



Department
for Education

A guide to new special free school revenue funding 2022 to 2023

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Introduction

This guide sets out how revenue funding for new special free schools will be calculated and paid based upon funding rates for the 2022 to 2023 academic year. It is primarily aimed at free schools opening in the 2022 to 2023 academic year. However, it will also be a useful guide for schools opening in future years. It is important to note that funding may change annually.

This guide also sets out the importance of good financial health and the financial governance and accountability requirements for trusts. The pre-opening [financial management and governance self-assessment](#) tool is a helpful tool for trusts to assess a free school's financial governance and compliance prior to opening.

The following funding will be available to special free schools upon opening:

- per-place (FTE) funding
- commissioner top-up funding
- business rates grant
- teachers' pay grant
- teachers' pension employer contribution grant
- universal infant free school meals
- PE and sport premium
- post-opening grant

Each is described in more detail later in this guide.

The guide does not cover:

- funding for mainstream or alternative provision free schools, for which separate guides are available
- funding for hospital education
- free schools open before September 2022 (who will be receiving updates on future funding arrangements from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA))
- any initial funding which may be provided by the department to help free school proposers to develop their projects before the opening of the school (e.g. project development grant). Further information on project development grant (PDG) is available in the [Free schools: pre-opening guide on GOV.UK](#).
- capital funding, which will depend on the circumstances of individual free schools (and within this is any ongoing annual costs of leasing premises)
- Value Added Tax (VAT) open academies and free schools do not receive a separate grant to cover these costs, but will instead be able to claim back, when open, any VAT paid in respect of their non-commercial activity, directly from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) via the VAT scheme for academies

School resource management and planning overview

School resource management

Effective schools make the best use of resources, ensuring that every pound is used to have maximum impact for their pupils and the school. Schools that do this well tend to:

- plan their curriculum and finances in a combined exercise, known as integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP) which allows them to base their financial planning on delivering educational outcomes, rather than as a separate consideration - ICFP can help analyse the most effective deployment of staff, for example, it can help model the impact of flexible working arrangements on your budget to make the best decision for your curriculum and finances while being inclusive of staff needs
- have a strategic approach towards financial planning for the longer term (3 to 5 years)
- deploy their staff effectively and efficiently, linked to their long-term plan
- have robust challenge from financially skilled governors and head teachers
- have skilled staff responsible for managing finances, who have experience of seeking best value for money when procuring
- have transparent financial systems and processes that encourage constructive challenge within and between schools

The [School resource management collection](#) offers a variety of resources and guidance to support all schools to target their resources to improve the education of pupils.

It includes DfE [approved frameworks](#) that help save money on regular purchases such as furniture, cleaning services, and ICT and support schools to buy compliantly through quality checked suppliers.

The [Risk Protection Arrangement](#), an alternative to commercial insurance.

The [supply teacher and agency worker deal](#) which makes fees and mark-ups transparent and removes the temp-to-perm fee after 12 weeks of working for you.

Support for buying can be found through [Get Help Buying for Schools](#) which is a national service providing free access to general advice and guidance, aggregation opportunities and in some instances will undertake complex procurement on behalf of schools.

Other tools that support [excellent resource management include the financial benchmarking service](#), which allows schools to compare their spending patterns to schools in similar circumstances, and the [View My Financial Insights \(VMFI\)](#) tool which gives schools an insight into their financial performance, identifies areas that may require further attention and matches the data with relevant guidance and resources.

The [Teaching Vacancies site](#) allows schools to advertise their vacancies for free.

There is also support and [guidance on financial efficiency](#) to help school leadership teams, including a [curriculum planning tool](#).

Through the [Get Help With Technology](#) page, schools can get support to access laptop, tablets and internet solutions, and get their school set up on a free digital platform.

The [schools resource management: top 10 planning checks for governors](#) guidance contains information to help schools manage their resources efficiently to deliver good educational outcomes. In particular, schools will want to use the important metrics contained within the planning checks to consider the affordability and value of your proposed curriculum and staffing plans.

To receive regular updates about the school resource management tools, support and guidance, schools can sign up to DfE's [schools business professionals contact list](#)

School Resource Management Advisers (SRMA) are practising sector financial experts. They provide peer-to-peer tailored advice on how schools and trusts can make best use of resources to deliver the best possible educational outcomes for their pupils. ESFA fully funds SRMA visits to academy trusts and if you are interested in working with a SRMA you should [contact ESFA](#). More information about how SRMAs work with schools and academy trusts can be found in the [Preventing financial failure in schools and academies](#) guidance on GOV.UK

Financial planning

Free schools should plan their expenditure using the most up to date [financial template](#) to ensure that it is affordable within the funding provided. This should be an on-going process with financial plans updated as plans for the school are more fully developed, staff are appointed, site plans are developed and other costs are more firmly established. Projects should also refresh financial plans as further details of funding arrangements are confirmed, and review them regularly to ensure they reflect the likely number of pupils based on the number of applications. In doing this, they will want to make sure they are aware of funding arrangements for each new academic year.

For local authority presumption free schools, the local authority and trust are required to determine the minimum viable number of the school; i.e. the minimum number of pupils required in order to be financially viable. The department expects local authorities to provide sustainable underwriting arrangements for presumption schools in support of the pupil forecasts agreed between the trust and the local authority.

If applying to open a free school you may be required to complete a financial plan for the proposed school. All applications, including those with an innovative or new approach, must demonstrate that the school will be financially viable. You can find the full criteria against which we will judge financial viability of free school applications in the [how to apply guide](#).

Free schools in pre-opening will be asked to share their current financial plans with the department before entering into a funding agreement. This should include a version modelled around the minimum number of pupils required in order to deliver an educationally and financially viable offer.

Financial plans will need to be resubmitted ahead of the school's readiness-to-open meeting (ROM) and should be based on the latest available number of accepted offers. Please note that at post-16, an adjustment of at least -30% should be applied to take account of the potential difference between accepted offers and students who register, as students are able to hold multiple offers. It should also be noted that not all 16 to 19 students progress from Year 12 to Year 13; this drop-off can be typically around 15%. The details included in this plan will be used in order for draft funding statements to be issued.

Projects should submit their plans with evidence to underpin their pupil number assumptions which must be realistic and achievable. The department will want to see that as far as possible the plans reflect the school's income based on the best estimates of available grants, the school's outgoings and the likely number of pupils. Plans should show that the school will not go into deficit at any point.

Plans should be based on the most up-to-date available estimates of grant funding. The free school [financial template](#) containing 2022 to 2023 funding rates is from the

department and will calculate indicative General Annual Grant (GAG) funding using the up-to-date funding rates.

Annual revenue funding for special free schools

Except where stated below, the funding for each free school will be calculated and paid by ESFA. Funding will be paid monthly in equal instalments. With the exception of the school's first month of opening, when the school will be paid on the eighth working day of the month, the ESFA pays schools on the first working day of the month.

Special free schools are established in response to demand from local authorities, and their support is essential. Evidence of demand for the school would have been needed to support the establishment of the school.

Funding in special free schools comprises:

- per-place funding for all places for pre-16 and 16 to 19 pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans; and
- top-up funding for each pupil placed in the free school

The fixed per-place funding will be paid for a number of places which will be subject to regular review. The per-place rate will be £10,000 in 2022 to 2023, and may be subject to change in subsequent years.

The top-up funding comes from the local authority commissioning the place, and is determined by the local authority in negotiation with the free school based on the pupil's assessed needs and the cost of meeting those needs in the school. This top-up funding is paid for as long as the pupil attends the school, and will flow directly between the local authority and the special free school.

Pupils without EHC plans can only be admitted to special schools in certain circumstances. Please refer to the [SEND code of practice](#) and your funding agreement for further details.

Special free schools' continuing financial viability depends on the ongoing support of local authorities, both in terms of a commitment to commission placements, and their willingness to provide associated top-up funding.

Place funding for the first year is based upon evidence provided in pre-opening of the estimated number of FTE places required for the number of pupils attending the free school. Evidence of commissioned places will have to be provided to the department during pre-opening.

Funding for special free schools is included in local authorities' high needs allocations. The number of places to be funded at special free schools from their second year of opening onwards will be agreed with the local authority through the [place change](#)

[notification process](#). Local authority support is therefore very important to the school's future viability.

Pupil premium

The pupil premium is a grant to provide schools with extra money to meet local challenges, chiefly those that may arise from deprivation. It is not a personal budget for pupils (like SEND funding) and carries no individual entitlements. Schools should assess the needs of all their eligible pupils and spend the pupil premium budget to meet those needs appropriately; some will need less expensive support, some will need more intensive support.

In 2022-23 schools receive the following funding for each pupil registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last 6 years:

- £1,385 for pupils in reception to year 6
- £985 for pupils in year 7 to year 11

This includes pupils from families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) that are temporarily eligible for FSM and registered in a claims process run by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Pupil premium eligibility was extended temporarily to some groups of pupils with NRPF in 2021-22.

Schools also receive £2,410 for each pupil who has left local authority care through adoption, a special guardianship order, a child arrangements order or a residence order. If a pupil has registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years and has also left local authority care for one of these reasons, they will attract the £2,410 rate.

Pupil premium payments are made to academies and free schools in quarterly instalments. A school's pupil premium allocation is calculated from the information it submits in the October schools census. Allocations are applied from the start of the next financial year (April), paid in arrears so maintained schools receive the first payment in June and academies in July.

Local authorities receive £2,410 for each looked-after child in their care, to be spent on their personal education plan in consultation with the child's school.

There is more information There is more information in [Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), including an explanation of the accountability requirements that can be found on [pupil premium: allocations and conditions of grant 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Children from service families attract a separate grant – the service premium, currently £320 per head. This has no connection with disadvantage - it is paid from the same budget for convenience and is solely for the pastoral support of children whose parents

are or were in the armed forces. More information about the service premium is available here: [Service pupil premium \(SPP\) - GOV.UK](#).

Teachers' pay grant

From the 2021 to 2022 financial year the majority of the historic teachers' pay grant (TPG), teachers' pensions employer contribution grant (TPECG) and pensions supplementary fund money has been incorporated into the high needs NFF allocations to local authorities.

The basic entitlement factor value in the NFF was increased by £660 to reflect the TPG/TPECG previously paid to local authorities for their maintained special schools, special academies and independent special schools.

We will continue to provide support to schools with respect to the 2018 and 2019 teachers' pay awards in the 2022 to 2023 financial year. From 2021 to 2022 the majority of this funding has been paid through the schools and high-needs national funding formulae (NFF).

We have ensured that the additional funding schools attract through the NFF is as close as possible to the funding they would have received if the funding was continuing as separate grants, without adding significant complexity to the formulae. More details can be found in the [NFF policy document](#).

We included funding previously paid through the teachers' pay grant within the core funding schools receive as part of their national funding formulae (NFF) allocations from April 2021 for maintained schools, and September 2021 for academies.

Maintained nursery schools, school nurseries, sixth forms, and 16-19 schools, are not funded through the NFF. In the 2022 to 2023 financial year the early years elements of the teachers' pay grant (TPG) will continue be paid as separate grants in 2022-23. The post-16 element of the TPG will be rolled into core 16-19 funding from the 2022/23 academic year. We will pay eligible schools the post-16 element of the TPG up to this point as a separate grant.

Beyond 2022-23 we intend to continue to simplify the allocation of this funding, by continuing the process of rolling in this funding into core allocations. We will provide information on how we intend to do that past 2022-23 in due course.

Teachers' pension employer contribution grant

The teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) provides additional funding to schools, to cover the cost of the increase in the employer contribution rate of the teachers' pension scheme (TPS) from 16.4% to 23.6% from September 2019.

We will continue to provide support to schools with respect to the 2019 increase to the employer contribution rate in the TPS 2022 to 2023 financial year. From 2021 to 2022 the majority of this funding has been paid through the schools and high needs national funding formulae (NFF). We included funding previously paid through the TPECG within the core funding schools receive as part of their national funding formulae (NFF) allocations from April 2021 for maintained schools, and September 2021 for academies.

We have ensured that the additional funding schools will attract through the NFF is as close as possible to the funding they would have received if the funding was continuing as separate grants, without adding significant complexity to the formulae. More details can be found in the [NFF policy document](#).

Maintained nursery schools, school nurseries, sixth forms, and 16-19 schools, are not funded through the NFF. In the 2022 to 2023 financial year the early years and post-16 elements of the TPECG will continue be paid as separate grants.

Beyond 2022-23 we intend to continue to simplify the allocation of this funding, by continuing the process of rolling in this funding into core allocations. We will provide information on how we intend to do that past 2022-23 in due course.

Risk protection arrangement (RPA)

Risk protection arrangement (RPA) is an alternative to commercial insurance, whereby government funds cover any losses that arise. The RPA will cover losses that are in scope of the [RPA membership rules](#).

The RPA membership year runs from 1 September to the following 31 August, however members can join at any time. Please note, free schools can join the RPA scheme and receive cover prior to opening; there is no cost or premium to join the RPA in pre-opening. Free schools in the pre-opening stage, should have discussions with their delivery officer regarding RPA and inform them if they require opting in to the RPA scheme at an early stage.

Once a school is open, ESFA will deduct the per-pupil cost at source from the free school's general annual grant (GAG). The cost of RPA will be £21 per pupil.

Free schools do not have to enter the scheme and are free to make their own alternative insurance arrangements; however, there will be no additional funding provided should extra costs be incurred. More information on [RPA](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

Business rates grant

Free schools pay business rates at the 80% discounted charitable rate. They will receive a grant to cover the actual costs paid if their billing authority is not adopting the new NNDR payment process. This needs to be claimed via the online form on GOV.UK.

Universal infant free school meals (UIFSM)

State-funded schools in England are required by law to provide free lunches to infant pupils (in reception, Year 1 and Year 2) who are not otherwise entitled to benefits-related free school meals.

Schools currently receive £445 for each of the eligible pupils, which is the equivalent of £2.34 per day for a school year for each of the eligible pupils. For free schools in their first year of opening, free school meals will initially be funded based on the estimates of the pupil numbers used to issue their indicative funding letter. Please note that any updates to the funding rate will be published with the allocations in June. Schools will receive an initial provisional payment in October based on these estimates and the average UIFSM take up rate in their local authority. Adjustments to reflect actual pupil numbers will be made in July, based upon meal take up to date from the October and January schools' census. The July payment will also include an additional allocation for the first 2 terms of the next academic year.

PE and sport premium

Free schools with primary age pupils receive [PE and sport premium](#) funding from ESFA, based on the number of pupils in years 1 to 6. This grant is for a specific purpose, and will be paid separately to the GAG funding. Schools must use the funding in line with published guidance to make additional and sustainable improvements to the quality of physical education (PE), physical activity and sport they offer.

Open school allocations are based on the January schools census (for example January 2021 census for the 2021 to 2022 academic year). For new schools or a school teaching eligible pupils for the first time in the 2022 to 2023 academic year, funding will be based on the data from the October 2022 school census. For free schools that open in September 2022, the funding will be based on the data from the October census and will be paid to the school in the following March.

The free school will receive PE and sport premium funding for a new academic year from the ESFA in two separate payments. These are:

- 7/12 of the funding allocation in November 2022 (or in March 2022 for new schools)
- 5/12 of the funding allocation in May 2023.

The Department for Education is considering arrangements for the Primary PE and sport premium for the 2022-23 academic year and beyond. We are aware of the importance of providing schools with sufficient notice of future funding and will confirm the position as soon as possible.

Post-opening grant (POG)

Special free schools (with the exception of LA presumption free schools) are provided with a post-opening grant to reflect the additional costs in establishing a new publicly-funded school which cannot be met through the GAG. The POG provides funding in two elements as the free school grows: non-staffing resources, paid on a per-place basis, and a leadership grant. These titles reflect the basis on which the funding is calculated, but the grant can be spent on any legitimate purpose of the school.

The first element (resources) is paid each year that the school builds up to capacity for each new place the school is *expected* to create. It is based on the final finance plan submitted before opening and is not revisited to reflect actual place numbers. It is paid at the following rates:

- £250 for each new place created in the primary phase (years R to 6)
- £500 for each new place created in the secondary and 16 to 19 phases (Years 7 to 13)

The second element (leadership) is a fixed-rate payment of £170,000 (50% in the first year; 30% in the second; and 20% in the third).

The resource element of POG is paid over the first 3 months of the academic year, with 50% paid in month 1, 25% in month 2 and 25% in month 3.

The leadership element of POG is paid monthly.

Free schools set up through the local authority presumption route are not eligible for POG. They should liaise with the local authority to agree what, if any, post opening/diseconomies funding the local authority will provide when the school opens.

Financial governance and accountability

Trusts will need to ensure that spending decisions are transparent and in the school's best interests and should not give rise to criticism of the trust by Parliament, and/or the public, and/or the media. Free schools will need sound financial procedures, the capacity to handle public money and good governance arrangements. On opening, a free school will need to have a robust framework to manage its funding and ensure proper accountability and procedures are maintained.

Academy Trust Handbook

The [Academy Trust Handbook](#), together with the funding agreement, sets out the financial management and governance requirements for academy trusts.

To note: Trusts must comply with the handbook throughout the pre-opening period and once open.

This is outlined within the grant agreements underlying any funding trusts receive from the department and/or ESFA. Non-compliance with the handbook is considered a breach of contract and may trigger various sanctions.

The handbook includes requirements in relation to financial oversight, financial planning, internal control, financial monitoring and management and proper and regular use of public funds as well as a number of other specific matters. The handbook also sets out the audit requirements for academy trusts.

The handbook is aimed at trustees, accounting officers (principals and chief executives), principal finance officers (finance directors and business managers), governance professionals (clerks) to the board of trustees, local governing bodies of multi-academy trusts and auditors.

The handbook clearly articulates that the accounting officer is personally responsible to Parliament, and to the accounting officer of ESFA, for the resources under their control. This personal responsibility extends to ensuring regularity, propriety and value for money. The accounting officer also has responsibilities for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for the management of opportunities and risks.

Financial statements

Free schools, including those in the pre-opening phase, with a funding agreement with the Secretary of State and an open academy at any point during the accounting period must submit audited annual report and financial statements to ESFA, for each year ending 31 August, by 31 December.

The [academies accounts direction](#) prescribes detailed guidance for academy trusts on preparing and auditing academy trusts' annual financial statements. Prior to signing the funding agreement financial statements should be prepared in accordance with company law.

Trusts should set their [accounting reference date](#) to 31 August at Companies House. This is the date to which their financial statements will be produced.

The accounts must also be filed by 31 May (i.e. within 9 months of the end of the accounting period) with Companies House. Further information can be found on the [Companies House website](#).

Other financial returns

Trusts must also submit the following financial returns to ESFA once open:

- budget forecast return outturn in May and the budget forecast return three-year in July. Note: the budget forecast return outturn is not required in 2022
- audited financial statements for the year ending 31 August, by the following December (as noted in paragraph 79 above)

- academies accounts return for the year ending 31 August, by the following January
- [land and buildings collection tool](#) as at 31 August, by the following November
- [financial management and governance self-assessment](#) submitted to ESFA within 3 months of opening. The self-assessment highlights the main requirements academies must have in place soon after opening. The pre-opening self-assessment questions are available via the link above and are a helpful tool for trusts to assess a free school's financial governance and compliance prior to opening

Trusts are responsible for keeping up to date with the latest deadlines and requirements. More [information about academies financial returns are](#) available on GOV.UK.

Trusts can also keep up to date through the [ESFA Update](#).

Document exchange

Document exchange is a secure, online service accessible via DfE sign-in. It enables academies to receive and exchange documents with ESFA.

Document exchange automatically uses information from Get Information About Schools (GIAS) to add the academy to document exchange as soon as the academy has opened. An organisation's approver will be able to add the service for their organisation's users.

Our [Document exchange user guide](#) can help you get started with the service. For questions or queries regarding document exchange, please contact us via [the ESFA online enquiry form](#).

Further information

Further information on academies revenue funding is available on [the ESFA pages](#) on GOV.UK.

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