

# Vulnerable Children's Grant 2024-2025

**Report being considered by:** Schools' Forum on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025

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**Item for:** Information **By:** All Forum Members

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the use of the Vulnerable Children's Grant (VCG) Fund 2024/2025 and the next steps for the application of Early Intervention Support Funding for West Berkshire schools.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Forum Members note the report.

**Is the Schools' Forum required to make a decision as part of this report or subsequent versions due to be considered later in the meeting cycle?**

Yes: ☐

No: ☒

**Consultation and Engagement:**

Consultation with West Berkshire Mainstream Funding Review Working Group (re: changes to funding approach)

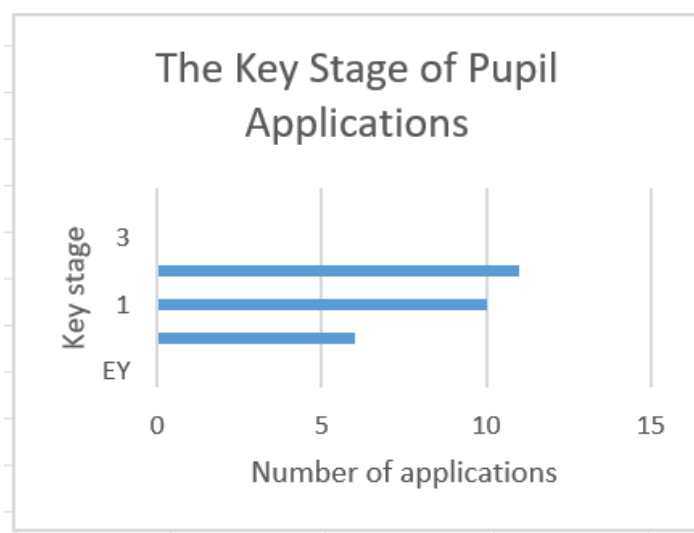
Engagement session at SENCo Update to explain change of funding arrangements and respond to queries.

## 3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 The Vulnerable Children's Grant (VCG) is a fund for schools who have unexpected additional financial pressures due to in-year admissions of children with Special Educational Needs and disabilities (SEND) or for children whose needs suddenly change. It is specifically devised to promote social inclusion, reduce exclusions and reduce the pressure on SEN budgets by providing temporary funding.

## 4. Supporting Information

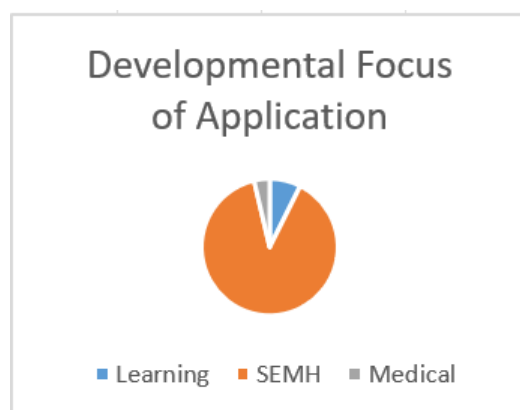
- 4.1 The VCG budget for 2024-2025 was £67,000.
- 4.2 16 settings successfully applied for VCG funding for 27 pupils. Applications were received from primary schools, with most support requested for pupils in key stage 2.



41 applications were made, the majority received were either for support for:

- A dramatic change in pupil need (24) or recent admission (10)

Of the applications accepted, most were to support a pupil's Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, with the remaining 14% requiring learning or support related to their medical needs.



Most applications (88%) requested money for Teaching Assistant (TA) support. When schools were surveyed in July 2025, responses indicated that the TA support was predominantly used to support a pupil's SEMH needs:

- Continuation of 1:1 EHA sessions.
- To follow a low-threat curriculum outside of the classroom alongside the continuation of iCollege placement
- Supporting with transition back into school on a bespoke timetable following a period of medical absence.
- Build relationships and work on compliancy.

- Settling into a new setting.
- Support to implement now / next strategies and use visual prompts.
- Support to follow instructions in the classroom
- Social support at break times and lunch times.
- Modelling appropriate social interactions.
- Support during times of dysregulation to offer consistency and build on strategies to self-manage.
- To help with interventions and a close level of support in morning lessons to enable participation the lessons.
- to provide 1:1 support in an alternative teaching space using the guidance from TTST to help pupil to succeed.
- Supporting pupil in class to access the curriculum, manage social opportunities, ensure good engagement and make expected progress
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Funding also supported learning needs:

- CALT resources used to help identify gaps in pupil's learning and plan future learning opportunities.
- Support the development of meta cognitive skills to be able to access some learning more independently.
- bespoke timetable and curriculum with 1:1 support in nurture room and outdoors
- to provide 1:1 support in an alternative teaching space using the guidance from TTST to help pupil to succeed.
- support in lessons in the mornings to help pupil to access some learning tasks and have deliver a range of daily interventions.

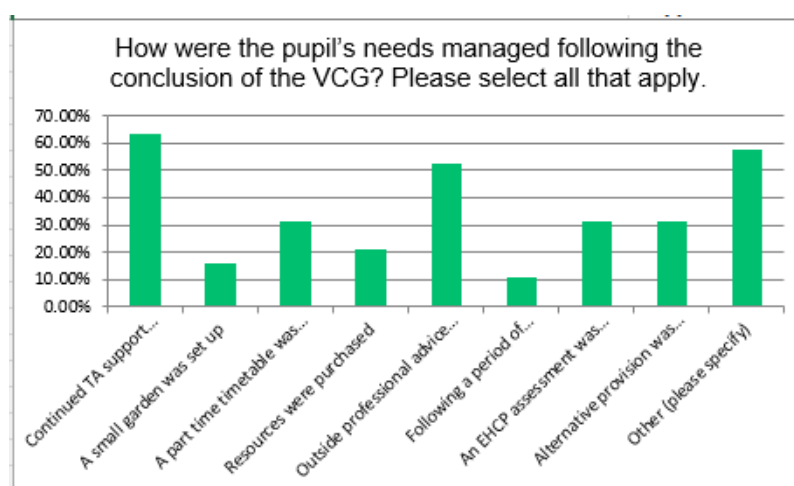
### **Impact**

Settings reported several areas of impact including:

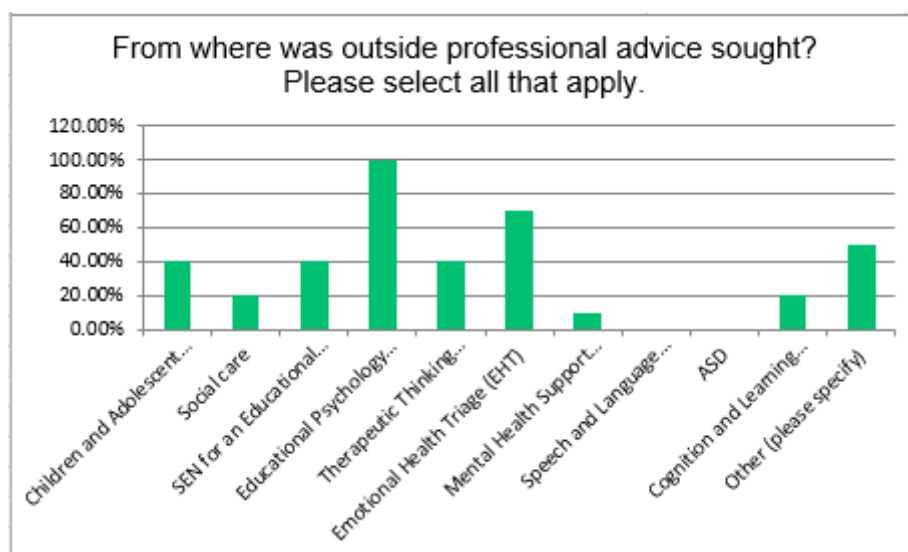
- improved attendance and participation
- promoting a sense of safety
- improved ability to build relationships with staff and students

- development of routines and understanding of expectations
- development of positive interactions and improved self-esteem
- improved emotional regulation
- development of social skills
- more able to access classroom-based learning
- progress with reading, writing and maths
- removed need for an EHCNA or supported evidence for an EHCNA

Although 10% of pupils did not require additional support after the conclusion of the VCG, the vast majority did. Schools often used their own budgets to continue to provide teaching assistant support, as well as supporting in other ways, e.g. organising part time timetables (31%); seeking professional advice (52%); making an EHCNA (31%); putting alternative provision in place (31%).



Of the 10 children for whom professional advice was sought during or following the use of the VCG funding, 100% received support from the Educational Psychology Service, 70% from the Emotional Health Triage, 40% from the Therapeutic Thinking Support Team, from CAMHS and for an EHCP assessment. 20% were referred to Social Care and the Cognition and Learning Teams. iCollege was also requested for some children.



Schools were clear that the VCG is an effective use of funds. Approximately 90% of pupils were said to have made 'a lot' or 'some' progress since receiving funding, indicating that:

- Interactions are more positive.
- He has made significant progress in his learning.
- He is now able to articulate a simple sentence and copy it neatly. He is very keen to be part of the rest of the class and do what they are doing. In the afternoons, once he has finished the task set for him, he will often challenge himself to go further and write a sentence independently.
- There is still a lot of gaps to be closed but the funding has really helped to engage K in his learning and make those first key steps as a writer and to be able to access some of the curriculum with support and independently.
- There has also been significant progress in his behaviour and social skills. When he started, he would often sit under the desk, spin around repeatedly or make humming noises. He would protest when asked to engage in lessons and would refuse to engage. He is now engaged in most lessons and follows instructions and routines without protest.
- There are still tricky periods for O, specifically around transition times but the implementation of full time 1:1, enabled by the grant, has made a difference for him and has reduced the number of behaviour incidents recorded for him.
- B is usually now in class. He has represented the school in sports and has joined in with the end of year play. He attempted his SATS which was a huge step for him.

- The child is now attending school on a more regular basis, and he is in the classroom full time.

Without the funding, schools indicated that:

- they would have found it difficult to implement risk assessments and interventions.
- Frequency and severity of challenging behaviours would increase and difficulties with social interactions would have escalated
- Suspensions and use of a part-time tables would increase
- Alternative provisions would need to be sourced
- Attendance would have decreased

## **5. Next Steps**

While VCG funding has been accessed by some schools, this has not been consistent across all schools. To increase access to and oversight of funding to all West Berkshire schools, a process of alignment is underway whereby five (HNB/Grant) funding streams will be pooled, referrals centralised and allocated via a single panel of Education Service team managers/officers and a school representative. The combined funds will be:

- Vulnerable Children's Grant
- Therapeutic Thinking Support fund
- Autism Limited Fund
- Virtual School fund
- Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Support Fund

This will become the Early Intervention Support Funding (EISF) which will be used to support schools with pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) but have significant additional needs beyond those that might be expected to be funded from the SEND Notional Budget. This funding is intended to provide short-term additional support to help close the gap for statutory school aged children with needs that exceed what would ordinarily be expected at SEN support.

Children and young people might experience the following challenges:

- Have experienced school moves due to their additional needs that is impacting on learning and progress.
- Be on reduced hours or not attending where additional support is required to extend hours or support attendance, engagement and reintegration.
- Where previous setting has had SENIF funding to support a child and new setting needs continuation to support transition into school short term.
- Experience difficulty in making sufficient progress towards their outcomes due to EBSA (where a detailed plan to support meeting needs is evidenced).
- Have experienced long term medical absence and are returning to school.

- Needs require support beyond quality first teaching and school-based support and intervention, as set out in the Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) Guidance (*in production*) but may not need an Education Health and Care Assessment at this time.
- Have had experienced an unexpected or sudden change that significantly impacts their learning and behavioural presentation, but with appropriate intervention, can close the gap.
- Have a medical condition that affects their learning and is creating a gap that can be closed with additional support that is above OAP.
- A risk assessment which evidences danger to self and others and school requires additional support to prevent suspension or permanent exclusion.

Coordinated funding and a single referral route will enable more comprehensive support and facilitate better partnership working, creating a more cohesive support system. Consolidating resources will also improve efficiency by reducing administration and duplication.

Funding and service support will be accessed via a single form to allow more flexible decision making around appropriate support. Alongside other internal process changes e.g. wider use of management information systems, teams will have broader awareness of the support provided to children and young people known to other teams and can mobilise more quickly.

Information including application guidance documents and form will be circulated to all schools before October half-term.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The VCG aims to be equitable and simple to request. Feedback from schools who have accessed it, indicate that it is valued and has significant impact. Access to Early Intervention Support Funding aims to increase inclusion, prevent movement between schools, reduce pressure on school funding and on the capacity of specialist support services, by empowering schools to make provision for pupils in need of additional support above Ordinarily Available Provision.
- 6.2 Changes underway will further improve access, fairness and transparency across funding streams.

## 7. Appendices

None

