

REPORT TO: Schools Forum

DATE: 11th June 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Education, Inclusion and Provision

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

SUBJECT: Delivering Better Value DfE Grant

WARD(S) All Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the school's forum with an update on the progress and impact of the Delivering Better Value workstreams to reduce the overspend against the High Needs Block.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Delivering Better Value (DBV) is a Department for Education programme working to identify and implement local opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND across 54 LAs, and aid local systems (alongside existing local and other DfE programmes) in their objective of achieving financial sustainability.

Halton was identified as eligible to apply for DBV grant funding and subsequently a grant application was submitted on the 20th December 2023. Halton requested £1m of grant funding, primarily to build resilience across all educational systems to support and include learners with Social, Emotional Mental Health Needs.

The initiatives outlined in our bid were designed to allow schools and settings to support SEND children effectively, without necessarily having to request an Education Health and Care assessment, alleviating the demand for specialist placements, and reducing both the risk of out of borough placement and permanent exclusions.

We were notified in March 2023 that our bid was successful and that we had been awarded the full £1m grant. This additional resource presents a significant opportunity to positively transform inclusive practices across Halton. Please note the work of the DBV grant is system changes, which impact will not be truly felt for a number of years.

created a Level 5 Apprenticeship offer for schools and settings. This has been positively received and applications have been made already by several schools (up to Apr 25 – 6 schools). One school is already underway with training an apprentice Level 5 Thrive Practitioner. Where schools have not claimed their spaces, these are now in the process of being reallocated to schools who have requested more, these are mainly larger settings such as secondary schools across the borough.

- 3.7 We are now in the process of offering Family Thrive to Early Years providers and settings. In March 25, we had workshops from Shine Therapy to support our EYFS settings with behaviour and sensory processing, this was to build on other work undertaken via the EYFS Cluster workshops and their annual conference- the neuroscience of play and behaviour. Over recent years, we have seen an increase in applications for EHCPs coming from the Early Years section, therefore giving support and training to them is important. Over the next few years, the impact should be a reduction in application requests.
- 3.8 Feedback from Halton Thrive Conference - *"It was great for me and my colleagues to have time to reflect on how far we have already come with our Thrive journey. We are now clearer on our next steps to establishing a really strong Thrive culture within our school and we are looking forward to forging new links with neighbouring schools which will hopefully strengthen our approaches further."* Astmoor Headteacher, Louisa Aldridge.
- 3.9 Miss Emma Jackson, Head teacher, Gorsewood Primary School *"Great to see how Thrive is evolving in Halton and how I can make all my staff involved. Another Head was able to share their implementation plan with me on the day"*.

310 **Team Teach – Behavioural support**

- 3.11 We are currently ahead in our rollout of Team Teach. All our Resource Provisions have been trained, as well as a number of mainstream settings- 245 members of school staff have had Level 1 training and 47 Level 2. We also have more settings booked in for Spring/Summer 25. The impact can be felt in the reduction of suspensions and exclusions this year (please see data further on in the report)
- 3.12 Our EP service (Educational Psychologist) are now training school staff, but are also providing bespoke advice regarding TEAM Teach through their consultations and reports for individual children. Having 8 EP's as trainers will give Halton the opportunity to be sustainable after DBV has finished.
- 3.13 We had previously planned to offer trainers training to schools (via expression of interest). However, it has been determined through

consultation that it is more appropriate to deliver bespoke training for settings if the need arises based on individual pupils needs.

3.14

We also delivered a further workshop aimed at support staff and governors from Team Teach at the end of March. This was designed to support schools who have only a few members of staff that need training, but also give the wider school a true understanding of the concepts of TEAM Teach. Impact can be seen in the reduction of suspensions and increase in attendance which is shown in data later in this report. It also explored the legal aspects for excluding pupils and the life consequences from an exclusion for a pupil.

3.15

Feedback from TEAM Teach:

“Our staff have really benefited from the TEAM Teach training delivered by Gemma. I feel it will support our group of learners”. A Hilldrup Halton Lodge

3.16

Team Around the School

3.17

Team around the School meetings (TATS) continue to have impact. This is in the form of a weekly professional meeting in which pupils at risk of exclusion are identified both by settings and other Halton LA data sets. The meetings are attended by EPs, Education Welfare, Specialist Teachers, Mental Health, Nursing, Locality Teams as well as Police, Youth Justice and Social Worker if applicable to the child. The newly appointed data analyst team members use the data to drive the meetings held.

We have already highlighted children who are vulnerable at transition points and are planning work around this with other teams such as EP and Specialist teachers to support the transition processes.

In March, we held our TATS Transition meeting for KS2 to KS3 and in April EYFS to Reception. After these meetings, follow-up support meetings are planned for the Summer and Autumn terms to support settings. This will ensure pupils have ongoing support as required.

As in previous years our data team will track attendance and suspensions of all these pupils highlighted. This has been supported by wider teams such as in February, our Virtual School hosted their training event, ‘Excluded to Included’.

The table below shows the impact this course of action has had on Year 7 pupils, as well as the excellent work of school teams.

| Year 7 | Aut/Spr 2023-24 | Aut/Spr 2024-25 | % change |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Suspensions | 168 | 67 | 60% decrease |
| Exclusions | 6 | 0 | 100% decrease |

Impact overall data for this academic year so far:

- Exclusions to date – 46 at this point last year. To date 32.
- Suspensions – currently 600 less suspensions compared to this point last year with over 1000 less lost days in school.

3.18

Feedback from TATS meeting: Jeanette McCann Upton All Saints Primary School – *“TATS gave us both reassurance and support for the pupil. It also allowed the EYFS team come in to our school to support us with Thrive”.*

3.19

Feedback from TATS KS2/3 Vulnerable Transition Day R Murphy Fairfield Primary SENDCO *“It was very useful to share all information with secondary schools. It was invaluable to have the police, NHS, Social Workers and other professionals in this meeting.”*

K Webster Wade Deacon SENDO *“Great to have all professionals together to discuss early actions to support pupils coming to us. This can only help reduce suspension again in Year 7. Pupils highlighted from last year are thriving.”*

3.20 **Emotional Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)**

3.21 Through the DBV project, our Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and EP Services are working with children and families where there is identified EBSNA.

3.22 At the Secondary Attendance Forum in February, case studies were shared to show the impact and support which has been given, this can be seen in the data sets below. Children have been identified by a S19 or Education Inclusion Panel to consider school referrals into this work.

With the support of our data analyst are using the Vulnerable Learners groups (meets 6 weekly) to identify and monitor this cohort and report impact. The next step is to provide a sustainable approach to this work. Training will be given, with resources to secondary school staff to ensure they can provide their own support for pupils after funding via DBV has ceased. Impact can be seen in improved attendance figures this year so far.

3.23 **School-Based Intensive Support**

An pilot Intensive Support Area (ISAs) has opened at Blessed Carlo Acutis funded through DBV in April 25 for students attending the school at greatest risk of permanent exclusion.

School staff have undertaken the Thrive approach training and TEAM Teach to support them in the roll out of this.

We have also offered additional specialist teacher and EP support, who are working with the school staff to enhance their provision and skillsets to

work with the pupils. This pilot is set to run for 1 year in the first instances and 4 pupils are currently accessing this area.

Benchmarking KPIs have been set for individual pupils and will be closely measured throughout the pilot to monitor impact and the invest for savings model that it has implemented. Early impact has seen one pupil would otherwise have required an out of borough provision successfully being able to remain at the school. Not only is this right for the young person to enable them to access a suitable education within their local area, it has saved Halton Local Authority both placement (£63k average) and transport costs (£30k average). To date, all 4 pupils have had no further suspensions and have all seen a rise in their attendance.

- 3.24 **Inclusion Quality Mark** – The IQM (Inclusion Quality Mark), has been well received by our schools that contain a Resource Provision (RP). They have been working together to develop and complete the evidence base paperwork to apply for assessment.

We now have a number of schools that have booked their assessment in the next two terms. One of our schools that contain a resource provision is already an IQM Assessor Centre (Woodside Primary School) and has supported all involved.

The intended impact is to ensure resource provisions are even more inclusive and reduce the need to seek out of borough placements for Halton pupils, therefore reducing the High Needs Block spend in this area and ensuring more children can be educated within their local area, in a provision that can meet their needs. It is also intended that at a later date resource provision practitioners will be able to support and share their knowledge with other mainstream settings.

- 3.25 Feedback L Perks SENDCO Oakfield – *“It has been a useful and supportive process to look at how we can develop our inclusion practice both in mainstream and further within our resource base”.*

- 3.26 **Headteacher Coach and Influence Model** – This is a model to support the well-being of senior leaders within schools. Our Principal EP (Education Psychologist) has continued to roll this out with good success.

There is currently 8 on the program with 6 sessions already been delivered with two more in summer term. There are also planned individual work for two other headteachers following previous group sessions. We have had more headteachers approach the team to use this resource.

This has developed the model to become hybrid and a more bespoke approach in the form of both online and face to face – both group and one to one. Headteachers now have a support mechanism in which they can pick up the phone for well-being support. We are utilising the existing cluster groups to further support Headteachers.

Further work for other SEND and SLT members has been highlighted for the second year of this. Feedback Halton Headteacher *"This has given me an outlet to talk and support my own mental well-being"*.

Impact of this can be seen in the data sets below regarding suspension rates.

3.27 Future workstreams and action via the DBV grant

To develop a borough-wide strategic approach to Ordinarily Available (OA) provision in mainstream schools to reduce the need of resource provision, specialist and out of borough place needs, by ensuring the provision within mainstream meets the needs of the SEND population. This will build on the graduated approach already in place.

Through the successful implementation of this approach, we will ensure that pupils are receiving the right education and life chances which they are entitled to within their local community. It is anticipated that this will then in turn reduce the cost to the LA of EHCPs which are no longer required and out of borough placements.

This will build on the graduated approach already in place.

A relaunch will take place at the DBV SEND Conference in November 2025.

3.28 Measuring impact

Below are a range of data set headlines submitted to the DfE on the use of DBV funding for the most recent quarter.

While the DBV work is only a contributing factor alongside the work of schools, Local Authority teams and other partners, it is clear to see collectively the impact our work is having:

- Primary Persistent Absentees has reduced for EHCP pupils by 0.81% and for SEN Support pupils by 0.96%.
- Secondary Persistent Absentees has also reduced for EHCP and SEN Support pupils by 1.41% and 0.78% respectively.
- The number of suspensions has reduced for SEN Support pupils by 7 pupils
- Permanent exclusions for EHCP pupils is still 0 and for SEN Support pupils it has reduced to 1.
- Overall attendance for EHCP pupils has increased for both primary and secondary school age.

- As of January 2025, in Halton the attendance of Children and Young People with EHCP in primary school was 92.1%, a slight improvement over January 2024 attendance rate of 90.2%.
- The secondary school attendance for this cohort of Children and Young People was 84.3%, an improvement over January 2024 rate of 76.9%.
- Similarly, the attendance of Children and Young People with EHCPs attending special schools as of January 2025 was 90.64%, a better performance when compared to the rate in January 2024 of 87.8%.
- The number of new plans as of January 2025 issued was 282, comprising of 247 new plans and 35 plans from Children and Young People with EHCPs transferred from other Local Authorities to Halton. While this is higher compared to January 2024 at 270, annual growth rate has slowed from 15.5% in January 2024 to 4.4% in January 2025. This could be attributed to the training provided via the DBV grant.
- The percentage of Child and Young People placed into Maintained Mainstream Schools (MMS) was 43.9% (Apr25), an improvement when compared to the rate in January 2023 at 35.0% and January 2024 rate at 41.9%. The current rate is now at par with the national average of 2024 which was at 43.1%. Halton mainstream schools continue to be more inclusive. This could be attributed to a combination of the various DBV workstreams carried out and that are ongoing.
- The percentage of Children and Young People placed into Maintained Special Schools (MSS) was 27.4% (Apr25), a slightly better performance when compared to the rates in January 2023 at 32.3% and January 2024 at 29.2%. Also, this is similar to 2024 national average of 26.9%. This indicates mainstream settings are increasing their ability to meet needs of our young people.
- The percentage of Children and Young People placed in non-maintained independent special school (NMISS) was 7.9% (Apr 25), a similar rate compared to 2023 at 8.2%, 2024 at 8.0%. The rate is still higher than 2024 national average of 5.2%. However, the data shows that the rate is currently stable and may begin to drop as Halton mainstream schools continue to be more inclusive.

* The above figures don't include early years, further education, elective home educated pupils, those not accessing education, employment or training and those who do not have a current setting/school.

- The number of ceased plans as of January 2025 was 122, up from 79 as of January 2024, representing 54.4% increase in the rate of ceased plan in the past year. This has a direct impact on reducing the High Needs funding block and the improvement of annual reviews and process in maintaining plans.

Teaching and Learning – With settings having access to a range of training opportunities via DBV such as Thrive and Team Teach, this has had an impact of learning outcomes:

Children with EHCPs:

- 35% of these children had achieved 'Working at Expected' in Phonics by the end of Year 2, compared with 31% nationally and 29% across our stat. neighbours.
- 20.5% (15) of these children achieved expected outcomes or greater in Reading at KS2, 1.1% better than their peers nationally.
- 12.5% (9) of these children achieved expected outcomes or greater in Writing at KS2, 0.1% better than their peers nationally.
- 19.2% (14) of these children achieved expected outcomes or greater in grammar, punctuation and spelling at KS2, 2.2% better than their peers nationally

SEN Support Children:

- 72% of these children achieved 'Working at Expected' in Phonics by the end of Year 2, compared with 70% nationally and 69% across our stat. neighbours.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 *No Policy Implications*

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Quarter 1 cost £326,240
 Quarter 2 cost £42,940
 Quarter 3 cost £101,933
 Quarter 4 Cost £30,041

Total Cost to date: £501,154

Income from the grant to date- £1,000,000 – full grant has been received. It is hoped that the impact of the Delivering Better Value work will significantly impact on the request for Education Health and Care Plans, which if successful, could have a positive impact on both spend against the High Needs block and the SEND transport spend. It is not possible at this time to quantify what that impact could be.

5.2 Grant spending is on track and within budget. The grant has been audited and passed with no areas to note. DfE are aware and have agreed spending so far.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

None Identified

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None Identified

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

As outlined above, this will ensure that children and young people are increasingly able to access education in line with their identified needs closer to home, within their local communities.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

This will ensure that children and young people with identified SEND are able to be supported to thrive within the right setting to deliver a high quality education in line with their identified needs.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None Identified

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None Identified

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 None

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.