

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Education

£6.1m OF EARMARKED FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S (EA'S) SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME FOR 2022/2023

Published at noon on Wednesday 24 August 2022.

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Education): This statement is in relation to £6.1m of earmarked funding made available by my Department to support the Education Authority's Special Educational Needs and Disability Transformation Programme during 2022/2023.

The SEND Transformation Programme, led by the EA, was established in late 2020 to incorporate all changes required within the SEN arena and represents a significant cross sectoral change agenda that will make a positive impact on children with Special Educational Needs across our society. It is chaired by the Chief Executive of the EA and the Departments of Education and Health are represented on the Programme Board. The Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young people (NICCY) attends as an adviser.

The Programme seeks to address the majority of recommendations (150+) made in numerous reviews and scrutiny reports in relation to SEN, by not only building on the SEN development work that is already underway across my Department and various agencies, but also by delivering a range of new projects to improve the outcomes for children with SEN.

As members will appreciate, the increasing number of children with SEN and the complexity of the issues involved have led to additional pressures being placed on a system which is already struggling to meet the demand for services. I fully appreciate the impact this has had and continues to have on those children and their families, and the SEND Transformation Programme aims to address some of these issues.

I welcome that the EA has undertaken extensive stakeholder engagement to explain the rationale for the Programme and that the concept has been positively received in terms of setting a strategic direction to resolve the fundamental issues faced.

Currently 13 priority first wave projects have been identified in terms of being child & family-centred. Six of these projects are being taken forward by my Department and are currently up and running. The remaining seven projects are EA led. Of these, three are ongoing and four are yet to be initiated and in order to proceed, are dependent on the appropriate resources being in place.

I recognise that SEND Transformation is a vital area of work that must be driven forward in the interests of children and young people with SEN - to better meet their needs and expectations and the expectations of their families. Stakeholders have highlighted the need to make SEN services more focused on the needs of the child and on improving the lives of our children with SEN. The SEND transformation agenda will be a crucial means of achieving that. We want our SEN services and support to wrap around families and their children guiding them through the process during what can I know be an unsettling and worrying time. While I appreciate the difficulties that are faced across our system, it is important that we do not shy away from the challenges. Through this transformation agenda, we have an opportunity to realise real, positive, meaningful change for our children with SEN. It is imperative that we keep the focus on bringing about the systemic change that will result in tangible outcomes for children with SEN and their families.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce that to support the Programme in 2022/2023, £6.1m has been allocated to the EA to generate real momentum with this work.

I wish to assure members that improving outcomes for our children and young people with SEN remains a key priority for myself and the Department, and I hope members will agree that the provision of this essential funding will go some way to ensuring that this is achieved.

This statement is being issued during Northern Ireland Assembly recess in order to keep members informed.

Michelle McIlveen MLA

Minister of Education