

Meeting:	Executive Member Decision Session
Meeting date:	14 th April 2026
Report of:	Martin Kelly, Corporate Director of Children and Education
Portfolio of:	Councillor Bob Webb, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

Decision Report: SEND capital grants to support inclusion and belonging

Subject of Report

1. To inform the Executive member about the proposed use of the Department for Education (DfE) SEND capital grant, 2025-26 to support projects which promote inclusion in mainstream settings through adaptations to classroom and outdoor learning spaces. The allocation of the grant has been used to support the ambition outlined in the city's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy to deliver the right support at the right time through promoting inclusive practice in mainstream schools. Our approach builds on the knowledge of what works well in adapting mainstream environments to meet predictable needs in mainstream. We have several good examples of adaptations to internal and outdoor spaces that have been made across the city's schools which are supporting children and young people to be able to access mainstream provision. This includes the development of inclusion bases and sensory regulation areas. The emphasis on developing inclusive mainstream provision is also a key pillar of the government's Schools White Paper and SEND reforms. The allocation of the SEND capital grants to local areas in 2025-26 is part of the national focus on supporting the development of the infrastructure in mainstream schools and specialist settings to support the implementation of the reforms.
2. The national reforms recognise the need to have access to sufficient specialist provision in each local area to reduce the reliance on out of area independent specialist provision. The allocation of SEND capital is designed both to improve inclusivity

in mainstream and also to support sufficiency of specialist provision. In York there is a need to fund a capital scheme to increase specialist capacity at Applefields School and also an identified need to increase specialist SEMH provision. Applefields Secondary Special School continues to be oversubscribed and in September 2026 will see an overall increase in numbers from 226 to 240 pupils. This requires work to take place at both Applefields and INSPIRE as outlined in the successful bids below.

3. By approving the overall programme spend it means that projects can be delivered in line with government expectations for the SEND Capital Grant during the academic year 2026/27. These projects support the delivery of York's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy and the aims of the national SEND reform programme

Benefits and Challenges

4. The benefit of supporting these projects is to increase capacity to support inclusion in mainstream for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It also supports the use of capital to address existing sufficiency issues in specialist settings.
5. The use of the SEND capital grant to improve the learning environment in mainstream schools supports the national SEND reforms and will help to support children to learn close to home, alongside their peers. The development of more inclusive mainstream provision will improve parental confidence and will ensure that there is greater consistency across schools in being able to demonstrate inclusive practice. The schemes being supported in this first phase of capital allocations are designed to build the capacity to meet predictable areas of need in mainstream and builds on the successful models that have been developed particularly in primary schools.
6. The main challenge in the delivery of this programme has been that the number and value of expressions of interest received from schools across the city has exceeded the total capital grant available. Each project has been evaluated using a range of criteria, including deliverability, number of children with SEND in each school, the impact of the investment on groups of children rather than meeting the needs of individuals. The successful projects have had to demonstrate that they are building sustainable capacity for the future.

7. Policy Basis for Decision

8. *Education and Skills: High Quality Skills and Learning for All*

- City of York Council 'CYC' has a statutory duty to secure sufficient suitable provision for all children in its area.

Financial Strategy Implications

9. The expenditure described in this report will be funded from Department for Education SEND Capital Grant, 2025-26. The receipt of this grant has been reported to the council's executive through the capital monitor reports.

Recommendation and Reasons

The Executive member is asked to:

- note the proposed use of the DfE 2025-26 SEND Capital through grant allocation to identified schools to support adaptations of the learning environment for children and young people with SEND.
- delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children and Education, the Director of Governance and the Director of Finance to take such steps as are necessary to develop the grant allocation process, procure, award and enter into the resulting grant agreements.

Reason: To ensure that the SEND capital schemes can be delivered in the academic year 2026/27 to improve inclusion and accessibility. The use of the capital funding supports the delivery of the local SEND reform plan.

Background

10. On 27 March 2025, the Department for Education published £738m of High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA) for 2025-26 for England. This funding is to support Local Authorities to deliver new places for Academic Year 2026/27 and to improve existing

provision for Children and Young People with SEND or who require Alternative Provision.

11. City of York Council was awarded £1.7 million from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocations as part of this scheme.
12. To support the delivery of the city's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy all schools were invited to submit an expression of interest (EOI) to access funding for small scale capital projects to improve accessibility and inclusion for SEND pupils. Schools were asked to submit EOIs by 30th November 2025. There was a high level of interest from mainstream schools and academies across the city.
13. Following the submission of EOIs the SEND and School Capital projects teams visited schools and academies between December 2025 and February 2026 to review each proposed scheme and to ensure that more detailed costings for each project have been scoped and more detailed project delivery plans submitted.
14. In addition to the EOIs received from mainstream schools there is an urgent need to support a capital project at Applefields Special School. This is to increase classroom capacity on the Applefields site to meet a sufficiency need from September 2026. The school continues to see an increase in pupil numbers. This will see numbers grow from 226 pupils to 240 pupils from September 2026. Without these adaptations Applefields would be unable to safely accommodate the increase in numbers which would result in children being placed out of city which would increase both place costs and transport costs.

Assessment of the EOIs

15. An internal SEND Capital Panel, whose membership included officers from the SEND and school capital teams, reviewed the applications against the grant criteria which are outlined below:
 - 1) Minor modifications to classrooms, therapy rooms, or other learning spaces with a SEND-specific focus (creation of sensory rooms, SEN bases).
 - 2) Long-term use of specialised equipment such as assistive technology (e.g. hoists) or adapted furniture.
 - 3) Accessibility improvements e.g., ramps, automatic doors, or handrails.

- 4) Enhancements to outdoor learning areas, including sensory paths, sensory panels.
- 5) Lighting upgrades for pupils with visual impairments or sensory sensitivities. Soundproofing to reduce noise levels and support sensory regulation

16. The deliverability and sustainability of each proposed project was considered and the context of the numbers of children and young people with SEND in each school was considered when assessing the EOIs. Each project was assessed to ensure a clear match with the grant criteria outlined above. This is to ensure that the impact of the grant funding can be maximised so that that it builds sustainable inclusive capacity in each of the successful schools.

17. Projects have come from both the secondary and primary phase and the successful bids have focused on improving school environments to meet sensory needs and also to support social, emotional and mental health needs through developing regulation spaces and improvements to outdoor learning spaces.

18. The successful schemes are summarised in the table below:

School	School status	Capital adaptation	Costs
Applefields Special School	Secondary Special Academy – Pathfinder	Additional classroom space to meet sufficiency needs in specialist provision	£470k
INSPIRE special school	Secondary special - Excel	Three additional classrooms and remodelling of outdoor areas to increase the capacity of in city specialist	£970K

		SEMH provision	
Archbishop Holgate's	Secondary Academy - Pathfinder	<p>Expansion of internal alternative provision area, this is to develop SEND unit capacity to meet social, emotional and mental health needs:</p> <p>Create a kitchen space</p> <p>Create a second workspace in the main classroom</p> <p>Create a covered outdoor area</p> <p>Supply and install fencing</p> <p>Build an outdoor classroom (including associated groundwork)</p> <p>Supply and install planters and seating</p> <p>Meet planning and building</p>	£130,802

		control regulations	
Clifton with Rawcliffe	Primary Academy-Pathfinder	This funding is provided to expand the school's internal alternative provision. It is to be used to supply and install fencing to create a safe outdoor area and supply and install a canopy for the outdoor space to extend year round use. Resurface the outdoor area to improve the accessibility.	£30,130
Fishergate	Local Authority Maintained Primary	This funding is provided to convert a room currently used primarily for storage into SEN provision.	£72, 250
Fulford	Secondary Academy – Yorkshire Learning Trust	This funding is provided to create a SEND hub classroom: Remove walls and make good ceilings and walls	££9,845

		<p>Replace skirting boards Redecorate</p> <p>Reinstate glass to internal door</p> <p>Supply and install new carpet</p> <p>Supply and install new lighting</p>	
Heworth	Primary Academy - Pathfinder	<p>Install a dedicated SEN room and adjoining sensory garden:</p> <p>Supply and install a small portable building (including associated ground works)</p> <p>Supply and install fencing</p> <p>Meet planning and building control regulations</p>	£88,635
Huntington	Primary Academy- Pathfinder	Relocate and enhance the Warren provision and to	£45,545

		<p>install fencing around the Nest provision:</p> <p>Supply and install fencing around The Nest outdoor provision</p> <p>Supply and install fencing around The Warren outdoor provision</p> <p>Relocate The Warren to the existing Y3/4 classroom, including replacement curtain wall and door</p> <p>Refurbish toilets to provide an accessible toilet</p> <p>Supply and install a new doorset</p> <p>Meet planning and building control regulations</p>	
Hob Moor	Primary Academy - Ebor	Installation of one sensory walk path and one learning pod:	£29,100

		<p>Supply and install a sensory wall</p> <p>Supply and install sensory flooring</p> <p>Supply and install a learning pod</p>	
Poppleton Ousebank	Primary Academy - Heartwood	<p>Create a sensory outdoor classroom:</p> <p>Build an outdoor classroom including seating and white board</p> <p>Provide 1x picnic bench Prepare and lay new surface</p> <p>Supply and install perimeter fence Supply and install Beehive Finger Maze</p>	£28,000
Ralph Butterfield	Local Authority Maintained Primary	Improve outdoor access to The Nest inclusion area and create an inclusive outdoor learning	£51,324

		<p>environment. It will be used to:</p> <p>Prepare the site and resurface the area</p> <p>Provide a ramp to both doorways</p> <p>Supply and install fencing</p> <p>Supply and install a canopy</p> <p>Supply and install a door allowing access to the outdoor area</p> <p>Supply and install a water heater and outdoor tap</p> <p>Supply and install fixed storage for outdoor equipment</p> <p>Meet planning and building control regulations</p>	
Rufforth	Primary Academy - Pathfinder	<p>Sensory room enhancement:</p> <p>Create a new doorway</p> <p>Provide a ramp, including installation of handrails</p> <p>Remove sockets</p>	£36,520

		<p>Box in pipes and radiators</p> <p>Adapt shelving to provide lockable doors</p> <p>Cover a light switch</p>	
St Aelred's	Primary Academy – Nicholas Post	<p>Create a specialist SEND hub with associated outdoor space.</p> <p>It will be used to:</p> <p>Pay for internal works for the creation of SEND rooms, accessible WC with changing area and kitchenette</p> <p>Alterations to entrance and windows</p> <p>Mechanical and electrical works as necessary</p> <p>Supply and install fencing</p> <p>Surfacing of play area</p>	£295,000

St Lawrence's	Primary Academy - Pathfinder	<p>Sensory room enhancement to extend access to outdoor space:</p> <p>Supply and install a canopy or gazebo</p> <p>Resurface with astro turf and provide zone markings</p> <p>Supply and install fencing to create a safe regulation area</p>	£36,316
Vale of York	Secondary Academy - Heartwood	<p>Create a sensory regulation area.</p> <p>Replace fencing and box pipes</p> <p>Supply and install planters</p> <p>Asphalt area</p> <p>Supply 2x picnic benches</p> <p>Build a canopy</p> <p>Supply and install outside lighting</p> <p>Supply wall art</p>	£15,500

		Purchase and supply a door	
Westfield	Local Authority Maintained Primary	This funding is provided to create a sensory room for KS1 use to support children with autism, ADHD and social, emotional and mental health needs	£48K

18. 7 schools submitted expressions of interest but their applications were unsuccessful in this first round of capital allocations. York will receive a further allocation £2,312,280 of SEND capital funding for 2026-27. This will allow unsuccessful schools to resubmit applications and also to consider new applications for funding to deliver inclusive mainstream provision.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

Option 1 – Approve the programme spend

19. By approving Option 1 the capital adaptations can be made which will support greater inclusion and accessibility in mainstream for children and young people with SEND. The work at Applefields and INSPIRE needs to be completed to meet current pressures on in-city specialist provision.

Option 2 – Do nothing

20. This would mean the schemes are not delivered and the work to improve inclusive practice in mainstream would be detrimentally impacted. This would not deliver the improvements to mainstream schools which are both the ambition in York's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy and are an important element of

the School's White Paper and the national SEND reforms. The allocation of High Needs funding by the Department for Education is designed to support the delivery of the local SEND Reform Plan and an important element of this is that capital investment is used to remove barriers to access to education for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Organisational Impact and Implications

Finance

21. The DfE have made available the capital funding for this purpose.
22. A condition of the funding for the 2025/26 financial year is that the funding is used to deliver projects which improve provision for children and young people with SEND. The aims of this grant support the ambitions in the city's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy and will be part of a 3 year capital plan which is a priority to support the delivery of the local SEND Reform plan.

Human Resources (HR)

23. There are no HR implications.

Legal

24. The grant funding arrangements sought to deliver the proposals set out in this report will need to be reviewed to consider whether the Council's acceptance and use of any such grant funding will comply with the requirements set out within the Subsidy Control Act 2022.
25. Any grant funding agreements put in place to regulate the use of the grant funding by providers will need to ensure the provisions of the DfE grant agreements are reflected and that any Subsidy Control elements are captured appropriately.
26. The Council has a statutory duty under the Children and Families Act, 2014 and the Education Act, 1996 to ensure there is sufficient suitable education provision in its area.

Procurement

27. The High Needs Provision capital grant allocation funding for York is provided through the DfE and therefore no direct CYC funding therefore there isn't a requirement to submit a report to the Procurement Challenge Board to obtain approval to commence this grants application process and award of grants. The council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPR's) include specific clauses, 4. Grants, that govern the processes to be followed in order to invite competitive grant applications and assess suitable providers and award grants that provides Best Value to the council and achieve the aims, outcomes for our SEND provision.
28. The Procurement Project Board includes representation from the councils Education Support Service team, Legal, Commercial Procurement and Finance teams who will ensure there is compliance with our CPR's, Financial Regulations and the grants are procured and awarded in alignment to the Council Plan and its aims and objectives.

Health and Wellbeing

29. It is likely that the introduction of these adaptations in mainstream schools will benefit both children and their families for years to come and, will ensure that more children and young people with SEND are able to access their local neighbourhood school.

Equalities and Human Rights

30. The Council recognises, and needs to take into account its Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it in the exercise of a public authority's functions).
31. A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and is included at Annex A. This highlights positive impacts for lower income groups and disabled children and in particular,

Data Protection and Privacy

32. As there is no personal data, special categories of personal data or criminal offence data being processed, there is no requirement to complete a data protection impact assessment (DPIA). This is evidenced by completion of DPIA screening questions logged under the reference number AD-07975.

Communications

33. This report sets out a positive benefit for children, young people and their families across the city and will require external communications, both immediately and in the longer term.

Risks and Mitigations

34. The key risk is the potential failure of CYC to facilitate the delivery of projects which improve inclusive mainstream provision and improve the sufficiency of specialist provision at Applefields School and INSPIRE. Statutory sufficiency duties would not be delivered leading to possible legal challenge from parents and reputational risk for the local authority.
35. Another possible risk associated with development is gaining planning permission. The planning process requires collaboration on all sides and the Council's planning department will work positively on any proposals with the providers. There is however the need to ensure that the providers work with the Planning Department and engage positively to ensure that there is a positive outcome and permission is secured in a timely manner. Any formal planning submission will need to have sufficient quality of information to support the planning application process, being mindful of local and national planning policy requirements.
36. In mitigation the application documentation will make it clear that any increase in financial costs arising from the planning process and any possible delays should be borne by the school/academy trust themselves.

Wards Impacted

37. All wards are impacted by this decision.

Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

Author

Name:	Maxine Squire
Job Title:	Assistant Director, Education and Skills
Service Area:	Children's Services and Education
Telephone:	07990 793483
Report approved:	Yes
Date:	01/04/2026

Co-Author

Name:	Martin Kelly
Job Title:	Corporate Director of Children and Education
Service Area:	Children's Services and Education
Telephone:	01904 555612
Report approved:	Yes
Date:	01/04/2026

Background papers

Annexes

- Annex A: Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)