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Guidance

School funding: exceptional costs associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) for the period March to July 2020

Published 7 April 2020

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We are extremely grateful for the exceptional efforts that teachers, headteachers and other school staff are making to support their pupils during this uniquely challenging period.

This guidance sets out the financial support the Department for Education will put in place to ensure schools can focus on the vital role they are playing at this time. While we do not know how long the current situation will continue, this guidance covers support for schools up to the end of the 2019 to 2020 summer term.

We have asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, except for vulnerable children, and children of critical workers.

We have already confirmed that schools will continue to receive their core funding allocations – as determined by the local authority for maintained schools and through the general annual grant (GAG) for academies – for the 2020 to 2021 financial year (April 2020 to March 2021 for maintained schools and until August 2021 for academies and non-maintained special schools). This will happen regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure and will ensure schools can continue to pay staff and meet other regular financial commitments, as we move through these extraordinary times.

Local authorities will also continue to receive their high needs budgets and should continue to pay top-up and other high needs funding to schools. This will ensure that the employment and payment of staff supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can continue.

Similarly, where schools pay top-up or other funding for pupils attending alternative provision (AP), or pay for other SEND or AP services, we expect these payments to continue so that teachers and other staff can be paid in accordance with their existing employment contracts.

If placements and services for the summer term have not yet been agreed, schools should fund on the basis of previous patterns of placements and commissioning.

The additional funding set out in this guidance is not intended to cover any additional costs relating to changes in SEND provision organised by local authorities for individual children and young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

There will be some instances where schools that remain open have already, or will over the coming weeks, face additional costs as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In some instances, schools will not be able to cover these from their existing resources.

The following guidance sets out the details of the support the Department for Education is putting in place for such schools. We will keep this guidance under review, as the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak develops.

Eligibility for this funding

Funding will be available for all state-funded mainstream and special schools, and alternative provision, including:

- primary, secondary and all through maintained schools, academies and free schools
- 16 to 19 academies and maintained schools
- maintained special schools
- special academies and free schools
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- alternative provision academies and free schools
- maintained hospital schools and academies

How schools can access funding

Funding will be available to cover costs relating to specific items. These items are ones we judge are likely to be necessary to allow schools to provide appropriate support to those children who will continue to attend school under the current arrangements.

Funding will be available to schools that are unable to meet such additional costs from their existing resources, or which they could only meet by drawing down on reserves and undermining their long-term financial sustainability.

While we are not asking schools to draw on existing reserves to meet these costs, we do not expect schools to make a claim against this funding if they are anticipating that they will be able to add to their reserves in the 2020 to 2021 financial year.

We are asking schools to make the necessary payments from their existing budgets and record these in line with local finance policies. In June, we will publish further guidance for schools on the process for informing us of any additional costs relating to coronavirus (COVID-19). We understand the significant challenges schools are facing at present and will therefore make the process for reporting this information as simple as possible. We will then make payments – direct to academies, or to local authorities to pass onto their schools – to reimburse schools for costs they apply for up to the limits set out below.

Additional costs covered by the fund

We understand this is a very challenging time for schools. We encourage all schools to continue to manage their budgets in the most effective way possible, and to redirect their existing resources to best support all their pupils, particularly vulnerable children and children of critical workers, in the current circumstances.

We have identified areas where we believe is it most likely that schools may face additional costs, as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

These are:

- **increased premises related costs** (including utilities and resources needed to keep the school open, such as hygiene services) associated with keeping schools open during the Easter and/or summer half term holidays, for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, over and above the costs that schools would have faced in other circumstances
- **support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school**, where those costs are not covered by the FSM national voucher scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>) - this covers:
 - costs to schools arising before the introduction of the national voucher scheme
 - costs where schools are providing free meals to children for whom the national voucher scheme is inappropriate (for example, because there are no participating supermarkets locally or schools are providing meals directly)
- **additional cleaning** – required due to confirmed or suspected coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, in line with COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>), over and above the cost of existing cleaning arrangements

If a school faces other, extraordinary costs to deliver appropriate support to their pupils through this period that are not covered by this list and cannot be met by existing budgets, they should contact DfE.CoronavirusHelpline@education.gov.uk. Other queries should continue to be directed towards central enquiry channels.

Funding allowances

Where they need to, schools will be eligible to claim up to the limits set out below. Schools will need to provide assurance that costs are legitimate additional costs incurred due to coronavirus (COVID-19) by taking necessary measures and should consider the following before submitting claims:

- schools should keep records of all expenditure relating to coronavirus (COVID-19), as is usual with all spend, these records will be necessary for local audit arrangements
- the headteacher or school business manager who submits the claim should give due consideration to their financial duties when doing so, including signing their name against any claim
- we would expect schools to be able to identify this income, and the related expenditure, when reporting their accounts

We want the claims process to be as simple and as user friendly as possible, recognising the additional work schools are already facing.

We will not be asking for detailed information of the individual items on a claim routinely, but schools should hold a record of what has been covered, in case of individual enquiries.

As usual, we reserve the right to audit the expenditure and clawback money if claims have not been made in accordance with the guidance, in order to protect public spending.

Limits for schools

Mainstream schools	
250 pupils or fewer	£25,000
251 to 500 pupils	£30,000
501 to 1000 pupils	£50,000
Over 1000 pupils	£75,000
Special schools and alternative provision	
All schools	£50,000

Pupil numbers will be defined by the following data:

- 2 to 4 year olds – headcount of funded places from January 2020
- 5 to 16 year olds – headcount from October 2019 census
- 16 to 19 year olds – pupil numbers from 2019 to 2020 academic year allocations

These limits have been set to ensure that few schools will be likely to exceed them, and we do not expect there to be many schools who need to spend up to these limits.

There may be some exceptional instances where individual schools will face additional costs that are higher than these limits. In these circumstances, schools will be able to make a case for increasing the limit when they submit a claim for additional funding.

Expectations of schools

Schools will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure, and this will ensure they are able to continue to pay for staff and meet their other regular financial commitments, while delivering the provision required during this unprecedented period.

Costs that are part of schools' expected expenditure for the year but that will not provide a benefit to the school or its pupils (such as exam fees, where exams will not now take place) are not covered by the funding set out in this guidance. This funding is focused on additional costs that schools face, over and above their expected expenditure, in delivering appropriate support for their pupils through this period.

We recognise that staff will need to be in school over the Easter and summer half term holidays when they would usually not be working. In order to protect staff wellbeing, and minimise any need for existing staff to work additional hours in order to cover the holiday periods, schools should consider:

- adopting rota systems to cover holidays, and offering staff time off in lieu for this
- approaching the local authority or academy trust to check whether staffing support is available from other institutions
- making appropriate use of their supply budget

If schools still have unavoidable additional staffing costs they should discuss these with their Regional School Commissioner who will support them to resolve the issue.

Short-term support with costs

We recognise that some schools may be unable to make up-front payments to cover the additional costs due to coronavirus (COVID-19) because of cash flow issues. In these circumstances, schools should follow the normal process for seeking short-term advances to support their cash flow by contacting the ESFA if they are an academy, or their local authority if they are a maintained school.

Any non-maintained special school with a cash flow difficulty should seek advice from the ESFA in the first instance.