

Service Area:	Learning and Early Support / Schools Finance
Presented By:	Martin Wilby / John Bartlett
Report:	Growth Fund for 2026/27 – early estimates
Date:	16 January 2026
Purpose Of Report:	To provide Schools Forum with information required to agree the level of Growth Fund for 2026/27
Is a Decision Required?	Yes
Decision context	Schools Forum are responsible setting a central spend budget and the criteria for allocating growth funding.

Growth Funding

A Dedicated School Grant Central Budget Retention [for mainstream maintained schools and academies] has been agreed by Schools Forum for Growth funding for several years:

Growth funding within the Schools Block

Budget provision	£	Notes
Pupil Growth Fund	600,000	Support in the KS1 primary school phase as per agreed principles and criteria.
Future pupil growth	600,000	Support for normal round bulge classes and permanent expansion as per agreed principles and criteria [current support is focused on bulge classes in the secondary school phase]
TOTAL	£1,200,000	

It is worth noting that the value of this budget has not changed over the years with inflation or changes in funding for schools. For example, secondary AWPU in 2019/20, the first year of funding bulge places, was £3,863 compared to £5,033 in 2024/25, an increase of 30%. The point being there is a real-terms reduction in this budget every year.

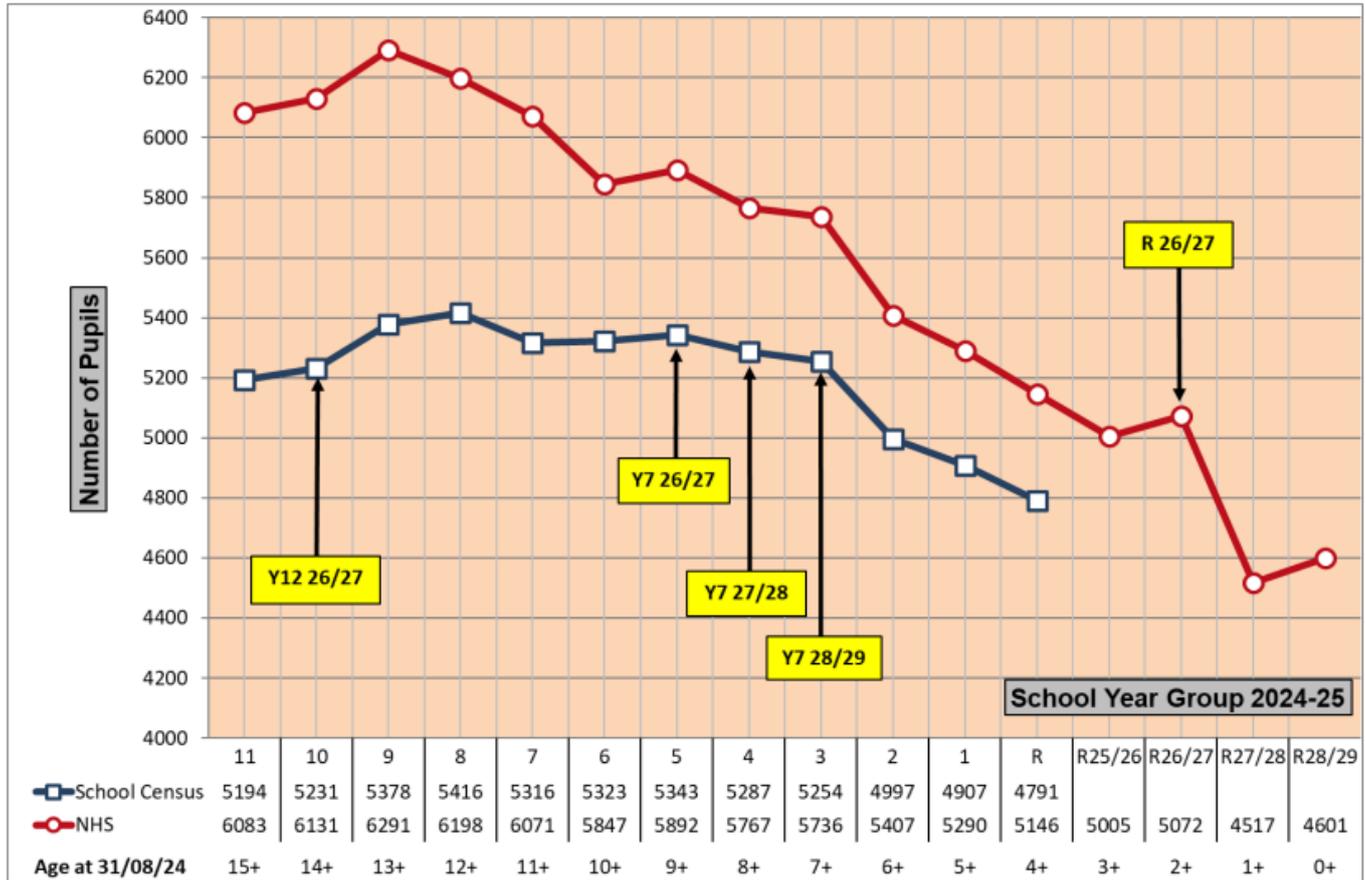
Future pupil growth (currently used for secondary school bulge places in the North of Kirklees)

An update was last shared with Schools Forum in June 2025 which suggested the Future Growth Fund element for the financial year 2025/26 would be up to £249K subject to final confirmation when October 2025 census results are available. It can now be confirmed that the final cost is likely to be £172K leaving an underspend of £428K.

Predicting the required Growth Funding beyond this time to support the required secondary phase bulge classes is far from an exact science. However, some indicators are available from population and school census data. Chart 1 in the Kirklees School Place Planning Document provides the Kirklees level overview of these key data sets:

Chart 1: Year Group Numbers 2024-25 – NHS Data and Kirklees School Pupil Census

Sources: NHS GP registration data May 2025 - NHS Digital
Kirklees School Census January 2025 – Kirklees Data & Insight



Alongside the data set we have a history of the secondary school bulge places required over time:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
TOTAL	130	210	178	193	230	152	49

As we move past the peak of demand for Year 7 places the number of required bulge places has started to reduce, meaning less spend has been required from the Future Growth Fund. An exact correlation between the reduction in bulge places and population data or the school census could not be found over a long period of time. The number of bulge places reduced by 44% of the population change in these data sets between 2023/24 and 2024/25 and by 46% between 2024/25 and 2025/26. Whilst this provides an indicator it masks a very complex situation where like for like comparisons do not exist. For example bulge places were required in the North in 2025/26 while surplus places were available in the South.

For Year 7 2026/27 the population evidence suggests a slight increase compared to 2025/26 (+45 pupils). Early indications of the number of secondary school applications for 2026/27 show a similar picture. There is always a degree of unpredictability in relation to parent preferencing and the ability of families to secure a school place outside Kirklees.

The cost of supporting 49 bulge places (2025/26 level) plus 23 (50% of +45 population change) = 72 places x estimated AWPU £5279 for autumn 2026 and spring 2027 (.58 of the year) would cost £220K.

Report for Schools Forum

When the summer 2026 commitment of £53K is added, **a budget of £300K would seem prudent for 2026/27 financial year.** This is a saving of £300k from the 2025/26 level.

It is important to put these estimates into the context of associated risk in order to justify the proposed prudence. This is that not having sufficient funds to support bulge places could result secondary schools refusing to accept unfunded pupils, leading to a breach of the council's statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places.

Pupil Growth Fund (Mainly used in KS1, primary phase)

KS1 class size rules continue to apply. With falling numbers, budgets in the primary phase continue to be under significant pressure meaning this support is vital. 2025/26 commitments, using the agreed criteria, are over budget at £649K (compared to £544K 2024/25), **reducing the total expected 2025/26 Growth Fund underspend to be £379K.**

£600K is considered to remain a realistic budget in 2026/2027.

The risk of withdrawing this support is an increase in sustainability pressures in the primary phase which is likely to compromise learning outcomes.

Proposal

With a degree of risk, it should be possible to set a Growth Fund for 2026/27 at £0.90M, a saving of £0.30M from 2025/26.