairs' Group will take place on 8 January 2025. Recommendations arising from this meeting around finalising the Schools Budget 2025/26 will be presented to the Forum on 10 January 2025.

Following consideration of the final Schools Budget proposals by the Forum and the Lancashire County Council, the Authority is required to submit a final Schools Block budget proforma for 2025/26 to the ESFA by 22 January 2025. This report also provides information on the High Needs, Early Years and Central School Services Blocks for 2025/26, and seeks the formal approval for the budget lines requiring Forum agreement.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report, including the 2025/26 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations and the budget proposals for each of the 4 funding block;
- b) Note the recommendations from the Forum Chairs' Group meeting on 8 January 2025 (to be presented at the Forum meeting on 10 January);
- c) Support the Schools Budget proposals for 2025/26 for the Schools Block, High Needs Block, Early Years and Central School Services Blocks;
- d) Express any views to be brought to the attention of the Cabinet when setting the 2025/26 Schools Budget.

Detail

The Dedicated Schools Grant is a ring-fenced specific grant and it must be used in support of the Schools Budget as defined in the Dedicated Schools Grant Conditions of Grant and the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations. The



Dedicated Schools Grant is allocated to every Local Authority in four funding blocks, each calculated using national funding formulae. The four blocks are:

- Schools Block.
- High Needs Block.
- Early Years Block.
- Central School Services Block.

Each year, the government allocates money to the Dedicated Schools Grant using a formula to reflect pupils' needs. This is called the National Funding Formula. The government published its funding notification in December 2024.

Further information on each of the funding blocks is provided below and details of the final 2025/26 Dedicated Schools Grant allocations, notified in December 2024, and the proposed Schools Budget expenditure are contained in Appendix 'A'.

Schools Block

The Schools Block funds mainstream primary and secondary schools and academies.

Following a previous consultation with schools and academies in the County, and discussions with the Schools Forum, the Cabinet ratified the use of the National Funding Formula as the Lancashire formula methodology from April 2018. This will continue to apply in 2025/26.

Whilst the basic structure of the National Funding Formula remains largely unchanged for 2025/26, the Department for Education have stated that funding through the mainstream schools national funding formula is increasing by 2.23% per pupil on average in 2025 to 2026, compared to 2024 to 2025. This includes a 1.28% increase to ensure that the 2024 teachers and support staff pay awards continue to be fully funded at national level in 2025 to 2026. Key changes to the schools National Funding Formula in 2025 to 2026 are:

Rolling the 2024 to 2025 teachers' pay additional grant, the teachers' pensions employer contribution grant 2024, and the core schools budget grant into the National Funding Formula For teachers' pay additional grant and the teachers' pensions employer contribution grant, this is done by:

- adding amounts representing what schools receive through the grants into their baselines;
- adding the value of the lump sums, basic per pupil rates and free school meals Ever6 parts of the grants, onto the respective factors in the National Funding Formula;
- uplifting the minimum per pupil values by the teachers' pay additional grant and the teachers' pensions employer contribution grant basic per-pupil values, and an additional amount which represents the average amount of funding schools receive from the free school meals Ever6 and lump sum parts of the grants;



• Further increases to National Funding Formula factor values (on top of the amounts we have added for the teachers' pay additional grant, the teachers' pensions employer contribution grant and annualised Central Schools Services Block, as can be afforded following the settlement of the core schools budget for 2025 to 2026.

Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)

Local authorities will continue to set a Minimum Funding Guarantee in local formulae, which in 2025/26 must be between -0.5% and 0.0%.

The level to be applied in Lancashire is the subject of a consultation with schools and the Schools Forum. The Forum letter to the Cabinet on finalising the Schools Budget for 2025/26, as set out at Appendix B, will include a final recommendation on the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee to be applied from April 2025.

Schools Block Transfer

The Regulatory framework continues to allow local authorities to be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block allocation to other blocks of the Dedicated Schools Grant, with schools forum approval.

In recent years, when headroom has been available this has been transferred to support demand and cost led pressures in other funding blocks, with most significant pressures within the High Needs Block in 2025/26.

For the previous two financial years there has been a deficit budget position on schools block in 2023/24 and 2024/25 of £1.879m and £1.154m respectively, with Dedicated Schools Grant reserves used to mitigate pressures in the funding block.

Due to pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant, a methodology was consulted on with schools and agreed with schools forum to balance schools block in 2025/26 without the use of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves. If any headroom was available after this methodology, schools forum approval was given to transfer to the High Needs Block.

Following the modelling and application of the methodology agreed, there is a balanced budget position within schools block in 2025/26. However, there will be no headroom available to support pressures in the other funding blocks.

Once approved, the Schools Block allocations for 2025/26 must be submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for compliance checking against the Department for Education regulations and guidance. A proforma is provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to facilitate submissions and the deadline for the 2025/26 return is 22 January 2025.

High Needs Block

The High Needs Block funds:

- Special Schools budgets.
- Alternative Provision budgets (mainly Pupil Referral Units).
- Special Education Resource Facility and Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools.
- Individually Assigned Resources for High Needs pupils across all educational establishments.
- Certain Special Education Needs Central Schools Services.

The allocation to Lancashire is calculated using a national High Needs Block formula, but the Local Authority's local funding formulae still apply to distribute High Needs funding to Lancashire providers.

Department for Education announcements confirm that the basic structure of the High Needs National Funding Formula for 2025/26 is not changing. The High Needs National Funding Formula floor and gains cap have been set as follows for 2025/26:

- The funding floor is set at 7% so each local authority will see an increase of at least 7% per head of their 2 to 18 population (as estimated by the Office for National Statistics.
- The gains limit is set at 10%, allowing local authorities to see gains up to this percentage increase under the formula, again calculated on a per head basis of their 2 to 18 population.

The total high needs budget for 2025 to 2026 will be £11.9 billion, of which £11.3 billion is initially distributed through the National Funding Formula to provide indicative allocations for local authorities, £145 million is set aside for later National Funding Formula adjustments and allocations outside the formula, and £480 million is for the core schools budget grant.

Early Years Block

Early Years Block funding is utilised for:

- Funding for the universal 15 hours entitlement for three- and four-year olds.
- Funding for the additional 15 hours entitlement for three- and four-year-old children of eligible working parents.
- Funding for the 15 hours entitlement for disadvantaged two-year olds.
- Funding for the 15 hours entitlement for working parents of two-year olds.
- Funding for the 15 hours entitlement for working parents of under two-year olds.
- Funding for the Early Years Pupil Premium.
- Funding for the Disability Access Fund.
- Supplementary funding for Maintained Nursery Schools.

The government introduced an Early Years National Funding Formula from April 2017. This arrangement introduced a formulaic mechanism for distributing early years funding from national Government to each local authority and set a framework that



must be used to distribute funding to all types of early education provider, including nursery schools; nursery classes in maintained primary schools; Private, Voluntary, and independent providers and Childminders. The Early Years National Funding Formula introduced a requirement to have a Universal Base Rate for all providers and set out the type and level of supplements that are available.

As detailed in the Chancellor's Autumn 2024 Budget announcements, the early years funded entitlements are being expanded to enable working parents of younger children to access funded childcare. From September 2025, eligible working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 years old can access 30 hours free childcare per week.

Central School Services Block

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This Block is to fund central functions that local authorities carry out on behalf of pupils in state-funded maintained schools and academies in England. The Central School Services Block was first introduced in 2018/19, and effectively replaced the previous Education Services Grant allocations, but the levels of funding have reduced over recent years.

The Central School Services Block allocation for local authorities is split into funding for historic commitments and funding for ongoing responsibilities.

The ongoing responsibilities element of funding is calculated by the Department for Education on a formulaic methodology based on pupil numbers and deprivation, plus an area cost adjustment. The historic commitments element of the Block funds certain ongoing obligations funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant.

The Department for Education have stated that they will continue to unwind the historic commitments funding to zero in future years.

Final Dedicated Schools Grant Allocation 2025/26

Details of Lancashire's final Dedicated Schools Grant allocations for 2025/26 for each funding block, and the expenditure proposals for each block are provided at Appendix 'A'. A summary of the key forum decision is provided at Appendix 'B'.

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Final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations and pupil data for 2025/26 were published by the Department for Education on 18 December 2024.

Lancashire's Gross 2025/26 Dedicated Schools Grant allocation is £1,483.964m.

The equivalent Gross Dedicated Schools Grant income figure for 2024/25 was £1,334.952m. The 2025/26 Dedicated Schools Grant allocation has increased by £149.012m.

This increase in funding is due to:

- Lancashire's share of the increased high needs block funding.
- Increased funding within schools block to reflect the pay award grants rolled into the funding formula.
- Increased funding within early years received due to the extended entitlements of 2-year-olds and under two-year-olds within the early years block.

The sections below provide further details of the Lancashire Dedicated Schools Grant allocations and presents the estimated Schools Budget for 2025/26.

DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT ALLOCATIONS 2025/26

The Department for Education sub-divide the Dedicated Schools Grant allocations into 4 funding blocks: Schools Block, High Needs Block, Early Years Block, and the Central Schools Services Block. These Blocks are all calculated on a formulaic basis.

Information on the allocations for each of the funding blocks is provided below:

Schools Block allocation (£1,051.778m)

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The Schools Block allocations for 2025/26 are derived based on illustrative individual Schools National Funding Formula allocations calculated by the Government. These calculations translate into primary and secondary units of funding for 2025/26. These units of funding are multiplied by the number of primary and secondary pupils from the October 2024 census. A Local Authority level allocation for premises factors and growth funding are added to provide a final Schools Block allocation.

This provides a total Lancashire Schools Block allocation for 2025/26 of £1,051.778m

The 2025/26 Schools Block allocation is over £73m higher than the equivalent figure in 2024/25. The increased allocation is in part due to Lancashire's share of the additional funding made available nationally by the Government to fund the teaching and support staff pay awards.

In 2024 to 2025 financial year, mainstream schools were allocated additional funding through the Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG). In 2025/26, this has been incorporated within the National Funding Formula.

It should also be noted that the Department for Education has introduced changes to the payment process of school business rates. School business rates will be paid by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to billing authorities directly on behalf of all state funded schools. For 2025/26, a rates allocation will continue to be included in the Department for Education's schools National Funding Formula but a deduction of \pounds 1.552m will be made from the Lancashire Schools Block cash allocation in 2025/26 to account for academy conversions.

High Needs Block allocation (£219.910m)

The 2025/26 High Needs Block allocation is calculated under the Government's national High Needs funding formula. Key features of the formula include:

- A high needs funding floor and gains calculation.
- Basic entitlement factor (with area cost adjusted) for the number of pupils in special schools and academies.
- Import/export adjustment.
- Additional Funding for Special Free Schools.
- Hospital education, Alternative Provision teachers' pay/pension and supplementary funding factor.

The formula provides a 2025/26 High Needs Block allocation for Lancashire of \pounds 219.910m.

This figure is over £17.764m higher than the equivalent 2024/25 allocation, due to increased funding for the High Needs Block made available by the Government. Of the £17.764m increase in funding, a large proportion is to fund the core schools budget grant.

It should be noted that the High Needs Block allocation is a provisional allocation, and the gross total includes allocations attributable to funded places that will be deducted and made directly by the Education & Skills Funding Agency. These are estimated by Education & Skills Funding Agency to total circa £10.424m.

Early Years Block allocation (£201.554m)

Allocations for the Early Years Block include:

- funding for the universal 15 hours entitlement for three- and four-year-olds (34YO).
- funding for the additional 15 hours entitlement for three- and four-year-old children of eligible working parents.
- funding for the 15 hours entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds (2YO).
- funding for the 15 hours entitlement for working families for two-year-olds.
- funding for the additional 15 hours entitlement for working families for two-yearolds (September 2025)
- funding for 15 hours entitlement for under two-year-olds (Under 2YO)
- funding for the additional 15 hours entitlement for under two-year-olds (September 2025)
- funding for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) expanded to 2-year-olds and under.
- funding for the Disability Access Fund (DAF) expanded to 2-year-olds and under.



• supplementary funding for Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS).

Lancashire received an increase in allocation in 2025/26 as follows:

- 3 and 4-year-old entitlements £0.24 per hour uplift.
- 3 and 4-year-old supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools £0.65 per hour uplift
- 2-year-old entitlement £0.29 per hour uplift (extended to 30hrs for working families September 2025).
- Under 2-year-old entitlement £0.36 per hour uplift (extended to 30hrs for working families September 2025)
- Early Years Pupil Premium £182 annual per year uplift
- Disability Access Fund £28 annual per year uplift

Entitlement	2024-25 Funding Rate Received	2025-26 Funding Rate Received	Difference
34YO	£5.47	£5.71	£0.24
34YO MNS	£5.18	£5.83	£0.65
2YO	£7.54	£7.83	£0.29
Under 2YO	£10.27	£10.63	£0.36
EYPP	£388.00	£570.00	£182.00
DAF	£910.00	£938.00	£28.00

These factors provide a total Early Years Block allocation for Lancashire for 2025/26 of £201.554m.

Lancashire's Early Years funding is significantly higher than the 2024/25 allocation, due to the extended entitlements.

It should be noted that the 2025/26 early years block allocations are initial, and based on Schools, Early Years and Alternative Provision censuses data from January 2024. These allocations will be updated based on January 2025 census data.

Central Schools Services Block (£8.633m)

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The Central Schools Services Block is to fund central functions that Local Authority's carry out on behalf of pupils in state-funded maintained schools and academies in England.

The Central Schools Services Block is split into funding for historic commitments and funding for ongoing responsibilities.

The total Lancashire's Central Schools Services Block allocation for 2025/26 is £8.633m.

In Year Adjustments

The Dedicated Schools Grant allocation notified is prior to in-year adjustments for:

- Academies recoupment from the schools block;
- Deductions for high needs places in academies and non-maintained special schools;
- Post 16 places;
- Deduction for national copyright licences;
- Deduction for schools business rates
- Updates to the funding for three- and four-year olds;
- Updates to the funding two-year olds;
- Updates to the funding for under 2-year olds;
- Updates to the early years pupil premium;
- Updates to early years Disability Access Fund.

Forecast total Dedicated Schools Grant income for 2025/26

The Lancashire Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for 2025/26 across the 4 funding blocks are shown below:

Forecast DSG Income	£m's
Schools Block	1,051.778
High Needs Block	219.910
Early Years Block	201.544
Central Schools Services Block	8.633
Gross Total forecast DSG Income	1,481.865
Total deduction for national school's non-domestic rates (academies)	-1.552
Total deductions for direct high needs payments made by the Education & Skills Funding Agency	-10.424
Net Total forecast DSG Income	1,469.889

SCHOOLS BUDGET 2025/26

The latest Individual School Budgets across all phases has been constructed using the final datasets made available from the Department for Education and our latest local Early Years and High Needs data.

This Schools Budget estimate has been calculated following discussions with the Schools Forum and where necessary, consultation with Lancashire schools.

Budget Summary

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The table below summarises the budgets to be allocated from each of the Dedicated Schools Grant funding blocks;

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Forecast DSG Expenditure	£m's
Schools Block	1,051.778
High Needs Block	219.910
Early Years Block	201.544
Central Schools Services Block	8.633
Total deduction for national schools non-domestic rates (academies)	-1.552
Total deductions for direct high needs payments made by the Education & Skills Funding Agency	-10.424
Total forecast DSG Expenditure	1,469.889

Further details about each block are provided below.

Schools Block (£1,051.778m)

Following a consultation with schools and the Schools Forum as part of the 2018/19 Schools Budget setting cycle, it was agreed to use the Government's National Funding Formula methodology as the local Lancashire funding model.

Lancashire will continue to mirror the National Funding Formula methodology in 2025/26 when calculating allocations to Lancashire schools and will incorporate the changes to the formula introduced nationally that are set out in the main report.

As supported by responses from schools in a consultation held in the autumn term 2024, the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) has been included in the formula at +0.0% and there is no cap on funding gains.

A 2025/26 growth fund requirement, which is used to support Local Authority initiated school expansions, of c£1.5m has been included for 2025/26. The balance of funding from the Growth Fund allocation received by Lancashire, equating to circa £0.943m, has been used as a contribution to Schools Block.

For the previous two financial years there has been a deficit budget position on schools block in 2023/24 and 2024/25 of £1.879m and £1.154m respectively, with DSG reserves used to mitigate pressures in the funding block.

Due to pressures on DSG a methodology was consulted on with schools and agreed with schools forum to balance schools block in 2025/26 without the use of DSG reserves. If any headroom was available after this methodology, schools forum approval was given to transfer to the High Needs Block.

Following the modelling and application of the methodology agreed there is a balanced budget position within schools block in 2025/26, however there will be no headroom available to support pressures in the other funding blocks.

The Schools Block expenditure for 2025/26 is therefore estimated in the table below:

Forecast Schools Block Expenditure	£m's
Primary	545.224
Secondary	494.011



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All-Through	11.041
Budgeted Growth	1.502
Total	1,051.778
DSG Schools Block Income	-1,051.778

As mentioned earlier in the appendix, the Department for Education has introduced changes to the payment process of schools business rates. From 2022/23, schools business rates will be paid by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to billing authorities directly on behalf of all state funded schools. For 2025/26, a rates allocation will continue to be included in the Department for Education's schools National Funding Formula but a deduction of £1.552m will be made from the Lancashire Schools Block cash allocation in 2025/26 to account for academy conversions.

High Needs Block (£219.910m)

The High Needs Block expenditure for 2025/26 is estimated in the table below:

	Place funding £m	Top-up funding £m
Delegated to Schools	42.098	105.987
Delegated to Early Years		0.500
FE Colleges		5.801
High Needs Block costs on a commissioned basis		54.464
Total deductions based on 25/26 for direct high needs payments made by the Education and		
Skills Funding Agency		10.424
Additional 24/25 High Needs places to be paid direct by Education and Skills Funding Agency		0.636
Total	42.098	177.812

Total Expenditure £ m	219.910
Total Income £ m	219.910

The forecast expenditure includes an estimate of the considerable cost and demand led pressures facing the block in 2025/26.

Proposals also build in a 0.5% increase to the level for the school specific factor rates in special schools and pupil referral units, however the weighted pupil number/banding top up values supporting all high needs pupils are proposed to remain at the 2024/25 value due to the pressures within the high needs block.

The circa £10.424m of deductions in the Dedicated Schools Grant notifications have been budgeted within HNB, as this relates to direct high needs payments made by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

An extra £0.636m of deductions for 2025/26 has also been included, for additional high needs places that have now been commissioned by the county council at establishments that are directly paid by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The Dedicated Schools Grant reserve as at 31 March 2024 was £18.40 million, however this is forecast to be fully utilised by 31 March 2025, and expenditure may exceed the current reserve level of DSG. This is due to increased strain on the High Needs Block budget with demand led pressures remaining at levels well above the income received. There is currently a statutory override in place which allows local authorities to carry DSG deficit and not effect local authority general reserves, however this is currently due to end by March 2026.

Whilst a balanced budget has been forecasted in 2025/26, if the demand pressures continue to increase within the High Needs Block, a resulting overspend will occur. The pressures on High Needs Block are affecting local government as a whole and is creating significant pressure on the overall Dedicated Schools Grant. It has been recently recognised by the DfE of the need to reform England's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)/High Needs Block provision to improve outcomes and return the system to financial sustainability. The government are committing to working with parents, teachers, and local authorities to take this work forward.

Early Years Block (£201.554m)

Lancashire has received an increased allocation in 2025/26 mainly due to the extended entitlements within the two-year-old and under 2-year-old entitlement, as well as a significant uplift in early years pupil premium rate. The rates are as follows:

- 3 and 4-year-old entitlements £0.29 per hour uplift;
- 3- and 4-year-old supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools £0.65 per hour uplift;
- 2-year-old entitlement £0.36 per hour uplift
- Under 2-year-old entitlement £0.70 per hour
- Early Years Pupil Premium £182 annual per year uplift
- Disability Access Fund £28 annual per year uplift

3 and 4-year-old entitlements

Due the increased funding Lancashire has received, the Lancashire base rate for 3 and 4-year-old entitlements is ± 5.70 per hour in 2025/26, an increase of ± 0.29 per hour from 2024/25.

The 2025/26 funding rate is therefore as follows:

2024/25 Base rate	£5.41 per hour
2025/26 DfE uplift	£0.24 per hour



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2025/26 Additional funding from within the Early Years Block	£0.05 per hour
2025/26 Base rate	£5.70 per hour

3- and 4-year-old Supplementary funding hourly rate for maintained nursery schools Lancashire will receive a £0.65 increase in the supplementary funding hourly rate for maintained nursery schools in 2025/26, which will be passed to the maintained nursery schools, providing a revised hourly supplement rate of £5.83 per hour.

2-year-old entitlement

Lancashire has adopted one single funding rate for 2-year-old entitlements. Due the increased funding Lancashire has received, the Lancashire base rate 2-year-old entitlements is £7.46 per hour in 2025/26, an increase of £0.36 per hour from 2024/25. Please note the extended entitlements to 30 hours for working parents from September 2025

The 2025/26 funding rate is therefore as follows:

2024/25 Base rate	£7.10 per hour
2025/26 DfE uplift	£0.29 per hour
2025/26 Additional funding from within the Early Years Block	£0.07 per hour
2025/26 Base rate	£7.46 per hour

Under 2-year-old entitlement

Due the increased funding Lancashire has received, the Lancashire base rate for Under 2-year-old entitlement is £10.21 per hour in 2025/26, an increase of £0.70 per hour from 2024/25. Please note the extended entitlements to 30 hours for working parents from September 2025

The 2025/26 funding rate is therefore as follows:

2024/25 Base rate	£9.51 per hour
2025/26 DfE uplift	£0.36 per hour
2025/26 Additional funding from within the Early Years Block	£0.34 per hour
2025/26 Base rate	£10.21 per hour

Early Years Pupil Premium

Lancashire will increase our early years pupil premium rate, up to £570 per eligible child per year, for 2025/26, in line with national announcements. This is an increase of £182 from 2024/25.

Disability Access Fund

Lancashire will increase the disability access fund, up to £938 per eligible child per year for 2025/26, in line with national announcements. This is an increase of £28 from 2024/25.



Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund

Local authorities are now required to have a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund for all eligible 3 and 4-year-olds, 2-year-olds and under 2s who are taking up the free entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken. For 2025/26 the Lancashire fund will total £1.65m due to the increased demands and extended entitlements.

The Early Years Block expenditure for 2025/26 is therefore estimated in the table below:

Forecast EYB Expenditure	£m's
Early Years Block under 2-year-olds	57.342
Early Years Block 2-year-olds	51.329
Early Years Block 3 and 4-year-olds	81.747
Early Years Pupil Premium expenditure	3.161
Early Years Disability Access Fund expenditure	0.971
Nursery School Maintained Nursery School	5.354
Special Educational Needs Inclusion	1.650
Total	201.554

Total Expenditure £ m	201.554
Total Income £ m	201.554

Central Schools Services Block (£8.633m)

The estimated Central Schools Services Block expenditure in 2025/26 is £8.633m.

Careful consideration will be needed around the Central Schools Services Block in future years, as Department for Education implement further reductions in the Historic Commitments budget.

Total Expenditure £ m	8.633
Total Income £ m	8.633

Calculation of the final 2025/26 funding position

	£m's
Total forecast DSG Income 2025/26	1,469.889
Total Forecast DSG Allocations 2025/26	1,469.889

These Schools Budget proposals forecast a balanced Dedicated Schools Grant funding position in 2025/26.

