

Dingley's Promise: Case Study

High-quality early intervention changes lives and makes financial sense. This case study shows how Dingley's Promise Specialist SEND Early Years Centre's improve outcomes for children with SEND, reduce pressure on costly statutory systems, increase successful transitions into mainstream education, and strengthen specialist sufficiency in the early years. It also demonstrates why investing earlier is more effective and more affordable than waiting until needs escalate.

OUR MODEL

A Dingley's Promise centre is designed to support children with SEND in the early years to have their needs met at these early stages of identification and ensure the children and parents receive the right support early to set a positive approach to their child's education. We work on a referral basis in collaboration with the local authority to recognise the right support for each child, this may be a placement in our centre or support from a family support worker who can build the families confidence and understanding of their child's needs and awareness of the support available and ways to engage with early years settings for their child.

The centre model is designed to ensure that children with SEND can access their full early education entitlement in a specialist, inclusive environment where assessment, family support, and transition planning happen together. Dingley's Promise evidence highlights that children with SEND are significantly less likely than their peers to access their full entitlement, even though they are often the children who would benefit most from earlier and more consistent support. A specialist 30-hour centre model creates the conditions for earlier identification of need, targeted support, close partnership with families, and a planned pathway towards the right long-term educational placement. Our model of working is successfully functioning across 7 Local Authorities which in some, have seen growth from 1 specialist centre to up to 3 per area, ensuring children across the local authority have access to this service and aren't limited by the postcode lottery.

ANNUAL COST PER CHILD

The cost of a 30-hour model equates to an indicative annual cost of £23,400 per child per year. This is a significant investment in the early years, but it remains low when compared with the long-term financial consequences of delayed support, increased EHCP demand, and specialist school placements. Put simply, the cost of acting early is far lower than the cost of acting late. Investing in the Early Years has a longer positive and more cost-effective impact longer term.

Impact at a glance:

- Suggestive annual cost of a 30-hour specialist early years place: £23,400 per child
- Children supported each year per centre: around 25 children then additional children supported through our Family Support Service.
- Children moving on to mainstream from the service is dependent on need and cohort of children but varies between 56% to 70%
- Long-term impact: reduced pressure on EHCPs, fewer high-cost placements, and stronger confidence in local inclusive pathways

REDUCING PRESSURE ON EHCP'S

A key benefit of the 30-hour model is its potential to reduce pressure on Education, Health and Care Plans by meeting need earlier, more intensively, and with greater confidence for families and professionals. The evidence is clear that where families do not trust the system to provide appropriate support, they are more likely to seek an EHCP and specialist school placement even where a child may be able to thrive in mainstream education with the right early intervention. By offering sustained specialist provision in the early years, alongside careful assessment and supported transitions, the 30-hour model can help avoid escalation, build family confidence, and reduce the number of children whose needs intensify before they reach statutory school age.

TRANSITION TO MAINSTREAM

The most exciting evidence for this model is what happens next for children. In one of our Dingley's Promise' Centres, around 50 families are supported each year with around 25 children attending the centre. Of the children who left the service in the most recent year, up to 70% moved on to mainstream education rather than specialist settings. This is a powerful indicator that when children receive the right support early enough, many can thrive in less restrictive environments with the right support and transition planning around them.

The financial impact is significant. If around 10 children each year move into mainstream education instead of specialist provision, the potential saving to the local authority in a single year is approximately £200,000, based on an estimated specialist school cost of £26,000 per year compared with an average mainstream school place cost of £6,000. These savings increase over time as children remain in mainstream education, while the wider benefits for children, families, and the local system continue to grow. Over the course of a child's primary education, this could save local authorities nearly £1.4 million. This figure does not include any additional savings from a reduction in EHCPs where these may no longer be needed.



GROWING SPECIALIST SUFFICIENCY IN THE EARLY YEARS

The 30-hour model also strengthens specialist sufficiency in the early years by creating more viable, planned, and purposeful provision for children with complex or emerging needs before they reach school age. Dingley's Promise research shows that many children with SEND are still unable to access their full entitlement, and that providers across the sector are under financial pressure and may feel unable to admit children whose needs require additional support. This has a further impact on families who are then unable to return to work which leads to a higher level of economic poverty for families of children with SEND. Our Specialist Centre model helps address this by creating dedicated capacity, increasing confidence in local pathways, and relieving pressure on mainstream providers who may otherwise lack the skills, confidence, staffing, or funding to respond effectively. In practice, this means more children are identified earlier, more families are supported, and local authorities are better able to evidence that they are taking reasonable steps to secure sufficient provision. This also supports with sufficiency planning for school allocation as children are known to Local Authorities who can carry out effective place planning.

RIGHT SUPPORT, RIGHT TIME, RIGHT SERVICE

Dingley's Promise is a valuable support service for early years children with SEND and we have found this support has the most impact when we work collaboratively with the local authority and other early support services within the area. One example of collaborative working is the development of a joined-up early years SEND pathway between local authorities, health partners, and specialist providers. Through a shared referral route, regular multi-agency discussion, and clear coordination between services, children and families can access the right support at the right time from the right service. For local authorities, this kind of coordinated approach helps reduce duplication, improve communication across teams, support more timely decision-making, and build greater confidence that children's needs are being identified and responded to as early as possible.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A specialist 30-hour centre model is more than a childcare offer. It is an early intervention strategy that helps address gaps in early years sufficiency and improves outcomes for young children. For children, it provides earlier support, stronger development, and a greater chance of thriving in mainstream education. For families, it offers better access to childcare, increased confidence, and more opportunity to work and take part in family life. For local authorities, it is a practical way to reduce long-term high-needs costs, ease pressure on EHCP systems, and build a more inclusive and sustainable early years system. Investing in specialist early years provision is not only the right thing to do, but also one of the most effective investments a system can make.



 **Dingley's Promise**

Transforming the Early Years for children with SEND

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