

# Early Years Inclusion Fund

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## **Introduction**

The Early Years Strategy Group (EYSG) and the Early Years Inclusion Fund group (EYIFg) have worked collaboratively to set up and run an Early Years Inclusion Fund for private, voluntary and independent settings, maintained and school Nurseries within North East Lincolnshire Council.

The purpose of this report is to firstly describe the Early Years Inclusion Funding (EYIF) which was introduced in the N. E. Lincs. in 2015 to support Foundation Stage 1 (FS1) children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and secondly to outline the anticipated impact of the funding for the children supported, their early years settings and for the local authority.

## **Anticipated benefits for the Early Years Settings**

- To enable the early years setting to focus more time on the child with SEND without taking the time away from other children in the setting.
- To enable them to work more closely with parents and support service professionals and attend multi-agency planning and review meetings.
- To increase the skills of the practitioners by working closely with support services to find techniques that improve the child's rate of progress.
- To increase practitioners' confidence, following the review, when they see how they have been able to make a difference to the child.
- To encourage the use of Universal and specialist services.
- To promote the Plan-Do-Review approach to learning.
- To support settings in being fully inclusive, which may not have been possible previously where additional resources were required for the safety and progress of the child in the setting but financial implications may have prohibited this.

### **Benefits for the Local Authority**

- Children's needs to be identified earlier and so support given earlier.
- More effective use of support services time when their advice is acted upon / implemented and the child makes more progress.
- To enable children to stay at a setting in their own locality.
- To identify training and workforce development needs which can then be met primarily by LA support service practitioners.
- Many of the children receiving EYIF can now have a 'My Support Plan' written collaboratively with parents, early years practitioners and support service professionals as part of the revised SEND legislation and Code of Practice. This may in future, be converted to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by the Special Needs Assessment and Review Team (SENART), if deemed appropriate.

### **Criteria for obtaining early year inclusion funding, application and review procedures.**

Following consideration of the literature into early intervention within inclusive settings, research into the policies and practices of implementing early years inclusion funding in other areas of the country, and the views and experiences of the professionals on the N. E. Lincs. Early Years Strategy Group, the following criteria for allocating inclusion funding was agreed:

- It was decided not to use a system of labelling children's SEN by a diagnosis of their disability or the extent of their developmental delay as measured by standardised or other measures to assess their level of needs in order to allocate funding but to consider the evidence of a child's skills, capacities, strengths, progress and special needs from existing early years records (EYFS baseline and progress tracking records) and from additional SEND assessment, intervention and monitoring. Recently, the EYIF panel has developed a descriptors' document which allows settings to monitor small steps of progress while providing evidence of the child's level of need. This serves as a monitoring and recording tool while allowing panel members a means to reach consistent, comprehensive decisions, based on evidence.
- It was also agreed that the early years/school setting needed to have sought the advice of a specialist practitioner from health and/or education and that this advice should have been implemented and outcomes evaluated. Reports from support service practitioners are also requested. It was agreed to keep the application forms for EYIF as short and simple and parent friendly as possible with the attachment of appropriate evidence, together with reports from specialist support services, to provide evidence of a child's SEND, why additional funding was required and how it would be used. Application forms have to be discussed and counter-signed by the child's parent/carer and one of the support services practitioners involved. All paperwork was intentionally

kept very similar to EHCP paperwork to enable easier access and familiarisation to settings and families.

- A brief review report is required on a termly basis to show evidence of how the funding has been used and the progress made by the child. Continuation, increase, reduction, or termination of the inclusion funding is to be made based on this information.
- Priority for allocating funding to early years settings has been given to children with 'high need-low incidence'. Children who are already in receipt of additional funding, for example through an Education Health and Care Plan are not eligible for EYIF.

### **Current context**

Settings have been familiarised with the process of applying for the EYIF (following informative sessions to SENCOs & communications).

Based on verbal feedback by the settings the Early Years Inclusion fund has been welcomed and seem to have provided the resources needed to support EY children-filling a gap.

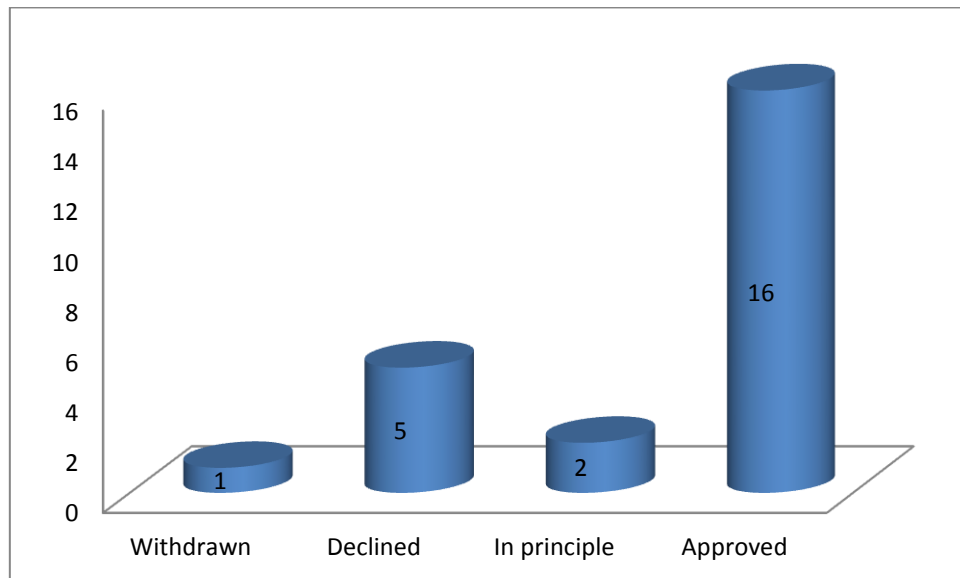
Settings have been encouraged to provide the funded resources to the child when he/she is due for a transition. Thus, the resources do not only support settings into supporting individual children but also follow the children into their new settings and support their transitions.

Settings have gradually developed in providing appropriate and relevant evidence in support of their applications. The panel has given consideration to current research and promote not only the support of children by providing one-to-one but also providing equipment suggested by relevant agencies and encouraging the use of specific interventions. This way the use of support universal and specialised agencies is promoted and children are not encouraged to merely depend on one-to-one support. Additional support may be in the form of:

- Resources to enable access.
- Staff training.
- 1:1 support.
- Specific programmes related to Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Individual education programmes & Specific interventions.

The EYIF panel meet once every month. The decisions are reached through group discussion on the information / evidence provided. If the evidence is either incomplete or inadequate, the funding request may be declined or delayed pending the supply of further information. The panel's decisions in the majority of the

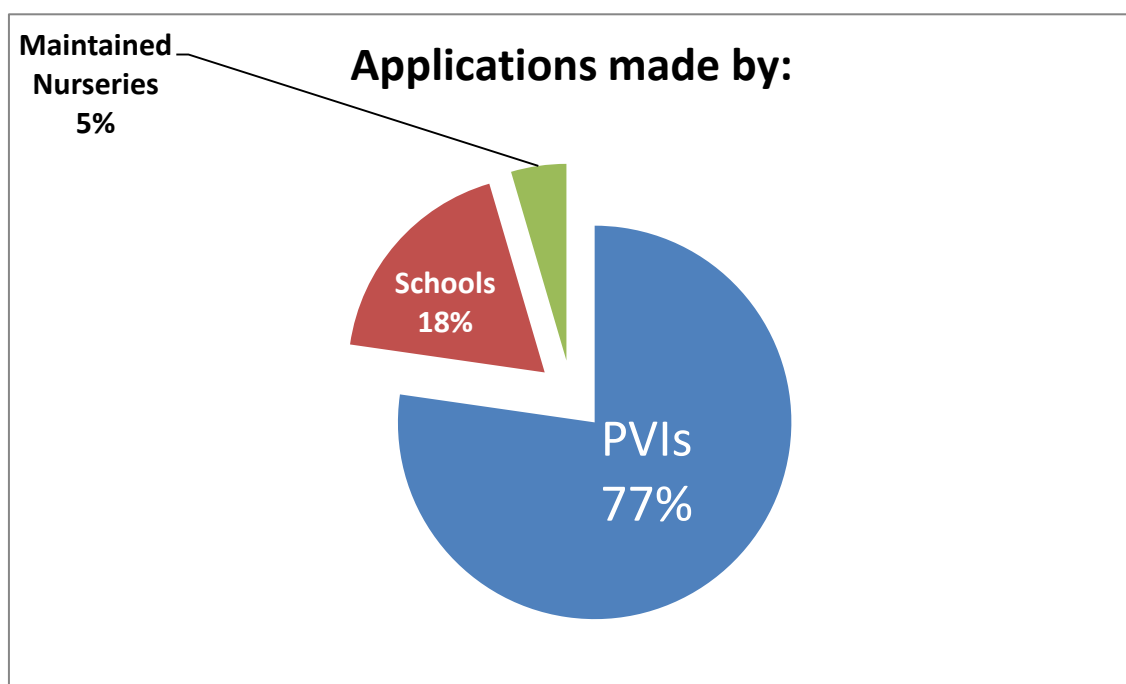
submitted plans has been approving with only a small proportion of these being either declined or approved in principle.



**Fig. 1: Panel's decisions**

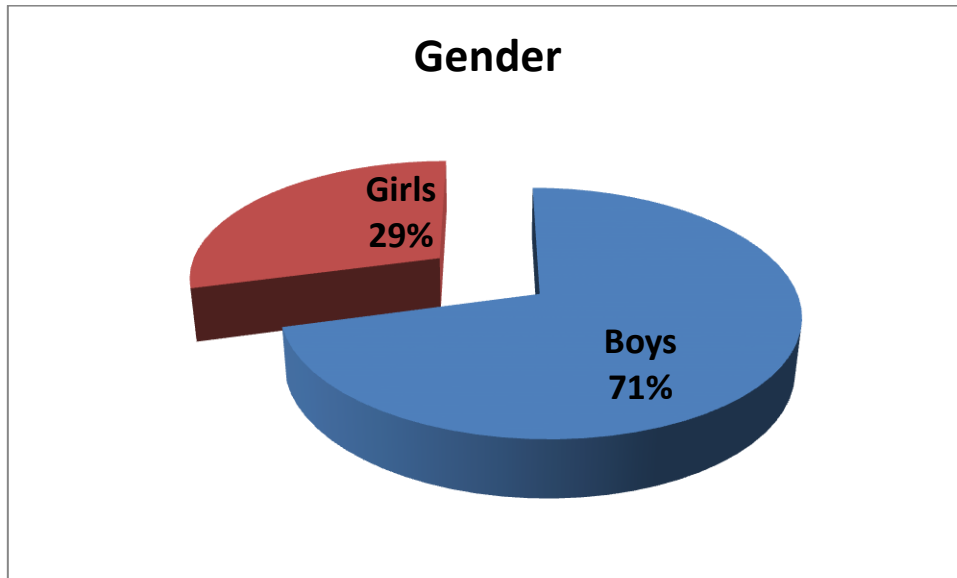
Data is held with regard to the areas of need for which settings are applying, the demographic characteristics i.e. sex and average age, funded equipment, the decisions and the evidence provided in support of applications.

Since April 2015, the panel has considered 24 cases. Of these 17 were submitted by a PVI, 4 were submitted by a school and 1 by a maintained Nursery.



**Fig. 2: Source of application**

The applications referred to 17 boys and 7 girls, as presented below.



**Fig. 3: Gender of children**

The panel has spent an average of £934.81 on each case where needs and support vary. In addition, equipment such as supportive seating has been funded and settings keep a record of such equipment which will be returned to the panel's possession once the specific child grows out of it. This aims to support settings in sharing equipment as well as good practice.

Our actions and considerations are based on the N. E. Lincs. SEND Strategy which places an emphasis on early identification and intervention.

### **Recommendations**

- Although it is yet not clear if the EYIF has reduced or increased the number of Statutory Assessments of SEND being requested at EY, it is anticipated that this has been deferred until children are nearing school entry. Certainly the 24 children supported through the EYIF during the last two years would not all have been supported through an EHC Plan. The funding also represents clear value for money as relatively small amounts of funding have made a difference.
- Informal feedback clearly demonstrates the benefits and impact of the funding on these young children. There is a strong need for this funding to continue so that FS 1 children eligible for an early education place who have complex

needs receive the same additional SEND support that children attending school receive.

- The funding formula for allocation of EYIF also needs to be integrated into N. E. Lincs. Banding/Stages of Intervention, support and funding which presently outline the stages relating to the school age population.

The EYIF paperwork and processes are to be reviewed in Spring term 2016.

### **Conclusions**

Since April 2015, 24 children have been supported in 22 different early years/school settings. The EYIF has enabled all FS1 children to access additional funding for SEND support regardless of the early years setting they attended. Previously this funding had not been available to early years settings in the private and voluntary sectors.

It is anticipated that the funding has made a difference to Early Years' children in N. E. Lincs. As children have to have high/complex SEN and/or disabilities to access the funding, its success should not be measured only in terms of the child's rate of progress but by whether it enables all children to attend their local early years/schools setting with their peers and be fully included safely and without detriment to other children.

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