

Press release: Thousands of places created in new special free schools

Thousands of new school places are being created for children with special educational needs or those facing additional challenges in mainstream education, providing tailored support to help children thrive.

Every region in the country will benefit from a new school, which include 37 special free schools and two alternative provision free schools. This will create around 3,500 additional school places, boosting choice for parents and providing specialist support and education for pupils with complex needs such as autism, severe learning difficulties or mental health conditions, and those who may have been or are at risk of being excluded from mainstream schools.

It follows a commitment from the Education Secretary Damian Hinds to give the green light to all high-quality special free school bids last December when he announced an additional £250 million for local authorities for their high needs budget. This builds on an additional £100m of capital funding for local authorities to invest in additional places and better facilities for pupils with special educational needs and disability at mainstream schools, special schools and colleges, taking total investment from 2018 to 2021 to £365 million.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Parents rightly want choice of where their child goes to school and to know that the education and support they receive will ignite that spark of potential that exists in all of us, so they can go on and succeed.□

We want every school to be a school for children with special educational needs and disabilities. That's why we are investing significant funding into Special Education Needs units attached to mainstream schools and in additional support so children with education, health and care plans can access mainstream education.

But we recognise some children require more specialist support. These new special free schools and alternative provision schools will make sure that more complex needs can be provided to help support every child to have a quality education.

Applications will now open in the 39 successful local authorities to find providers – including community groups, teachers, charities, existing education providers and other organisations – that will run them.

Of the 37 new special free schools:

- three will be in the North East, providing over 200 places in total mostly for children with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH);
- six will be in the North West, providing over 400 places including for children with SEMH, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD) and speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN);
- five will be in Yorkshire and the Humber, providing over 500 places including for children with SEMH, ASD, SLD, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and SLCN;
- one will be in the East Midlands, providing 50 places for children with SEMH;
- four will be in the West Midlands, providing over 400 places including for children with SEMH, ASD and Multiple Learning Difficulties (MLD);
- four will be in the East of England, providing over 300 places including for children with SEMH, ASD and SLCN;
- five will be in London, providing over 400 places including for children with SEMH, ASD and SLCN;
- three will be in the South East, providing over 300 places including for children with SEMH and ASD;
- six will be in the South West, providing 500 places including for children with SEMH, ASD, Complex Learning Difficulties (CLD) and SLCN; and
- two AP free schools will provide over 100 places in the West Midlands for children who have been, or are at risk of being, excluded from mainstream education.

Dame Christine Lenehan, Director of the Council for Disabled Children, said:

We are pleased to welcome the new wave of special free schools and the extra choice they will bring to the system for children with special educational needs. We look forward to seeing them working in partnership with parents, children and local agencies to deliver the best outcomes for children.

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said:

These additional school places will enable children with special needs and those facing difficulties to have access to high quality education provision. Over the past week, there has been much debate in the media about children and young people whose social, emotional and behavioural needs make them vulnerable. Today's announcement of a range of specialist provision in every region of the country is hugely welcome.

The 39 new free schools will offer an extra 3459 extra places for pupils. The schools add to the 34 special and 42 AP free schools already open, and come on top of a further 54 special and 12 AP free schools approved in a previous application rounds, which will open in future. The total number of special

free schools will come to 125 upon completion.

Notes to editors:

- Information about the 39 areas, as well as guidance about the application process for the competitions, has been published on GOV.UK.
- The 37 special and two alternative provision free schools will be established in the following local authority areas:
 - Special free schools – Bexley, Bromley, Bury, Cornwall, Dorset, Essex, Halton, Hartlepool, Hertfordshire, Kent, Kingston upon Hull, Kingston upon Thames, Leeds, Leicestershire, Newham, Norfolk, North Lincolnshire, North Somerset, North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Reading, Richmond upon Thames, Rochdale, Salford, Sandwell, Sheffield, Shropshire, Solihull, Somerset, Stockport, Stoke on Trent, Suffolk, Tees Valley, Warrington and Wiltshire.
 - Alternative provision free schools – Warwickshire and Worcestershire
- The 39 new free schools follow an applications round in July 2018, where councils set out their case for why a new special or AP free school would benefit pupils in their area.
- Once all the schools are open, they will offer an extra 3,469 extra places for pupils, extending the support given to SEND pupils as well as those not in mainstream education.
- The commitment to 39 new free schools comes after the Department for Education announced an additional £250 million for the high needs budget and an extra £100 million investment to create more specialist places in mainstream schools, colleges and special schools in December.