

Thousands more school and sixth form places to be created

Thousands of new school places will be created for children in England, including for those who are living in disadvantaged areas, have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or require alternative provision.

The government's 55 Education Investment Areas, the local authorities where outcomes for pupils are currently weakest, will be prioritised for up to 15 new mainstream free schools. This will include a targeted number of high-quality, standalone sixth forms, designed to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds fulfil their potential.

The first of the new wave of up to 60 special and alternative provision free schools will begin opening from September 2025, creating approximately 4,500 new places, and boosting choice for parents.

The new alternative provision (AP) schools will help keep those who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion, engaged with their education, as well as offering more behaviour and mental health support.

These school places build on commitments set out in the government's recent education reforms, including the Schools and Levelling Up White Papers and the SEND and AP Green Paper, which aim to radically raise the national average attainment in English and maths, with investment and energy focused in areas of the country previously left behind, and to end the postcode lottery in the SEND system.

Through these reforms every young person will be supported to gain the education and skills they need to get a good job and help the economy to continue growing.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

All children have the right to a high-quality education. Parents should feel confident that their local school works for their child, no matter where they live or their ability.

From mainstream education which can provide for every need, to specialist teachers and equipment in tailored settings, our new schools across the country will continue to make sure that every child, in every corner of the country, gets the support they need to succeed.

Special schools will offer specialist support and education for pupils with needs such as autism, severe learning difficulties or social emotional and mental health conditions. The schools can be built to be more accessible, including with specialist fixtures like ceiling hoists and wheelchair ramps,

or acoustically adapted classrooms.

The government is making sure that talented children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to a college, school sixth form or 16-19 academy, with a track record of progress on to leading universities, such as Harris Westminster Sixth Form and Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form Free School in Norwich.

The new special and AP free school waves come as Government consult on ambitious proposals for a more inclusive, consistent, transparent and accountable system for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and for those who require alternative provision.

Part of a £2.6 billion investment of funding for more specialist places and support for children with SEND and who will benefit from AP over three years, the special and AP free school waves follow continued increased investment in local authority high needs funding, worth £9.1 billion overall for 2022-23.

Guidance about the process for applicants has been published on Gov.uk for [special free schools](#), [alternative provision free schools](#) and [mainstream free schools](#).

LAs across England will be able to bid for the special schools and funding will be allocated according to demonstrated need for specialist places, and where new free schools are most needed.

For alternative provision free schools, we will also be prioritising LA areas where none of the existing AP schools are currently rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, or where no AP schools currently exist.

The new special and AP free school waves build upon the 60 schools already in the pipeline, from waves launched in 2018, which launched 37 special and 2 AP free schools.

The [SEND and AP green paper](#) is open for consultation until 22 July.

Applicant groups have until 16 September to register their interest. Further guidance on the mainstream application process will be published in July.