

# Enhancing Inclusive Practice High Needs Block Fund Report (Year 1)

## 1. Background Summary

Working within the East Sussex Collective vision that ‘All pupils in East Sussex will be part of an excellent inclusive and equitable education system’, East Sussex Education in collaboration with the Schools’ Forum, has made one off funding of £4 million available, via the High Needs Block, for Education Improvement Partnerships, Alliances, Secondary Area Groups, and other groups of schools to collaboratively pilot new and innovative projects in their locality.

The aim of the programme is to develop a more inclusive mainstream education system in East Sussex with a more confident expert workforce delivering consistently excellent mainstream provision.

The project addressed three key outcomes, as agreed by the Schools’ Forum to:

- Improve early identification of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) - so the correct provision can be put into place sooner before gaps in progress and development between children with and without SEND become too wide.
- Improve the mainstream offer for children with SEND - to achieve consist high quality SEND provision countywide. Research suggests that children with SEND do better with the correct provision in mainstream than in special schools.
- Improve parental confidence in the mainstream SEND Offer - although many parents in the county are positive about their child’s education setting, too many continue to report that their children’s needs are not always being met for several reasons.

A steering group of school Headteachers, CEOs and other representatives scoped out the following six different pilot project areas to be taken forward, originally over 2 academic years from September 2023:

- Development of an enhanced family support offer for children with SEND
- Early identification and early intervention in nursery provision to support transition into EYFS
- Improving expertise and availability of SEN support for local school alliances
- Creating a workforce development programme for support staff
- Supporting transition to secondary school

NB Setting Up satellite special school classrooms in mainstream schools was withdrawn due to lack of Special School capacity and engagement.

Supporting Transition to 16+ provision. (added by demand to replace satellite classrooms)

**(See Appendix 1 to for a list of all the strand projects with lead and partner schools).**

30 lead organisations were supported by LA Project Managers to apply for funding in partnership with other schools either via Alliances, Education Improvement Partnerships, Trusts, or geographical links. The three rounds of applications were reviewed by the Steering Group and 22 pilot projects were approved, with at least two in each strand. Unfortunately, 3 withdrew, primarily due to capacity issues, recruitment issues and changes in leadership.

In all 19 projects are now underway (some from Sept 2024) involving 135 schools and colleges (with 15 involved in two different projects) and 3 nurseries are engaged in the projects across six strands of action.

The realisation of some proposals was hindered and delayed by legal, leadership and recruitment challenges but thanks to the partnerships willingness to address these collaboratively creatively

where necessary all others are underway from Sept 2024 and have been granted the 2-year trial period from their date of commencement.

All projects have worked with LA officers, External Advisers, Educational Psychologists, and other professionals to maximise their potential.

## Current Delivery Status of Projects

- Sept - Jan 2023 (one year in) - Beacon, Seaford Head, Rye Alliance, Eastbourne Alliance (Cavendish), Chailey, Wealden & Ashdown (Uckfield), UBAT, FSN.
- Started in year 2024 - Plumpton College, Eastbourne Alliance (Langley), St Richards.
- Starting in September 2024 - Heathfield, Bexhill College, Seahaven, Wadhurst, Uckfield (Workforce Dev), Hastings Academy. St Catherines and Haven Alliance.

## Early Examples of Initial Impact and Feedback

The initial feedback from lead organisations and schools is that all strands have had a positive impact on pupil outcomes, attendance, progress, behaviour for learning, mental health, and wellbeing for many of the referred children they are working with. Every parent interviewed was positive about the impact of the programme on their child. Many parents were pleased that they felt that they were being listened to. Several projects are confident that the work in building relationships with parents will reduce parent initiated EHCPs.

Total number of pupils involved in projects to date	Percentage of Pupils with improved attendance	Percentage of Pupils with improved behaviour	Improvement in pupil attitude to school 10 pt scale	Improvement in Parental confidence and satisfaction in school provision 10 point scale	Improvement in staff confidence to support SEND pupils
314	56%	44%	+2.94	+3.26	+1.95

\*Data from reports received from the projects that are underway

## EHCP applications - (Sept 2023 start projects only)

Project	Rye Alliance	UBAT	Wealden	Chailey	Beacon	Seaford Head	Cavendish	FSN
EHCP 22-3	15	22	20	23	14	13	28	3
EHCP 23-4	8	13	13	14	10	18	24	7

Six (75%) of the early starting projects have shown a reduction in EHCP applications. FSN has increased applications which may be due to better and more effective early identification. It has allowed intervention and transition support to start earlier.

## Participant feedback

Zoe James (Beacon Academy, Deputy Headteacher):

“After 8 months we are seeing increased parental confidence and already know that there will be a reduction in EHCP applications, as parents, desperate for an EHCP due to anxiety have said they feel their children have the support they need”.

Early Parental feedback has been equally positive across all strands with all parents interviewed pleased that the school has been able to help their child. Many felt more confident in working with the school and supporting their child’s progress at school. An example of parental feedback from

the Beacon Bridge project first cohort evidences the improvements which are being reported as it progresses.

An average was calculated using parental surveys based on the 5 Likert scale questions.

Average before transition	Average after transition	Difference
3.8	5	+1.2
2.2	5	+2.8
3.6	4.6	+1.0
1.8	4.8	+3.0
5.6	5.6	+0.0

The staff responses to the workforce development and improving expertise strands have been very positive with staff feeling better valued and empowered to meet the challenge of addressing the needs of their pupils with SEND.

In many cases the staff are working collaboratively across the whole school and even across the partnership of schools, which should be a sustainable outcome of the programme.

One head teacher said, “Unusually, we have no resignations from teachers or TAs as staff feel much more able to manage”. Another said, “staff have been asking if they can join the training programme”.

A parent whose child has been supported by FSWs said “I feel very strongly that they need to have their outstanding work acknowledged and the case needs to be made forcefully for the service they have been providing to be extended into future years. The reason she (her daughter) is attending school each day is without doubt the rapport that (FSW) has built with her.”

A recent Ofsted report for Forest Row Primary (Chailey project) commented on the strength of provision for children with high needs.

A recent Ofsted report for Plumpton College stated “Since the previous Ofsted inspection, leaders have significantly improved the quality of the provision for students with high needs. Managers and teachers implement highly effective teaching strategies and tailored support to make sure students reach their full potential. Students with high needs make excellent progress towards their planned outcomes.”

The recent Beacon Osted report stated “The school is taking a strategic approach to new ways of supporting attendance. They also make thoughtful use of alternative provision both within the school, and externally where appropriate. These approaches are proving to be effective in reducing absence. In lessons, pupils are highly engaged”.

Dom O’Riordan (Headteacher of West St Leonards) said “We have seen the children’s confidence improve, their attendance improve but also its about academic (progress), if they are in school more we can do to support them making progress.”

Mrs Jan Poulter (Inclusion Lead, The Baird PA) said “We have seen a huge improvement in mental health and wellbeing for those children working with the Family Support Workers”.

Mrs Gillespie (Silverdale PA SENCO) said “the SEND Family Support Worker programme has had an impact on the families, they are calmer and more open to dialogue about their children. They have a better knowledge of how school, school-based plans and interventions support their child and, consequently are more confident and willing to work with the school at home and in school. They

understand the partnership and team around the child so are less reactive and likely to apply for statutory assessment without school support.”

Hailey Thwaites (Early Years Project Lead, Fellowship OF St Nicholas) said “its (the project) about building a bridge between the school and home. Some children transitioning need intervention to support speech and language etc. and parents don’t know how to support them and are anxious about the transition. Working with parents including home visits has helped build confidence.”

Some of the work has led to further developments e.g. Transition work which is now focusing on a sense of belonging and building a whole school ethos towards inclusivity and Family Support Worker projects that have led to developing and expanding the place of Sensory Club and Sensory Circuits initiatives across school provision.

## 2. The Programme in Detail

### What was the challenge?

East Sussex schools, in conjunction with the Education East Sussex, identified areas of challenge in terms of EHCP applications and Special School applications reflecting some of the issues they face regarding SEND provision and that some SEND learners were not achieving the outcomes that they should.

These include:

- Limited resources for SEN learners. Many schools have had to reduce the number of teaching assistants over recent years, putting additional pressure on class teachers, who may or may not have had adequate training and preparation for meeting the needs of learners with SEND during their teacher training.
- High classroom numbers with increasing numbers of SEND pupils.
- The curriculum demands increase in the later years of secondary school which can create social, emotional, and mental health needs in young people
- There is a shortage of specialist staff notably experienced SENCOs, and many who are new in post can find it overwhelming to balance their role (which is often part-time) with the requirement of further postgraduate study, whilst often being expected to teach as well. There are high time demands due to elevated levels of bureaucracy in the education, health, and the care plan (EHCP) process.
- Inexperienced staff and staff shortages. Schools often struggle with the demands of staffing challenges and strained finances TA roles are often comparatively low paid and so less attractive.
- Many SEND pupils come from chaotic homes and/or families living in poverty which often manifest themselves at school via increased absence, lack of readiness to learn and poor behaviour.

All too often, primary schools are excellent at nurturing their pupils and making certain adaptations for those that have underlying needs, and this may be lost in the handover to secondary schools despite their best efforts to provide a quality transition programme. The pupil then struggles to settle in a big, busy secondary school and often is not on the SEND register, so their behaviour can sometimes be dismissed as “naughty” without the root causes being understood. This can lead to frequent behaviour sanctions and other issues such as disengagement from learning or poor attendance, and culminate in school refusal, serial fixed term exclusions or even permanent exclusion.

SEN learners have varying difficulties outside of the classroom, which can sometimes be worse than

the learning challenges they face.

Many children and families fall below the increasing threshold for external agency support / intervention and such support from external professionals can be hard to engage, particularly against the backdrop of shortages within the fields of educational psychology and pediatric occupational therapy etc., and extremely long waiting lists for CAMHS etc.

### **The Programme Aim**

The aspiration is that the pilots will test what actions might impact locally, what the LA may be able to roll out in support and what schools could invest in with their own resources or as groups working collaboratively to have maximum impact in addressing the issues. The intention is that this will significantly improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people, enabling them to achieve their potential through

excellent teaching, improved early identification and appropriate, high-quality support delivered in the right place.

The programme will contribute to a robust, evidence-based performance culture of high quality SEND provision to reflect the principles of the SEND Code of Practice through active leadership, visible across the partnership and engaged with by all stakeholders, including school leaders.

The programme will link to and work with other concurrent Education East Sussex existing and revised support programmes such as the revised EHCP Transitions team.

The programme will therefore contribute to the development of an excellent education system where schools and families will feel confident that mainstream settings are the right place for all children and young people and that inclusive high-quality practices will ensure that their needs will be met.

### **How was the Enhancing Inclusive Practice Fund programme rolled out? (See Appendix 1 for list of projects and Appendix 2 for funding)**

After consultation with special schools, the satellite school classrooms strand was withdrawn primarily due to their citing a lack of capacity in special schools. Following further consultation with schools, the strand was replaced in round two of funding with a new strand to address transition from secondary to tertiary education as an additional new strand.

All schools and colleges were made aware of the programme and invited to work up collaborative applications to meet local need around one of the strands through the normal communication lines as well as informative meetings and Q&A sessions.

Initial expressions of interest enabled the project managers to collaborate with potential applicants in consultation with LA officers to work up applications which were reviewed, and grants awarded to the successful applicants by the Steering Group.

There were three rounds of applications, each being refined to ensure all strands had pilots and that as many schools as possible were involved. In all thirty applications were received, and 22 were successful in being awarded delivery grants over the three rounds across all the available strands. Four applicants had to withdraw due to capacity issues leaving eighteen pilots involving 129 different schools and colleges and 16 nurseries.

The successful applicants were award grants, via grant agreements setting out what they should deliver, the KPIs and the funding regime.

Two project managers facilitated and supported the successful applicants to realise their proposals including linking similar projects to enhance support but also disseminate shared learning.

“So as a school leader, applying for bids can always be a challenge, but this was quite a smooth process for us. Having two project leads that we could talk to and guide us through the process really helped. And the form itself was quite straightforward.” - Zoe James (Deputy Headteacher Beacon Academy).

As previously stated, the original period has been extended by two years to allow all projects to run for the 2- year trial period, with the agreement of the Steering Group to enable some of the pilots to address legal, leadership capacity and recruitment issues which delayed implementation. Some round one projects will complete the initial trial in Summer 2025, the round 3 projects will finish by Summer 2026.

### **How would the programme be Monitored and Evaluated? (See Appendices 3 & 4)**

The project aims are monitored by individual projects reporting against the following KPIs twice a year at the end of term 3 and term 6:

- Short term progress indicators of improved provision and early intervention
- Improved SEND Attendance Data
- Improved SEND Behaviour logs and exclusion records
- Improved SEND Pupil progress Improved SEND Pupil Voice comment
- Reduced exclusions and pupils of normal timetable
- Improved parental confidence in mainstream schools (evidenced by SEND Parent Voice) and reducing of SEND related complaints
- Improved teacher confidence and ability to provide for SEND pupils
- Reduced requests for EHCPs especially parent triggered referrals and possible cessation of EHCPs (especially 16+ Transition programmes)
- Reduced request for Special School places
- Individual pupil and project case studies (see Appendices 5-10)

All projects are also encouraged to offer any other evidence, pertinent to their programme which evidence impact or challenge.

A Working party, comprising representatives from the lead schools and colleges and LA officers led by the project managers has been set up for each strand, to provide opportunities to share learning, allow collaborative problem solving, provide mutual support as well as scrutiny and challenge (see Appendix 5 Working Party terms of reference).

The Working Group meets twice a year (end of terms 3 and 6) following the monitoring data captures and report to the Steering Group. The role of the working group is to provide scrutiny, advice, support and challenge around implementation and impact of the Enhancing Inclusive Practice (EIP) programme and individual projects.

This will feed from the Steering Group back to the Schools' Forum. The involvement of the LA officers will also ensure that the pilot programmes maximise impact by linking into and dovetailing with existing provision and LA initiatives.

Regular updates are shared with other LA groups. In addition, the PMs have regular contact with the projects via 'Keeping in Touch' meetings, some of the current outcomes of these and the first data capture have been shared in the case studies examples that follow.

### **What have we learnt?**



The following learning has been collated having reviewed the data, and from conversations and questionnaires with schools, providers, parents, practitioners and children and young people following the initial working groups and the early 'Keeping in touch' meetings.

See the illustrative Case studies of projects by strand.

## Generic Learning

Recruitment has been a challenge for many projects, and many have had to be creative in terms of sharing, backfilling, training, and developing existing staff or inducting staff new to education but with relevant skills sets or experience.

Collaborative work needs excellent regular communication to ensure that all parties have similar expectation and a collective belief that the project will meet their needs. This has been an issue for some in terms of 'identifying the bar for referral' for example.

Collaborative working needs staff to be flexible to work effectively across schools with different ethos's, management processes etc.

Systems such as supervision, Lone Working and Safeguarding need to be clear, consistent, and managed across the partnership.

Projects can support and act as drivers towards whole school initiatives such as developing a sense of Belonging or pupil mental health and wellbeing.

All reporting projects have identified significant improvements in attendance, behaviour and parental confidence for a number of the pupils engaged in the project.

Several projects suggested that their projects will reduce the number of EHCP and Special School applications over time.

Creating branding for the project e.g. The Bridge can create a stronger community partnership and joint ownership feel rather than a situation where one school is 'doing something' to others.

## Early Learning by Strand

### 1. Development of an enhanced family support offer for children with SEN

- By providing guidance, support, and access to resources, enhanced Family Support Workers help families navigate challenging situations, strengthen relationships within the family and with school, and build resilience.
- FSWs can fill the gap left by the decline in service support and long waiting lists for assessment.
- FSWs support children and their families with a variety of problems such as: drug and alcohol addiction; cost of living issues: housing concerns; having a parent in hospital; a parent or child with a disability or special educational needs (SEN) and so gain the confidence of parents and give insight to schools.
- FSWs can provide valuable tools and resources that can help an individual cope with tough life situations or events and provide education and guidance on how to cope with stress, manage emotions, and develop positive coping strategies.
- FSWs can help improve behaviour in schools by helping schools know and understand their pupils and the influences on them as well as help teach learning behaviours and supporting behaviours in the home.
- FSWs can bridge the gap from home to school bringing about greater consistency and doubling down on strategies for better understanding and impact.

## **2. Early identification and early intervention in nursery provision to support transition into KS1.**

- This strand focusses on an equitable start so all children can begin their education journey on an equal footing with their peers and early identification of SEND children can help stop them falling significantly behind their peers before they enter primary school SEN.
- Early ID allows teachers to put in place effective provision sooner and help them to a ‘soft landing’ at transition.
- The specialist worker can identify red flags that could indicate a learning disability include problems with pronouncing words and difficulty in learning the meaning of unfamiliar words can be flagged up and shared with nursery and school staff.
- In their early years, children with SEND often require intervention and targeted support aimed at improving key developmental skills and wellbeing.
- Children with speech and language disorders and delays are identified earlier, they make faster progress and have a better chance to catch up to same-aged peers.
- Nursery and school EYFS assessments are different which can lead to challenges around identification of level of need and make transition more difficult. The transition work can bridge these issues and allow for greater understanding and a smoother softer landing by adopting similar or familiar strategies.

## **3. Improving expertise and availability of SEN support for local school alliances.**

- The programme focused staff to work more closely together and it was clear that peer support was a valuable component enabling SENCOs to feel that they were able to successfully to include children with special needs.
- Working in teams, shared observations, challenges etc. is an effective way of supporting individuals to improve the quality of inclusive provision.
- High quality targeted support, working closely with parents, teachers, other SENCOs, and Teaching Assistants can have a significant impact on inclusivity.
- Modelling good practice working alongside teachers and TAs has been effective. .
- Addressing staff identified need can build confidence to ‘take action’ and improve the quality of intervention and support

## **4. Creating a workforce development programme for support staff.**

- The programme can raise staff awareness and understanding of individual learner’s needs across the school.
- The staff feel valued and make better contributions to SEND support and work more closely with the teacher.
- Enables staff to adopt effective targeted approaches to meet the needs of individuals in your school.
- Develops a learning culture and environment across the school Develop the use of effective classroom management strategies to support good classroom behaviour.
- Workforce development can help develop a whole school inclusivity approach and build constancy and quality provision across the school

## **5. Supporting transition to secondary school.**

- The Transition staff can help individual students who would have struggled make a successful transition.
- They can help improve behaviour by helping a school know and understand their pupils and the influences on them.
- The Bridge project with the associated CPD has raised the profile of EBSA across the schools and contributed towards a whole school ethos and developing a sense of belonging.
- The transition programme can have an incredibly positive impact on parental confidence.



They feel supported, listened to and understood.

- Parents can feel much more confident that the child is attending the right new institution for them and so there is more buy in and less looking for alternatives such as special schools.

#### **6. Supporting Transition to 16+ provision.**

- Regular visits to their new college and the opportunity to meet key staff help pupils understand what their new institution will 'look like' and build pupil confidence.
- Visits to their current school from College staff that will be collaborating with them in the future can build relationships, confidence and understanding.
- Ideally transition planning should begin as early as possible, involving any relevant agencies and specialists throughout the process.
- The transition workers can help to make the transition process as personalised as possible.
- School pupils can have a number of teachers involved in transition e.g. Careers, Head of Year, form tutor, subject specialist and this can be confusing nominating one trusted colleague may be better for some SEND pupils.

All the projects will be reviewed at the Working groups and the impact and learning shared with schools and colleges across the county at the conclusion of the project.

For more information:

- <https://localoffer.eastsussex.gov.uk/send-information-and-services/education-east-sussex/enhancing-inclusive-practice-fund-projects>