

# SEND Inclusion Fund (SENDIF)

## Handbook and Guidance

Version December 2024



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# 1. Context and background

Local authorities (LAs) and early education and childcare providers must follow the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 0-25 Code of Practice (2015) and demonstrate how they implement a graduated approach to support children with SEND to fulfil their potential.

To support children that have or may have a SEND to access and attend in Early Years settings, the Government has established several measures, including additional funding for setting to support them to meet the needs of children in their care such as Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Disability Access Fund (DAF), and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Fund (SENDIF). For further information about EYPP and DAF, please refer to the Merton Funded Early Education Guidance.

All LAs are required to establish a SENDIF for children starting from 9 months of age who are in receipt of funded early education. The allocation and demand for the fund also supports the LA's responsibilities for commissioning and ensuring adequate SEND services under the Children and Families Act 2014 and Childcare Act 2006.

In addition, London Borough of Merton recognises there are circumstances in which a setting may require advice or support to meet the needs of children with SEND.

Therefore, the Early Education Intervention and Inclusion team provides a SEND advisory service for Early Years settings nurseries in Merton, and collaborates with early years settings to enhance practices, providing advice, information, and guidance tailored to the setting. The Inclusion team focuses on supporting settings in their work with parents and carers, rather than working directly with children and their families.

# 3. Working in partnership with parents

SENDIF applications must include the parent and carers signed consent and actively share their perspectives and insights about their child's needs. Full involvement of parent and carers is essential, as they play a key role in agreeing on and supporting the actions undertaken by the setting. A strong partnership between the setting and the parents and carers is fundamental to achieving the best outcomes for the child. Additionally, the views of professionals involved with the family should be included to support the application process. Please ensure all sections of the application are completed, and that the parent or carer has signed the form prior to submission

## 3.2 Funding Processes

**SEND Inclusion Fund (SENDIF):** The SENDIF is available for settings when a child is accessing funded early education and meets the criteria for SENDIF at the relevant level (see section 4)

### 3.3 Eligible Providers

To qualify for SENDIF, early years settings must:

- Be located within the London Borough of Merton.
- Be listed on Merton’s Directory of Providers for funded early education.

#### Eligible Providers for SENDIF

Provider Type	Child with Funded Early Education Place	Eligible for SENDIF
Ofsted-registered early years setting	Yes	✓
Ofsted-registered early years setting	No	✗
Independent school	Yes	✓
Independent school	No	✗
Maintained school nursery class (all children funded)	Yes	✓

If your setting is outside the London Borough of Merton and you require specific advice regarding processes and services related to a child with SEND those lives in Merton, please email [providers@merton.gov.uk](mailto:providers@merton.gov.uk). Or alternatively contact the LA your setting is based and ask for the support they offer settings operating in their area.

## 4. Application processes

Most children with SEND can be successfully included in early years settings without the need for specialist resources or enhanced staffing. Many settings effectively meet the needs of children with SEND using their Ordinarily Available (OA) resources and best practices. OA practice refers to the strategies, interventions, and resources that all settings should have in place to meet the diverse needs of children, including those with SEND, as part of their everyday provision.

It is important to understand that a delay in learning and development in the early years does not always indicate that a child has a Special Educational Need that requires special educational provision. For example, difficulties related solely to learning English as an additional language are not considered a Special Educational Need.

Providers are expected to demonstrate how they have utilised their OA resources and staffing to support individual children before applying for SENDIF. This should include evidence of the OA strategies and interventions that have been implemented to address the child’s needs, and a cycle of assess, plan, do and review. Children with health conditions may not have SEND, and as such are not supported via the SENDIF if the presenting need is around health. Settings should take health advice from the professionals working with the child as to how health needs can be met in their setting.

For further details on OA practice a please refer to the [Ordinarily Available Guidance](#)

## 4.2 SENDIF Application

### SENDIF criteria and evidence required

The child must attend an eligible setting in Merton (see page 5 for provider type eligibility) and is taking up a funded early education place at the setting and meets the SENDIF criteria.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If SENDIF funding is agreed, funding will only be allocated if the child is named on the setting's termly funded early education headcount/census claim.

Applications should be submitted to the LA in accordance with the published criteria (see page 12). Settings must provide evidence of the child's special educational needs and or disabilities, the actions already taken and a clear plan for how the funding will be used for to support the application. This evidence should include where applicable:

- Information from parents/carers
- Details from previous settings or services such as Portage (if applicable)
- Current observations and activity records progress reports
- Health care plan, risk assessments or similar documents that evidence a child's SEND
- Evidence of individualised assessment, planning, provision, monitoring and evaluation cycles
- Documentation from professionals involved with the child

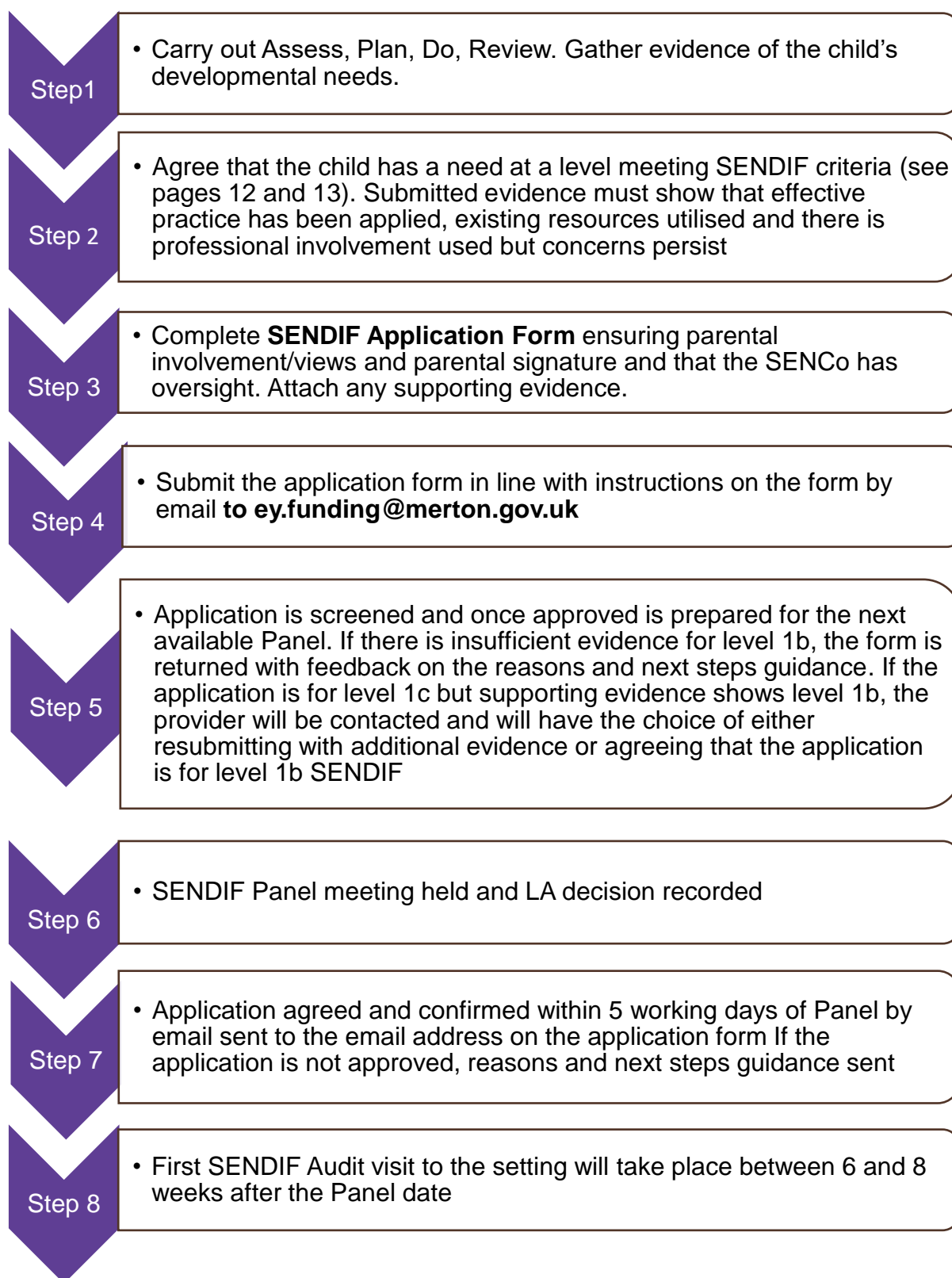
## 4.3 Use of the SENDIF

The application form asks settings to outline the proposed use of the SENDIF and to identify the SENDIF criteria they are applying for (see page 12) Examples of how funding can be used include:

- Specific Staff training to meet a child's needs, such as understanding autism or using Makaton. This may be on site (charged for) training from a local SEND professional or to cover attendance at external training and cover staff costs
- A contribution to enhance staff ratios for children with a higher level of need, at certain times of the day/to access specific aspects of the EYFS
- Improvements/ enhancements to the setting's inclusive environment, such as, resources and equipment. Setting should also consider whether the setting receives the Disability Access Fund (DAF) and how that fund has / will be used
- Embedding new strategies, practices, and interventions

Section 6 provide further details on the SENDIF Criteria and suggestions on the types of activities and resources the funds may cover.

### 3.3 Application pathway for SENDIF



**The Audit Visit** (Step 8) is designed to ensure that the funding is being used as outlined in the application and that the child's educational and learning outcomes are being met, with evidence of progress.

The visit focuses on assessing how effectively the setting is using the SENDIF to support the child's SEND plan and learning goals/outcomes, as detailed in the SENDIF application.

During the audit visit, the Early Intervention and Inclusion Officer will:

- Discuss and observe how the **Ordinarily Available (OA) provision** is being used to support both the identified child and the wider SEND cohort
- Discuss any concerns, successes, and progress with the Key Person and SENCo.
- Review current strategies and interventions, as well as evidence of SENDIF spending and its impact on the child's learning outcomes.
- Review updated key information, including professionals or agencies involved and any new reports.
- Provide agreed actions and recommendations to enhance practice and SEND support.
- Observe practitioners' interactions with the child.
- Review resources and the environment to ensure they support the child's needs.

### Frequency of Audits

- **Children aged from 9 months to 2 years – under 2's (U2):** two audit visits
- **Medium Level of Need (1b):** two audit visits.
- **Higher Level of Need (1c):** three audit visits.

#### Important notes:

If a child moves to a different setting, a new application must be submitted by the new setting if continued support is required.

Funding does not transfer to the new setting if a child changes placement during the funding period.

## 4. SENDIF Levels of Funding

### 4.1. Levels of funding - up to March 2025

The level of funding differs depending on the age of the child as set out below.

#### Children aged from 9 months to – 2 years (under 2's - U2)

- Fixed rate of £3.50
- Child must be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

#### 2-year-olds

- 1b / Medium Level - £2.55 per hour
- 1c / High Level - £7.80 (includes children undergoing an EHC Needs Assessment)

### 3 years & 4-year-olds

- 1b / Medium Level - £2.80 per hour
- 1c / High Level - £10.50 (includes children undergoing an EHC Needs Assessment)

Information on all SEN funding available can be accessed on the Merton website [Funding for pupils with Special Educational Needs \(SEN\) in Early Years settings and Schools](#)

## 4.2. Funded Early Education Claims and SENDIF Payment Process

### PVIs and Childminders

SENDIF payments will be calculated using the date of the SENDIF application and the child-led funded early education funding claims data (Headcount or Late Starter claim) for each term. Payment of SENDIF is subject to the child being submitted on a provider's Headcount or Late Starter claim on the Early Years Provider Hub, within the deadlines and guidance published in Section 9 of the Funded Early Education Guidance. Please ensure the child is recorded as SEN support on the Child Details section of your claim on the Early Years Provider Hub. SENDIF will be paid to providers within one week of the Headcount or Late Starter payment dates (as applicable)

Full details on how to claim funded early education and SENDIF can be found in section 9 of the Funded Early Education Guidance found here: [Early education funding support](#).

### Schools

SENDIF payments will be calculated using the date of the application and the child-led funded early education data submitted on a school's census return each term. Payment of SENDIF is subject to the child being submitted on the census and a child's eligibility for early education funding - please see the Early Years Funding Guide for Schools found here: [Early education funding support](#).

SENDIF payments will be included in the monthly adjustment at the end of each term (where applicable).

### All Settings

It is important that the child's name and date of birth entered on the Headcount, Late Starter claim or Census and on the SENDIF application form matches exactly, so that SENDIF can be identified correctly.

As SENDIF is processed using the existing claims arrangements, the number of funded early education hours claimed for a child will correspond with the number of hours SENDIF applies. For example, if a child is taking up 30 funded hours per week, SENDIF will be paid for 30 hours a week.



Settings will receive email confirmation of the SENDIF amount to be paid for each eligible child once termly Headcount/Census claims have been processed by the LA.

In some rare cases, children identified as needing SEND support and receiving additional inclusion funding, or children with an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan), may claim the full 15 hours of funded childcare even if they do not attend for the full entitlement.

This arrangement is only permitted when:

- It is agreed upon by the childcare setting, the child's parent(s) and an Inclusion Officer.
- It is determined to be in the best interest of the child.
- The child is new to the setting and the child's SEND support needs are being fully understood during the transition period

This temporary flexibility is only used to support a planned transition, such as when a child is gradually increasing their attendance to help them adjust to a new environment or routine. As we appreciate that for some children transition into an early year's place may take longer than others depending on the child's needs. It is expected that during the first funding period of starting at a setting, a plan is followed to enable the child to take up their full entitlement.

If after the first term the child does not attend for the full entitlement each week, the provider can only claim for the hours that the child is attending.

### Moving between funding levels

- The movement of a child from 1b/medium level funding to 1c/higher level (2-4year olds only) funding must first be agreed by the SENDIF Panel via the application process. Once agreed, the funding will automatically be upgraded from the date of submission of the application.
- If a child is receiving 1b/medium level funding and an agreement to assess them for an EHCP is made by the LA's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Integrated Service (SENDIS) Panel (this includes children resident in another LA, for whom written evidence will be required). SENDIF funding will automatically move to 1c/higher level funding effective from the decision date and will be allocated for 20 calendar weeks or the effective date of the finalised EHCP, whichever is sooner.

### Child changing setting at end of the funding period

The child's new setting will need to complete an **SENDIF Change of Setting form** prior to making the first funded early education funding claim for the child at the new setting. This confirms that the transition arrangements have been made between the two settings.

### Child changing settings during a funding period – before the Headcount funding claim

There will be no funding allocated to the setting if the child is not on the setting's funded early education Headcount claim, even if the SENDIF has been agreed. SENDIF is subject to the child being on the termly early education funding Headcount claim.

### Child changing setting during a funding period – after the Headcount funding claim

There will be no SENDIF allocated to the new setting after the Headcount funding claim period ceases. The setting that submits the funded early education claim during Headcount week will receive the SENDIF.

SENDIF allocation period

Once the SENDIF panel decision to award funding is made, SENDIF is awarded for either 2 funding periods (1b) or 3 funding periods (1c)

- Children aged from 9 months to 2 years – under 2's allocations up to the 31 March 2025.
- SENDIF 1B allocations are made for 2 complete terms of funding
- SENDIF 1C allocations are made for 3 complete terms of funding

The SENDIF level and end date will be confirmed in the email sent to settings with their application outcome, following Panel.

## 4.3. Application timescales

### Applications Received Before the First Panel (Before Half Term):

If the application is received before the first panel of the term (i.e., before half term), SENDIF funding will start from the date the application is received and will cover up to two or three full terms, depending on the level of funding awarded.

### Applications Received After the First Panel (After Half Term):

If the application is received after the first panel but before the second panel (i.e., after half term), SENDIF funding will start from the date the application is received, but the funding for that term will be partially allocated. The child will then receive two or three full terms of funding starting from the following term

**Please note:** SENDIF applications received after the submission deadline will not be considered until the following SENDIF Panel, which may not take place until the following funding period/term. **If these applications are successful funding applied from the date of the new funding period, not the date the application was received.**

**Applications without the physical signature of both the parent and SENCo cannot be accepted.**

## 4.4. Extension of funding

SENDIF is awarded as follows:

- 9 months to 2 years (Under 2s) up until 31 March 25
- 2 terms of funding for children allocated 1b
- 3 terms if funding for children allocated 1c.

If a setting still requires additional funding to support a child's needs and has evidence to show that the funding should be extended at the end of the funding period, then early years settings will need to submit an **SENDIF Extension Form** before the SENDIF application deadlines, to be considered by the SENDIF Panel. Submission of an Extension Form does not mean that the extension of SENDIF will be agreed.

The SENDIF is reviewed annually to inform the upcoming financial year's SENDIF budget and align SENDIF process within the total value of the fund.

Where SENDIF funding is agreed for a timescale that spans across two financial years, there may be changes to the unit cost (price per hour) of the SENDIF allocated for funding periods that fall into the new financial year.

The LA will consult with early years setting on any changes to the SENDIF budget available and/ or changes to the SENDIF application and allocation process

## 4.5. Appeals Process

If the evidence submitted to Panel does not show how the child meets the published criteria for SENDIF, an explanation will be given to the setting highlighting which criteria was not met and this decision is final. Criteria is either met or not met and therefore the decision cannot be appealed unless there is further/new/additional evidence that shows the criteria is has been met.

If the setting believes the SENDIF Panel decision making to be inconsistent with the criteria, a letter/email to the Head of the Early Years' Service should be sent within 15 working days of the decision.

On receipt of this, the Head of Service and a named Advisor or Inspector from the Education Department's School Improvement Team will review the documentation, and the evidence submitted against the published criteria. The outcome of this will be that the appeal is either upheld or not.

If the provider is still not satisfied with this response they can follow the council's [formal complaints procedure](#).

## 5. Links to relevant documents

- [Inclusion Advisory Support Request Form](#)
- [SENDIF Application Form](#)
- [SENDIF AUDIT](#)
- [SENDIF EXTENTION FORM](#)

- [SENDIF Change of Setting form](#)
- [Early Years SENCO Handbook](#)
- [Early Years SENCO Handbook Appendices \(Zip file\)](#)
- [Early years foundation stage - Merton ordinarily available guidance](#)
- [Ordinarily Available Guidance, Training videos and key resources](#)

## 6 SENDIF Criteria, evidence and examples of how the funding can be used

### Funding Criteria and Evidence Requirements

Funding level	Available for	Threshold and criteria	Evidence to be provided
<b>Fixed Rate</b>	Children receiving: - Working Parent Entitlement (9 months–2 years old)	Children under 2 years old in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Taking up a funded early education place	Parental consent and views Evidence of Assess, Plan, Do, Review (SEN Support) Evidence the child is in receipt of DLA
<b>1b/Medium Level</b>	Children receiving: - Working Parent Entitlement (2-year-olds) Additional government support entitlement for eligible 2-year-old Universal and extended entitlement for 3 & 4-year-olds For a maximum of 2 funding periods	Assessed as below Age-Related Expectations (ARE) in 2 of the 3 prime areas of learning Requires targeted SEN support with an SEN Support Plan Professional involvement from at least 1 external specialist Taking up a funded early education place	Parental consent and views Evidence of Assess, Plan, Do, Review (SEN Support) Details of developmental delays with assessments or reports showing evidence Professional report/assessment showing delay in 2 of 3 prime areas of learning
<b>1c/Higher Level</b>	Working Parent Entitlement (2-year-olds) Additional government support entitlement for eligible 2-year-olds Universal and extended entitlement for 3 & 4-year-olds For a maximum of 3 funding periods	Significant and complex needs: 2-year-olds assessed as 12 months below ARE in 2 of 3 prime areas 3-year-olds assessed as 18 months below ARE in 2 of 3 prime areas 4-year-olds assessed as 24 months below ARE in 2 of 3 prime areas Requires highly differentiated curriculum Professional involvement from 2 specialists or a community paediatrician (e.g. Educational Psychologist, Paediatrician, SALT, OT, Physiotherapist, that evidence developmental delay / additional needs in 2 out of the 3 prime areas of learning) Undergoing an EHC Needs Assessment Taking up a funded early education place	Parental consent and views - Evidence of Assess, Plan, Do, Review (SEN Support) for at least 1 term Evidence of age-related delays with professional reports Minimum of 2 professional reports evidencing additional needs in 2 of 3 prime areas of learning

\*On occasion, when there are exceptional and unforeseen circumstances relating to the child's needs, professional judgement will be applied to inform decision-making

**General Notes**

**One-to-One Support:** Not provided via SENDIF. Funding should focus on strategies and interventions outlined above.

**SEN Support Plan:** Should detail the interventions required and align with professional recommendations.

Health needs don't necessarily result in the child having SEND. If the presenting need is health and there are not SEND identified, then advice should be sought from the child's named health professional.

**Possible Uses for SENDIF Funding**

Funding Rate	Possible Uses for the Funding
<b>Fixed Rate</b>	<p>Funding can be used for any interventions or strategies outlined under the 1b and 1c funding levels where applicable.</p> <p><b>This includes:</b></p> <p>Supporting staff training to implement inclusive strategies.</p> <p>Providing resources such as visual aids, sensory toys, or environmental adjustments in line with the child's SEN Support Plan.</p>
<b>1b/Medium Level</b>	<p><b>Individualised and Differentiated Activities:</b> Well-planned and well-resourced activities tailored to support the named child's longer-term outcomes and specific targets included in their SEND Support Plan or as recommended by another professional. (Activities that are not carefully planned or linked to the child's SEND Support Plan do not require additional funding.)</p> <p><b>Short, Direct Teaching/intervention Sessions</b> One-to-one teaching/intervention sessions between the child and an adult, clearly planned and linked to the SEND Support Plan. (When 1:4 ratios are in place due to children's age or a high number of children in receipt of funding, additional funding may not be necessary.)</p> <p><b>Behavioural Support:</b> Individualised and differentiated support for children with a behaviour plan or SEND Support Plan, particularly for those with challenging behaviours.</p> <p><b>Risk Assessments and Enhanced Staffing:</b> Risk assessments for children with risky behaviours and enhanced staffing support during specific periods of the day.</p> <p><b>Care plans</b> for children requiring specific care as part of their SEND, considered above and beyond what is typically expected for children of a similar age, as outlined by a medical professional and delivered by appropriately trained staff.</p>

Funding Rate	Possible Uses for the Funding
	<p><b>Environmental Adjustments and Resources</b> Adjustments to the environment or provision of resources linked to the child’s individual SEN Support Plan and professional recommendations.</p> <p><b>Specialist or Additional Equipment</b> to support children with physical disabilities, as outlined in the SEN Support Plan and professional reports. (This applies where the DAF is not in place.)</p> <p><b>Changes to Staff Deployment:</b> Changes to staff deployment to enable small group work involving the named child or to provide individualised support for planned activities that cannot be managed within existing ratios.</p> <p><b>Supervision During Specific Activities:</b> Additional supervision when accessing specific equipment or resources for planned interventions, as named in the SEN Support Plan, to ensure the health and safety of the child.</p> <p><b>Support for Hygiene, Feeding, and Personal Need:</b> Assistance with managing basic hygiene, feeding, and personal needs above and beyond what is typically expected for a child of their age. (Note: Nappy changing and changing clothes are integral aspects of caring for children under 4 within the Early Years Foundation Stage framework.)</p>
1c/Higher Level	<p><b>Prerequisites for 1C Funding Strategies</b> and interventions identified under <b>1B/Medium Level</b> must also be in place.</p> <p><b>1C funding will not be allocated</b> where only 1B-level interventions are evident in the SEN Support Plan or where professional recommendations are limited to 1B interventions.</p> <p><b>Important Note Settings</b> must be aware that <b>one-to-one support is not provided via SENDIF</b>, and funding must not be used for this purpose.</p> <p><b>Highly Differentiated and Planned Curriculum:</b> Delivery of a curriculum that is intensively planned and adapted to meet the specific targets and outcomes outlined in the SEN Support Plan. (This should not be used for one-to-one support.)</p> <p><b>Intensive Support/Teaching</b> sessions designed to address the needs of the child, based on recommendations made by multiple professionals involved in the child’s care. (This should not take the form of one-to-one support.)</p> <p><b>Personal, Social, and Emotional Development;</b> Intensive support aimed at addressing significant challenges in personal, social, and emotional development, such as managing highly challenging behaviours and fostering social interactions.</p> <p><b>Complex Special Needs and Care Requirements:</b> Intensive support for children with very complex SEND, including moving and handling, feeding, basic hygiene, and personal care. This must be overseen by trained staff or supported by a community nurse and involve a range of professionals.</p> <p><b>Personal Equipment and Staff Training:</b> The provision and maintenance of specialised personal equipment, including manual handling aids, as well as staff training in manual handling and the use of hoists, where applicable.</p>