



Stoke-on-Trent City Council

High Needs Capital
Inclusive Environments
Fund Protocol
2025-2026

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Introduction

The Inclusive Environments Capital Fund is a targeted funding initiative by Stoke-on-Trent City Council to support mainstream education settings in creating more inclusive learning environments for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), particularly those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

This policy outlines the purpose, eligibility, application process, and assessment criteria for the fund.

Overview

The Inclusive Environments Grant funding, forming part of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's High Needs Capital Provision Allocation, is to support inclusion in mainstream settings by making improvements to spaces.

The Local Authority are opening applications from early-year settings, schools and post 16 education providers who are interested in applying for a small grant of up to £15,000 to develop or enhance an area of their building or outdoor space to make their setting more inclusive for children with EHCPs.

Funding applications can be for a stand-alone project fully funded within the £15,000 or to put towards a larger project with the same aim.

This is one-off grant funding, which is to be spent on buildings and spaces that are used for teaching and learning. Settings who are successful in their application will be financially responsible for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of any spaces developed or large equipment purchased.

Any education setting who has not yet received, or due to receive, High Needs Capital Grant can apply for a one-off amount up to £15,000.

Through this funding we aim to:

- Financially support education settings who cater for children aged 0-25 for educational provision.
- Increase access to mainstream placements for pupils with high needs (who might otherwise have required more specialist provision)
- Reduce instances of the learning environment becoming a barrier to the inclusion of children and young people within mainstream settings and, as a result, reduce the use of high-cost independent provisions for children who could be successful in mainstream settings

- Increase the local availability of high needs places where this can help reduce out-of-area placements with large associated transport or residential costs, and/or reduce reliance on more expensive provision where local provision can be provided at less ongoing cost.
- Adapt, re-model or improve existing high needs places to make them suitable for a wider range of pupil needs.

The types of projects that education settings may want to consider applying for could include.

- Development of a sensory space
- Purchase of additional accessible outdoor equipment for wheelchair users, or for children who need support with sensory regulation
- Permanent sensory circuit developed in outdoor space
- Spatial sequencing and clear wayfinding– e.g. ramps, wayfinding handrails
- Inclusive sanitary provision – e.g. accessible toilets, changing facilities
- Lighting, thermal comfort & ventilation
- Inclusive acoustics - e.g. acoustic wall panels, acoustic pods, acoustic ceilings
- Spaces for re-regulation – e.g. 1:1 restorative spaces, breakout rooms or refurbishment of a small group space for targeted interventions to take place.
- Access to nature – e.g. doors from classrooms for direct access to outside space

Accessing Inclusive Environments Grants

Settings will be able to apply for funding from 01 September 2025. Applications will be via an online form available from the Stoke-on-Trent SEND Local Offer.

To apply, settings will need to complete the online application form in full and include supporting documents, including:

- Proposed evidence base for how you will know that the project has made a difference and supported more children with EHCPs in your setting.
- Quotations for the project that you are proposing
- Confirmation of any match funding, or additional funds secured for a larger project
- Any evidence of engagement
- Any evidence of anticipated environmental impact (e.g. environment policy/strategy) including how you will measure the impact of the funding at a setting level.

Assessment of eligibility

Requests for Inclusive Environment grant funding will be considered by the cluster panel within which the setting is located. The cluster panel will review the request against the criteria set out below and make a recommendation to Stoke-on-Trent city council as the responsible body for the High needs Capital Provision Allocation.

The panel will assess the applications following a scoring approach which will be consistently applied.

The following areas will be considered and allocated a score for each area:

- **Strategic fit** – rationale for project, impact on outcomes for children and young people. A model proposal will include how to quantify the success of the improvements post-implementation. For example, the

additional number of learners accessing the setting, improved school attendance, improved wellbeing scores from learners, etc.

- **Quality of project design/build** – do designs meet rationale identified
- **Capacity** – Is project deliverable in timescales, evidence of capacity to deliver project
- **Finance** – are quotes value for money, include whole costs; match funding (source)
- **Environmental considerations** – positive impact on carbon targets
- **Engagement** – evidence of children/young people and other stakeholders' engagement

The recommendations will then be taken to the local authority's Place, Planning and Sufficiency Board for review. This board consists of Local Authority decision makers from across education, finance and asset management.

What isn't eligible?

The grant funding cannot be used for:

- Maintenance work, which should continue to be covered by Devolved Formula Capital funding (DFC), the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) or School Condition Allocations (SCA).
- Settings who have already benefitted from the High Needs Capital Grant funding will not be eligible to apply for further funding through this process. That includes any setting who has received or agrees to receive grant funding for building work or outdoor space as part of an Enhanced Resource Provision project.
- The funding is provided for capital purposes only and cannot be used for revenue expenditure of any kind, such as training or staff costs.
- Higher education including universities and other higher education provisions.
- Any provision for those aged 25 and over.
- Individual mobility equipment such as wheelchairs. However, settings can spend this funding on capital installations such as ceiling hoists for lifting non-ambulant children into, for example, a hydrotherapy pool.

The funding is provided for capital purposes only and cannot be used for revenue expenditure of any kind, such as training, staff costs or electric vehicles.

[Click here for detailed advice on the use of high needs capital provision allocation use.](#)

Funding

Funding will be provided following successful completion of the project, quality assurance visit undertaken, and on the production of payment evidence (paid invoices/transactions).

Match funding

This is not a requirement, but those projects including match funding to give greater enhancement or enable capital funding pot to stretch further will score favourably.

Estimated timeline

Applications must be received by the closing date of midnight, 31 December 2025. Any late applications may not be considered in this round and may be considered only should a further round become advertised.

It is expected that any project receiving grant funding will have completed the desired work and be using the space from the latest end of September 2026.

September 2025 to December 2025 - Applications

Electronic applications to be received.

January 2026 - Assessment

All completed applications are to be considered by a panel of stakeholders including Parent Carer and schools' representation. More information may be requested for final scoring.

February 2026 - Awards

Successful applications projects will receive confirmation of grant funding being awarded for their projects. Agreement of success criteria on an individual project basis.

Unsuccessful applicants will be advised of the outcome.

Latter Spring term 2025 onwards – Project commencement

Successful applicants commence project

August 2026 – Project completion

Latest date for project completion. Date for initial visit, quality assurance and evaluation of project takes place. Suggested evidence gathered. Payment made to setting following successful assessment

September 2026 - Evaluation

This is the latest date for completion by cluster panel representatives for a final visit and evidence gathering of the impact and difference the project has made to children with SEND and/or EHCPs. Qualitative data will also be considered as part of the evaluation including an assessment of progress towards the success criteria identified at the start of the process.

