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[Department
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Guidance

Pupil premium: overview

Updated 11 May 2026

Applies to England

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This guidance is an overview of pupil premium for school staff, parents and anyone else interested in the pupil premium.

[Guidance for school leaders](#) explains how to make the best use of pupil premium funding.

Purpose

The pupil premium grant provides funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools in England.

The service pupil premium (SPP) provides support for children and young people of service families. It is combined into pupil premium payments to make it easier for schools to manage their spending. Pupils that the SPP intends to support are not necessarily from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

We want to support all schools to use the wealth of evidence of 'what works', evaluated by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), to use this funding effectively to drive high and rising standards for disadvantaged pupils.

Funding criteria

Pupil premium funding is allocated to eligible schools based on the number of:

- pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals (FSM), or have been recorded as eligible in the past 6 years (referred to as Ever 6 FSM)
- children previously looked after by a local authority or other state care, including children adopted from state care or equivalent from outside England and Wales

Pupil premium is not a personal budget for individual pupils, and schools do not have to spend pupil premium so that it solely benefits pupils who meet the funding criteria. It can be used:

- to support other pupils with identified needs, such as those who have or have had a social worker, or who act as a carer
- for whole class interventions which will also benefit non-disadvantaged pupils

Pupil premium funding is allocated to local authorities based on the number of:

- looked-after children, supported by the local authority
- pupils who meet any of the eligibility criteria and who attend an independent setting, where the local authority pays full tuition fees

For pupils who are looked-after children, funding should be managed by the local authority's virtual school head (VSH) in consultation with the child's school.

Details of the funding criteria for SPP are outlined in the [Service pupil premium](#) section.

Implications of the free school meals expansion on pupil premium

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, the Department for Education (DfE) is delivering an expansion to FSM eligibility to include all pupils from households in receipt of Universal Credit. There will then be 2 categories of FSM:

- Targeted FSM, which continues to be based on the existing £7,400 income threshold
- Expanded FSM, which will apply to meals only, covering pupils who do not qualify for Targeted FSM, but who are in households in receipt of Universal Credit

Following the expansion of FSM, only pupils eligible for Targeted FSM will be part of the Ever 6 FSM cohort. This means that pupils who become eligible for FSM for the first time through the new Expanded FSM category will not attract pupil premium funding.

Pupils who were eligible for FSM before the expansion will continue to be part of the Ever 6 FSM cohort after the expansion. That includes any pupil whose household income increases after the expansion, such that they either lose FSM eligibility altogether or become eligible for FSM through Expanded FSM. Such pupils will remain part of the Ever 6 FSM cohort for 6 years.

Further information is available on the [expansion of free school meals eligibility](#).

Eligible schools

The following types of school are eligible to receive an allocation of pupil premium.

Local authority-maintained schools

These include:

- mainstream infant, primary, middle, junior, secondary and all-through schools serving pupils in year groups reception to year 11
- schools for children with special educational needs or disabilities and general hospital schools
- pupil referral units (PRUs), for children who do not go to a mainstream school

Academies, free schools and non-maintained special schools

These include:

- mainstream infant, primary, middle, junior, secondary and all-through academies serving pupils in year groups reception to year 11
- academies and non-maintained special schools for children with special educational needs or disabilities
- alternative provision academies, for children who do not go to a mainstream school

Pupil premium is also provided to local authorities for eligible pupils in independent settings where the local authority pays full tuition fees. It is for the local authority to decide how much of this funding to pass on to the child's school.

Funding rates for the 2026 to 2027 financial year

This table shows how the pupil premium grant is allocated to schools and local authorities in the 2026 to 2027 financial year, based on per pupil rates.

Funding criteria	Amount of	Amount of funding	Funding
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	funding for each primary-aged pupil per year	for each secondary-aged pupil per year	is paid to
Pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or have been eligible in the past 6 years	£1,550	£1,100	School
Pupils previously looked after by a local authority or other state care	£2,690	£2,690	School
Children who are looked after by the local authority	£2,690	£2,690	Local authority

Pupil premium [allocations and conditions of grant for the 2026 to 2027 financial year](#) has more information including:

- allocations for each school and the totals at national, local authority and parliamentary constituency level
- how pupil premium funding must be spent
- how allocations are calculated

Payment schedule for the 2026 to 2027 financial year

Local authorities will be sent payments on:

- 30 June 2026
- 30 September 2026
- 31 December 2026
- 31 March 2027

Academy trusts (and free schools) will be sent payments on:

- 8 July 2026
- 8 October 2026
- 11 January 2027
- 8 April 2027

Non-maintained special schools will be sent payments on:

- 18 August 2026
- 16 October 2026
- 18 January 2027
- 16 April 2027

Service pupil premium

Service pupil premium is additional funding for schools with children and young people of service families.

Pupils in state-funded schools in England attract the service pupil premium grant at the rate of £360 per eligible pupil in the 2026 to 2027 financial year.

Pupils are eligible if they meet any of the following criteria:

- one of their parents is serving in the regular armed forces (including pupils with a parent who is on full commitment as part of the full-time reserve service) or is in the armed forces of another nation and is stationed in England and they have been registered as a 'service child' in the most recent autumn DfE school census
- they do not currently have 'service child' status but they have been registered as a 'service child' on any DfE school census in the past 6 years
- one of their parents died whilst serving in the armed forces and the pupil receives a pension under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme or the War Pensions Scheme

This funding is primarily to enable schools to offer pastoral support and help mitigate the negative impact of family mobility or parental deployment. It can also be used to help improve the academic progress of eligible pupils if the school deems this to be a priority.

There is non-statutory guidance on how to understand and address the needs of [service pupils in schools](#).

Funding paid to schools

To ensure that pupil premium is focused on effective approaches to raising the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils, schools (including local authority virtual schools) must spend their pupil premium grant on evidence-informed activities in line with the 'menu of approaches' set by DfE. This does not apply to SPP.

The menu of approaches is in '[Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders](#)'.

The menu aligns with the EEF's 3-tiered approach, which helps schools allocate spending across the following areas:

- developing high-quality teaching, for example through professional development and recruitment and retention
- providing targeted academic support, such as one-to-one or small group tuition
- tackling non-academic barriers to academic success, such as difficulties with attendance, behaviour and social and emotional wellbeing

When considering the balance of spending within the 3-tiered model set out in [EEF's guide to the pupil premium](#), schools should bear in mind that the EEF recommends that approaches which support and promote high-quality teaching in schools should be a top priority for pupil premium spending. However, the exact balance of spending between categories will vary depending on the specific needs of pupils and the relative size of the school's pupil premium cohort.

High attaining eligible pupils should receive just as much focus as lower attaining eligible pupils when it comes to spending funding. Evidence shows that eligible pupils who are among the highest performers at key stage 2 are more likely than their non-eligible peers to fall behind by key stage 4.

Funding for looked-after children

Virtual school heads are responsible for managing the funding given to local authorities for the children in their care. They work with schools to ensure the funding is used to help deliver the outcomes identified in the children's personal education plans, in line with the menu of approaches.

They can pass all the funding on to schools or retain some to fund activities that will benefit a group, or all, of the local authority's looked-after children.

Accountability

Schools must show how they are using their pupil premium effectively:

- by publishing a statement on their website each academic year using the DfE template
- through [inspections by Ofsted](#) - inspectors may discuss plans schools have to spend their pupil premium
- through scrutiny of pupil premium plans by governors and trustees

Ofsted's framework for inspecting local authority children's services requires inspectors to ask for the virtual school annual report. This report should include details of how the VSH has managed the pupil premium for looked-after children.

Schools are also held to account for the outcomes achieved by their disadvantaged pupils through published [performance tables](#).

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