

DoE: Recouping local authority funding for free schools

This response was submitted online. Below are the answers provided.

Q. Do you agree with the proposal to recoup funding for all mainstream free schools from the first year of opening? (Yes /No)

A. *No*

Q. Please provide any further comments. If you do not agree, please add any suggestions about how the proposal could be improved.

A. *Recoupment of funding for the Free School would entail the deduction of Lump Sum allocations in addition to all pupil led funding, social deprivation, and school specific allocations such as rates.*

Pupils attending a free school may well be electively home educated at the point of census and so no Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) will have been allocated to the authority for that financial year. Those pupils relocating from a maintained or academy school will have attracted DSG and this will have been passed to the relevant schools for the financial year. There is no methodology by which a Local Authority (LA) can recover delegated funds for those pupils moving to the new Free School. In both of the above cases the LA will have effectively be forced to double fund the pupils attending the free school for at least part of the year should the proposal be adopted.

Q. Do you think there is any particular support the department could give local authorities to help them estimate pupil numbers for new mainstream free schools, or any other support which would make recoupment fairer or simpler?

A. *The DFE should continue to fund free schools centrally from the point of inception to the beginning of the next fundable period, allowing for capture of pupil data in the next funding census. Alternatively grossing up pupil numbers to reflect the increased pupil count and/or a retrospective funding adjustment to cover any increase in school population might assist in mitigating the additional costs. This would also assist with LA's experiencing significant growth in pupil population.*

Further detail of the process and scrutiny challenges to setting up Free Schools in areas where the pupil population is relatively stable or within the current capacity available would be appreciated given previous experience of free schools in Cornwall.