

## Committee report

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| Committee | <b>SCHOOLS FORUM</b>   |
| Date      | <b>20 MARCH 2025</b>   |
| Title     | <b>SCHOOL FUNDING POLICY PACK 2025/26</b>                      |
| Report of | <b>DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF FINANCE</b> |

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises minor housekeeping updates to the school funding policy pack for 2025/26. Growth Fund policy require specific decisions from Schools Forum, and other elements where Schools Forum acts on a consultative basis. The updated policy pack will become active from 1 April 2025.

### BACKGROUND

2. The Isle of Wight School Funding Policy Pack is a document refreshed annually to take account of changing policies for allocating different elements of funding to schools outside of core formula driven funding. Currently it contains sections for Growth Fund (including falling rolls), Contingency, SEN Additional Funding and Over Occupancy Funding.

### SCHOOL FUNDING POLICY PACK

3. The 2025/26 school funding policy pack reflects mandatory updates as well as minor housekeeping changes to the existing policies from the 2024/25 financial year. The final versions of the policies are included in Appendix A.
4. Following the release of the DfE [Schools operational guide: 2025 to 2026](#) in December 2024, important changes are reflected in the local Isle of Wight 2025/26 School Funding Policy Pack in relation to:
  - Growth Fund
  - Falling Rolls Fund

## GROWTH FUND

5. In 2025/26 financial year Local Authorities continue to be able to set local criteria for Growth fund, including providing growth funding where a school or academy has agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or as an ongoing commitment). Funding, either through the growth fund, or by adjusting pupil numbers in the APT, will need to be provided regardless of whether the additional class is within or outside of the PAN. As a minimum local authorities will have to provide funding to a level which is compliant with the following formula:

primary growth factor value (£1,570) × number of pupils × ACA

6. The updated Schools funding policy pack for 2025/26 financial year reflects this change

## FALLING ROLLS FUND

7. Local Authorities will continue to have discretion over whether to operate a falling rolls fund in 2025/26 financial year, however where local authorities operate a fund, they will only be able to provide funding where the most recent school capacity (SCAP) survey shows that school places will be required in 2025 to 2026 and/or the subsequent 2 years.

## GROWTH FUND POLICY FOR FUNDING DISPLACED PUPILS. FUNDING PRINCIPLES SPECIFIC TO PROPOSED 31 AUGUST 2025 SCHOOL CLOSURES

8. The Local Authority is seeking Schools forum approval to include an amendment to Growth fund policy specific to proposed 31 August 2025 school closures.
9. When a school or academy has closed and the displaced pupils have been admitted to other establishments, it is the local authority's responsibility to fund these pupils using the growth fund.
10. If a maintained school closes, the local authority should transfer the remaining budget to their Growth fund and support the schools admitting the displaced pupils.
11. Under the current Growth fund policy, the Local Authority is required to fund either at the minimum level set by the DfE (£1,593 per pupil) or under the local Growth fund policy which provides funding equivalent to 7/12th of AWPU (£2,277 per pupil).
12. To ensure the available funding following school closures is distributed in full, Local Authority proposes to make an amendment to the Growth fund policy specific to the proposed school closures. The proposal will result in estimated funding in the region of £4,500 per pupil with the final rate determined after confirmation of eligible pupils by the Admissions team.
13. Due to significant pupil movement following the proposed closures announcement, the Local Authority proposes using data from October 2024 census to determine funding for schools admitting displaced pupils.

14. The Local Authority proposes to distribute the available funding in full on a per pupil basis. The available funding represents 7/12th of the closing schools budget share.
15. Eligible pupils for funding will be those enrolled as of the October 2024 census at the closing schools, specifically including pupils from Reception to Year 5. Pupils in Year 6, who will transition to secondary schools, will be excluded from the per-pupil funding calculation. Additionally, Reception pupils starting in September 2025 will be excluded, as it is not possible to determine if their enrolment is due to school closures.
16. Schools eligible for funding will be those that admit pupils listed in the closing schools October 2024 census, confirmed by admissions by 31/07/2025.
17. Funding will be paid in 7 equal instalments covering September 2025 to March 2026 and will be paid 1 month in advance. The first instalment will reach schools within first 7 working days in August.
18. There will be no further adjustments to payments if any pupil moves to a different school after the eligible pupils and their destinations are determined by the Admissions team by 31/07/2025.
19. The Growth fund policy reflecting the above principles will be updated and will be active only in the event of school closures on 31 August 2025. Funding per pupil will be calculated as follows:

$C \text{ (funding per pupil)} = A \text{ (budget share)} / B \text{ (eligible pupils)}$

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| 7/12th closing schools budget share for 2025/26 financial year  | A        |
| Displaced pupils (year R-5 pupils on closed schools roll as of October 2024 census, admitted to other primary schools, confirmed by the Admissions by 31/07/2025) | B        |
| <b>Funding per pupil: A/B</b>   | <b>C</b> |

## OTHER POLICY UPDATES

20. Minor housekeeping changes have been made to all of the policies. The housekeeping is primarily around updated links to Department for Education (DfE) guidance, and updated examples to reflect current values of basic entitlement (AWPU) funding for instance.
21. The Isle of Wight Scheme for Financing Schools was last reviewed at the July 2024 Schools Forum. There is potential for a DfE update on requirements during 2025/26 financial year and if this happens, consideration of an in-year update to the scheme will take place depending on DfE mandatory instruction.

## SCHOOLS FORUM APPROVAL

22. Although Schools Forum acts on a consultative basis for reviewing the policy pack, there are decisions required for elements of it specifically, the growth fund and falling rolls criteria. These requirements can be found in Annex 4 section 51.5 of the [Schools operational guide: 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-operational-guide-2024-to-2025)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That representatives approve the continuation of the existing criteria for growth and falling rolls for 2025/26 detailed in Appendix A.
2. That representatives approve funding principles for displaced pupils specific to proposed 31 August 2025 school closures.
3. That representatives note the minor housekeeping updates to the policy pack in Appendix A which will apply from 1 April 2025.

### APPENDICES ATTACHED

Appendix A – School Funding Policy Pack 2025/26

### BACKGROUND PAPERS

Isle of Wight Scheme for Financing Schools [Scheme for financing schools](#)

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# **SCHOOL FUNDING POLICIES**

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# **Growth Fund**

## **Growing Schools**

In November 2024, the Department for Education (DfE) updated the [Schools operational guide: 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#) in which they stated local authorities can centrally retain Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to support schools which are supporting growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need, to support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation and to meet the revenue costs of new schools, including lead in, start up and diseconomy costs.

The growth fund may not be used to support schools in financial difficulty or general growth due to popularity.

This is subject to the following DfE requirements:

1. Local authorities must produce criteria for allocating growth funding. The criteria should set out both the circumstances in which a payment is made and the basis for calculating the sum to be paid.
2. Local authorities will need to propose the criteria to Schools Forum and gain its agreement before growth funding is allocated. The local authority must regularly update the Schools Forum on the use of the funding.
3. Authority will provide growth funding where a school or academy has agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class to meet basic need in the area. Funding will be provided regardless of whether the additional class is within or outside of the PAN and Authority will fund to a level compliant with the DfE formula.
4. The growth fund must be ring-fenced so that it is only used for the purposes of supporting growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet *basic need*.
5. The growth fund is for the benefit of both maintained schools and academies.
6. Any unspent growth funding remaining at the year-end should be reported to Schools Forum. Funding may be carried forward to the following funding period, providing Authority is in an overall surplus, as with any other centrally retained budget, and can be used specifically for growth.
7. The use of the growth fund is solely for the purposes of supporting growth in pupil numbers, to support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation and to meet the costs of new schools.

Any costs met or additional funding provided to schools in relation to the growth fund is subject to agreement in advance with the local authority.

## **Growing Schools IOW criteria and funding mechanism**

The current Isle of Wight criteria and mechanism for funding growing schools is set out below.

- If a school is asked by the Authority to admit in excess of its Planned Admission Number (PAN) in the normal admissions round, there may be a need to run an additional class or employ an extra teacher in keeping with infant class size regulations (maximum of 30 pupils in a class). This will require the appointment of an additional teacher in advance of the class coming into being.
- A funding mechanism, based on a per pupil top-up would be applied. The funding would be based on 7/12 (covering September to March) of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding for the additional pupils.

Where the number of pupils triggering the need for an additional class is less than 5, growth funding will be allocated in advance on a termly basis in recognition of the possibility of pupil numbers falling to the extent that an additional class is no longer required.

A number on roll increase must be agreed with the admissions team to constitute a *planned* growth. The School Funding team will then be informed about schools that have a planned growth having agreed forecast pupil numbers with the school.

For the avoidance of doubt, growth funding can only be allocated where there is a growth in basic need in the area requiring a school to admit outside of PAN or to increase their PAN, in agreement with the admissions team. Where schools see an increase in pupil numbers due to popularity, whether within or by increasing their PAN, growth funding cannot be allocated.

### **Growth fund – minimum funding**

As per DfE requirements, since 2024/25 financial year, growth funding will be provided where a school or academy has agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or as an ongoing commitment). Funding through the growth fund will be provided regardless of whether the additional class is within or outside of the PAN.

As a minimum local authority will provide funding to a level which is compliant with the following formula directed by DfE:

primary growth factor value (£1,570) × number of pupils × ACA (1.01479)

Since academies are funded on an academic year basis, they would receive additional funding (at a rate of an additional five-sevenths of the allocation) to cover a full year's growth funding before the system 'catches up'.

### Funding mechanism

#### **Examples of different funding scenarios**

Some different funding scenarios are listed below to demonstrate the application of the current funding mechanism:

##### **Example 1 – required to open an extra class**

If a school ran an additional class, as agreed with the authority, then the school will require a minimum of 20 children to fund a class (e.g. 20 x AWPU of £3,904 = £78,078 in a full year) to cover the cost of a teacher, including on-costs, and other associated costs.

As such the school would be funded in the first year on the basis of increasing the year group by 20 pupils in the September regardless of the actual number of pupils in the class and would receive  $20 \times \frac{7}{12} \times \text{AWPU} = £45,546$ . If the additional class has 20 or more children all will be counted in the October census and the school will receive the full year's pupil led funding for all 20 children through the school's budget share. There will be no further adjustments to the school's budget.

If less than 20 additional children are admitted to the school, there may be a need to "top up" the school's funding to this level. This funding is not guaranteed, and each situation will be assessed on an individual case basis and reviewed annually.

##### **Example 2 – increased intake but no extra class required**

In instances where schools admit pupils at the Authority's request but no extra class is required, the school would receive  $\frac{7}{12} \times \text{AWPU}$  for the equivalent number of children. The school would then receive the full year pupil led funding for these additional children based on the following October census. No further adjustment to the school's budget will be required.

### Infant Class Size regulations

In rare circumstances where the admission of "excepted pupils" to an infant class results in an average class size of 33 or above (through agreement with the local authority and the school), it is proposed that growth funding be allocated to meet the average cost of a Learning Support Assistant.



The allocation of such funding would be reviewed on a termly basis in respect of the agreed numbers for the following term. In order to ensure funding is fair and consistent, the class size will be calculated by using the average number of pupils in the year group impacted (number of pupils divided by the number of classes).

For example, a school with 90 pupils plus three excepted pupils would not normally be eligible for this funding, as the average class size is 31 ( $93 / 3$ ). In this example the school would need to have nine excepted pupils in the year group impacted to be eligible for the funding ( $99/3 = 33$ ). Exceptional circumstances may only be agreed by the local authority.

### **Secondary Growing Schools**

The same funding mechanism used for primary schools would be applied to secondary schools. As such, secondary schools would receive  $7/12 \times \text{AWPU}$ . The schools would then receive the full year pupil led funding for the additional pupils based on the following academic year's October census.

## **Falling Rolls**

The DfE's [Schools operational guide: 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#) sets out the criteria for a falling rolls policy.

This is subject to the following DfE requirements:

- Fund can be retained centrally to support schools with falling rolls where the most recent SCAP (school capacity survey) shows that school places will be required in 2025 to 2026 or the subsequent 2 years. The Schools Forum should agree both the value of the top slice and the criteria for allocation, and the local authority should regularly update the Schools Forum on the use of the funding.
- Criteria for allocating funding should contain clear trigger points for qualification and a clear formula for calculating allocations.
- Any falling rolls funds remaining at the end of the financial year should be reported to Schools Forum. Funding can only be carried forward to the following funding period, if the Authority is an overall surplus. As with any other centrally retained budget and local authorities can choose to use it specifically for falling rolls.

### **Isle of Wight Criteria**

Schools must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for falling rolls funding:

- Most recent school capacity survey (SCAP) data shows that school places will be required in 2025 to 2026 or the subsequent 2 years.
- Must have had a falling number on roll for a minimum of 2 years based on the autumn term census.
- Number on roll must have fallen by more than 5% in both years.
- The forecast pupil data must show the school is expected to have an increase in pupil numbers by the end of the 3 years (e.g. years 2 to 3)
- Schools are not eligible if they are deemed to have an excess balance
- Schools cannot receive more than 5% of budget share or £100,000

The data showing schools forecast pupil data is taken from the SCAP return which is a school level capacity return. Local authorities are required to provide data and information on all state-funded primary and secondary schools in their areas. This data is returned to the Department for Education in August each year.

The SCAP return does not include special schools and education centres. Any growth in special schools and education centres anticipated over the next 2 -3 years

and ongoing would need to be agreed by the admissions team in conjunction with the SEN department.

An excess balance is deemed as those schools that have had a balance of over 10% of budget share for the last 3 years.

### **Methodology**

Any schools that have fallen in roll by more than 5% from the previous year will be funded for the percentage above this. For example, a school that has dropped 50 pupils, which is a 10% reduction, will receive funding for 25 pupils, which is the amount over and above the 5%.

Primary and Secondary Schools will be funded on the pupil led funding for each school rather than simply the Age Weighted Pupil Unit. Using this method will take into account the other pupil led factors for which schools receive funding for example deprivation, looked after children, low attainment, mobility and English as an additional language. This approach takes into account the profile of each school and assumes any new pupils will have similar attributes. Using the example above the school will receive their school level AWPU of £3,904 x 25 pupils = £97,600.

Special schools and Education centres will be funded on the basis of per place funding.

## **Contingency**

The DfE lists a limited range of services where central provision for maintained schools may be argued on the grounds of economies of scale or pooled risk, which includes contingencies. This is a de-delegated budget and relates to maintained primary and secondary schools.

The DfE states that contingencies can only be retained centrally for maintained schools for a limited range of circumstances:

- **Exceptional unforeseen costs**
- **Schools in financial difficulties**
- **Deficits of closing schools**

Maintained schools have elected not to de-delegate a contingency budget, and so there is not a current policy for how such funding is distributed.

# **SEN Additional Funding (CAP)**

## **Purpose**

To provide additional discretionary funding for schools that are disproportionately impacted by the cost of high needs pupils relative to their budget share.

## **Operation of the policy**

The threshold for additional financial support is set at 5% of budget share. This is the figure before de-delegation and excluding any resourced provision funding.

A school's spend on pupils with EHCPs will be based on the number of pupils that the school receives top-up funding for through the local authority financial year.

The methodology for calculating whether a school is eligible for any additional funding under the policy is as follows:

1. Calculate 5% of the school's budget share (A)
2. Calculate the school's contribution to support for high needs pupils, which is calculated as the number of FTE pupils the school has received top-up funding for in the local authority financial year, multiplied by £6,000 (B)
3. If B is greater than A, additional funding will be provided.

A fixed budget of £30,000 is available for additional funding, and this will be distributed between schools based on relative need, measured by the costs at each qualifying school over the 5% funding threshold. See the worked example below for more detail.

The funding will be paid at the end of the local authority financial year once the final spend on high needs pupils has been confirmed.

### **Worked Example**

Based on three schools only, with a total budget for additional funding of £30,000

| <b>School</b>                              | <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b>   |
|--|----------|----------|------------|
| Budget Share                               | £500,000 | £500,000 | £1,000,000 |
| 5% threshold                               | £25,000  | £25,000  | £50,000    |
| FTE high needs pupils                      | 4        | 8        | 12         |
| Cost of high needs pupils                  | £24,000  | £48,000  | £72,000    |
| Pupil cost over threshold                  | NIL      | £23,000  | £22,000    |
| Proportion of additional funding allocated | 0%       | 51%      | £49%       |
| Additional funding payable                 | £0       | £15,333  | £14,667    |

## Over-Occupancy Funding

This funding is payable to academy and maintained special schools, schools with resourced provisions and pupil referral units (PRUs).

This funding ensures that a school is not financially disadvantaged in the event of their actual average occupancy across the financial year (April to March) exceeding their agreed place number (APN). The APN for each specialist provision is agreed between the SEN department and the school prior to the start of the year.

The funding is calculated by taking the average actual pupil numbers for the year and comparing it to the APN. If this number is greater than the APN, the additional places are funded at the place funding rate (currently £10,000). The pupil numbers are the actual termly FTE pupils used for the purposes of calculating top-up funding. A worked example can be found below:

School APN – **45**

Actual average pupil numbers across year = **47**

Over occupancy funding = **£20,000** ( $47 - 45 = 2 \times £10,000$ )

Funding is calculated and transferred to the school at the end of the local authority financial year, once all of the top-up funding and pupil numbers have been finalised.

For resourced provisions, the same calculation is applied. However, the place funding value will be either £10,000 or £6,000, depending on the occupancy of the unit in the previous October census. Places up to the number of pupils occupying the unit at the previous October census and on the roll of the host school, will be funded at £6,000 and, places above this number, will be funded at £10,000.

Funding is only payable when a school exceeds the APN. Place funding will not be adjusted in the event of when the average pupil numbers for the year is lower than the APN.