



# **Writing a bid for a new special free school**

## Local authority guidance document

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## 1. Purpose of this guide

This guidance has been written for local authorities (LA) in England who are seeking to submit a special free school proposal bid to the Department for Education (DfE). As of 10th June 2022, the DfE is inviting applications for new special and alternative provision free schools. LAs must complete the pre-registration form by 11 July and applications must be submitted by Friday 21 October 2022. This sits alongside the LA presumption competition route to opening a new school and a central mainstream wave. An expression of interest form should be submitted by 16 September 2022 for the mainstream wave, and the application submitted by 31 October 2022.

The guidance should be used in conjunction to the [guidance](#) and criteria issues by the DfE for the special free school wave. The alternative provision wave is based on a partnership model, and guidance specific to this can be found [here](#).

Please note, the LA submission is the first stage of this process; if your bid is successful, trusts and other proposer groups will be invited apply to run the school in the second stage. Create: Schools can provide further information and support to successful LAs around engaging and assessing applicants.

## 2. How to write your bid?

The bid should be informative and data-driven, with the aim of providing the DfE with an in-depth understanding of the educational landscape of the LA and the context of the LA's SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) strategy and educational offer. It should be written based on the assumption that the assessors have limited knowledge of the LA's context, and therefore should be explicit and detailed.

Where possible, you should use evidence and data-based analysis to present the case for a new school. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Trends in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)
- Trends in the numbers of out-of-borough placements and costs associated with travel/residential care
- Use of non-maintained/independent provision and costs associated with this
- Trends in the number of pupils with SEND educated in mainstream schools
- Current outcomes for pupils with SEND across the borough, in both mainstream and specialist settings

- Gaps in provision and impact of the current educational choices on children and young people
- Rates of exclusions, home-schooling, possibilities of off-rolling, NEET figures and life outcomes
- Financial expenditure and strategies to minimise financial pressures.

You should ensure that you have met each criteria point outlined by the DfE and addressed each section of the guidance document in depth. To assist with your understanding of the application process, you could also consult the guidance issued by the DfE on opening a new school. This can be found [here](#).

### 3. Who should write the bid?

The DfE does not specify the number of people or specific roles that should input into the bidding process. However, you may wish to delegate sections of the application to different team members based on their expertise; this is likely to involve colleagues such as SEND service managers, place planning leads and business manager roles. If multiple people are contributing to the bid, you should ensure that the prose and information provided is consistent across all sections and that one person has final oversight of the bid.

### 4. Joint bids

The SEND free school process allows multiple LAs to submit joint bids where these authorities will all commission places at the new free school. If you wish to submit a joint bid, this guidance will still apply. The focus of any LA-specific sections should be roughly proportional to the number of places being commissioned, e.g., if LA X is commissioning 70% of the places, the majority of the contextual information provided in the bid should relate to LA X, which should be considered the 'lead proposer.'

If a very small proportion of the places will be commissioned by a different authority, then you do not need to submit a joint bid, but a written agreement from the second LA must be included in your application.

### 5. Our support

Create: Schools is here to provide expert guidance and support to ensure LAs submit a high-quality bid which meets the published criteria. Our Advisors have long-standing experience supporting proposers and free schools in all stages of the new school journey. Our support includes access to a

named Advisor, section and full-application bid reviews, high-quality and efficient feedback, access to our diagnostic tool and resources, access to our experienced external associates and partners and much more.

If successful, we also provide bespoke masterclasses, support in generating interest from sponsors, free school event design and delivery and support for conducting interviews.

If you would like to find out more about our support, please get in touch using our [initial engagement form](#). Alternatively, you can contact us via our website [here](#).

## 6. Checklist

The checklist below is a non-exhaustive list that has been written to ensure the relevant criteria has been met. It should be tailored according to the circumstances of the LA. The DfE's How to Apply Guide must be followed.

### 6.1.1 Checklist

Topic	Completed?	Additional information
Outline of school		
Age range Number of places (inc. nursery or sixth form if applicable) Desired year of opening (YOO) SEN designation Commissioning arrangements including top-up banding		
Context of LA's existing SEN offer, including independent provision		
Summary of LA's SEN and high needs strategy <sup>1</sup> . over the next 5 years, linking to the <a href="#">Government's Green Paper</a> . This should include clear outcomes (KPIs)		
Need for a new school (contextual narrative), including description of current capacity, high needs spend etc.  <i>Please see Annex B: List of resources we will use in our assessment in the guidance document, which outlines the data you should include in your bid.</i>		
Data supporting the need for a new school (see above for the type of information you may wish to use here)		

<sup>1</sup> Diagrams may be useful here to help with word limits.

Description of pupil cohort, and cohort needs/behaviours.		
Vision for the new school		
Rationale and narrative behind the need for a new school		
Outline of local schools and standards in the area		
Outline of educational offer/ethos/pedagogy for the pupil cohort		
Additional purpose of the school e.g., training centre/Centre of Excellence/community Hub/mainstream school support etc. and funding strategies related to this		
Expected educational and life outcomes for pupils		
Engagement		
Outline of community engagement with parents/carers/young people/local businesses/local organisations that have informed the bid		
Outline of engagement with neighbouring local authorities if applicable		
Outline of engagement with local schools		
Expectations for community engagement from proposers		
Capacity and capability		
Impact assessment of opening a new school		
Risk assessment and mitigating actions related to a new school		
Outline of the LA's capacity to deliver a new school, including assessment and pre-opening support <sup>i</sup>		
Finances		
High needs budget and outline of strategy (if special/AP free school)		
Demonstrate school places will be commissioned		
Outline of funding strategy during pre-opening and once in operation		
Outline of financial strategy to ensure viability of school		
Financial risk assessment		
Site		
Outline of chosen site: location/postcode/building size/map/lease costs		
Rationale behind site		
Context and rationale behind finding the site and current use of the site		
Suitability of site for expected pupil cohort		
Availability and accessibility of site		
Demonstrate value for money		
Outline of financial contributions towards the site		

Understanding of LA’s role with site management and liaising with sponsor trust <sup>2</sup>		
Practical considerations		
Ensure relevant heads of departments and Director of Children’s Services has signed off on the bid		
Demonstrate the LA can meet approved deadlines and timeline for establishing a new school		

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<sup>2</sup> During the pre-opening stage, LAs will be involved primarily in working with the DfE to manage the site, and in finalising commissioning arrangements with the trust.

