

For schools, secondary schools and MATs

A guide to navigating GCSE funding

And how to use it to support the attainment of students

[Overview](#) · [Quick wins](#) · [Top tips](#)



Why funding clarity matters now

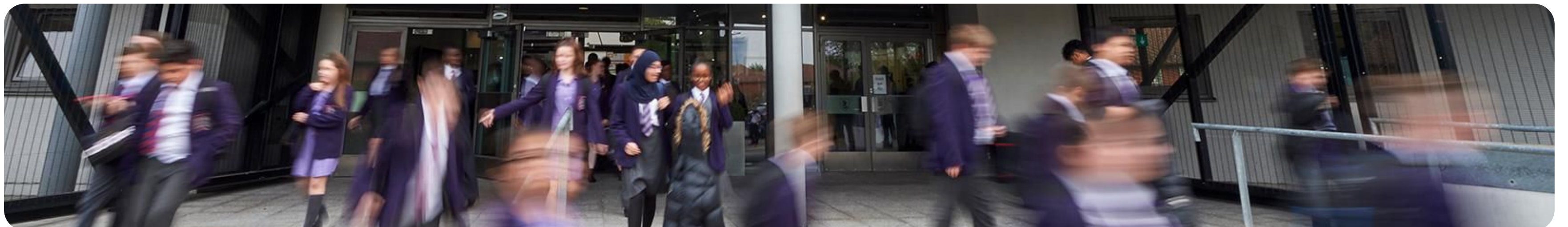
Schools are facing increased financial pressure across the board. Budgets are being stretched, teacher shortages are causing significant problems, and accountability pressure from Progress 8 and GCSE outcomes are creating a perfect storm.

Navigating the funding landscape as a CFO of a MAT, headteacher, or head of science can be bewildering and time-consuming.

Up Learn, the adaptive attainment platform for GCSE and A Level success, has created this guide to provide an overview of the funding process, quick wins, and top tips, to help you understand and manage your funding.

What's in this guide

- ✓ How the GCSE funding formula works
- ✓ The funding calendar and census deadlines
- ✓ Pupil premium and other funding options
- ✓ Where Up Learn fits into your provision



How does Up Learn support GCSE education?

Up Learn is a smart learning platform that helps schools close gaps and push grades higher. Working with an extensive range of partner schools including Ark Schools, The Harris Federation, NOVA, and United Learning, it is a trusted method by many.

Up Learn's comprehensive courses cover GCSE Combined Science and Triple Science, alongside A Levels in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Maths, Economics, and Psychology.

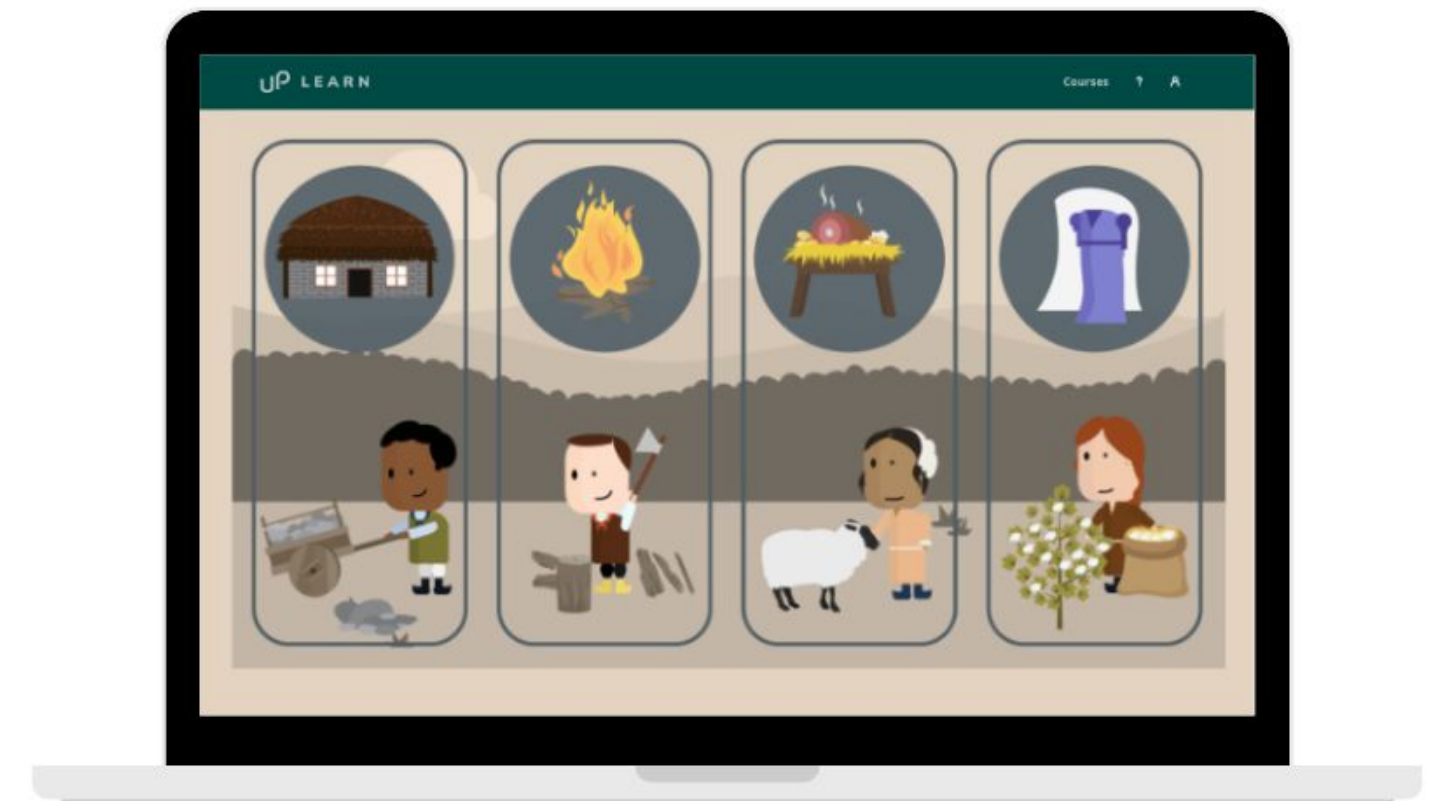


“My son just started Up Learn; he is in year 10. This is a game-changer. I wish I had known about this website sooner.”

— Norean, GCSE Parent

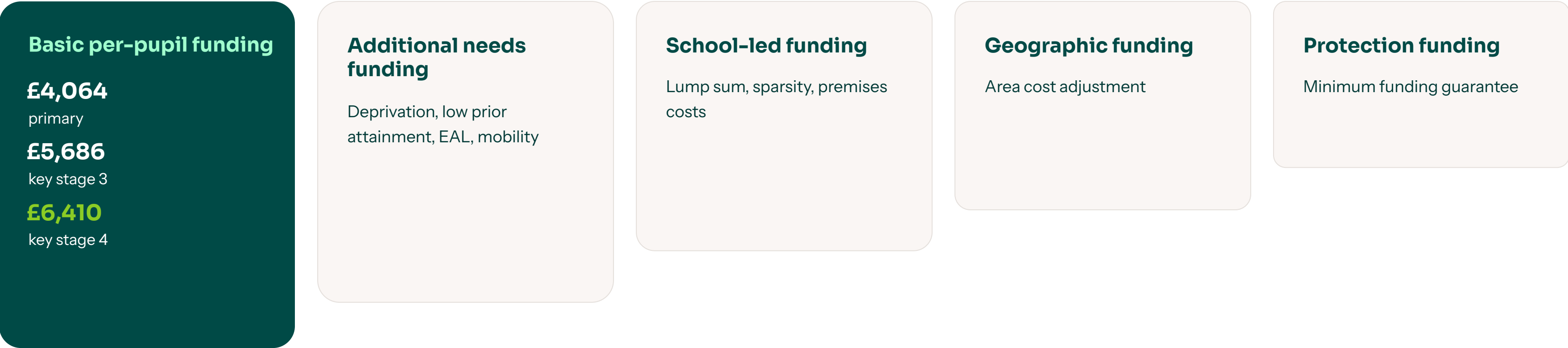
“Up Learn changed my entire perspective on learning. Using this for my GCSE's literally changed how I viewed science. I feel so blessed to have found this website because it made me enjoy sitting down and revising in a way I never expected.”

— Zara, GCSE Student



How is funding calculated for GCSE-age students?

The schools national funding formula (NFF) calculates how much funding each mainstream school receives, through the schools block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG). Local authorities can set their own local rates instead of using the national ones exactly. But if a rate is more than 2.5% away from the national rate, they have to close at least 10% of that gap every year, until it's in line.



Rates shown are national rates for 2026 to 2027. Local authorities may set their own values within DfE-permitted ranges.

Know the dates, maximise the funding

The funding cycle begins with the October school census, which is used to calculate the following year's schools block allocation. The most important thing you can do to maximise your funding is to be aware of the actions and deadlines. Typically the key months are as follows.



Month	Activity
October	Autumn school census. Used for the following year's schools block allocation and pupil premium eligibility.
November	Deadline for local authority disapplication requests.
December	Publication of DSG schools block and high needs block allocations.
Dec to Jan	Local authorities submit their authority proforma tool (APT) return.
February	Local authorities issue compliant maintained school budgets to schools.
March onwards	Academy budget shares issued.



The census, get it right!

Some schools risk not getting the correct funding because of errors in the data and inaccurate census returns. This is the most essential part of the funding process. The window between your local formula being set and budgets being issued is small, so be ready to check for accuracy and challenge it should there be errors.



Top tips for maximising funding

1

Understand the funding cycle for this year's schools block allocation, to make sure funding is maximised and accurate.

2

Share census data internally. Make sure your data team doesn't miss changes to pupils that could affect funding eligibility, such as free school meals or SEND status.

3

Check your October census, then check it again. Make sure staff preparing the return have up-to-date training on how census data feeds into your funding formula.

4

Check your local authority's allocation modelling for the funding factors and pupil numbers behind your allocation. Every pupil counts.

5

Put the funding dates in your diary. Check your budget as soon as it's issued, and be ready to challenge it with your local authority if it looks wrong.

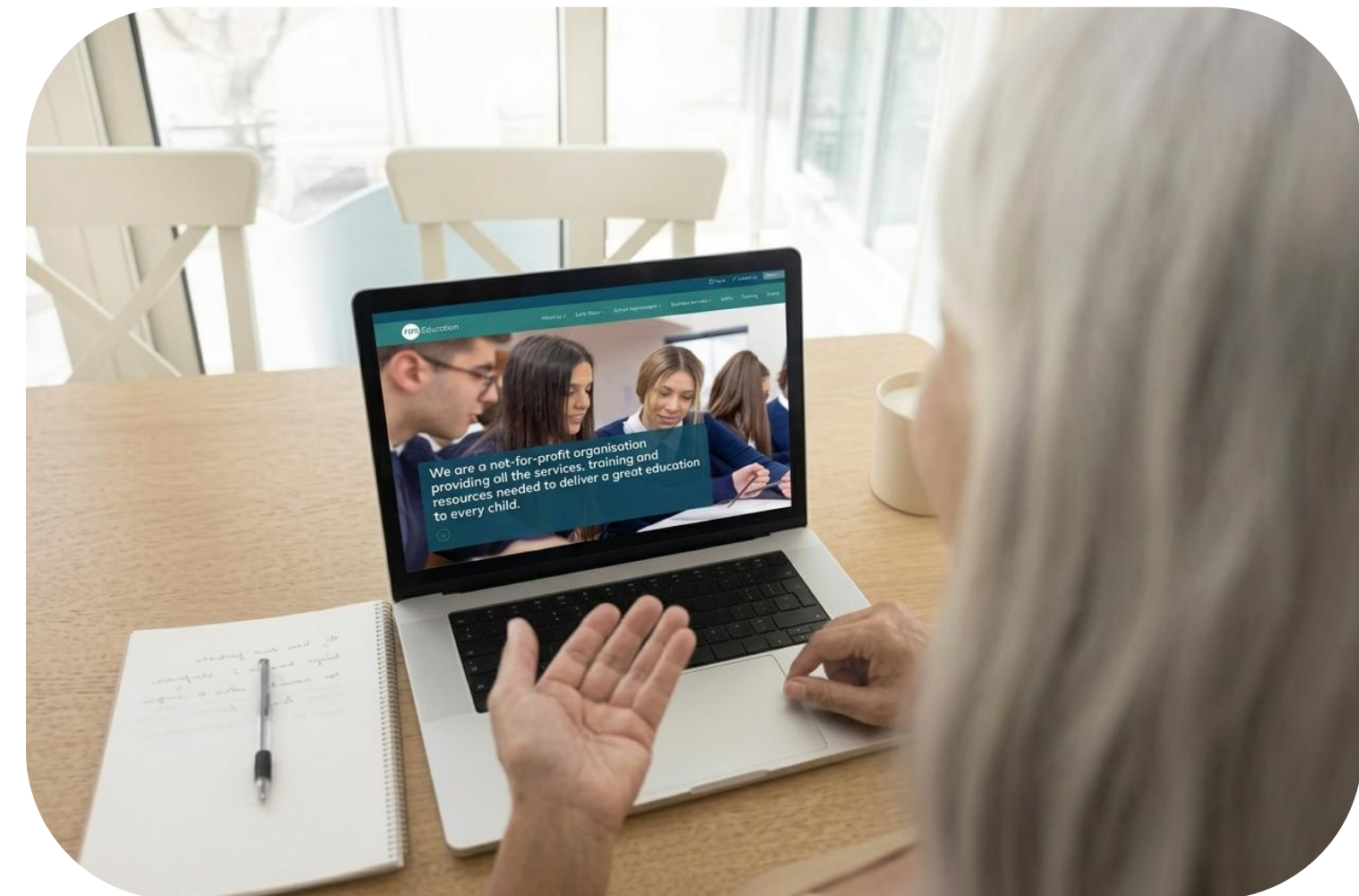


Additional tools and resources available

Each year, the Department for Education publishes an analysis of local authorities' schools block funding formulae, comparing local rates to the national funding formula (NFF) factor by factor. This is a useful way to see how your local authority's choices compare nationally.

The '[check your data](#)' section of the school census guidance sets out how to validate your return before submission, and [the schools operational guide](#) explains how each NFF factor is calculated.

There are services and training available from local authorities and organisations such as **HFL Education** to help schools understand and make the most of their funding.



Pupil premium

Did you know that disadvantaged GCSE-age pupils can attract up to an extra £1,100 per pupil per year in funding?

For 2026 to 2027, secondary-aged pupils (year 7 to year 11) eligible for free school meals, or who have been eligible in the last six years, attract £1,100 in pupil premium. Pupils looked after, or previously looked after, by a local authority attract £2,690.

Pupil premium is not ring-fenced. Schools are free to choose how to use it to support disadvantaged pupils, including those with low prior attainment or learning difficulties and disabilities.

Up Learn has proven experience improving outcomes for:

- ✓ Low prior attainment in Science.
- ✓ Economic deprivation (free school meals and pupil premium).
- ✓ Learning difficulties and disabilities.
- ✓ 72% of teachers rated Up Learn as having a positive or excellent impact on students with SEND or EHCP plans.



How Up Learn works in your school or trust



The full GCSE Science specification, built from scratch

Hundreds of engaging videos and thousands of quizzes. Higher and Foundation.



Adaptive learning, designed with cognitive science

Spaced repetition and retrieval practice ensure learning sticks.



Set homework, track completion, and monitor mastery

At individual, cohort, class, year, and school level.



Secure, GDPR-compliant data syncing

Wonde integration and Cyber Essentials certification keep student data protected.

The evidence behind Up Learn. Evaluation of 2,500 exam entries from 23 schools:

90%

of assignments completed correlates with an average increase of around one grade

70%

increase in likelihood of a top grade from 30+ refresh knowledge sessions

9 months

of additional progress from achieving mastery (80%+) in 20% of sections

Up Learn can be part of pupil premium spending

Up Learn has been used successfully by pupils with low prior attainment, those eligible for free school meals, and pupils with SEND.

Low prior attainment

Up Learn has examples of significant progress from pupils with low prior attainment, as concepts are learnt from first principles and gaps in knowledge are addressed.



“Students feel like they’re genuinely improving. They’re revisiting topics independently. That’s really empowering.”

— Mark Lee, Physics Teacher at South Molton Community College



Economic disadvantage

Thousands of pupils eligible for free school meals use Up Learn every year as part of their GCSE Science preparation, funded through pupil premium.

SEND support

The course teaches from scratch with clear visuals and spaced repetition, meaning students with ADHD, dyslexia, and other learning needs work at their own pace.



“I think the videos are more helpful than anything I've ever used, as an autistic student.”

— Loven

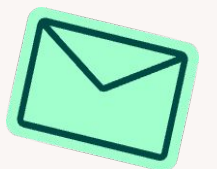
Conclusion

The good news is that there are many funding options to explore.

Pupil premium remains one of the most flexible funding streams available to support GCSE Science outcomes.



If you want to understand how Up Learn can add value to your existing provision, student attainment, and teacher workload, [get in touch here.](#)



Welcome to The Future. Welcome to Up Learn.

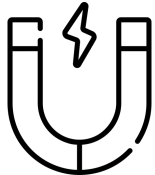
50M+
learning minutes in the last 12 months

500k+
students enrolled

685+
schools raising attainment

We created Up Learn to deliver a world-class learning experience that brings out the best in any student. One that ensures that all students can learn effectively and master their subjects. We exist so that anyone who wants to learn anything, can.

Why Does It Work?



Engaging



Efficient



Effective

As Seen In













Proud to work with hundreds of schools, trusts and MATs, including:

















UP LEARN

uplearn.co.uk

