Guidance for Mainstream Schools considering applying for Capital Funding to enhance / set up a sensory environment

In your application you should take account of the principles, priorities, vision and goals in Sections 1,2 and 3. You may also wish to draw on existing effective practice within your school or from other schools.

When applying describe your proposal in more detail taking account of the questions set out in Section 7.

1. Principles (from DfE Guidance for inclusion bases June 2026)

Six key principles of effective practice:

1. Supporting inclusion in the school or local area
2. High-quality curriculum design
3. Effective data, assessment and outcomes
4. Effective workforce and leadership
5. Effective partnership working
6. Inclusive and accessible physical environments

2. Reform Plan Priorities

- early
- local
- fair
- effective
- shared

3. Hillingdon's Vision and underpinning goals

Vision

We are committed to building a SEND system where every child and young person is safe, supported early, and able to achieve and thrive. Our ambition is a fully inclusive, coherent, fair and financially sustainable 0–25 system operating seamlessly across education, health and social care, with support that is timely, local and effective.

Four goals:

1. Strengthen early identification

Needs identified early and met through timely, effective support.

2. High-quality mainstream inclusion

More children and young people with SEND thrive in local mainstream provision and feel they belong.

3. Needs-led continuum of provision

Sufficient mainstream, specialist and post-16 provision aligned to local need and delivering value for money.

4. Improve outcomes and confidence

Improved outcomes for children and young people, stronger family confidence, and co-produced partnerships that shape delivery

4. Aims

- To enable children and young people to access the specialist resources to meet their needs whilst remaining in their local communities, close to their families and friends.
- To deliver the right support in the right place, so that every child in a mainstream school can achieve and thrive.
- To form part of the school's wider inclusive approach.
- To support children and young people to regulate, participate in learning and successfully access the mainstream school environment.

5. What could be included in an application for a sensory environment

- Sensory room
- Sensory spaces in the school buildings
- Outdoor sensory space / sensory equipment
- Equipment that supports sensory regulation / sensory integration (as recommended for example by an OT)

A sensory environment should not operate as isolated provision or routinely replace access to high-quality classroom teaching.

6. Evidence of need

- What evidence demonstrates the need for this provision?
- How many children / young people or cohorts are expected to benefit and what needs have been identified?
- How does the proposal respond to needs identified through school-level SEND data, assessment and existing support?
- What provision is currently available and what gap will this investment address?

7. Questions to consider when applying

- What type of resource are you considering and why?
    - Sensory room
    - Sensory space/s in the school buildings

    - External space / outdoor equipment
    - Sensory integration equipment
- Will it be active / interactive or passive?
- What are your aims for the resource?
- What will the educational benefits be?
- What outcomes will you be aiming to achieve? Individual level / school level?
- What measurable difference will the investment make?
- How will you plan, develop and monitor programmes for pupils' use of the resource?
- What equipment / resources do you already have and what would enhance this provision?
- Have you sought advice from or visited other schools that use sensory equipment, occupational therapists?
- How does the proposed sensory environment form part of the school's graduated approach to SEND and complement the school's Ordinarily Available Provision