



Department
for Education

School-Based Nurseries Capital Grant 2024 to 2025

Information for applicants

October 2024

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). It is for state-funded primary-phase schools in England who already offer some early education, such as a reception class, and wish to apply for the School-based Nursery (SBN) Capital Grant 2024 to 2025. Through this grant, schools can bid for up to £150,000 of capital funding to create or expand school-based nursery provision by using surplus space in primary-phase school buildings. This guidance explains what the grant is for, who is eligible to apply, what types of projects are eligible and how bids for funding will be assessed.

Before applying for the grant, please read this guidance in full and refer to separate guidance on [Establishing School-Based Nursery Provision](#).

Schools who are interested in opening a nursery but are not able to apply for the SBN Capital Grant 2024 to 2025 may register their interest on the [online application service](#). Please refer to the '[Registration of interest](#)' section of this guidance for more information.

Expiry date

This guidance is valid for the Autumn 2024 application window, which runs from 17 October 2024 until 19 December 2024.

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for:

- Head teachers
- Local authorities
- Multi-academy trust leaders
- School governors or trustees
- Private, Voluntary, or Independent childcare providers
- Childminders
- Faith-based education authorities

Other key publications

- [Online application service](#)
- [Establishing School-Based Nursery Provision guidance](#)

Contact Us

If you want to contact us about school-based nurseries, please [submit an enquiry on the Customer Help Portal](#). If you're a Multi Academy Trust submitting an enquiry, please include which school your enquiry relates to. To allow sufficient time for the team to assist you, we recommend that you submit your enquiry at least 5 working days before the application deadline. Whilst we will endeavour to respond to all enquiries, we cannot guarantee a response before the application deadline.

Please do not submit multiple requests for the same issue.

We are unable to provide any advice related to individual applications due to their competitive nature.

Introduction

High-quality early education is essential for giving every child the best start in life and transforming their life chances, enhancing their readiness for primary school and improving their socio-emotional development. It is particularly beneficial for children facing additional challenges such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

School-based nurseries (SBNs) play a crucial role in the early years sector, making up 20% of registered early years childcare places in 2023. They provide a greater share of places in the most deprived areas and serve a higher proportion of children with SEND compared to private group-based providers¹. Additionally, they help establish and build relationships between families and schools ahead of compulsory education and offer convenience for parents with other children already attending the primary school.

For the purposes of this grant, SBNs can operate as:²

- nursery classes embedded in a school
- nursery units led by governors or academy trusts
- childminders and private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) nurseries contracted to deliver nursery provision on a school site, or operating on a school's behalf

This government is committed to expanding SBNs across England, with the SBN Capital Grant 2024 to 2025 marking the first stage in this long-term commitment. Our primary aim at this stage is to build more capacity into the early education sector by using surplus space in school buildings made available by falling primary school rolls, where this space may not be needed in the near future for primary provision.

We will collaborate with schools, trusts, local authorities and religious authorities to ensure new or expanded SBNs are established where there is greatest need. We will also work closely with successful grant applicants to gain further insights into the challenges faced and to address these issues, ensuring improvements for future SBNs and expansions.

¹ [Childcare and early years providers survey: 2023](#)

² Each delivery model has different requirements, such as the age of children able to enrol, the qualification make-up of staff needed, registration requirements and the regulatory and compliance standards that must be met. Ofsted inspection arrangements will be determined by registration requirements. Additionally, delivery models can influence funding sources, operational flexibility, and the integration of nursery activities with the school's curriculum and resources. For more information, please see [Establishing School-Based Nursery Provision guidance](#) and [Ofsted's Registering school-based childcare provision guidance](#).

Key dates and deadlines

Please note this timeline is indicative and subject to change.

Milestone	Date
Information about the grant for applicants published, online application window opens, and registration of interest opens	17 October 2024
Deadline for new applicants to register for a DfE sign-in account (required to access the online application service) Deadline for enquiries about grant applications to be sent via the Customer Help Portal	12 December 2024
Deadline for applicants to fully submit applications with all supporting documents. It is recommended that you log into the online application service and begin submitting your application at least 5 working days before the deadline. Registration of interest closes	12 midday, 19 December 2024
Applicants notified of outcome, grant letters issued to successful bidders and project initiation	Spring 2025
Projects aim to be operational	September 2025
Capital funding provided must be spent, or the Secretary of State for Education may claw back funds provided	31 March 2027

Registration of interest

If you are interested in opening an SBN in the future but you are unable or ineligible to apply through this bidding round, then please register your interest on the [online application service](#). This includes schools who:

- do not meet the current eligibility criteria;
- are considering opening a nursery within a more extended timeframe; or
- are facing other challenges at this time which prevent an application being made.

You should detail why you would like to open or expand SBN provision, the key challenges that prevent you from doing so, and what support may help you to achieve this in the future. You may be contacted by the DfE to discuss support options. Your contribution will also help inform the development of the programme. Please note that if we contact your school, this will have no bearing on the outcome of any future grant applications.

School-Based Nursery Capital Grant

Who can apply

Applications for grant funding are open to state-funded primary-phase schools in England who already offer some early education, such as a reception class. Projects must use surplus space in the school building (including at primary-phase satellite sites) and should aim to be operational in the 2025 to 2026 academic year. If you anticipate needing longer to make best use of resources and minimise disruption, you should provide justification for this in your application.

Maintained nursery schools and special schools are excluded from applying for this grant as they would not have spare space freed up by falling primary school rolls. They are however encouraged to [register their interest](#) for wanting to open new nursery places in the future. This will help inform future development of the programme.

Your project must meet all [eligibility criteria](#) outlined in this guidance, including securing support from your local authority and obtaining consent from your landlord or relevant freehold landowner where necessary. Applications that meet the eligibility criteria will then be evaluated against the [assessment criteria](#).

This is a one-time grant and will not impact your eligibility for any future funding applications.

Please ensure you are familiar with the statutory and non-statutory requirements for SBNs, including Ofsted registration requirements, as detailed in the [Establishing SBN Provision guidance](#).

What funding is available

You can apply for up to £150,000 of funding to be used solely for capital expenditure to repurpose surplus space in a primary-phase school building, so that it is suitable for nursery provision. This could include:

- conversion of a building within the school estate
- renovations, refurbishments and refits of existing school space into nursery provision, including works required to meet any SEND requirements
- upgrading or carrying out alterations to essential systems like heating, plumbing, fire alarm and electrical, where this is needed within affected space to support the expansion or opening of a nursery
- purchasing new physical assets for the nursery (to be considered capital expenditure, the asset must bring an economic benefit and be able to be of sufficient value to be depreciated over more than one financial year, for example, computer equipment and furniture)

- improving outdoor spaces, such as playgrounds, or flow between indoor and outdoor space, where this is part of the nursery provision
- project team Technical Advisor fees and survey costs

The grant cannot be used for the day-to-day operational costs of running an SBN, such as:

- salaries for teachers, practitioners and support staff
- utility bills (e.g. electricity, water, heating)
- Ofsted registration fees (where relevant)
- general teaching materials and nursery supplies
- routine maintenance
- general day-to-day administrative costs

More examples are listed in [Annex B](#). You should not include ineligible costs in your application, and you should ensure you have alternative funding to cover these. Where your project costs include ineligible items, it may reduce the amount of grant you are able to claim.

The DfE will only fund the amount specified on your bid application form. We will not provide further grant funding for any additional, unforeseen costs incurred. However, you may use additional funding sources alongside the grant to complete your SBN project. You must ensure there is no conflict using other funding sources against this grant.

You will need to provide a breakdown of project costs in your application, including a cost line for 'risk' that is proportionate to the costs and risks identified within the project (see '[Cost plan or assessed competitive quotation](#)'). The DfE reserves the right to recover any funding that is used for ineligible expenditure or not wholly spent. Further information on clawback proceedings will be provided to successful applicants as part of the grant terms and conditions.

All capital works undertaken must be compliant with relevant statutory and regulatory requirements.

Voluntary-Aided Schools

Under the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#), the Secretary of State can award grants to Voluntary Aided (VA) schools. Typically, these grants cover up to 90% of expenditure, with the remaining 10% of costs expected to be met by the governing bodies of VA schools from their own resources. However, in exceptional circumstances, the Secretary of State may authorise grants that cover 100% of the expenditure. This grant is considered an exceptional circumstance, allowing VA schools to receive full funding within the specified grant limit of £150,000.

Making a significant change

Academies applying for this grant do not need to apply to the DfE for approval to make a significant change because we have consolidated this requirement into the grant process.

Maintained schools applying for this grant should refer to the [Making Significant Changes guidance](#) to determine whether it is necessary to follow the prescribed alteration (PA) process. The DfE's intention, subject to Parliamentary procedure, is to remove the requirement to follow the statutory process to add a nursery as soon as possible. More information can be found in [Establishing SBN Provision guidance](#), which the DfE will continue to update.

After reading all of the guidance, if you judge that a consultation is required, you will need to submit a summary of the consultation within your grant application.

Key considerations

Suitability of proposed space

For the purposes of this grant, surplus space refers to space in an existing primary-phase school building. It is important to thoroughly assess the suitability and condition of your surplus space. This includes evaluating whether the current facilities meet the needs of the proposed nursery and if they can be adapted effectively. Consider factors such as value for money, structural integrity, location on the school site, accessibility, and the potential for creating a conducive learning environment for children in early education, in line with the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory requirements](#).

You should also consider competing priorities for using the space, to ensure the best use of the school's assets for the benefit of both children and staff, supporting sustainable and long-term planning.

Meeting local demand for early education

When developing your bid, it is important to consider how the places created by the new provision will meet local demand. This requires careful consideration of whether there is demand from families for provision outside of school hours or provision which runs year-round. As part of this, you should consider the operating hours and the level to which you are providing early years childcare using the [government funded childcare entitlement for working parents](#). Consideration of this at the outset is key to future financial stability of the nursery. It is essential to work with your local authority representatives to ensure it is clear in your bid that you have considered how your business model meets local need.

Permissions and approvals

Governing bodies, trustees and landowners must be satisfied your project meets strategic objectives for your estate and is the right solution for providing early education in the context of the whole school and for future years. The governing body or trustees should stress test the budget and timeline, realistically assessing affordability if risks should materialise.

To be eligible for this grant, you must confirm that your local authority is content with the use of surplus space for nursery provision, and in principle is content with you making an application for funding. You may also need to seek approval in principle from the Local Planning Authority (LPA) which is responsible for overseeing planning and development within an area (see [Plain English guide to the planning system](#) for more information).

You must also secure other necessary permissions, where appropriate, for example, through prescribed alteration processes or from Historic England, your freehold landowner, your direct landlord, superior landlord or religious authority. The freehold landowner or those holding headleases must also be satisfied that use of the land for an SBN is compatible with the terms under which they hold their land - particularly where that land is of charitable origin.

Consultation

To apply for the SBN Capital Grant 2024 to 2025, we specify that in applicable circumstances, your project must have undergone a consultation with interested local parties. Consultations, where required, should run for a minimum of 3-4 weeks. The [consultations principles guidance](#) can be referenced for examples of good practice.

Cases in which a local consultation may be required ahead of applying for this capital scheme will include:

- for academy schools, adding a new nursery (and therefore lowering the age range of the school), expanding existing nursery provision by more than 30 places, or reducing the capacity of the school by more than 30 places to accommodate the new or expanded nursery
- for schools maintained by local authorities, adding a new nursery (and therefore lowering the age range of the school), expanding existing nursery provision beyond the thresholds set out in [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools guidance](#), or reducing capacity of the school by 30 places or more to accommodate the new or expanded nursery

Ultimately it is the responsibility of schools to determine whether a consultation is required ahead of returning a response. You should review the detailed guidance on [making significant changes to an academy](#) and [making "prescribed alterations" to maintained schools](#) if you are unsure.

Published Admissions Number (PAN)

As part of determining their admission arrangements, all admission authorities must set a Published Admission Number (PAN) for each relevant age group. This is the number of pupils a school plans to admit to their normal year of admission i.e. the reception year in a primary school. Subject to very limited exceptions, a school may not refuse to admit a pupil if they have not reached their PAN. Schools applying for the SBN Capital Grant 2024 to 2025 should consider whether they need to reduce their PAN, for example, if they have not already reduced the PAN to reflect falling pupil numbers in their reception year.

In order to reduce their PAN, schools must ordinarily consult in accordance with paragraphs 1.45 to 1.48 of the [School Admissions Code](#). Where this is not possible, they may be able to request a variation (from the Schools Adjudicator in the case of maintained schools and from the Secretary of State in the case of academies). See paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the Code for further information about variations. Information on how to apply for a variation is available at [School admission arrangements](#).

Ofsted or Childminder Agency registration

Your SBN delivery model will affect registration requirements and the regulatory and compliance standards that must be met. Ofsted inspection arrangements will be determined by registration requirements. You should refer to Ofsted's [Registering school-based nurseries](#) and [Childcare registration exemptions](#) guidance documents.

For example, schools can offer early education to children over the age of two under their existing school registration, as long as all of the requirements set out in the [Childcare Act 2006](#) are met. Schools that offer early education to children under 2 years must always register separately with Ofsted on the Early Years Register. This is separate from the main school registration with the DfE. There are also varied requirements depend on your school type and location. Childminders must register their provision with either Ofsted or a childminder agency.

You should factor in the timescales for registration when considering when you want the early education provision to begin operating and consider registration fees. Schools which successfully apply for this grant must note that they are not automatically guaranteed approval for Ofsted registration.

Project timeline

Places should aim to be operational in the 2025 to 2026 academic year. If you anticipate needing longer to make best use of resources and minimise disruption, you should provide justification for this in your application. If the funded activities are not completed by 31st March 2027, the DfE reserves the right to exercise clawback proceedings. Your timeline should allow enough time for factors such as:

- consulting on the project proposal
- getting necessary approvals and consents for an operationally ready learning space, including timescales for registration with Ofsted or a childminding agency (where needed)
- ensuring procurement complies with public regulations and your organisation's policies and checking the suitability of technical advisors or contractors, including their experience in the education sector, site staff experience, financial health, and safety record
- intrusive surveying of building elements like services, structure, and asbestos
- managing health & safety and other project risks at each stage

Insurance

You will be required to insure your building project. Consult your legal advisors early and regularly to ensure your project has the appropriate insurance coverage. The additional insurance premium for the capital project is an eligible cost under the grant.

The DfE's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) is an optional programme for schools, which acts like insurance. If something goes wrong, the Government will cover the costs instead of an insurance company. However, there are some limitations you should consider before starting a project, to avoid uninsured losses, contract breaches, and high extra insurance costs later.

[RPA Information & Documents](#) provides further information. Alternatively, you can discuss the cover provided by RPA on their advice line on 0117 9769 361 or email RPAAdvice@willistowerswatsonsecure.com.

Collaborating with PVIs and Childminders

You may choose to lease buildings to a private, voluntary, or independent provider (PVI), childminder or group of childminders to operate from your surplus space. These partnerships can bring additional benefits such as flexibility to offer nursery provision that better meets demand. The local authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of early education for working parents in your local area and are best placed to help you locate potential partners to take up this offer (see [here](#) for more information).

How to apply

Before writing your application, you should read [Establishing SBN Provision guidance](#), which provides essential information about the relevant regulations and standards your project must meet, including health and safety requirements, building regulations, industry codes, registration and other legal requirements.

Online application service

You must [submit your application, including all supporting documents, to the online application service](#) by midday on 19 December 2024. We will not accept applications made through other routes or after this deadline.

[Annex A](#) provides a checklist that you should complete before submitting your application.

For help accessing the online application service, please [contact us through DfE sign-in](#). For help using the online application service, please [contact us through the Customer Help Portal](#).

To allow sufficient time for the team to assist you, we recommend that you submit your enquiry at least 5 working days before the application deadline. Whilst we will endeavour to respond to all enquiries, we cannot guarantee a response before the application deadline.

Please do not submit multiple requests for the same issue.

Who can act as the bid coordinator

Your bid application can be submitted by any responsible official representing the school, such as a school or multi-academy trust (MAT) leader. The bid coordinator must have access to your DfE Sign-In account to apply for the grant through the [online application service](#).

Applicants must complete one application per project bid. We will only assess one project bid per school. If multiple applications for a single project bid are received, we will assess only the first application received.

You may use technical advisers, contractors or other professionals to help you prepare your bid and to deliver the work, but they cannot submit the proposal or communicate on your behalf. We must communicate with the responsible official for your responsible body directly.

Completing your application

You are required to complete all relevant elements of the application in full. You must adhere to the word limits stated on the application form and provide full answers for each section.

It is vital to provide accurate information in your application. Submitting inaccurate or misleading information could constitute fraud and result in the withdrawal of funding. You must also ensure that the information provided in the application form matches that in the supporting documentation, otherwise your application may not be considered.

If any required information is missing, this will affect the scores we are able to award your application and may mean we are unable to award the grant.

Eligibility criteria

When completing your application, you must first confirm that your project meets all of the following eligibility criteria. Failure against any one of the eligibility criteria listed will result in an automatic failure and the remainder of the application not being scored:

1. The nursery provision is directly linked to a state-funded primary-phase school which already offers some early education provision, such as a reception class. The nursery provision will be governed by that school, or multi-academy trust **OR** will be delivered in partnership with a PVI or childminder, while being housed on school premises.
2. The project is repurposing surplus space in the school building(s) to either expand existing nursery provision or create a new nursery provision.
3. The local authority Early Years Lead and Pupil Place Planning Lead have been consulted and the local authority is content with the use of surplus space for nursery provision, and with the proposal to add new or expanded nursery provision.
4. The project is deliverable with the DfE contribution requested, or in combination with additional funding sources from elsewhere. Any unbudgeted or unplanned additional costs incurred during the process will need to be covered or sourced by the applicant.
5. The relevant freehold landowner (such as a local authority, foundation, trust or relevant religious body) has been consulted ahead of completing the application for capital funding to support SBN provision, and the freehold landowner is content with the use of their land for nursery provision, and consents to any necessary capital works (where necessary).

If your project does not meet the eligibility criteria but you are interested in opening a nursery, you should register your interest on the [online application service](#). For more information, see [Registration of interest](#).

Non-Scored information

If you meet the eligibility criteria, you must provide the following information which will not be scored.

Non-scored information	Explanation
Applicant details	The job title and contact information for the person completing the application (bid coordinator)
PVI or childminder details	If your project will be delivered in partnership with a PVI, childminder or group of childminders, you must supply their contact information
Existing nursery provision	Indicate whether your school currently offers nursery provision and describe the type of provision currently offered in terms of hours and governance. You must also indicate whether the new provision will require a reduction in the school's existing capacity for school-aged pupils.

Scored information

You must then complete the remainder of the application form and upload the following mandatory documentation:

- floor plans and scope of work
- photographs
- cost plan or assessed competitive quotation
- summary of consultation and responses (if applicable)

[Annex C](#) provides a list of the questions you will be asked on the online application service. Further information can also be found under [assessment criteria](#).

Declaration

Before submitting your application, you must confirm that the information provided is complete and accurate, that you have given due regard to your duties under the Public Section Equality Duty, that governing bodies are satisfied with the proposal, and that you understand:

- this funding is to cover the actual eligible costs of specified works only, and any underspends must be returned to the DfE
- if the funded activities are not completed by 31st March 2027, the DfE reserves the right to exercise clawback proceedings

Use of Technical Advisers

You can use technical advisers or representatives to help prepare your application and to deliver the works, but they cannot apply on your behalf. If you use a technical adviser who may also be working with other applicants, make sure that the evidence and information you submit applies to your school and is not generic in its nature.

As with the rest of your project, you should have a competitive procurement process in place for these services and be able to demonstrate how they were procured. You should ensure that the fees charged represent good value for money and should not assume that fees at or below 10%, or any 'no-win-no-fee' arrangements automatically offer good value for money.

It is recommended that you research the company beforehand and seek legal advice on their scope of services and terms and conditions. You should select a technical adviser who has relevant experience and is a member of an appropriate professional body, such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) or Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). By example, it is recommended a professional cost consultant is a member of the RICS or such professional body experienced in cost management of the type of project proposed.

You must seek advice on your duties under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations and Building Regulations if you are not already aware.

You should also consider any conflicts of interest that the technical adviser may have with others involved in your application, such as those undertaking the condition reports or tendering for the works. You should notify us of any conflicts of interest by including this in your '[scope of work](#)' description. A conflict of interest could lead to your application being disqualified, your final score being reduced or approved in principle if successful.

Further support for procurement:

The DfE's "[Get help buying for schools](#)" service offers free support from procurement specialists to all state-funded schools in England. These specialists provide advice and guidance to ensure compliant purchasing, review procurement documents, and assist with framework agreements. Schools can request support through the service, which aims to save time and money while ensuring compliance.

For complex or high-value procurements, they offer additional help, including running the procurement process. This includes schools who are new or not experienced in running procurements (please see the website for more information).

How we will assess your application

Each application will be reviewed to ensure it meets the [eligibility criteria](#) and then scored according to how well it meets each of the [assessment criteria](#).

Applications will be independently evaluated by DfE officials from a variety of professions, then moderated by a panel of evaluators, also comprising of DfE officials. All applications will then be moderated and evaluated holistically as one. As part of our moderation process, assessors will evaluate the financial stability of applicant schools using financial indicators available to the DfE. Once this process is complete the applications will be ranked based on overall score. Should there be more successful applicants than funds available the DfE will prioritise successful bids by overall score.

We reserve the right not to award funding where we have concerns regarding an applicants' long term financial viability. We also reserve the right to request additional financial information as required. This is regardless of how the project performs against the criteria.

Assessors will evaluate each project using the information contained within the application, the mandatory documentation, as well as school performance and financial indicators available to the DfE, as well as other DfE data sources outlined in relevant sections below. To ensure fairness and consistency, we will only assess applications and information which are submitted in the required format.

Applications consists of scored elements, which fall into four criteria. The total score under each criteria will be weighted according to the following percentages:

Application Sections	Assessment Criteria	Total Score
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project proposal and funding• Project costs and additional funding• Quotes• Project Timeline information• Planning permission• Project Risks• Mandatory documents (site and layout plans, photographs of affected spaces, cost quotations)	Project Overview & Value for Money	35%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evidence of local childcare need• Holiday childcare	Local Need for Early Education	25%

Application Sections	Assessment Criteria	Total Score
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach to early years education 	Educational Approach	25%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliverability and sustainability of provision 	Management of Provision	15%
	Total	100%

Each scored element will be evaluated against a 6-point scale. As a minimum, to be considered for an award you will need to score a 3 (“Satisfactory”) against all scored elements. If a score 0-2 is scored against any question your application will not be progressed. The DfE reserves the right to seek further information before finalising scores.

6-point scale

Acceptability	Scoring rationale	Score
Outstanding	<p>The evidence provided fully meets the information request and provides demonstrable added value.</p> <p>Demonstrates an excellent understanding of the requirements with no concerns or omissions identified.</p>	5
Good	<p>The evidence provided fully meets the information request. There are minor omissions, but the response demonstrates a good understanding of the requirements.</p> <p>The response may include some minor concerns or omissions they are not considered to present a risk or have an impact.</p>	4
Satisfactory	<p>The evidence provided meets the information request, but minor reservations exist about the quality or extent of the evidence provided.</p> <p>The response presents concerns that are considered to present an element of risk or may have an impact on achieving success but can be reasonably managed or resolved.</p>	3
Poor	<p>The response provided fails to fully address the question, lacking clarity or any missing evidence or detail is significant demonstrating a lack of understanding of the requirements.</p> <p>The response presents concerns that are considered a risk to achieving success that would require significant intervention to manage or resolve.</p>	2

Acceptability	Scoring rationale	Score
Unacceptable	<p>Fails to fully address the question, providing limited evidence and demonstrating a significant lack of understanding of the requirements.</p> <p>The response presents significant concerns or omissions that are considered to represent a level of risk that would have a detrimental impact on achieving success.</p>	1
No Answer Provided	Fails to provide the required information.	0

The following table provides an example of how the weighting will be applied to the total score for each criteria:

Criteria	Score	Weighting	Total score
Project overview and value for money	12 out of 20 (3 out of 5 on all four scored elements)	35%	21 (12/20 * 35)
Need for early education	3 out of 5	25%	15 (3/5 * 25)
Educational approach	4 out of 5	25%	20 (4/5 * 25)
Management of provision	5 out of 5	15%	15 (5/5 * 15)
Totals	24 out of 35	100%	71 out of 100

Assessment criteria

This section details the information required in applying for the SBN Capital Grant 2024 to 2025, in relation to each assessment criteria. It explains how this information will be assessed and offers advice to achieving a satisfactory score.

Project overview and value for money (35%)

Project proposal and funding, planning permission (scored using the 6-point scale)

You must provide a brief description of the overall project which summarises the necessary construction and equipment costs, and clearly justifies the need for capital funding to deliver the work. You should demonstrate that you have considered various options, and that the chosen solution is the most effective and the best value for money. If applicable you should state any conflicts of interest your technical advisor may have with others involved in your application.

You should only provide high-level detail regarding cost, as you will need to provide a more detailed breakdown in the [summary of eligible project costs](#) section of the application. For more examples of eligible expenditure, see [Annex B](#).

Although planning approval is not required at this stage, you must discuss planning implications with your Local Planning Authority and summarise the outcome in the dedicated section on planning permission. These two sections will be considered together, to provide one overall score.

To receive a satisfactory score, you should:

- Include the necessary construction works and equipment, and how the capital funding will enable the delivery of nursery places.
- Justify that the scope of work is proportionate to the funding requested and number of places to be provided.
- Indicate whether planning permission is required for the project, and if it is, a clear path to obtaining it.

Project milestones plan (scored using the 6-point scale)

You must indicate projected dates for the following sub-categories:

- Design complete
- Planning approval
- Tender complete
- Start of construction on site date
- Provision opening

Your timeline should be realistic and achievable in relation to the scale of capital works being proposed. You may wish to upload a more detailed timeline, in addition to the milestones provided in the application, if it helps to more clearly illustrate the project path to provision opening.

To receive a satisfactory score, you must:

- Include projected dates for all categories specified above
- Have a project completion date of before 31st of March 2027

We will score projects more highly if they illustrate realistic timelines for provision opening in September 2025 (compared to the scope of works required).

Project Risks (scored using the 6-point scale)

You must summarise the key risks to successfully opening the provision by the projected date (which you must indicate in the application form). You must show that you have

considered their likelihood and impact and are planning appropriate mitigations for them. We will examine whether the risks associated with the project have been thoroughly considered and whether appropriate mitigations are in place.

Examples of risks might include risk related to fraud, risks commonly associated with capital projects such as certainty of costs and timelines for procurement and construction, as well as operational risks to the longer-term success of the provision (e.g. continuity of teaching or lack of take-up from local parents).

To receive a satisfactory score you must identify, as a minimum, the top 3 risks related to the successful opening of provision and relevant mitigations.

Value for money (scored using the 6-point scale)

The following information will be evaluated collectively to provide one overall score using the 6-point scale. As part of this, assessors will benchmark total project costs against an internal cost model, and average cost-per-place calculation.

- **Nursery capacity**

You must provide information on the school's existing capacity for children on roll, as well as the capacity for children on roll following the completion of capital works. By capacity we mean the maximum number of children that your nursery setting can provide care for at any one time, within the physical space available.

If you are a school without existing nursery provision, you should input 0 for the existing number of children your nursery can accommodate in the financial year 2024 to 2025.

- **Total amount of grant funding requested from DfE**

You must provide the total amount of grant funding being requested from the DfE (which should not exceed £150,000).

- **Additional funding sources**

You must detail any relevant sources of funding the project will make use of, beyond DfE contribution (for example, if the total cost of the project is above £150,000). We will consider any prior funding your school has received from the DfE when assessing your application, to ensure projects are not double funded. For example, you will receive a low score if you have already received funding from your local authority's share of the 2023 to 24 Childcare Expansion Capital Grant, and the project you are applying for does not create additional places beyond those already funded.

- **Breakdown of project costs**

You must outline all relevant project costs, against the following categories:

- Building works
- External works
- Abnormal items (these are project-specific but not typical construction costs, for example asbestos removal or service upgrades)
- Furniture, fixtures and equipment
- Survey and design fees
- Technical adviser fees
- Risk allowance
- Irrecoverable VAT (if applicable)

These costs should match the full amount of funding being requested from the Department, and any additional funding from other sources being used (if applicable). You will have the opportunity to provide any relevant commentary against the costs when filling in the application form (e.g. where they may be higher than expected for a project of the scale being undertaken).

You must also include a total eligible project cost, which breaks costs down into all relevant categories. You must ensure that any risk allowance above 5-10% of the total project value is justified.

The DfE reserves the right to seek clarification ahead of funding projects where costs appear higher than expected against departmental benchmarks.

You should refer to [Annex B](#) to ensure costs requested for furniture, fixtures and equipment are in scope for the capital funding.

- **Cost certainty (referring to your Cost Plan or assessed competitive quotation)**

To provide the minimum required level of cost certainty, you must provide a minimum of one quantified cost breakdown from a professional cost consultant or assessed competitive quantified quotation, and list details of quotes received from a competitive tender exercise, if undertaken.

We expect all successful projects to demonstrate value for money and provide evidence of cost certainty. Project costs should be within an appropriate cost range for the type of works proposed.

Your evidence, where appropriate, should include:

- A quantified breakdown of costs appropriate for the design, size, and scale of the project.
- Either reports from professional cost consultants or a detailed quantified assessed competitive quote aligning to a project specification from a contractor
- Where available, a summary of any tender exercise, including a copy of the tender reconciliation.
- Details of the procurement route adopted, including naming the form of contract to be used.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) defines abnormal costs as those which might be considered as project specific (that is, they are not a 'typical' construction cost) and are classified as such because they tend to have a notable consequence. Examples include asbestos removal and upgrade of services installations. You should take care when including abnormal costs and they must be clearly identified and justified.

Your project must be delivered in compliance with all applicable statutory duties, including relevant public procurement rules. Academies must also comply with the [Academies Financial Handbook](#).

You should be realistic about the level of risk allowance included. This should be appropriate to the scale and type of the project, and the level of work already undertaken to establish price certainty. For example, we normally expect risk allowances of between 5% and 10% of the total project value. You must justify these costs in your application if higher than this range. You should take care to avoid costs having multiple risk allowances and should be rigorously challenged by the governing body to avoid including risk on risk costing.

You should be aware that if your project is approved in principle only, and you cannot accept the Terms and Conditions, the DfE is under no obligation to make payments in those circumstances. Any expenses you, or a third party, have incurred prior to the acceptance of the Terms and Conditions, will only be paid where approved for payment by the DfE.

VAT status:

You should obtain appropriate advice on your VAT liability as this will depend on the type of provider you are and the nature of the project works. If you are not liable for VAT, you should exclude VAT from your project costs. If you are liable to pay VAT and you are unable to recover this in part or in full, then you should ensure that the project costs presented include this. If you are successful in your application and have included VAT in your project costs, we may ask for supporting evidence to confirm your VAT status before confirming the grant award. The DfE cannot provide advice on VAT liabilities.

- **Floor plans and Scope of Work**

You must upload a site plan showing the extent of the school premises, and existing and proposed floor plans, with room names and numbers. These must be in pdf format. If the proposed work includes areas outside the building, you must also provide existing and proposed plans for the affected areas. The project must be undertaken within the school boundary as defined in freehold or leasehold ownership.

To accompany floor plans, you must provide a full and clear description of construction works to be undertaken including work to the structure and service installations. We expect the design information you provide to be coherent with cost, timeline and risks to deliver the project.

The application will need to demonstrate that the project design has been developed to a level of confidence that the project is feasible to deliver the outcomes intended. To achieve this, you may need to appoint technical advisors and undertake visual and desktop surveys to better inform project risks, costs and timelines. This will help us assess whether the area of works is proportionate to the number of new places provided.

- **Photographs**

You must upload photographs of the space affected within the project scope taken at the time of the preparation of the application. This will be used to assure the department that the relevant surplus space has been accurately described.

Local Need for Childcare Provision (25%)

The following information will be evaluated collectively to provide one overall score using the 6-point scale. We will also use a mixture of departmental modelling and established data sources on early years childcare accessibility to supplement and validate the information provided in your application form.

- **Holiday childcare**

You must indicate whether you currently offer, or plan to offer through use of the capital funding, nursery provision outside of term-time, and indicate the capacity of the provision (the DfE considers an out-of-term-time care offer as a school which provides early years childcare during the school holidays).

- **Evidence of local childcare needs**

You must provide a description of your understanding for local demand for early years childcare and how your proposal addresses local needs. You may wish to discuss your response to this question with your local authority and consider how far your proposal aligns with their sufficiency analysis of early years childcare places, and any future demand of implications.

To receive a satisfactory score, you must demonstrate how your proposal has considered the need for early years childcare in your local area and provide evidence to support this. As part of this, you could evidence:

- your understanding of local demand for early years childcare (this should be evidence based and could include information based on discussion, or ideally consultation with parents at the school, such as a parental survey)
- information on local-level early years childcare availability within the school catchment area, for example, relevant information from any necessary local consultations completed and information from current nursery waiting lists to help illustrate demand (where applicable)
- information on local-level early years childcare availability within the school catchment area. For example, where applicable, relevant information from any necessary local
- the existing and future need in your local early years childcare market, and how your provision could help fill this need (e.g. if your provision will serve an age range not currently catered for)

We will score projects more highly if they:

- aim to provide out-of-term-time care (as we know this is of value to parents)
- are based in areas with high levels of demand, compared with existing levels of provision

Approach to early years education (25%)

You must provide a clear description of how you propose to deliver high-quality early years learning, in line with the [Early Years Foundation Stage framework](#), and evidence whether and how your provision will focus on improving the outcomes of children from disadvantaged families. This will be evaluated alongside your school's existing performance record (or in the case of schools operating provision run by PVI and childminder partners, the relevant PVI or childminder organisation) to provide one overall score using the 6-point scale. Where available, we will consider Ofsted judgements, with particular regard to quality of education, leadership and management and early years provision key judgements, which should be good or outstanding.³

³ From September 2024, Ofsted stopped issuing an overall effectiveness judgement on school inspections. However, overall effectiveness judgements from reports published before then remain valid until the provider is next inspected.

To receive a satisfactory score, your answer should demonstrate a clear focus on early years learning for children aged 4 and below, specific to the needs of children in your local area.

We will score projects more highly if they:

- clearly evidence that they are focussed on supporting children from disadvantaged families (this will be assessed through the evidence submitted in your application and supplemented and validated by using departmental data related to established disadvantage factors)
- are associated with schools (or in the case of schools operating provision run by PVI and childminder partners, the relevant PVI or childminder organisation) that have strong performance records such as Good or Outstanding Ofsted key judgements

Deliverability and sustainability of nursery provision (15%)

You must provide a summary of how this provision will be delivered and be financially sustainable, which be scored using the 6-point scale, in relation to the effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed nursery provision.

To receive a satisfactory score, you must provide clear evidence that the school will be able to appropriately staff nursery provision, and that the school can afford to run the nursery. As part of this, you should provide:

- evidence that the provision will be sufficiently staffed by the time of project completion, considering the necessary staff: child ratios outlined in the EYFS framework
- consideration of whether there are existing staff with appropriate experience of early years education, and relevant DBS checks and if not, how this will be addressed
- assurance that nursery provision will be appropriately governed
- assurance regarding the overall financial management of the school (you may wish to consider the school financial value standards)

The role of local authorities

In addition to expecting schools to collaborate with their local authority throughout the application process, we will also provide local authorities with an opportunity to offer further comments to the DfE as part of the assessment process. This additional input from local authorities will help inform our evaluation by providing valuable insights, such as the specific needs of the project, local context, and any other relevant considerations that may impact the success and necessity of the provision.

SBN Capital Fund Outcomes

Notification of outcome

Applicants will be notified of outcomes in Spring 2025. You will be contacted via the details provided on your application.

Successful Bids

Grant distribution, management and recovery

Details will be shared at the point of notification of successful application. We would expect to make initial payments in Spring 2025, subject to agreement of grant conditions.

Grant Conditions

If your application is successful, you will be expected to comply with our grant funding terms and conditions, which you will receive at the point of notification of outcome. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions will affect payment of the grant.

Grant conditions will include the (not exhaustive) requirements to:

- agree that any unbudgeted or unplanned additional costs incurred during the process will be at the expense of the responsible body
- report the progress of the project throughout its lifecycle by completing regular project monitoring reports
- inform DfE of any changes or delays to planned project milestones and of any project overspends or underspends
- agree conditions of claw back, payment suspension and early termination clauses in circumstances where monies are not spent for the purposes as set out in the grant or if the programme is unable to be completed

Once the grant funding agreement has been signed by you and the Department, you should be in a position to enter into contract with your contractors.

The DfE will not be liable for any costs or expenses incurred by any potential applicant, or any other person in connection with the application process, including (but not limited to) the preparation and submission of applications, nor will the DfE or any of its officers, Ministers, employees, agents or advisors will be liable in any way to any potential applicant, or any other person for any costs, expenses or losses incurred by any potential applicant, any member of the potential applicant's team or any other person in connection with this application process, including (but not limited to) where the application process is cancelled or amended or the DfE otherwise decides not to award funding.

Grant compliance

On completion of the project, you must provide the information below within three months. Officials from the DfE may visit during the project's progress or at completion to assure the work matches information provided. You should make contractors and technical advisers (where relevant) aware of this requirement, so that they can contribute to providing the following information:

- a completed Statement of Use of Funds (which will be provided to you at project completion), signed by your accounting officer or a senior member of the leadership team
- a copy of the practical completion certificate or similar, signed by a suitably qualified independent construction professional
- a copy of the Building Control Officer's final certificate where needed
- as-built floor plans
- photographs of each completed space with space identification
- an invoice listing and copy of all invoices which must match the total final eligible project cost within the Statement of Use of Funds

Project feedback and evaluation

We want to learn from your experience. We will work closely with you during this first stage of the programme to understand what has worked well and any potential obstacles or challenges. This will help us to gain a deeper understanding of what is needed to deliver new or expanded nursery provision in primary schools.

Unsuccessful bids

Application Feedback

There is no right of appeal if your application is unsuccessful, and we are unable to provide individual feedback on applications.

Annex A: Submitting your application checklist

This list is not exhaustive but provides some important things to consider.

Action	Complete
Check that you have access to the online application service in advance and make sure that at least one other person can access this account in case a contingency is needed	
Check that you are submitting the application against the correct school and that the project documents relate to the school which you are applying for	
Check that the information you have provided on the online application service matches the information in the project documents.	
Ensure that your document uploads comply with the document size (1MB per document)	
Check that all your documents are clear and readable – especially scanned documents which can appear too dark to show detail, or documents which have been shrunk so much that they are illegible	
Ensure that the information included in your application is accurate	
When you are ready to submit your application, make sure you save first and then remember to press submit. It is unlikely we will accept an application that is saved but not submitted after the application window closes	

Annex B: Scope of funding

This annex provides some examples of eligible and ineligible expenditure under the SBN Capital Grant, in addition to those already listed in this guidance (see '[What funding is available](#)'). It is not an exhaustive list. If you have doubts about what is capital expenditure, you should seek local professional advice.

Eligible costs

- Work to ensure a safe construction site including access and egress.
- Works required to achieve a planning consent, if relevant, such as tree replacement and enhanced finishes or features
- Removing and encapsulating asbestos
- Reconfiguring existing spaces to be suitable for nursery, including installing new access points, walls and locally altering and reconnecting existing services to suit the new layout
- Replacing existing or installing new toilet facilities to cater for younger children
- Updating the existing finishes to those suitable for a nursery, e.g. replacing carpet with vinyl in wet play areas
- Installing changing and medical rooms and kitchens that are required for operational reasons
- Updating the door handles, locks, and other fittings to meet safety standards
- Installing intercom and door access systems to allow the nursery to function independently of the main school
- Installing an external canopy to allow for outdoor play
- Installing suitable fencing to provide safe and secure external play space
- Purchasing furniture and equipment to allow the nursery to function properly
- Providing ventilation to rooms that have a change of use, e.g. a meeting room into toilets and required to meet legislation
- Payment of professional advice and services, design fees and survey costs that are required to deliver the capital works

Ineligible costs

In costing your project, you should exclude ineligible costs such as, but not limited to, those listed below. Where your project costs include ineligible items, it may reduce the amount of grant you are able to claim.

- Carrying out backlog maintenance or upgrading infrastructure which will not exclusively benefit the new provision
- Planned, preventative and routine maintenance costs

- Works to the school estate that are not consequential to the provision of the nursery
- Refurbishment of existing nursery spaces where there is no correlation to the expansion of places
- Revenue items, such as books, paint, pens, etc.
- Labour and materials for removals and storage, such as storage boxes, gloves and shipping containers
- Annual software licences
- Temporary accommodation
- Refurbishment of spaces for interim teaching
- Rent service charges
- Internal staffing costs
- Recoverable VAT on costs incurred
- Costs, liabilities or expenditure incurred before the SBN Capital Grant launched
- Costs arising where scope of the project changes, and these have not been agreed with the DfE

Annex C: Online application service questions

Eligibility

Question	Answer format
Will the nursery be located on the school premises?	Yes or No
How will the nursey provision be delivered?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly linked to the school and governed by the school, Multi-Academy Trust or a governor • In partnership with a Private, Voluntary and Independent provider or childminder • Neither
Is the project using available space in the school buildings to create new nursery places?	Yes or No
Has your Local Authority Early Years lead been consulted before starting this application?	Yes or No
Has your Local Authority Pupil Place Planning lead been consulted before starting this application?	Yes or No
Does your Local Authority agree with the proposal for a school-based nursery?	Yes or No
Can the project be delivered with up to £150,000 of DfE capital funding, or in combination with funding from other sources?	Yes or No
Has the relevant freehold landowner (e.g. the Local Authority, foundation or trust, or relevant religious body) agreed to the use of their land for the nursery provision and any necessary capital works?	Yes or No

Bid applicant details

Question	Answer format
What is your job title?	Free text box

Question	Answer format
What is your contact phone number?	Free text box

PVI childminder information

Question	Answer format
Which provider, organisation or individual is the school partnering with?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A private, voluntary and independent provider (PVI) • A childminder organisation or company • An individual childminder
What is the name of the PVI provider?	Free text box
What is the name of the childminder company or organisation?	Free text box
What is the name of the individual childminder?	Free text box
Provide a contact name	Free text box
Enter the address of the provider, organisation or individual	Free text box
What is their contact phone number?	Free text box
What is their contact email address?	Free text box

Nursery provision and capacity

Question	Answer format
Will you be reducing capacity for school-aged pupils to accommodate the nursery provision?	Yes or No
By how many places will your capacity be reduced?	Free text box
What will the school's capacity be after the reduction?	Free text box
Does the school currently provide nursery provision during the academic year?	Yes or No

Question	Answer format
Who will deliver the nursery provision?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school • A Multi-Academy Trust • A governor • A Private, Voluntary or Independent childcare provider (PVI) • A childminder organisation or company • An individual childminder
What will be the opening hours of the nursery provision?	Free text box
Nursery capacity for academic year 2024 to 2025	Free text box for the following numbers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the age of 2 • 2 years of age • 3 years of age • 4 years of age
Nursery capacity for academic year 2025 to 2026	Free text box for the following numbers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the age of 2 • 2 years of age • 3 years of age • 4 years of age
Nursery capacity for academic year 2026 to 2027	Free text box for the following numbers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the age of 2 • 2 years of age • 3 years of age • 4 years of age

Holiday childcare

Question	Answer format
Do you currently provide holiday childcare?	Yes or No

Question	Answer format
Will the DfE funding provide holiday childcare where it does not currently exist?	Yes or No
What is your current total capacity for holiday childcare?	Free text box
What will the holiday childcare capacity of the nursery be after the project is completed?	Free text box

Project information

Question	Answer format
Project proposal and funding - Describe the scope of the work and why capital funding is needed (maximum 750 words).	Free text box
Site and layout plans	Upload pdf of plans
Photographs of affected spaces	Upload photos

Local need, educational approach and sustainability of provision

Question	Answer format
Evidence of local childcare needs - provide evidence that your proposal has considered the local need for childcare places (maximum 1,000 words).	Free text box
Approach to early years learning - provide evidence regarding the approach your nursery would take towards early years learning (maximum 750 words).	Free text box
Delivery and sustainability - tell us how this nursery provision will be delivered and financially sustainable (maximum 750 words).	Free text box

Local consultation

Question	Answer format
Has this project undergone a minimum of 3 to 4 weeks consultation with interested local parties?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Consultation is still in progress • Not applicable
Consultation details	Upload PDF of consultation summary
Provide more information (if answer is anything but yes)	Free text box

Project and additional funding costs

Question	Answer format
What type of project is it?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New build • Extension • Remodel • Refurbishment • Heavy refurbishment • Refresh
How much DfE Capital Grant funding are you applying for?	Free text box
Will you be receiving additional funding from other source?	Yes or No
How much additional funding will you receive?	Free text box
Additional funding costs	Free text box
Give us information on who is providing the additional funding.	
Breakdown of project costs – the total costs provided should match the full amount you are requesting, including both DfE funding and any additional funding from other sources.	Free text box each for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total indoor area size (m²) • Building works • External works • Abnormal items

Question	Answer format
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furniture, fixtures and equipment • Survey and design fees • Technical advisor fees • Risk allowance • Irrecoverable VAT (if applicable)

Quotes

Question	Answer format
What quotes have you received for the work?	<p>Free text box asking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company name • Total estimate • Date quote was received • Any other information <p>User must also upload at least one quote (maximum of 3)</p>

Project timeline

Question	Answer format
<p>Project timeline information - You must have completed a feasibility assessment.</p> <p>The dates you provide should show realistic timelines based on the size of the work needed to get the space ready for use.</p>	<p>Free text box asking for dates of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design complete • Planning approval secured • Date tender process begins • Project start date • Project end date • Date nursery provision will open

Project timeline

Question	Answer format
Is planning permission required for this project?	Yes or No
At what stage is your planning permission at?	Choice:

Question	Answer format
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I already have planning permission • I have applied for planning permission but waiting on the decision • I need to apply for planning permission
Provide more information (if you have applied and are waiting)	Free text box
Provide more information (if you need to apply)	Free text box

Project risks

Question	Answer format
What is the risk?	Free text box
What is the chance that the risk will happen?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high • High • Medium • Low • Very low
What is the impact of the risk?	Choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high • High • Medium • Very low • Low
How will you mitigate this risk?	Free text box



Department
for Education

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