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Guidance

Strategic School Improvement Fund

From:

[National College for Teaching and Leadership](#)

Published:

24 March 2017

Last updated:

12 September 2017, [see all updates](#)

Funding for eligible schools for a range of school improvement activities.

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Apply

Applications for round 2 of the Strategic School Improvement Fund are now open and will close at midday on Friday 20 October 2017.

Apply now using the [online form](#). This link will take you to the application form login page. If you don't already have an account with us, you will need to register first.

Please read the [application completion guidance](#) before completing the online form.

All applications must be submitted using the online form. We will not accept applications sent by email.

We expect to inform applicants of the outcome of their applications in January, when schools return from their Christmas holiday.

There will be a third round of funding to open before Christmas 2017, with a closing date in spring 2018.

Overview

The £140 million Strategic School Improvement Fund is a grant to support first, infant, primary, secondary, middle, all-through, alternative provision and special academies and maintained schools, and pupil referral units. It is intended to further build a school-led system, and aims to target resources at the schools most in need to improve school performance and pupil attainment; to help them use their resources most effectively, and to deliver more good school places.

The fund will support a broad range of school improvement activities including, but not limited to, improving leadership, governance, teaching methods and approaches, and financial health and efficiency. The fund will support medium- to long-term sustainable activities across groups of schools with a preference towards school-led provision, that is, support provided by schools, for schools.

The Strategic School Improvement Fund is not intended to support specific projects or activities already funded through other Department for Education programmes. These will include specific programmes relating to curriculum enhancement, opportunity areas, the Northern Powerhouse, national professional qualifications, initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment, the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund, academy conversion activities and improvements in school buildings or infrastructure.

Teaching schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities should submit to the Department for Education applications for funding to address local improvement priorities across groups of schools. To ensure that support reaches those schools which need it most, and in the most effective way, we expect that, in shaping these applications, regional schools commissioners, multi-academy trusts, local authorities, the Teaching Schools Council, and diocesan representatives will work collaboratively in [sub-regional improvement boards](#) and with schools to bring together their local intelligence to identify shared improvement priorities.

To avoid duplication, we encourage teaching schools to make their Teaching Schools Council regional lead aware of their intention to submit an application(s). Similarly, we encourage multi-academy trusts to make their regional schools commissioner aware of their intention to apply.

Each application must support a minimum of 4 schools, of which at least 70% must meet one or more of the [eligibility criteria](#). Eligible schools will be those which are currently underperforming, as well as schools at risk of doing so. Where applications are solely in support of special schools, pupil referral units and alternative provision units, the 70% threshold does not apply because the needs of these schools are not always apparent from performance data.

One of the main criteria for assessing applications is how well they are supported by evidence which demonstrates why the proposed improvement approaches are expected to drive up standards in schools.

Applications should set out a clear rationale for why the improvement is necessary, and should detail what activities will be undertaken by which providers, and the expected costs, short-term and long-term outcomes.

We expect schools, in particular teaching schools, national support schools, and multi-academy trusts to provide the majority of improvement support; however, applicants are at liberty to use a range of providers and will be responsible for securing and quality assuring all provision.

Applications will be assessed against the criteria detailed below and the Department for Education will also refer to local intelligence to inform its decision-making on priorities.

If there is an urgent need for more bespoke support, there is provision to apply for [emergency funding](#) to support an individual school in difficulty.

Who can apply

To apply for the Strategic School Improvement Fund, you should be a designated teaching school, a multi-academy trust, or a local authority.

Multi-academy trusts can apply to support schools within their trust or intending to join the trust during the lifetime of the improvement programme, but only when at least 25% of supported schools in any one application are not in the MAT or not due to be; or, for applications in support of more than 20 schools, there is a minimum of 5 schools not in the MAT or not due to be. In both cases, the schools not in the MAT or not due to be must meet the [eligibility criteria](#). For the purposes of this criteria, we are defining 'due to be' as the supported school's governing body having passed a resolution to join the MAT.

Applications will need to be ratified by a senior responsible officer in the applicant organisation. We ask that applicants name this individual on the application form, and that they are in a position to commit their organisation to be accountable to the Department for Education for the correct use of the funding and delivery of the outcomes set out therein, as well as complying with the [terms and conditions of the grant funding agreement](#). We require applications to be ratified by:

- the headteacher – if you are a teaching school
- the director, assistant director, or equivalent, of children's services – if you are a local authority, or
- the chief executive officer/accounting officer – if you are a multi-academy trust

In submitting an application, you are confirming your commitment to undertake delivery of the improvement

activities, to be accountable for correct use of funding, to quality assure all provision and to provide a termly progress report evidencing achievement of outcomes and completion of activities as stated in your application.

All parties – applicant, providers and supported schools – must have given their express approval to the application and its provisions prior to submission. Where this express approval has not been given by all parties, the application will be deemed ineligible.

An applicant may submit more than one application, providing they are able to demonstrate in the application form that they have the capacity and capability to manage several simultaneous programmes.

We may seek or draw on further information on applicants and providers in order to confirm their capacity to carry out the activities required for the successful delivery of an application.

Making sure your application is eligible

Applicants should ensure prior to submission that their application(s) meets all aspects of eligibility:

- The applicant is either a local authority, designated teaching school or multi-academy trust.
- Supported schools are eligible to receive support
- Each application supports a minimum of 4 schools and that all supported schools have given their express approval.
- At least 70% of supported schools in any application meet one or more of the supported schools eligibility criteria, unless the flexibilities for special schools, SEND, pupil referral units, alternative provision units and infant/first schools apply.
- For applications submitted by multi-academy trusts, even those which are a designated teaching school, at least 25% of supported schools in any one application are not in the MAT and not due to join during the lifetime of the improvement programme; or, for applications in support of more than 20 schools, there is a minimum of 5 schools not in the MAT and not due to join (as defined under 'Who can apply' above). In both cases, the schools not in the MAT and not due to be must meet the [eligibility criteria](#).
- Improvement activities undertaken are not those in the 'activities which are not eligible for funding' section of this guidance.
- All parties to the application have given their express approval to its provisions.

Schools eligible to receive support

All first, infant, primary, secondary, middle, all-through alternative provision and special academies and maintained schools, and pupil referral units in England qualify for support, with the exception of:

- solely 16+ provision institutions (that is, those which are not part of a secondary school)
- local authority nurseries
- secure units
- schools subject to academy orders (unless exceptional circumstances apply)
- schools which are open but proposed to close

Exceptional circumstances are determined by the relevant regional schools commissioner who will make a

judgement as to whether the school is in need of support through the fund in addition to that it will receive on joining a multi-academy trust.

Each application must include at least 4 supported schools, and at least 70% of the supported schools in each application must meet at least one of the [eligibility criteria](#). The remaining 30% of schools may be those which do not meet any of the eligibility criteria, but are identified by local intelligence as being at risk of decline.

Please note: eligibility of schools in relation to criteria E6 to E14 is based on their 2015/16 published performance data.

A supported school may be included in more than one application; however, if more than one of those applications is successful, providers must expect to co-ordinate their efforts to ensure that the school can benefit from each of the programmes. The supported schools should make certain that they have the capacity to participate fully in more than one improvement programme.

A number of special schools, pupil referral units and alternative provision units may meet one or more of the criteria because they cater for pupils who are working at lower key stage levels or making less rapid progress than their mainstream educated peers. Although such schools may not necessarily be at risk of underperforming, it is important that these schools are able to benefit from the support of the Strategic School Improvement Fund. They will be able to do so either through applications which include other special schools, pupil referral units and alternative provisions units, or applications which include these and mainstream schools.

Where all of the supported schools in an application are special schools, pupil referral units or alternative provision units, the requirement for 70% of supported schools to meet one or more of the eligibility criteria will not apply.

Where applications are solely to support improvements in outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream schools, we will allow some flexibility in the requirement for 70% of supported schools to meet one or more of the eligibility criteria– please consult ssif.enquiries@education.gov.uk before finalising your application.

Similar to special schools, improvement needs of first/infant schools may not be apparent from the eligibility criteria and it is important that these schools are able to benefit from the Strategic School Improvement Fund. Where applications are specifically to increase the proportion of children in infant/first schools meeting or exceeding expectations for language and communication, literacy, and mathematics, the requirement for 70% of supported schools to meet one or more of the eligibility criteria will not apply.

If you have any questions about eligibility, prior to submitting your application please contact ssif.enquiries@education.gov.uk.

Funding available per application

There is no set amount of funding per application; however, each application must include a minimum of 4 supported schools. Individual application values will typically be in the range of £100,000 to £500,000 and will support multiple schools to address shared improvement priorities. We are particularly interested in receiving higher value applications that use evidence-led approaches to address improvement priorities across a large number of schools in a locality.

We expect that:

- the vast majority of funding will be spent on direct delivery of the improvement activities, with no more than 35% in total on administration, project management, monitoring, and application development costs.
- day rates for NLE, SLE and other system leaders will be in line with national benchmarks of approximately £500-£650 for a national leader of education; £400-£500 for a local leader of education; and £350 - £400 for a specialist leader of education.

What we will fund

Applications must address local improvement priorities to benefit multiple schools (minimum of 4 supported schools per application), and

- be of a scale and nature that brings about sustainable improvement in school standards and performance across an area, phase or group of schools
- be supported by evidence that demonstrates why the proposed improvement approach is expected to drive up standards in schools. See a [classification of types of evidence](#) and how they might be used.
- set out a clear rationale for why the improvement is necessary, and detail what activities will be undertaken by which providers, and the expected costs, short-term and long-term outcomes

Applications may include innovative ideas and approaches to school improvement; however, such applications will still require an evidence base to support why and how they are expected to achieve the stated outcomes.

The types of activities that we will fund include, but are not limited to, those which:

- deliver improvements in overall teaching, learning and leadership.
- increase teachers' capacity, to enable them to focus on their teaching and undertake effective evidence-based professional development. This could include support to review and remove unnecessary workload, in line with the [recommendations of the 3 independent reports on marking, planning and resources and data management](#).
- improve specifically the performance of a school in relation to its disadvantaged pupils.
- are specifically focused on raising the attainment of pupils with SEND; in particular proposals which focus on identifying SEND, putting in place effective interventions, commissioning specialist support, parental involvement, transitions, minimising exclusion and preparation for adulthood.
- have a clear impact on pupil outcomes and social mobility by getting the best value from school resources. This could include, for example, schools working in partnership to increase efficiency by sharing specialist staff; collaborative procurement arrangements to help get the best value from non-staff expenditure; or developing schools' capability for effective financial management.
- improve the standard of language, literacy and numeracy in reception.
- are specifically focussed on increasing the number of high quality experienced teachers working in challenging schools, to deliver improved pupil progress in a way that will ensure improvements can be sustained beyond the period of any secondment.
- deliver improvements in governance.

Activities which are not eligible for this fund include:

- academy conversion activities that are expected to be paid for through other funds such as, but not limited to, the sponsored academies pre-opening grant or the MAT development and improvement fund.
- any projects which are already being, or planned to be, paid for through Opportunity Area or Northern Powerhouse funding
- projects supported by other Department for Education funding including (but not restricted to) national professional qualifications, ITT recruitment, or Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund
- improvements in school buildings or infrastructure such as IT hardware, and other capital investments

Applications will be for medium- to long-term improvement support which will start and finish sometime within the period January 2018 to March 2019. All interventions must finish by March 2019 at the latest.

Organisations that can deliver the improvement support

We expect teaching schools and national leaders of education in particular to play a major role in delivering the funded support interventions.

Some applicants may also wish to draw on the expertise and specialisms of other proven school improvement/school-to-school support providers such as, but not limited to, maintained schools, multi-academy trusts, local authorities, higher education institutions, independent schools, charities and not-for-profit organisations as well as private sector providers. Applicants must be of sound financial health and be able to demonstrate how they plan on using their funding efficiently.

The applicant will be accountable for quality assuring all provision and ensuring providers have the capacity and capability to deliver the activity such that it delivers the desired outcomes.

Application process

1. Submitting the application – teaching school/local authority/multi-academy trust (the applicant) submits an application for funding. In submitting an application, the applicant is agreeing to the Department for Education [grant funding agreement terms and conditions](#).
2. Eligibility and completeness checks – on receipt of applications, we will undertake checks to ensure that the applicant has completed all required fields in the application form, and that the application meets the eligibility requirements of the fund.
3. Assessment of applications – we will assess all applications against the assessment criteria and the national Expert Investment Board will make recommendations to Ministers on which applications to be awarded funding.
4. Grant payment made – if the application is successful, we will pay the application development costs as the first instalment of the grant to the applicant, and send a Grant Offer Letter which will make clear the terms and conditions under which this grant is offered.
5. Delivery of activity – the applicant will manage delivery of the activity outlined in the application.
6. Termly progress reporting – the applicant will monitor progress of delivery and achievement of outcomes, and will submit a termly progress report to evidence that the improvement programme is on track and further grant funding can be released.
7. Applicants will be required to participate as required by the Department for Education in any formal

evaluation of the fund and/or the associated processes.

Assessment criteria:

We will assess the extent to which applications demonstrate:

An evidence-based programme of work

- The strength of the evidence about why the improvement is a priority for schools in the area
- The strength of the evidence that the support will reach the schools which need it most
- The strength of the evidence to support why and how the intervention will successfully address the improvement need identified, and lead to improved outcomes for children
- The extent to which appropriate and measurable short and long term outcomes have been identified, and will provide evidence of impact

Deliverability

- The robustness and achievability of the action plan
- The robustness and clarity of proposals to monitor the progress and impact of improvement activities, and of the risk management process proposed
- The strength of the evidence that the specified providers have the capacity and capability to successfully deliver the activity such that it delivers the desired outcomes

Sustainability

- The extent that improvements will be sustained beyond the period of funding, through embedding improved practices, behaviours, systems and people, for example, in the school(s)' business as usual operations, including accountabilities for making this happen.

Value for money

- The extent to which costs are clearly broken down and ensure value for money, and the overall strength of evidence that the intervention will deliver good value for money.

We will prioritise applications that address improvement priorities identified by the sub-regional improvement boards, and interventions that have a strong evidence base.

Terms and conditions of grant funding

Please ensure you have read and understood the Department for Education [grant funding agreement: terms and conditions](#). In applying for the Strategic School Improvement Fund (including emergency funding) you will be agreeing to the Department for Education Grant Funding Agreement terms and conditions.

In the event of an application being successful, the applicant will be required to sign a Grant Offer Letter.

This will set out the specific grant conditions, monitoring arrangements and payment details. It will also include a Certificate of Expenditure (Annex G) which applicants are required to submit on an annual basis.

For applicants who already receive grant funding from the Department for Education, for example, teaching schools, the Strategic School Improvement Fund should be clearly identified and included as part of a single certificate of expenditure return.

If you are a teaching school you will need to ensure you have submitted your Certificate of Expenditure (Annex G) return for the last financial year. If you have not yet submitted this, you will need to get this back to us before funding is paid.

Roles and responsibilities

Below are the roles and responsibilities we expect of organisations who wish to draw down support from the fund.

The supported school(s)

Schools that are the recipients of improvement support funded through applications. The majority of these will meet one or more of the fund's eligibility criteria.

The applicant

The organisation which submits the application, and which will receive and be accountable for, the grant funding, and achievement of the stated improvement outcomes. Applicants are accountable for quality assuring the providers and the overall provision. The applicant must be a teaching school, a local authority, or a multi-academy trust.

The provider

The organisation(s) that delivers the improvement activities set out in the application. Providers can be any organisation, such as a school, local authority, university or charity; however, it is the applicant's responsibility to quality assure all provision.

Other funds available

Alongside the Strategic School Improvement Fund, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has committed to invest up to £20 million over the next 2 years to further evaluate and disseminate evidence-based programmes and approaches included in a selection of larger-scale applications.

The Strategic School Improvement Fund will sit alongside a wide range of other Department for Education funding streams aimed at improving school improvement including:

- from September, a £50 million a year fund for local authorities to continue to broker and monitor school improvement for low-performing maintained schools
- the [Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund](#), which is a 3-year investment worth up to £75 million that will support high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders in areas of the

country that need it most

- the £72 million investment for the 12 [opportunity areas](#) - over the next 3 financial years. Opportunity areas will see local partnerships formed with early years providers, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, charities and local authorities, to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Opportunity areas will also get priority access to the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.

Successful applications: summer 2017

The applications in round 1 demonstrated many examples of partnership working between teaching schools, local authorities, multi-academy trusts, dioceses and schools, as well as a high level of interest in the fund.

Applications to the fund closed on Friday 23 June 2017 and we would like to congratulate the 55 successful applicants, who will collectively provide support to just under 1,350 schools of all types across the country. [Find out which organisations were successful](#).

Contact

If you have any queries, questions or comments, please contact us.

Strategic School Improvement Fund

Email

ssif.enquiries@education.gov.uk

Published:

24 March 2017

Updated:

12 September 2017

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