



Department  
for Education

# **Local authority commissioned special free schools**

**An expression of interest form for local  
authorities interested in commissioning a  
special free school**

**October 2016**

## Overview

Since local authorities play a key role in placing pupils with statements or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, it is important that they shape the range of provision in their area. Previously, proposals to establish special free schools have only been taken forward in consultation with local authorities. **We are now providing a further opportunity for local authorities themselves to identify where a new special free school would benefit their area**, inform their Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), and potentially seek proposals for the new school they want, with the Department for Education (DfE) providing capital funding and start-up grants. This is in addition to the central route for special free schools, which continues to operate.

This **expression of interest (EOI) form is for local authorities that would like a new special school**. It allows them to make a case that a special school would be beneficial in their area, including a case that it would help meet demographic growth, changing patterns of need, and cost pressures, without reducing inclusion. It provides RSCs with the initial information they need to understand what is wanted and why. If the EOI is successful, the opportunity will be advertised nationally, and if a strong proposal comes forward that both the local authority/authorities and the Secretary of State wish to take forward, the DfE will provide capital and start-up grant funding, subject to value for money assessments covering both the affordability of the site solution and the limitations on overall capital availability. Please see the accompanying guidance for further detail.

The form should be completed by a local authority representative (or representatives, if it is a joint bid) with the approval of the Director of Children's Services (DCS).

This opportunity is intended to identify and meet untapped demand for special free schools as a supplement to LA's existing resources. It **does not replace the 'presumption' process nor does it replace a local authority's duties to ensure appropriate placements for all children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)**.

You should use this form to provide all the necessary information and evidence for your proposal. Please:

- email your RSC during October to say whether you are interested and give any headline facts available (email addresses are in the guidance)
- return this EOI, completed, to [freeschool.special@education.gov.uk](mailto:freeschool.special@education.gov.uk) copying in your RSC, **by midday on 11 November**.

More detailed information about this process can be found in the [local authority-commissioned special free schools guidance](#).

## Section A – Key facts about the school and the local authorities that want to commission it

### A1: Who is putting forward this expression of interest?

If this is a joint EOI, please fill in the table below for each LA involved and state the lead LA below. The Regional Schools Commissioner’s team may need to contact these people to understand more about the EOI. **Please note that including a LA on this list means that they have committed to commissioning places.**

Name of LA	Name of person leading	Contact details
<p><i>Lead LA: [name] (The LA in which the school would be located)</i>  <b>Blackpool Council</b></p>	<p>[REDACTED]  [REDACTED]  [REDACTED]</p>	<p>[REDACTED]  [REDACTED]  [REDACTED]</p>
<p><i>[if applicable – name of 2<sup>nd</sup> LA. Please add rows for additional LAs who have committed to commissioning places.]</i>  <b>Lancashire Council</b></p>	<p>[REDACTED]  [REDACTED]</p>	<p>[REDACTED]  [REDACTED]</p>

## A2: What type of school is wanted?

Please provide key information about the school you would like to commission:

<b>Category of SEN provision (if more than one type, with different top-up rates, please explain)</b>	SEMH including other secondary needs including but not necessarily limited to Speech and Language and Autism
<b>Per-pupil revenue funding you would expect to pay (if a range of rates, please explain)</b>	████ per place plus a top up rate per pupil based on the current banding system use in Blackpool. Average top up for this category is █████. Total funding per place (including top up) would be approx. █████
<b>Age range</b>	10-16
<b>Gender (boys/girls/co-educational)</b>	Co-educational
<b>Total number of proposed places</b>	48
<b>Early years provision? If so, how many places?</b>	No
<b>16-19 provision? If so, how many places?</b>	No
<b>Community use/shared facilities</b>	To be determined

Please use this space to expand on any of the key information above [max. 200 words]

There is currently no SEMH specialist school in the Blackpool Local Authority area. The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in the area is over capacity with a number of pupils remaining in alternative provision for an entire keystage or more. Some of the reasons for this are, mainstream settings do not have the capacity and resources to provide the specialist provision required, the nature of their complex needs is preventing a successful reintegration back into mainstream school and they require a longer term intensive intervention before they are able to reengage with mainstream education.

Currently a the majority of Blackpool pupils who need special provision for SEMH needs are transported to out of borough independent special schools at considerable cost, starting from

██████████. There are currently 66 pupils in a variety of age ranges placed out of area. This often means that pupils travel for over 40-50 minutes to and from school. Not an ideal situation for what can be pupils who display challenging behaviours and are often our most vulnerable members of society. These journeys often include travelling long distances on motorways and can present considerable safety concerns for both staff and young people. There is also a considerable burden of expense

These current schools cater for the diverse range of needs for pupils but do not provide links to the Blackpool local community and as a result of this, transition back to the area of Blackpool once school placements finish can be turbulent and are often unsuccessful.

### A3: Conversations with partners

Local authorities (in particular smaller ones) **must** speak to their neighbouring LAs to check whether they want to commit to commissioning places at the new school at the specified top-up rate. If they do not, LAs may put in a solo EOI. Authorities **may** speak to other partners in order to ensure that their EOI will complement the local landscape and be a close match for what families want. If you have not engaged with your Schools Forum before sending this EOI to your Regional Schools Commissioner, you will need to do so if successful.

Who?	Conversation summary (3 points max)
Your neighbouring LAs – please specify  Lancashire County Council	It is likely that they would utilise Primary places in the new provision. Secondary places are yet to be determined. They currently have no primary SEMH places in the North of Lancashire, near Blackpool. They would like further discussion if the expression of interest was successful.
Optional: Parent Carer Forum view	Parents supportive of provision being provided locally to meet the needs of Blackpool pupils Proposed site is close to a current mainstream school and utilises empty council land for a sustainable purpose Reduced travelling and transport times for pupils will have a positive impact on behaviour.
Optional: Any other partners, Schools forum, existing FE colleges etc (please specify)  Independent Specialist school provider- Witherslack Group of Schools	Capacity in their schools is currently maximum and the group are opening new provision in Bolton to cope with demand. This provision would not be accessible for Blackpool pupils due to distance. Support the idea and recognise Blackpool Local Authority needs the provision and have no concerns for the opening of a school to meet local demand.

Who?	Conversation summary (3 points max)
Schools Forum	Pressure on the high needs block is increasing and Schools Forum has had to allocate additional resources to the out of borough budget in recent years. Discussions have taken place regarding the option to create local provision to reduce cost and improve outcomes for pupils and families.

## Section B – The proposed location and site (if applicable)

Please describe where the school would be located and whether a site has been made available/identified. Making a site available on a peppercorn lease gives the greatest chance of the school opening successfully, and on time.

*Please include as much detail as possible as this will help your EOI:*

- *Address and postcode* - [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] a vacant plot of land
- *Size of site is 6,000sq meters*
- *Current and previous uses including planning designation (if known)-* [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- *Estimated timescale for formal ratification that the LA will release the site for the school (if agreed)- can be immediate*
- *Estimated date the site would be available for works to commence – as soon as the agreement for the school is in place*
- *Tenure upon which the site will be made available (if agreed)-* [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- *If applicable, whether the site is co-located with another school etc.- not co located*  
[REDACTED]
- *If you do not have a site please provide information on where this school would need to be located as this will ensure the Education Funding Agency (EFA) can look at property in the area should your EOI progress.*

Please provide the name and contact details for the main LA contact about the site. The EFA may contact this person to ask questions about the site. **If you know any of these site details before submitting your EOI, please let DfE know (by emailing [FreeSchools.EFACAPITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:FreeSchools.EFACAPITAL@education.gov.uk)) so we can start conversations with you.**

[REDACTED]

Please tick the box below to confirm that the relevant Lead Member for Corporate Property has seen this expression of interest and is content with the information provided about site (if provided).

I confirm that the Lead Member of Corporate Property at **Blackpool Local Authority** has seen this expression of interest and supports it.

Please tick to confirm ✓

## Section C – Rationale for School

Please provide an explanation of how and why this provision is required and how it would benefit the local area. [500 words max.]

*Please include:*

- *How the school will fit into the broader spectrum of SEN provision in the region (including neighbouring LAs if appropriate)*
- *How it would help meet pressures on special educational provision*
- *The potential impact on inclusion, including (where applicable) types of expert support you would expect the school to provide to mainstream schools in the area*
- *Parental demand*

This special school will cater for young people with social, emotional and mental health needs whose associated behaviours have prevented them from learning within a mainstream school. The pupils referred will have already accessed and exhausted current provision within Blackpool which will usually include a short term intensive intervention either through specialist outreach services or a Pupil Referral Unit.

Evidence suggests that many young people with a primary need of SEMH can also have underlying communication and social difficulties and the presenting behavioural difficulties can be caused by frustration with their education. Therefore, there may be young people referred who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or a social communication difficulty. There is a recognition that the young people referred to this provision will require a longer term intervention than is currently provided by the PRU or independent providers. However, the desired outcome remains that for all young people who attend in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 is for them to reintegrate back into mainstream education.

It is anticipated that the new school will have a positive impact upon the current PRU Provision as well as reducing the independent commissioned providers. Those pupils who require longer term placement will be accommodated and therefore more young people who will benefit from shorter term intervention will be more able to access provision.

Parental concerns for current provision being offered by Blackpool is the transport of young people to other LA areas and the risks this presents, there is also frustration with parent groups that Blackpool does not offer a SEMH and autism school based provision. Opening a free school would reduce significantly the cost of commissioned places and transport for Blackpool as well as meeting the needs of the increasing population of SEMH young people.

A new school would provide specialist expertise and advice to current mainstream and PRU provision in Blackpool to reduce the need for young people to attend specialist provision in the long term.

There is also a plan, when the free school opens to improve the transition and coordinated approach to support young people with SEMH and autism needs into more positive destinations. Currently in Blackpool this is difficult to coordinate outside of the LA area.

Blackpool council promotes collaborative working with partners to improve quality, efficiency and to drive forward integrated working for more effective service delivery. Therefore it is expected that the new school will develop good links and joint working with Social Care, the Early Help Team and Pupil Welfare Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). The Service will also engage with other health partners, where involved, and work closely with Special Needs Officers to ensure that appropriate support is in place. Where relevant, the school will also work with the Youth Offending Team and in the case of Looked After Children, the Virtual School for Children Looked After. These will all be easier with the students educated within the locality.

## **Section D – Pupil data and existing SEN provision**

The purpose of this section is to help us to understand the need for a new school in the context of how existing provision is used, and future expected growth in need. We want to approve EOIs that:

- address demographic growth
- help LAs meet what pupils and parents want



- help LAs manage within their budgetary constraints

We do not want to approve EOIs that have the side-effect of decreasing inclusion in mainstream schools, or of creating excess spare capacity in existing special schools. (eg. if several LAs each want a similar school, any one of those might make sense on its own but in aggregate there might not be enough need.) In this section you need to explain how the places in this school would be filled and where the pupils would come from (D1). You also need to explain the general demographic trends and placement trends for *all* pupils with EHC plans (D2).

## D1: Pupils who would go to the new special school

Please indicate how you expect the places in this school to be filled, and the impact on inclusion. [500 words max.]

*Please include:*

- *Where the pupils will come from – what is the balance of demographic growth (eg new housing developments) vs changing patterns of need (eg which are the schools the pupils would attend if this school did not go ahead)?*
- *The impact on numbers and proportion of students with SEN at mainstream schools*
- *How the school would be financially sustainable within budgetary constraints in the long term, including (if applicable) how it would help deliver wider value for money (for example in reducing transport costs)*

At present Blackpool LA commissions 16 independent providers out of the LA area, to deliver long term specialist provision for our vulnerable young people. It would be preferable to reduce this number by returning learners to Blackpool allowing us to invest in local specialist provision in order to meet the needs of our own learning community. By having the significant majority of our SEMH learners in one provision we will also be able to develop more robust admissions and quality assurance procedures thereby ensuring that we provide suitable learning environment to secure good outcomes for some of our most vulnerable young people. The main focus of the new free school is for pupils who are finding it difficult to access mainstream school because of SEMH and autism difficulties.

The school would be funded by reducing the number of commissioned places with the independent providers and by significantly reducing transport cost for this vulnerable group. A new school would provide specialist expertise and advice to current mainstream and PRU provision in Blackpool to reduce the need for young people to attend specialist provision in the long term.

The new school will be expected to accommodate 48 pupils and make provision for full time, day places. There will be no boarding facilities at the school. Young people will be admitted from School Year 5 to Year 11 therefore the age range will be between 10 and 16 years of age. However, we do appreciate that there will need to be a phased approach to admissions, starting with a smaller number of pupils when the new school opens with the intention of being at full capacity within two years of opening. Young people attending this new provision will have an Education and Health Care Plan, which will be subject to review on at least an annual basis. Therefore, the admission of pupils will be overseen by the Special Educational Needs Team in liaison with the Head teacher of the new school.

## D2: Trends in your specialist provision for all children with EHC plans

Please use the table below to describe the recent, current and projected trends of specialist provision that caters for **children with EHC plans living in your LA(s), of the age range for which you want the new school** (drawing upon [SEN2 Data](#) ). If this is a joint bid, ie. other LAs are

committed to commissioning places, either fill in the table once for the LAs together, or copy/paste the table and fill it in for each LA (please say which you have done). **The projected data for 2020 should show the pattern you expect if this EOI is successful.**

	No. of Settings	Please indicate the no. of pupils with an EHC plan living in your LA who are placed within these settings		
		2012	2016 (as at Sep 2016)	2020
Resourced provision and units inside LA	5	14	14	14
Resourced provision and units outside LA	0	0	0	0
Special schools (either maintained or academies) inside LA	3	267	300	518
Special schools (either maintained or academies) outside LA	6	10	9	6
Independent / non-maintained special schools inside LA	0	0	0	0
Independent / non-maintained special schools outside LA	16	68	89	31
Mainstream schools inside LA	37	156	117	136
Mainstream schools outside LA	17	17	23	20
General FE colleges (if relevant) inside LA	2	0	69	52
General FE colleges (if relevant) outside LA	1	0	22	31
Specialist FE providers (if relevant) inside LA	1	0	13	16
Specialist FE providers (if relevant) outside LA	3	1	2	1

Please provide a brief explanation of any recent trends and the rationale for future projections [200 words max.]

Please include:

- anything the RSC should know about why you are expecting the changes you have described from now to 2020
- any changes to capacity you are already expecting (eg. planned expansions / closures / other new schools and how this school would sit alongside those)
- details of any wave 12 free school applications

Blackpool has seen an increase in the number of young people needing Education, Health and Care Plans/Statements over a short period of time. In 2012 513 young people had Statements, rising to 658 in 2016 and a projected number of 825 by 2020. The increases are due to Blackpool being a net importer of need. This increase is currently unsustainable and cannot be supported with current funding allocations. The new school would reduce a significant cost burden on the Local Authority and see the number of Independent Specialist Provider commissioned places reduce. This would also significantly reduce the transport cost of sending these young people to the Out Of Borough independent providers.

In Blackpool we have had a decrease in the level of young people with SEN having their needs met by mainstream provision. This has resulted in our PRU being oversubscribed, the number of independent specialist places increasing and the number of places in our special schools increasing. This new school would reduce the number of independent specialist placements whilst providing outreach services to mainstream schools to support young people with SEMH and communication difficulties. By providing school on school support it is expected the inclusion rate of SEN in mainstream will eventually increase and in turn reduce the number of special school placements required for people who have cognition and learning difficulties who then display challenging behaviour, that aim would be to meet unmet needs in mainstream that wouldn't then manifest itself as a SEMH need.

## Confirmation

I confirm that the Director of Children's Services at **Blackpool Local Authority** has seen this expression of interest and supports it.

Please tick to confirm ✓

Date 10/11/2016	
-----------------	---