



Department
for Education

Free school presumption: Annex A

**Model specification template for local
authorities seeking proposals to establish
a new secondary special school**

Section A - Introduction

Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the 'free school presumption') where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy. Manchester City Council has identified a requirement to establish a new secondary special school in north Manchester to open in September 2024.

Manchester's population is growing significantly and the number of children and young people with SEND is increasing in line with the population increase. In addition, earlier identification of children's needs, staff becoming more skilled in identifying needs and parents' greater readiness to ask for support for their children are contributing to a rise in numbers of children and young people at both SEN Support and with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Nationally, the actual numbers and proportion of pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) have increased with the overall percentage now at 4.0% of the whole school population. Within the Manchester school population, the January 2022 census showed that 4.7% of the school population have an EHCP (4,350 pupils). In Manchester the number of pupils attending special schools is growing and now stands at 2.2% of the total school population.

There are currently 14 Special schools established in the City organised across all-through, primary, and secondary settings. In addition, 20 schools have resourced provision (RP) for between 7 and 15 children at each site in excess of their mainstream cohorts. Since 2020, an additional 34 resource provision places and 387 special school places have been created in Manchester. As at January 2022 census, there were 2020 pupils on roll at a Manchester special school, split across primary (772), secondary (982), and post-16 (266). This is an increase of 420 across the age range when compared with the January 2019 census which identified a total of 1600 pupils on roll. The growth of Manchester's special school pupil cohort is consistently increasing year-on-year and this trend is well established.

The significant levels of demand for specialist provision have resulted in approximately 270 Manchester residents accessing a place in non-maintained or independent special schools, often outside the city. These placements result in additional cost when compared with accessing provision in local special schools. Manchester is experiencing pressure on its High Needs budget which is partly attributable to utilisation of high-cost placements. Developing provision in maintained special schools through expansions or new free schools is a key component to reduce budgetary pressures and improving outcomes for Manchester's SEN pupils.

Forecasted demand for special school places is expected to reach 2408 pupils by 2025, split across primary (866), Secondary (1215), and post-16 (328). By 2029 these figures

could reach 897 in primary, 1660 in secondary, and 427 in post-16 resulting in a considerable shortfall of places.

Capacity of Manchester special schools is currently forecast to reach a total of 2285 places by 2025-26 academic year. When compared with the forecast noted above, this leaves a potential shortfall of 123 places which will increase to 699 by 2029-30. The proposed special free school will be well placed in the city to meet a proportion of this growing demand.

The authority is therefore seeking proposals from DfE approved sponsors to open this new school which will be deemed a free school. Proposers should complete the Free School Presumption application form and return it to:

John Francoli
 Lead for School Places
 Email: school.organisation@manchester.gov.uk

The process for accessing proposals will be as follows:

Stage	Date(s)	Action
Invitation to Sponsor	19 April - 14 June 2023	Proposers to submit bids over 8-week period
Assessment of Sponsors	14 June – 23 June 2023	The Local Authority will assess bids using the DfE model assessment criteria
Submission to RDNW	23 June 2023	Recommendation of Local Authority preferred sponsor made
Sponsor Agreed	TBC	RDNW on behalf of the Secretary of State to agree sponsor
Pre-Opening Phase	TBC	Successful sponsor to commence pre-opening
School Opens	September 2024	Admission of first cohort

Potential sponsors should complete the model application form located at the following web address.

<https://www.manchester.gov.uk/education/newsecondaryspecialschool>

The Council will use the DfE model criteria for assessing applications concluding with a recommendation of preferred sponsor to the Regional Director for North West (RDNW).

The Regional Director for North West, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will consider the local authority assessments and recommendations before deciding which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school. The RDNW will inform the local authority and

the successful proposer of its decision, and the local authority will inform any unsuccessful proposers.

If you would like further information or wish to discuss your application, please contact:

John Francoli
Lead for School Places
Email: school.organisation@manchester.gov.uk

Please return your completed form to school.organisation@manchester.gov.uk

NB: the local authority led free school presumption is a different route to the DfE's free school programme. Further information about how to establish a new school via the DfE's free school programme route can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school>

Section B - The School

The characteristics of the new school are expected to be as follows.

School Characteristics	
Opening Date	September 2024
Permanent Site	Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester
School Size	150 places (120 for 11-16 & 30 for 16-19 year olds)
School Growth	It is expected that the school will open in its permanent accommodation in September 2024 and admit up to 50 pupils aged 11-16 years old.
Type of School	Free School
Phase and Age Range	Secondary with Sixth Form 11-19
Gender (boys/girls/mixed)	Mixed (co-educational)
Nursery Provision	No
Sixth Form Provision	30 places for 16-19 year old pupils
SEN Provision	Generic Specialist Support Secondary School which would include places for pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Outreach	The school will provide access to specialist facilities e.g., sensory rooms to children with SEND who attend local mainstream secondary schools and resourced provision on a sessional basis during school hours. Access to facilities after school, at weekend and school holidays will facilitate groups for parents/carers of children with SEND and also for the provision of short breaks and food scheme (HAF). Vocational experiences / opportunities will be made available to children and may include access to shops, cafes, catering, gardening, and digital.
Community Use	The school will be expected to make available its facilities for community use
Admission Arrangements	The school will be required to follow Manchester's policy for special school admissions
Transport Arrangements	Pupils will be encouraged to develop and adopt independent travel skills to access the school via sustainable transport links. Certain pupils may be eligible for travel support as determined by the Council's Travel Policy.
Character/Ethos of school	The school will not have a religious character or ethos.
Equalities Impact Analysis	See Section G
Site Ownership	The site is owned freehold by Manchester City Council and will be leased to the school operator for a period of 125 years.

Section C - Vision

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance.

As a minimum, please ensure you include the following:

- A strong educational vision and ethos supported by an engaging broad and balanced curriculum relevant to all learners which engenders a love of learning and includes opportunities for learners to develop social and cultural capital.
- An absolute commitment to ethos and values of inclusive education for all Manchester's children including those vulnerable to social exclusion, those in care, those with SEN and those newly arrived in the city requiring a school place.
- A strong commitment to work in partnership with Manchester City Council and its partners to deliver the City's ambitions for its children and young people and the shared vision that Manchester's young people with SEND are happy, safe,

successful, healthy and are able to make choices and be independent.

- A track record of strong and sustainable leadership with the capacity and resources to deliver the vision for the school.
- Ambition to achieve the very best outcomes for all learners which exceed national averages and expectations underpinned by evidence of a strong track record of leading a highly performing school.
- To provide ambitious and high-quality careers, information, advice and guidance including access to high quality work experience and employment opportunities
- Experience of providing good or outstanding special school provision and post-16 provision within an urban context.
- Excellent provision which meets the needs of children with a range of Special Educational Needs.
- Plans for high levels of engagement with the local community and parents/carers during the pre-opening period and post opening and a commitment to work in coproduction with parents/carers and young people to develop a high-quality education offer.
- A commitment to the provision of a nurturing school community with strong pastoral support which ensures that children have the opportunity to develop self-belief, self-management, resilience and understand what it means to be a good citizen.
- Commitment to ensuring the future progression of children through the development of key life skills, digital skills, and strong links with businesses.
- Evidence of a strong and robust approach to safeguarding all children and a willingness to commit to integrated working with Children's services, Voluntary and Community Sector and other agencies to secure family support around children and young people.
- Evidence of effective and collaborative partnerships with other schools and a willingness to develop and contribute to school-to-school partnership working and a commitment to fair access for pupils.
- To meet Manchester City Council's expectation of a MAT operating in the City including membership of the Manchester School's Alliance and engagement with special school partnership arrangements.
- A commitment to the highest possible standards of environmental sustainability including physical infrastructure e.g., energy use and integration of sustainability into the curriculum (formal and informal) and the life of the school community.

Section D - Education Plan

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance.

As a minimum, please ensure you include the following:

- An ambitious, broad and balanced, deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent

with the vision and relevant to the school community. This could include a curriculum table and pupil build up chart.

- Strategies for measuring pupil performance effectively and setting aspirational targets.
- Strategies for recognition of all types of achievement.
- A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels; with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective performance management). This could also include an organogram and staff build up chart.
- A plan for attracting, recruiting and retaining high quality staff including staff development.
- Evidence of how the needs of all children are fully provided for and how the school will be fully inclusive.
- Details of enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs.
- The school's approach to; pastoral support; PHSE; the Prevent Duty; safeguarding and welfare; and promoting fundamental British values (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs).
- The school's plan for ensuring children are equipped with life skills, digital skills and the world of work.
- The school's plan for ensuring children have opportunities and experiences which develop their cultural capital.
- The school's plan for ensuring all children are safeguarded.
- The school's plan for ensuring equality of opportunity and that individuals within the school community with protected characteristics do not suffer any indirect or direct discrimination.
- The school's plan for community engagement and use of the building and facilities once fully open.
- The school's plan for high quality local governance with which oversees the delivery of the school's vision and strategy and effectively holds school leaders to account.

Section E - Capacity and Capability

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance.

As a minimum, please ensure you include the following:

- The resources you would draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new free school by the opening date.
- Clear evidence that you would be able to open the school by September 2024.

- Clear evidence that you have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including; managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety.
- How the school would be organised including a diagram of the proposed structures.
- Governance arrangements including local governance and relationship to Trust arrangements.

Section F - Funding and Costs

The costs for construction of the school will be met from the Local Authority's High Needs capital allocation.

The land which will be occupied by the school is owned by the Council and a model free school lease will be provided to the operator at nil consideration.

The DfE currently provides £25,000 for legal expenses to the successful sponsor.

The Council will work with the appointed academy trust to identify and agree pre- and post-opening costs for the school.

Section G - Impact and Equalities Assessments

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The Council's impact assessment on existing educational provision along with the equalities impact assessment can be requested by contacting:

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Lead for School Places
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