

Press release: Applications open to create 1,600 new special free school places

More than 1,600 new special free school places will be created across England as 19 local authorities invite applications to run new special free schools.

It will mean 19 new schools, providing high quality provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities, will be built through the government's ambitious free schools programme that provides choice, innovation and higher standards for parents.

Organisations ranging from successful Multi-Academy Trusts to specialist charitable organisations can now apply to the 19 local authorities, setting out how they will be able to meet the specification for each project. Criteria have been developed by the local authorities, in conjunction with the Department for Education, to ensure they meet the needs of each local community and provide much-needed places for special educational needs and disability (SEND) pupils.

Among the special free school specifications published today are:

- A 200-place school with both early years and post-16 places for pupils between the ages of three and 19 in the Borough of Bedford.
- A 100-place school with post-16 provision for pupils between the ages of five to 19 with complex communication and interaction needs, Autism spectrum disorder and other social and mental health needs in Doncaster.
- A 125-place school for pupils between the ages of four and 16 with social communication needs and Autism spectrum disorder in Hampshire.
- A 150-place school with early years and post-16 provision for pupils between the ages of two to 19 with Autism spectrum disorder in Croydon.

Schools System Minister, Lord Nash, said:

Free schools are providing many good new school places in response to the needs of communities across the country. This process will give local authorities the chance to identify expert organisations with proven track records in SEND provision to run special schools that will help hundreds of children fulfil their potential.

The new schools are part of the most-recent wave of free schools approved in April, and are separate from government plans to open 30 free schools in partnership with local authorities – as recently announced by Education Secretary, Justine Greening. Since 2015, the government has committed £5.8 billion of basic need funding to deliver the school places needed by 2020. Applications close on 24 November.

Notes to Editors

- On 12 April 2017, the Department for Education announced the approval of 131 new free schools, including approval of plans to launch special free school competitions in Bedford, Blackpool, Bradford, Cheshire East, Croydon, Doncaster, Enfield, Essex, Hampshire, Havering, Herefordshire, Hounslow, Manchester, Portsmouth, Redbridge, Sheffield, South Gloucestershire, Suffolk and Sunderland.
- More than 9 in 10 free schools have been approved in areas where a need for more school places has already been identified, and the remainder have been created by local communities deciding they wanted more choice. Free schools are ensuring more parents have access to a good local school place for their children.
- There are currently 346 open free schools, 38 studio schools and 48 university technical colleges, which will provide over 234,000 places when at capacity.

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