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# School buildings and capital funding (England)



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## Summary

### Changes in departmental capital spending since 2009-10

In financial year 2022-23 [capital spending](#) by the Department for Education was around £5.3 billion in cash terms and £5.5 billion [in real terms 2023-24 prices](#) (after adjusting for inflation). This includes capital spending on schools as well as other establishments such as early years, or further education providers.

Overall, between 2009-10 and 2022-23, Department for Education capital spending declined by 28% in cash terms and 46% in real terms.

**Planned** capital spending for 2023-24 is around £7.0 billion which is a 28% real terms increase compared to 2022-23.

### School Rebuilding Programme

On 29 June 2020 the Government announced what the Education Secretary described in the House as “a 10-year, multi-wave rebuilding programme for schools,” to replace “poor-condition and ageing school buildings, with modern, energy-efficient designs.”

The first 100 projects for the [School Rebuilding Programme](#) were announced in two stages in [February 2021](#) and [July 2021](#).

There was a consultation between July to October 2021 on [prioritising schools for further phases of the programme](#). The Government [published its response](#) in February 2022.

In March 2022 nominations for school projects closed, 1,105 nominations were received. [In July 2022 61 of these were successful](#).

In December 2022 a [further 239 schools](#) were added to the list, bringing the total number of schools in the programme to 400.

[In May 2023, in response to a PQ](#) the Department for Education confirmed that at that time four projects had been completed, and works had started at 170 schools since the programme began in 2021.

## DfE Annual Report 2021-22: A significant risk

The Department for Education's [annual report for the financial year 2021-22](#), published in December 2022, identified the condition of school buildings, particularly those built between 1945-70, as one of six 'significant risks' the Department was managing. The report noted that the situation had worsened during the year, and was unlikely to improve during 2022.

## National Audit Office report

The National Audit Office published a report on the [Condition of School Buildings](#) in June 2023.

The report said that, "following years of underinvestment, the estate's overall condition is declining and around 700,000 pupils are learning in a school that the responsible body or DfE believes needs major rebuilding or refurbishment."

The NAO said that the rate of school rebuilding is significantly below what the Department for Education estimated was required to maintain the school estate, and that there was also an unknown number of schools that may need rebuilding due to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC).

## Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC)

There have been serious concerns about the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in school construction. RAAC is a lightweight, 'bubbly' form of concrete commonly used in construction between the 1950s and mid-1990s.

In August 2023, it was announced that a number of schools had been told that they may need to shut buildings following the discovery of RAAC. This followed earlier closures and relocations of schools where RAAC has been discovered.

The DfE's [published data](#) (as of 16 October 2023) states that there are 214 schools across England with confirmed RAAC. 202 are providing full-time face-to-face education, with the other 12 providing hybrid arrangements.

# 1 Streams of capital funding and changes in allocations over time

There are many different streams of school capital funding, these have also changed over time. [Department for Education capital spending](#) (outlined in section 1.1) is the broadest measure (it includes non-schools such as early years providers) but is the most comparable over time.

For schools specifically, the main sources of capital funding included in this briefing are: [basic need capital allocations](#) (for local authorities to create new mainstream school places), [school condition funding](#) (for either individual schools or organisations responsible for schools, such as local authorities, to improve the condition of the school estate), and [high needs provision capital allocations](#) (for local authorities to create new high needs places). New places through the centrally delivered free school programme are not included in this briefing.

## Box 1: Inflation adjusted figures

All inflation adjusted figures (real terms figures) in this briefing are in [2023-24 prices](#).

To calculate real term figures [the OBR's GDP deflator growth forecast](#) for financial year 2020-21, and 2021-22 have been averaged across the two years to smooth the distortions caused by pandemic-related factors.

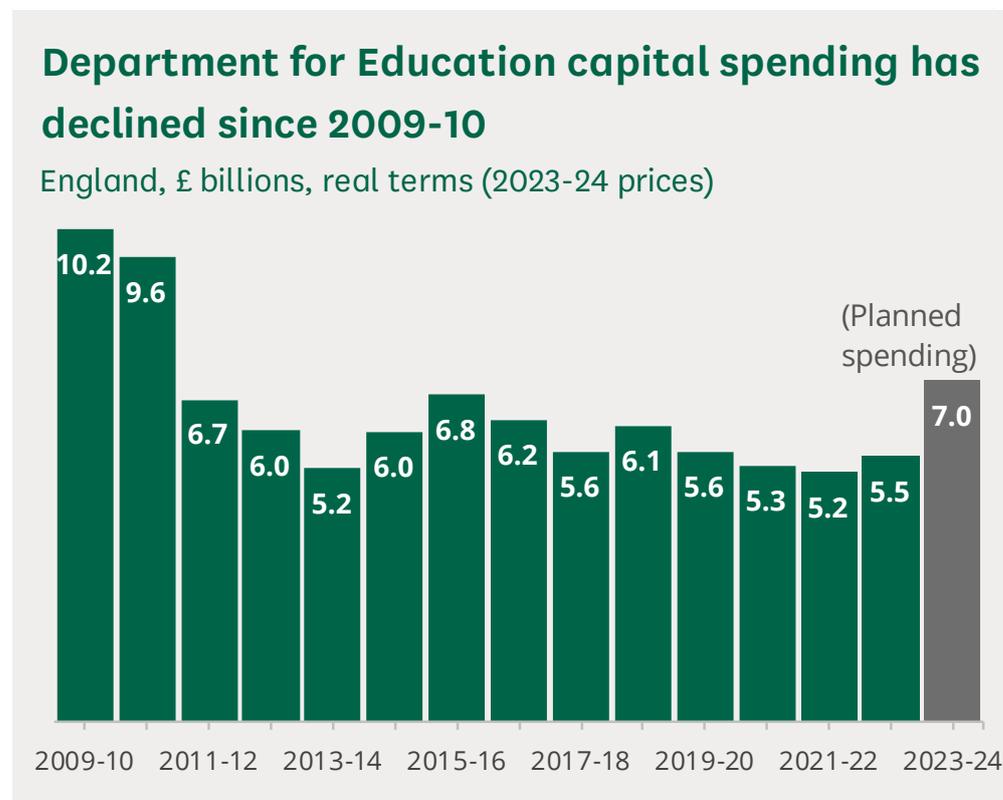
## 1.1 Department for Education capital spending since 2009-10

Between financial years 2009-10 and 2021-22, capital spending by the Department for Education ranged between a high of £10.2 billion in 2009-10 to a low of £5.2 billion in both 2013-14 and 2021-22 (adjusted for inflation in 2023-24 prices).<sup>1</sup> This includes capital spending on schools as well as non-school capital spending (such as on early years or further education providers).

<sup>1</sup> HM Treasury, [PESA: various years](#) (Table 1.8); Real terms ([2023-24 prices](#)) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

Spending adjusted for inflation generally followed a downward trend between 2009-10 and 2013-14. Since 2013-14 spending has fluctuated. Further detail is shown in the chart below.

Overall, between 2009-10 and 2022-23, capital spending declined by around 28% in cash terms and 46% in real terms.<sup>2</sup>



Sources: HM Treasury, [PESA: various years](#) (Table 1.8); HM Treasury, [GDP Deflators at market prices, and money GDP: June 2023](#), 30 June 2023 (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

The Department for Education **planned** capital spending for 2023-24 is around £7.0 billion. This is a 28% increase in real terms compared to 2022-23.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2

### Basic need funding for local authorities

#### Duties on local authorities to provide school places

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area, and parents can make representations about the supply of

<sup>2</sup> HM Treasury, [PESA: various years](#) (Table 1.8); Real terms ([2023-24 prices](#)) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

<sup>3</sup> HM Treasury, [PESA: various years](#) (Table 1.8); Real terms ([2023-24 prices](#)) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

school places.<sup>4</sup> Local authorities must respond to such representations under [Section 14A of the Education Act 1996](#) as amended.

How local authorities fulfil their statutory duties is a matter for each local authority to decide.

In June 2023 the Department for Education published the [Local Authority School Places Scorecards 2022](#) which provides data on basic needs allocations, new schools places created/planned, demand for new places, costs and the ‘quality’ of new places created.

## Basic need allocations over time

[Basic need capital allocations](#) are made to local authorities to provide new mainstream pupil places by expanding existing schools or by establishing new schools. This is in addition to places provided by centrally delivered programmes such as the [free school programme](#).

Basic need capital allocations are calculated by comparing school capacity with forecasted pupil numbers. This means that changes in allocations are driven by the difference between existing capacity and changes in demand for places.

In financial year 2022-23 the Government paid around £0.5 billion to local authorities to create new school places needed for September 2023.<sup>5</sup> This was the third lowest amount since 2011-12 (2023-24 prices). The 2020-21 allocation of around £0.2 billion was the lowest amount over the period.

One reason for this decrease in spending in recent years is due to less demand for new primary school places. The Department for Education [estimated demand for primary school places peaked in academic year 2021/22](#) following several years of increased demand.

From 2011-12 to 2022-23 the overall basic need funding allocations for England were worth around £14.8 billion for the whole period (2022-23 prices) or around £1.2 billion per year.<sup>6</sup>

The Government has allocated around £0.7 billion of planned basic need spending for 2023-24.<sup>7</sup>

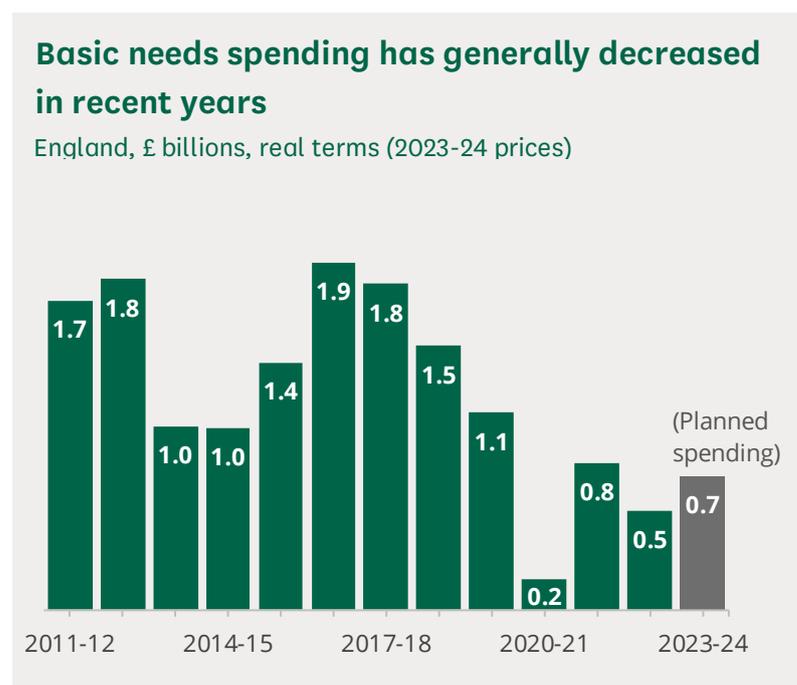
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<sup>4</sup> [Section 14, Education Act 1996](#)

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), updated 22 June 2023; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), updated 22 June 2023; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details); The DfE published a joint allocation for 2013-15, this calculation is assumes that the funding was allocated equally between the two years.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), updated 22 June 2023; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)



Note: The DfE published a joint allocation for 2013-15, figures for 2013-14 and 2014-15 assume that the funding was allocated equally in cash terms between the two years.

Sources: Department for Education, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), 22 June 2023; HM Treasury, [GDP Deflators at market prices, and money GDP: June 2023](#), 30 June 2023 (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

## 1.3 High needs provision capital allocations

Local authorities also receive separate funding ([high needs provision capital allocations](#)) to provide new school places for children with special educational needs, and to improve existing provision.

The Department for Education has published the allocations for 2022-23 (£1.2 billion), and 2023-24 (£354 million). These were both higher than the 2021-22 allocation (£300 million).<sup>8</sup>

In the [Spending Review 2021](#), £2.6 billion was announced for high needs capital funding over the spending review period (financial years 2022-23 to 2024-25).<sup>9</sup>

Taking into account the amounts that the Department for Education has allocated for 2022-23 and 2023-24, This suggests that £1.05 billion is expected to be allocated for 2024-25.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, [High needs provision capital allocations](#), updated 21 August 2023

<sup>9</sup> HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021: documents](#), 27 October 2021, p49

<sup>10</sup> Department for Education, [High needs provision capital allocations](#), updated 21 August 2023

## 1.4

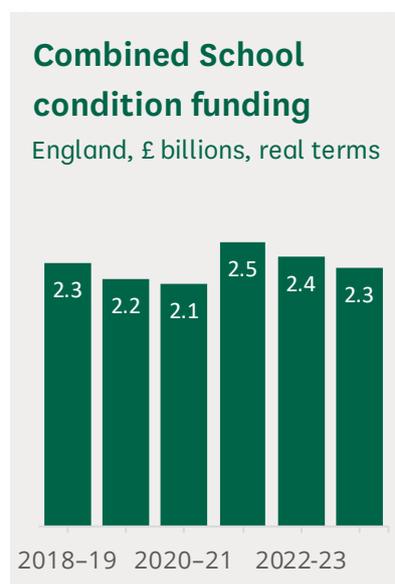
## School condition funding

[School condition funding](#) is the money allocated by the Government each year to improve and maintain the school estate (buildings and grounds), it is distributed through three separate allocations:

- **Devolved formula capital (DFC) allocations:** direct funding for individual schools rather than via local authorities. Allocations are based on a formula which takes school type and pupil numbers into account. Schools do not need to apply for this funding and can spend it on capital projects of their choosing.
- **School condition allocations (SCA):** funding for some organisations responsible for large numbers of schools, such as local authorities and large multi-academy trusts (with at least five academies and at least 3,000 pupils). Funding is based on a formula which takes school type and pupil numbers into account. Eligible organisations do not need to apply for this funding and can spend it on condition need across the schools they are responsible for.
- **Condition improvement fund (CIF) allocations:** smaller schools that are not eligible for SCA can apply for [CIF funding](#) for individual projects “to address significant condition needs”.<sup>11</sup> The CIF replaced the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund (ACMF) and the Building Condition Improvement Fund (BCIF).

In financial year 2023-24 the three school condition funding allocations combined (DFC, SCA and CIF) totalled around £2.3 billion. This was 2% lower in cash terms than in the previous year and 4% lower in real terms.<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, the combined school condition funding allocations in real terms have varied between £2.1 billion in 2020-21, and £2.5 billion in 2021-22.<sup>13</sup> The chart on the right provides more detail.



Sources: DfE, [Condition Improvement Fund: various years](#); DfE, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), updated 22 June 2023; Real terms ([2022-23 prices](#)) (see Box 1 for more inflation details).

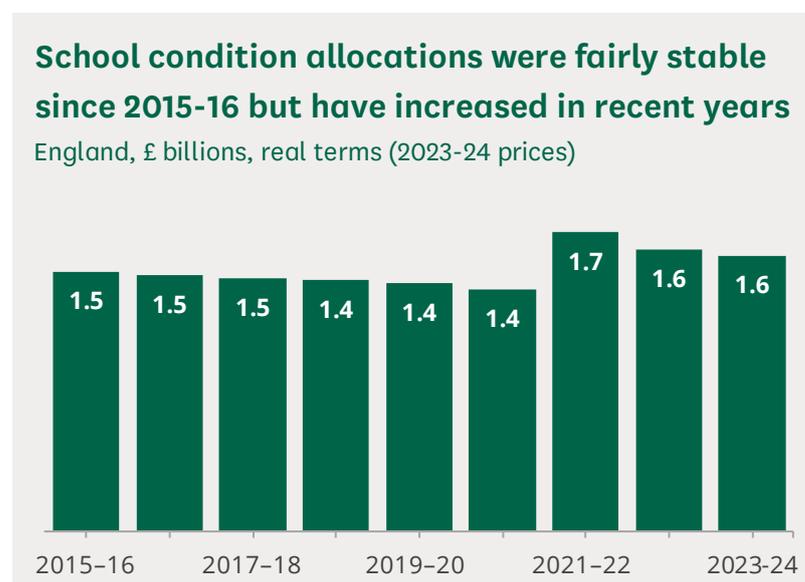
<sup>11</sup> Department for Education, [Condition Improvement Fund](#), 7 November 2022

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, [Condition Improvement Fund: various years](#); Department for Education, [School Capital Funding](#) [accessed 21/09/2023]; Real terms ([2023-24 prices](#)) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

<sup>13</sup> Same as above.

**School condition allocations (SCA)** make up the majority of this funding. From 2015-16 to 2023-24 SCA ranged from around £1.3 billion in 2020-21, to a high of £1.7 billion in 2021-22 (2023-24 prices). They were worth around £13.6 billion for the whole period, or around £1.5 billion per year.<sup>14</sup>

In 2023-24 the SCA allocation was around £1.6 billion, this was 32% higher in cash terms than in 2015-16, and 6% higher in real terms.<sup>15</sup>



Sources: Department for Education, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), updated 22 June 2023; Real terms (2022-23 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

From 2015-16 to 2023-24 the **devolved formula capital allocations (DFC)** very gradually declined in real terms. They were worth around £2.1 billion for the whole period in real terms, which equates to around £200 million per year.<sup>16</sup>

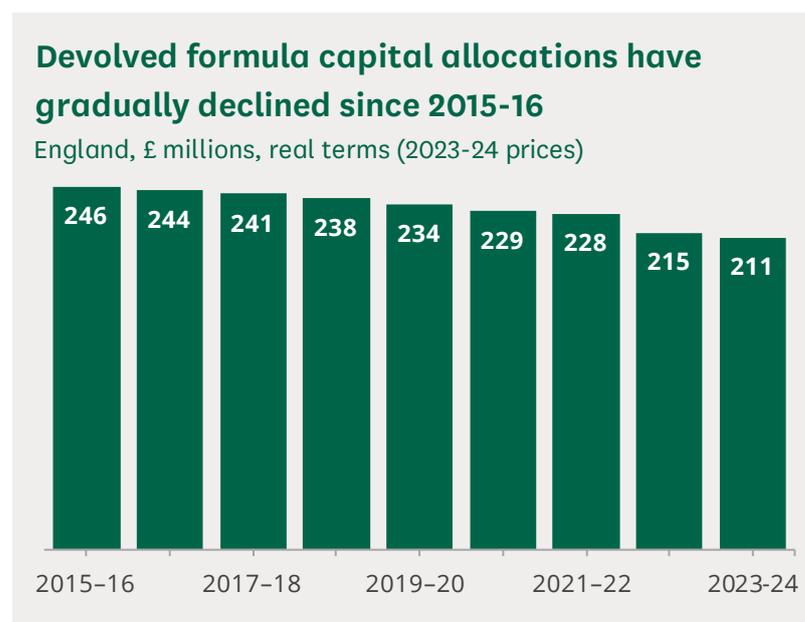
In 2023-24 the DFC allocation for England was around £200 million, this was 7% higher in cash terms than in 2015-16 but 14% lower in real terms.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Department for Education, [School Capital Funding](#) [accessed 21/09/2023]; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

<sup>15</sup> Department for Education, [School Capital Funding](#) [accessed 21/09/2023]; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

<sup>16</sup> Department for Education, [School Capital Funding](#) [accessed 21/09/2023]; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

<sup>17</sup> Department for Education, [School Capital Funding](#) [accessed 21/09/2023]; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)



Sources: Department for Education, [Basic need allocations for 2026](#), updated 22 June 2023; Real terms (2022-23 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

In 2023-24 [the Condition improvement fund \(CIF\)](#) allocated £456 million to 859 successful schools and sixth-form colleges (an average of around £500,000 per school, some schools could have more than one project approved). This total CIF allocation is an 8% decline in cash terms compared to the previous year and an 11% decline in real terms. However, the allocation per successful school increased by 20% in cash terms and 17% in real terms.<sup>18</sup>

Earlier allocations for SCA and DFC can be found in the following links:

- [2008-11](#)
- [2011-12](#)
- [2012-13](#)
- [2013-14](#)
- [2014-15](#)

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, [Condition Improvement Fund: 2022 to 2023 outcome](#), 28 July 2022; Department for Education, [Condition Improvement Fund: 2021 to 2022 outcome](#), 23 June 2021; Real terms (2023-24 prices) (see Box 1 for more inflation details)

## 2 Rebuilding programmes since 2010

### 2.1 School Rebuilding Programme

On [29 June 2020](#) the Government announced what the Education Secretary described in the House as “a 10-year, multi-wave rebuilding programme for schools,” to replace “poor-condition and ageing school buildings, with modern, energy-efficient designs.”<sup>19</sup>

The Education Secretary announced £1 billion in capital funding to be spent on 50 initial projects, with work due to begin in autumn 2021.

The Secretary of State also announced £560 million of additional condition funding for the school system to help support essential maintenance projects, on top of the £1.4 billion already provided for school maintenance in financial year 2020-21.<sup>20</sup>

Wider information is now available on the [School Rebuilding Programme](#).<sup>21</sup> The first 100 projects for a major rebuild or refurbishment were announced in two stages, in February and July 2021.<sup>22</sup>

A consultation ran from 19 July to 8 October 2021 on [prioritising schools for further phases of the programme](#). The Government [published its response](#) on how schools would be prioritised in February 2022.<sup>23</sup> It stated that up to 300 further schools would be prioritised in 2022-23, with a delivery rate of 50 per year. At the same time, the Government published information on [how to nominate a school for the next stage of the programme](#). Nominations closed on 3 March 2022.<sup>24</sup>

In July 2022, a [further 61 schools refurbishments were announced](#). The announcement stated that this would “include updating and modernising buildings, and creating state of the art facilities such as new sports halls, music rooms, science labs and dining areas.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> [HC Deb 29 June 2020 c2WS](#)

<sup>20</sup> As above

<sup>21</sup> Department for Education, [School Rebuilding Programme](#), 19 July 2021

<sup>22</sup> Department for Education, [School Rebuilding Programme: first 50 schools](#), 5 February 2021; [School Rebuilding Programme: second set of 50 schools](#), 19 July 2021

<sup>23</sup> Department for Education, [School Rebuilding Programme consultation response](#), February 2022

<sup>24</sup> Department for Education, [Nominate a school for the School Rebuilding Programme](#), 3 February 2022

<sup>25</sup> Department for Education, [Schools across the country to receive state of the art refurbishments](#), 12 July 2022; [Transparency data: School rebuilding programme: third set of 61 schools](#), 12 July 2022

In December 2022 a [further 239 schools](#) were added to the list, bringing the total number of schools in the programme to 400.<sup>26</sup>

The DfE published a blog in December 2022 providing [an overview of the programme](#), its purpose and where it stands.<sup>27</sup>

In May 2023, the school minister said that of the 400 schools that had been selected for the School Rebuilding Programme since 2021, works had started at 170 schools and four building projects have been completed.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2

## The Priority School Building Programme

The Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) was launched by the Coalition Government in July 2011. It replaced the Building Schools for the Future Programme established by the previous Labour Government, which was ended by the Coalition Government soon after it took office. The announcement of the closure included the announcement of a review of capital funding.<sup>29</sup>

Sebastian James' [review of capital funding](#) was subsequently published in April 2011.<sup>30</sup>

In a [statement to the House in July 2011](#), the then Education Secretary Michael Gove said that the design of the Building Schools for the Future Programme “was not as efficient as it could have been. Specifically, it did not prioritise schools in the worst condition and it did not procure new buildings as cheaply as possible.”

In its place, he announced the PSBP, which would be available to “all schools—academies, community schools and voluntary-aided schools—and local authorities that are responsible for the maintenance of a number of schools” and focused on schools with the “greatest need”:

I am also aware that many of our existing school buildings across the country are in desperate need of repair. I am grateful to hon. Members from all parties who have shown me and my colleagues schools in their constituencies that desperately need investment. The energy and skill with which so many colleagues have lobbied underlines how effectively so many hon. Members across the House represent the most needy in their constituencies.

We have already made £1.4 billion available this year to deal with maintenance problems. Overall, we are spending more on school buildings in

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<sup>26</sup> [HL Deb 19 December 2022 c6-7WS](#); The Department for Education has published a list [of schools in the programme and how they were prioritised](#), 16 December 2022

<sup>27</sup> Department for Education, [Building new schools – your questions answered](#), 16 December 2022

<sup>28</sup> [PQ 185586 \[School Rebuilding Programme\]. 22 May 2023](#)

<sup>29</sup> See a Written Ministerial Statement by the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, beginning at [HC Deb 5 July 2010 c47](#), and the following debate

<sup>30</sup> Department for Education, [Review of Education capital](#), 5 April 2011

every year of this Parliament cumulatively than the previous Government spent in every year of their first two Parliaments. But I want to do more, which is why today I am launching a new privately financed school building programme to address the schools in the worst condition, wherever they are in the country. The programme will be open to local authorities and schools that had been due funding via BSF but, critically, it will also be open to those which, despite real problems, had never been promised BSF funding. I believe strongly that those in genuine need should receive the funding they deserve and that no part of the country should be favoured over any other. Individual schools and local authorities will all be able to apply, and I am launching the application process today. The scheme will be rigorously policed to ensure that we do not incur the excessive costs incurred by previous privately financed schemes. The programme should cover between 100 and 300 schools, with the first of these open in September 2014, and is expected to be worth about £2 billion in up-front construction costs.<sup>31</sup>

In a subsequent [letter to local authorities](#), the then Secretary of State added:

The programme will be available to all publicly funded schools. I am determined that criticisms of the previous model for private financing must be addressed and I will only agree to projects when a series of rigorous value for money tests have been passed.

Local authorities, schools, and organisations with responsibility for schools will be able to submit applications for the programme.<sup>32</sup>

[General information](#) about PSBP is available on the gov.uk website.<sup>33</sup>

There have been two phases of PSBP. The first was [announced](#) in May 2012,<sup>34</sup> the [second](#) in May 2014.<sup>35</sup>

The successful schools in this second wave were announced on 9 February 2015. The announcement stated that under this second phase:

[...] around £2 billion will be invested in rebuilding or refurbishing buildings at 277 schools across England, under the second phase of the government's flagship Priority School Building Programme. 260 schools are already benefiting under the first phase of the programme, bringing the total number to receive a revamp to 537.<sup>36</sup>

## Education Committee evidence session

In March 2015, the Education Select Committee in the Commons held a [one off evidence session](#) on the PSBP, as well as taking [written evidence](#).

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<sup>31</sup> [HC Deb 19 July 2011 c793](#)

<sup>32</sup> Department for Education, [Michael Gove announcement on education funding](#), 19 July 2011

<sup>33</sup> Department for Education, [Priority School Building Programme](#), 7 August 2015

<sup>34</sup> Department for Education, [Written ministerial statement on the Priority School Building Programme](#), 24 May 2012

<sup>35</sup> Department for Education, [Education spending](#), 1 May 2014

<sup>36</sup> Department for Education, [£6 billion investment to rebuild and improve schools across England](#), 9 February 2015

In oral evidence, the then Schools Minister David Laws was asked what message he would send to schools that had applied for the two phases of PSBP but not been successful:

**Q149 Chair:** What message would you send to those schools that applied for PSBP 1 and 2 but failed? What confidence can they have that they will be funded in future?

**Mr Laws:** If they are academies, I would urge them to apply to the new condition improvement fund. Obviously, through that we fund some quite large bids. We are going through the bids and approving them at the moment. Although some of them are for £40,000 or £50,000, there will be some multimillion pound bids. If they are academies, they can bid for that and potentially get a large amount of money. If they are LA-maintained schools, they should know that we have now made this three-year allocation of maintenance, perhaps for the first time ever, so local authorities now have a lot of money for this, which is allocated on the basis of need in their area. Schools should be going to the local authority, particularly if the local authority put them forward for one of the Priority School Building Programmes, and saying, “We are disappointed that we didn’t get into it, but we know you have some money allocated for condition need. You obviously accept that we have condition need, so can we now sit down and talk about how some of that money can come our way?”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> [HC 1090, Session 2014-15, Q149](#)

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## 3 Reports on capital funding and school building conditions

### 3.1 National Audit Office: Condition of School Buildings report (2023)

The National Audit Office published a report on the [Condition of School Buildings](#) in June 2023.

The report said that, “following years of underinvestment, the estate’s overall condition is declining and around 700,000 pupils are learning in a school that the responsible body or DfE believes needs major rebuilding or refurbishment,”<sup>38</sup> and that:

Most seriously, DfE recognises significant safety concerns across the estate, and has escalated these concerns to the government risk register. Although it has made progress in the last year, DfE currently lacks comprehensive information on the extent and severity of these safety issues, which would allow it to develop a longer-term plan to address them.<sup>39</sup>

The report said that around 24,000 school buildings (38% of the total) are beyond their estimated initial design life so generally require more maintenance than newer buildings. This included 10,000 buildings constructed before 1940, with an estimated initial design life of 60 to 80 years; and an estimated 13,800 ‘system-built’ blocks constructed between 1940 and 1980, with an estimated initial design life of 30 to 40 years.<sup>40</sup>

The NAO said that the rate of school rebuilding is significantly below what the Department for Education estimated was required to maintain the school estate, and that there was also an unknown number of schools that may need rebuilding due to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) (see section 4).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> National Audit Office, [Condition of School Buildings](#), June 2023, p10

<sup>39</sup> National Audit Office, [Condition of School Buildings](#), June 2023, p10

<sup>40</sup> As above, p7

<sup>41</sup> As above, p29

## 3.2 DfE Annual Report 2022: a significant risk

The Department for Education's [annual report for the financial year 2021-22](#), published in December 2022, identified the condition of school buildings as one of six 'significant risks' the Department was managing. The report noted that the situation had worsened during the year, and was unlikely to improve during 2022.

The risk the report identified was "the collapse of one or more blocks in some schools which are at or approaching the end of their designed life-expectancy and structural integrity is impaired." The report said:

The risk predominantly exists in those buildings built in the years 1945 to 1970 which used 'system build' light frame techniques. At the publication there are no open schools or college buildings where we know of an imminent risk to life.<sup>42</sup>

The report said that school buildings safety, alongside cyber security, had been escalated to the Civil Service Board as a cross-governmental risk, adding:

The likelihood of the school buildings safety risk increased in October 2021 due to the increased numbers of serious structural issues identified. The impact and likelihood are unlikely to reduce in 2022, as there was no agreement to increase condition funding or the scale of the rebuilding programme at SR21.<sup>43</sup>

## 3.3 National Audit Office Report (2017)

In February 2017, the National Audit Office published a report on [Capital funding for schools](#) in England, which assessed the current position of the school estate and the funding required for its maintenance and expansion.

The report's key findings covered a variety of areas:

### Providing school places

- The Department for Education and local authorities had created a net increase of 599,000 school places between 2010 and 2015, at a cost of £7.5 billion
- 420,000 additional places were forecast to be needed between 2016 and 2021 with demand highest in London and the South East.
- School places were unevenly available, with pressure in some areas and a large amount of spare capacity elsewhere.

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<sup>42</sup> Department for Education, [Department for Education consolidated annual report and accounts 2021 to 2022](#), December 2022, p106

<sup>43</sup> As above, p19-20

- Local authorities faced significant challenges in providing school places on time, particularly in London and the South East.
- The DfE had improved how it estimates the need for school places and allocates money more closely according to need
- Where academies do not want to expand or relationships with the local authority are weak, authorities are restricted in their ability to provide sufficient school places – a statutory duty. This was also affected by free schools, whose opening local authorities can initiate but not fully control
- The Government’s plan for 500 new free schools by 2020 could eventually provide 270,000 additional places; around half of which were estimated to be available by 2012.
- Around half of places at free schools up to 2021 are expected to contribute towards meeting local demographic need. The remainder will create some spare capacity in schools in their immediate area.
- Free schools that create spare capacity affect pupil numbers and funding for neighbouring schools and, where a significant number of places are not filled, their own financial viability.

## The school estate

- It would cost £6.7bn to return all school buildings to a satisfactory or better condition
- The DfE has improved its data on the condition of the school estate but is not yet able to reliably assess how the condition is changing over time; the first results from a new property data survey to assess this were expected in 2017
- There is a significant risk of major costs arising from deterioration of the estate, with the DfE estimating that the cost of returning schools to satisfactory condition would double between 2015-16 and 2020-21
- Funding to repair school buildings is better targeted than previously but still does not fully follow need; 47% of local authorities said they did not think school condition allocations were allocated appropriately

## Delivering capital projects

- The cost of delivering capital projects varies considerably between local authorities and the Department’s role in promoting good practice is limited
- The Priority School Building Programme has replaced many schools in poor condition at a lower cost than Building Schools for the Future
- The lack of suitable sites is the biggest risk for delivering buildings for new free schools

- It was not clear that the DfE, local authorities and academy trusts had the skills and resources they needed to manage capital programmes effectively.<sup>44</sup>

The report made a series of recommendations to the Department, including that it should continue to improve its understanding of the condition of the school estate, work more closely with local authorities to understand and meet need and, in assessing applications for new free schools, explicitly assess whether the value gained from increasing choice and competition outweighs the disadvantages of creating spare school places.<sup>45</sup>

## NAO report source

The NAO finding that it would “cost £6.7bn to return all school buildings to a satisfactory or better condition” was [reported](#) in the media.

This estimate was based on the [Property Data Survey programme](#). The Property Data Survey programme ran from May 2012 to July 2014 and inspected a total of 18,830 schools. It excluded schools that had recently been modernised or were scheduled for renewal or replacement.

From 2021 to 2026 the [Condition Data Collection 2 programme](#) will visit every state-funded school and college in England to collect data about their building condition.

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<sup>44</sup> National Audit Office, [Capital funding for schools](#), February 2017, p7-12

<sup>45</sup> Full list of recommendations available in National Audit Office, [Capital funding for schools](#), p13

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## 4 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

### 4.1 Background and guidance

There have been serious concerns about the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in school construction.

RAAC is a lightweight, ‘bubbly’ form of concrete commonly used in construction between the 1950s and mid-1990s. It is predominantly found as precast panels in roofs (commonly flat roofs, sometimes pitched) and occasionally in floors and walls.<sup>46</sup>

In December 2022, the Department for Education published guidance for schools on identifying RAAC and appropriate steps to take. This guidance was updated in August 2023 and is now published as:

- [Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete: identification guidance](#)
- [Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete: guidance for responsible bodies and education settings with confirmed RAAC](#)

A DfE blog, [List of schools affected by RAAC and what you need to know about the new guidance](#), 6 September 2023, provides an overview.

The [identification guidance](#) sets out why RAAC is of concern:

In December 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Local Government Association (LGA) made building owners aware of a recent building component failure in a property constructed using RAAC. In May 2019, the Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) raised an alert to emphasise the potential risks from such construction, highlighting the failure of a RAAC panel roof construction within an operational school. This collapse was sudden with no apparent warning.

Since then, we have been made aware of further sudden collapses of RAAC panels in roofs that appeared to be in good condition. It is therefore essential that all responsible bodies undertake work to identify any RAAC they have in their estate following the stages set out in this guidance.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Department for Education, [Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete \(RAAC\): identification guidance](#), August 2023, p8

<sup>47</sup> As above

A flowchart on page 9 of the [identification guidance](#) sets out the process schools are expected to follow to identify whether they may have RAAC issues on their estate.

## Number of schools affected

The DfE's [published data](#) (as of 16 October 2023) states that there are 214 schools across England with confirmed RAAC. 202 are providing full-time face-to-face education, with the other 12 providing hybrid arrangements.

On 19 October 2023 the Government [confirmed in a written statement](#) that the response rate to its survey on RAAC was “99.9% of schools and colleges with blocks built in the target era.”<sup>48</sup>

## Timeline

The National Audit Office report on the [Condition of School Buildings](#) (June 2023, see section 3.3), included a timeline of events relating to RAAC:

- **February 1999** The Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) recommends that those responsible for buildings, including schools, with pre-1980 RAAC plank roofs should have these roofs inspected.
- **October 2018** The Department for Education (DfE) is informed of a sudden roof collapse at a school in Kent that had occurred in July 2018.
- **December 2018** DfE, with the Local Government Association, issues a warning note bulletin to all responsible bodies.
- **May 2019** SCOSS issues an alert that pre-1980 RAAC planks are now past their expected service life and calls on owners to locate buildings where RAAC planks are present and assess their condition and structural adequacy.
- **November 2019** The Office of Government Property issues a warning note, stating that SCOSS recommends all RAAC planks installed before 1980 are replaced.
- **February 2020** DfE expands its second Condition Data Collection programme (CDC2), which runs from 2021 to 2026, to consider RAAC.
- **February 2021** DfE issues a guide to identifying RAAC (updated in December 2022).
- **July 2021** DfE assesses whether existing data allow it to understand the extent of RAAC across the estate. It concludes that, given insufficient data, it would need to issue a questionnaire.

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<sup>48</sup> [HC Deb \[schools and colleges update\] HCWS1074, 19 October 2023](#)

- **March 2022** DfE issues a questionnaire to responsible bodies.<sup>49</sup>

## 4.2 Government position and funding

Schools were sent a [RAAC Survey](#) by the Department for Education in 2022 asking them to provide information on RAAC in their estates.

In response to a Parliamentary Question in May 2023, the schools minister said that “identifying RAAC can be difficult, so all reports of suspected RAAC are investigated by structural engineers commissioned by the Department and, where needed, site surveys are undertaken to confirm its presence.”<sup>50</sup>

The schools minister summarised the Government’s approach to RAAC in response to a Parliamentary Question in July 2023:

The Department is working with responsible bodies, schools, and colleges to support them through the process of investigation, assessment, and management of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

The Department has been communicating with schools about the potential risks of RAAC since 2018, when the Department first published a warning note with the Local Government Association.

Since then, the Department has published guidance in identifying and managing RAAC. In March 2022, the Department asked all schools to share their knowledge of RAAC, its presence in their buildings, and how they are managing it. The Department is following up rigorously to ensure as complete a response as possible.

The Department continues to urge all responsible bodies to get in touch with it immediately if they have any concerns about their school building. The Department relies on this information to enable it to take swift action.

The questionnaire is still open for responses from responsible bodies and schools, and the Department also encourages settings to update their responses if their situation changes.

The Department’s professional surveyors have already carried out over 200 assessments where RAAC is suspected to verify its presence and assess its condition. The Department is on track to complete 600 assessments by autumn, ahead of the initial forecast of December 2023.

In cases where RAAC is confirmed, the Department provides rapid support to schools on the advice of structural engineers. This could include funding capital works to remove any immediate risk and, where absolutely necessary, the provision of temporary buildings.

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<sup>49</sup> Department for Education, [Condition of School Buildings](#), June 2023, p25

<sup>50</sup> [PQ 185276, 22 May 2023](#)

Longer term remediation of RAAC is supported by capital funding provided to the sector, the Department's rebuilding programme and urgent capital support.<sup>51</sup>

The DfE blog, [List of schools affected by RAAC and what you need to know about the new guidance](#), states:

The government will spend whatever it takes to keep children safe.

This includes paying for the emergency mitigation work to make buildings safe, including alternative classroom space where necessary.

Where schools need additional help with revenue costs like transport to other locations, we are actively engaging with every school affected to put appropriate support in place.<sup>52</sup>

The [guidance for schools with confirmed RAAC](#) states:

DfE will provide funding for all mitigation works that are capital funded. This includes propping and temporary units on your estate. [...]

Where schools, colleges and maintained nursery schools need additional help with revenue costs, like transport to locations or temporarily renting a local hall or office, you should discuss this with your caseworker and the Education and Skills Funding Agency in the first instance to agree any further support needed. We expect all reasonable requests will be approved. We recommend that you contact your commercial insurer or the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) if you are a member.<sup>53</sup>

## 4.3

## August-September 2023 announcements

On 31 August 2023, shortly before the start of the autumn term, it was announced that 104 schools had been told that they may need to shut buildings following the discovery of RAAC.<sup>54</sup> The schools minister has said that this was prompted by a beam collapse that meant RAAC previously considered low risk was now seen as unsafe. The minister also said the government will pay for the costs of temporary accommodation.<sup>55</sup>

On 4 September 2023, the Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, said the Government was “taking a deliberately cautious approach to prioritising children’s safety.”<sup>56</sup> The shadow Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, said

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<sup>51</sup> [PQ 191562, 10 July 2023](#)

<sup>52</sup> Department for Education, [List of schools affected by RAAC and what you need to know about the new guidance](#), 6 September 2023

<sup>53</sup> Department for Education, [Guidance for Responsible Bodies and education settings with confirmed RAAC in their buildings](#), September 2023, p7

<sup>54</sup> See for example BBC News, [Schools with dangerous concrete race to replan start of term](#), 1 September 2023

<sup>55</sup> BBC News, [Beam collapse led to new schools warning about concrete – minister](#), 1 September 2023

<sup>56</sup> [HC Deb 4 Sep 2023 c52](#)

the situation was “the tragic endgame of the sticking-plaster politics of the last 13 years.”<sup>57</sup>

## 4.4 Earlier press comment and concerns beyond the school estate

Concerns about RAAC have previously been raised in the press, for example:

- TES, [NAO: Lightweight concrete school building risk is ‘real’](#), 28 June 2023
- Schools Week, [RAAC: Schools forced to close due to ‘crumbly’ concrete ceilings](#), 16 June 2023
- Sec Ed, [Crumbling schools: DfE promises to publish data – but not just yet](#), 24 May 2023
- Schools Week, [Avoid costly survey on ‘crumbly concrete’, DfE tells schools](#), 22 May 2023
- Schools Week, [Councils dawdle on surveying collapse risk building material](#), 9 January 2023

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office has said the Government is investigating concerns about RAAC in public buildings more widely:

**Alex Burghart:** The Cabinet Office’s Office of Government Property is establishing a Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete Working Group. Objectives include understanding the scale of the issue, developing a register of Government buildings impacted, and sharing remedial best practices. Responsibility for safety of individual buildings remains with departments, their arms-length bodies and wider organisations.

To address property condition and safety issues such as RAAC more widely, in September 2022 the Office of Government Property established the Better Buildings programme on behalf of the Government Property Function.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> [HC Deb 4 Sep 2023 c55](#)

<sup>58</sup> [PQ 189624, 19 June 2023](#)

## 5 Previous capital funds

### 5.1 Healthy Pupil Capital Fund (2018-19)

On 28 February 2017, the DfE announced that £415 million of funding from the soft drinks industry levy would be allocated to schools in 2018-19 to “pay for facilities to support physical education, after-school activities and healthy eating.” It added that schools would be able to use the funding – referred to as the healthy pupils capital fund (HPCF) – to “improve facilities for children with physical conditions or support young people struggling with mental health issues.”<sup>59</sup>

#### Reduction of funding for HPCF

On 17 July 2017, the Education Secretary announced an additional £1.3 billion for the core schools budget across 2018-19 and 2019-20, which would, she said, be “funded in full from efficiencies and savings that I have identified in my Department’s budget.” She went on to explain that “efficiencies and savings” from the Department’s capital budget would release £420 million, £315 million of which would come from the money originally committed for the HPCF:

Efficiencies and savings across our main capital budget can, I believe, release £420 million. The majority of this will be from healthy pupils capital funding, from which we can make savings of £315 million. This reflects reductions in forecast revenue from the soft drinks industry levy. I will be able to channel the planned budget, which remains in place, to frontline schools, while meeting our commitment that every single pound of England’s share of spending from the levy will continue to be invested in improving children’s health; that includes £100 million in 2018-19 for healthy pupils capital.<sup>60</sup>

A subsequent response to a parliamentary question confirmed that £100 million would be invested in the HPCF in 2018-19, with the funding for one year only.<sup>61</sup> The funding for the PE and Sports Premium announced at the 2016 Budget remained unchanged.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Department for Education, [New funding to boost schools facilities and healthy lifestyles](#), 28 February 2017.

<sup>60</sup> HC Deb 17 July 2017, [cc563-66](#).

<sup>61</sup> [PQ 107301](#), 18 October 2017.

<sup>62</sup> [PQ 3745](#), 24 July 2017; [HC Deb 17 July 2017, c564](#).

## HPCF allocations

The HPCF was allocated through the existing arrangements for schools' capital funding. Single and small academy trusts and sixth form colleges were able to bid for funding through the Condition Improvement Fund, with [guidance](#) published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency stating that the HPCF "is intended to improve children's and young people's physical and mental health by enhancing access to facilities for physical activity, healthy eating, mental health and wellbeing and medical conditions, such as kitchens, dining facilities, changing rooms, playgrounds and sports facilities."<sup>63</sup> In March 2018 the Education and Skills Funding Agency [published](#) the list of schools who had successfully bid for funding from the Condition Improvement Fund. £38 million was provided for specific projects supported by the HPCF in 2018-19.<sup>64</sup>

Local authorities, large multi-academy trusts and other bodies are not eligible to bid for the Condition Improvement Fund and instead receive School Condition Allocations (SCA). They received a direct allocation from the HPCF in addition to their normal SCA for 2018-19.<sup>65</sup> School Condition Allocations for 2018-19 were [published](#) in March 2018.<sup>66</sup>

## 5.2 Targeted Basic Need Programme (2013-15)

The Targeted Basic Need Programme, launched in March 2013 by the then Coalition Government, aimed to provide additional funding for school places in areas where they are most needed. It was worth around £0.8 billion in total for the years it covered (2013-15). A breakdown by local authority can be found alongside the most recent Basic Need [allocations](#).

In a July 2013 [Written Ministerial Statement](#) announcing the successful applicants, the then Schools Minister David Laws stated:

[...] we invited applications from local authorities for additional new places, particularly focused on places in outstanding or good schools, and on creating new academies sponsored by organisations with a good track record in educational success. [...] I am delighted to announce that the Targeted Basic Need programme will provide £820 million to fund an additional 74,000 high-quality school places on top of those already created and funded - all in areas that face the greatest pressure on places. These new places will be in 45 new schools and in 333 expanding schools that are rated as outstanding or good.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency, [Condition Improvement Fund](#), last updated 14 December 2017.

<sup>64</sup> [Condition Improvement Fund: 2018 to 2019 outcome](#), Education and Skills Funding Agency, March 2018.

<sup>65</sup> [PQ 11892Q](#), 19 December 2017.

<sup>66</sup> [School capital funding allocations](#), Education and Skills Funding Agency, March 2018.

<sup>67</sup> [HC Deb 18 July 2013 c121-122WS](#)

In December 2013 the Government announced details of the [new academies being built under the Targeted Basic Need Programme](#).<sup>68</sup>

The places created through the programme became available between September 2014 and September 2015.

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<sup>68</sup> Department for Education, [BT, Mossbourne Academy and the Harris Federation named among sponsors of new academies](#), 12 December 2013

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## 6 Further information

Information is also available from the DfE on:

- [Academy Property Transactions](#)
- [Disposal of school land: Decisions](#)
- [An overview of school building and maintenance policy under the Coalition Government](#)

General information on [schools' capital expenditure and funding](#) is provided on the gov.uk website.<sup>69</sup>

The Department for Education's [Governance Handbook](#), most recently updated in October 2020, also includes a useful overview of school capital funding (see section 6.11.4).

### Parliamentary debate

A debate on [school building conditions](#) was held in Westminster Hall on 21 September 2021.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Department for Education, [Schools capital expenditure and funding](#) collection

<sup>70</sup> [HC Deb 21 Sep 2021 c88-96WH](#)

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