

Free School Meals Top-Up Funding SEND

Step by step process

Since the start of the Mayor's free school meals programme, the GLA has provided top-up funding to state-funded special schools to contribute to the extraordinary costs associated with providing meals for pupils with SEND.

This guidance document outlines the process for boroughs and schools, with links to a form to be uploaded to the GLA OPS platform.

The GLA will allocate approved top-up funding on a per pupil basis, at a pre-agreed amount of up to £1 per meal, at 100% uptake. Boroughs will be required to confirm school name(s), number of pupils eligible for Mayoral funding (free school meals), price per meal (see below), and the reason for funding need. This information will be gathered by boroughs from school applications.

Local authorities (boroughs) are required to play a role in processing the claims on behalf of their schools. The process is as follows:

1. Boroughs must ensure all state-funded special schools are aware of the application process for top-up funding. A template for schools can be found within the SEND Top-up Summary Form.
2. Schools must be made aware of this process by boroughs no later than **25 March 2026**.
3. Schools must email their borough officer with their completed applications for top-up funding. Due to the date set out in point 6, this is suggested to be no later than **24 April 2026**.
4. Borough officers must review each application for top-up funding, ensuring that the data provided is accurate and complete in full
5. Boroughs should then download the SEND top-up summary form to complete information about all schools who have successfully submitted requests for top-up funding
6. Completed SEND top-up summary forms must be uploaded on GLA OPS by **1 May 2026**.
7. The price per meal is required to confirm the actual cost of a meal for Key Stage 2 pupils. This top-up funding offer is available only to schools whose price per meal is higher than the £3 already provided by the Mayor.
8. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals via Mayoral funding is based on the number of Key Stage 2 pupils who are eligible for Mayoral funding in each school. This is the number of KS2 pupils who are not eligible for Government funded Free School Meals under the current eligibility criteria.

The GLA will review all claims submitted via OPS after the May 1st deadline. Once a claim has been approved, the GLA will write to boroughs with their additional funding allocations (in total – including any other additional funding allocated), in Summer 2026.

Additional funding payments will be made alongside the 1st milestone payment of Year 4 (academic year 2026/27) directly to boroughs.

Boroughs must administer funding to schools no later than 1 month following receipt of payment. Boroughs can administer funding to schools in advance of receipt of payment, as long as written confirmation of additional funding allocations has been received.

Borough officers should review each application for top-up funding received from schools, ensuring that the data provided is accurate. The GLA will only consider completed with the correct information. The GLA reserves the right to request further information or evidence outlined below.

By submitting the SEND top-up summary form to the GLA, the local authority automatically confirms the returns as authorised by the head teacher for that school. This disclosure indicates schools have entered accurate data that has been validated by the head teacher.

Key Dates

- 1 May 2026 - last date for boroughs to submit claims to the GLA
- August 2026 – funding issued to boroughs