

Pupil premium strategy statement

This statement details our school's use of pupil premium for the 2025 to 2026 academic year) funding to help improve the attainment of our disadvantaged pupils.

It outlines our pupil premium strategy, how we intend to spend the funding in this academic year and the effect that last year's spending of pupil premium had within our school.

School overview

Detail	Data
School name	Discovery Special Academy
Number of pupils in school	187 (Nursery – Year 9)
Proportion (%) of pupil premium eligible pupils	64%
Academic year/years that our current pupil premium strategy plan covers (3-year plans are recommended)	2025-2028
Date this statement was published	November 2025
Date on which it will be reviewed	October 2026
Statement authorised by	Jennifer Duncan
Pupil premium lead	Ann Titchener
Governor / Trustee lead	Adrian Dougherty

Funding overview

Detail	Amount
Pupil premium funding allocation this academic year	£141,525
Recovery premium funding allocation this academic year	£0
Pupil premium funding carried forward from previous years (enter £0 if not applicable)	£0
Total budget for this academic year If your school is an academy in a trust that pools this funding, state the amount available to your school this academic year	£141,525

Part A: Pupil premium strategy plan

Statement of intent

At Discovery Special Academy, our core objective is to ensure exceptional progress for all pupils by meeting them at their unique starting points and helping them achieve their full potential. We are committed to closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers by providing targeted support and creating opportunities for all.

Pupil premium funding is strategically utilised to eliminate barriers to learning and participation, ensuring every child can fully access and engage in the wide range of opportunities available to them. Regardless of socio-economic status or family circumstances, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment where all pupils are empowered to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Central to this commitment is a broad, balanced, and ambitious curriculum designed to support all aspects of pupils' development—academic, social, physical, and emotional. Our curriculum not only nurtures achievement but also prepares pupils for adulthood by equipping them with vital life skills, fostering independence, and instilling the confidence to become effective citizens of the 21st century. Planned and explicit teaching of character education is also vital in supporting our pupils to become successful citizens within the community. Our core values of independence, collaboration, resilience, and respect underpin our approach to character education, ensuring pupils develop the personal qualities and social awareness needed to thrive both in school and beyond.

Our approach is collaborative and personalised, built on a multi-agency framework with joint commissioning of services to provide a holistic support network. We take a responsive and highly individualised approach, tailoring interventions to each child's needs, strengths, and aspirations. This ensures that every pupil receives the support required to thrive.

We are equally committed to holistic development, promoting excellence and enjoyment by cultivating a supportive learning community. Our focus extends beyond academic outcomes to encompass the development of social and emotional skills, resilience, and independence, ensuring that all pupils are well-equipped to face the challenges of the future.

A key component of our approach is our strong pastoral focus, which provides comprehensive support to pupils and their families. Discovery Special Academy works closely with pupils to address individual challenges, nurture well-being, and build resilience. Through a compassionate and proactive approach, the academy ensures that every child feels valued, safe, and supported in their journey to achieve their personal best. This support extends beyond the classroom, fostering strong relationships with families and local stakeholders to create a unified network of care.

In the context of post-pandemic education, we are addressing the long-term impacts of disrupted learning while responding proactively to the growing and emerging needs of disadvantaged pupils. Building on previous initiatives, our current plan integrates evidence-based practices to accelerate progress and ensure sustained improvements. Discovery Special Academy is steadfast in its commitment to spending pupil premium funding effectively and efficiently. By creating an inclusive and empowering educational environment, we ensure that all children are supported to excel and thrive in every aspect of their development. This approach prepares them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need for adulthood and beyond.

Challenges

This details the key challenges to achievement that we have identified among our disadvantaged pupils.

Challenge number	Detail of challenge
1	<p>Acquisition of language and effective communication continues to be a significant barrier for all our pupils.</p> <p>100% of our children have communication and interaction needs as part of their SLD diagnosis with over 60% having a diagnosis of Autism.</p> <p>Pupils' experiences beyond school and home can be limited reducing opportunity for rich exposure to language and vocabulary in the early years. This is more prevalent amongst our disadvantaged pupils.</p>
2	<p>Ensuring all pupils have personalised, high quality, well-rounded grounding in early literacy, language and communication leading to high quality phonic and comprehension development.</p>
3	<p>Complex sensory needs impact on the ability to engage, attend, focus and regulate. Additionally, pupils come into the academy with low levels of sense of self, personal development and ability to understand and regulate emotions. This was compounded throughout the pandemic, with the effects of this still being visible, and some pupils are displaying increased needs in the area of emotional wellbeing and regulation.</p>
4	<p>Attendance data shows that attendance and persistent absence rates among our disadvantaged pupils during the previous two academic years have been lower than non-disadvantaged pupils. Good attendance supports pupils to establish routines, develop their social and emotional skills, independence and communication, which all support good progress.</p>
5	<p>The vulnerability of families remains a critical area of need. It is essential to support families in engaging with their child's development and understanding how to access necessary support and services. This awareness is key to ensuring consistent attendance and promoting positive progress.</p>
6	<p>Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) face unique challenges when transitioning out of school and into adulthood.</p>

Intended outcomes

This explains the outcomes we are aiming for **by the end of our current strategy plan**, and how we will measure whether they have been achieved.

Intended outcome	Success criteria
<p>Improved levels of language, communication, pupil sense of self and resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils will make progress in their communication and language development relative to their starting points over a 12-month period (evidenced through PIVATS progress, MAPP, Functional skills and EHCP outcomes). • An embedded approach to communication is evident across the academy. This includes high levels of oral language and communication skills for pupils who are able, and a developed, progressive approach to AAC. • Staff are aware of the impact of language and communication on progress for disadvantaged pupils.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are confident to communicate in different settings and with different people in the academy and wider locality. • Effective pupil voice develops a sense of self, confidence and agency • Pupils are able to express their sense of self through appropriate communicative means by making choices, expressing opinions and demonstrating confidence in different settings and situations (e.g. trust choir events, performances, work experience, community visits) • The core values pupils need to succeed in their future lives will be embedded.
<p>Pupils make good progress in their phonic and reading comprehension development through a clear focus on early reading skills and a structured, progressive approach to all reading areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85%+ of pupils on the semi-formal curriculum meet or exceed their PIVATS targets in reading as generated by CASPA • Personalised MAPP data, individual case studies and learning journeys demonstrate that pupils on the informal pathway make good progress in early reading from their own personal starting points. • 85%+ of pupils following Functional Skills accreditation meet or exceed their target • Early reading skills lay the foundation for comprehension development for pupils who are developmentally ready. • There is an embedded and structured approach to teaching comprehension which recognises the importance of early language and communication development as the pre-requisite for this. • Reading of high quality texts is embedded within wider subjects across the curriculum.
<p>Pupils are ready to learn, are able to better regulate their sensory and emotional needs (with support), have a growing sense of self and therefore make good progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils will have regular access to a range of appropriate therapies to support holistic development. • Staff are confident with delivering a range of appropriate therapies. • Therapies are chosen and delivered based on accurate understanding of need. • Pupils have access to a range of environments and experiences that support their development in all areas. • Reduced incidents of significant behaviour recorded on CPOMs for targeted children. • Monitoring demonstrates pupils are focused and able to access learning. • Pupils make good progress against individual targets. • Timely external referrals are made to support pupils needs.
<p>Families are well supported by the academy, are aware of services they can access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole school attendance to be at least 94% in the year 2025-2026 with aspirations to increase this in subsequent years. • PA to be below 20% in the academic year 2025-2026, with aspirations to reduce this in subsequent years. • The gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged

<p>To achieve and sustain improved attendance of all pupils, particularly our disadvantaged pupils (particularly PA).</p>	<p>attendance and PA rates to be reduced, and disadvantaged rates to be in line with non-disadvantaged.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are supported to develop the key knowledge, understanding and strategies to support their children at home which in turn impacts on their well-being, attendance and progress. • Families are signposted to services and referrals are timely and lead to effective support from external agencies. • Families have a support network within the academy community and beyond.
<p>Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are successfully prepared for transitioning out of school and into adulthood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable careers programme is in place enables pupils to have knowledge and confidence about their post school opportunities and options. • Pupils study a range of accreditations relevant to employment sectors and their interests. • Pupils access a range of experiences and encounters, workplaces and employees, enterprise projects. • Pupils have encounters and experiences with other adult support services available. • Pupils are prepared for independent or supported living. • Pupils' health and well-being is positively supported through the curriculum and wider experiences.

Activity in this academic year

This details how we intend to spend our pupil premium (and recovery premium funding) **this academic year** to address the challenges listed above.

Teaching (for example, CPD, recruitment and retention)

Budgeted cost: £102,392.12

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
Clear, focused CPD based on analysis of pupil and academy needs (quantitative and qualitative) including CPD on language acquisition, communication (AAC), phonics, emotional well-being (linked to PSHERE), therapeutic approaches, accreditations and preparing for adulthood.	EEF states that ensuring an effective teacher is in front of every class, and that every teacher is supported to keep improving, is the key ingredient of a successful school and should rightly be the top priority for Pupil Premium spending.	1,2,3,4,5,6
Development of early literacy, language and communication teaching, resources and a progression document to support language acquisition and comprehension skills.	EEF Preparing for Early Literacy report. Language provides the foundation for thinking and learning and should be prioritised EEF Early Literacy Report	1,2,6
Purchase further communication, emotional regulation, positive relationships, core values boards/resources for additional areas of the academy building	Oral language interventions and reading comprehension strategies can both result in +6 months gain.	
Develop and implement a broad and balanced curriculum that is responsive to the needs of SEND pupils and to embed oracy/communication across the curriculum.	Curriculum design can promote deep thinking and support inclusion. The role of knowledge-rich curricula in promoting deep thinking and complex skill acquisition - ScienceDirect Towards a holistic education: Inclusive curriculum design for student growth : My College	1,2,6
Monitoring and moderation of early reading and phonics teaching and assessment by English Leader.	Ensuring accurate assessment of phonic development ensures understanding of next steps EEF Early Phonics Report	1,2

<p>Recruitment of additional level 2 TAs across the academy to support pupils sensory, social and emotional wellbeing and therapeutic access will ensure teachers are able to focus on teaching and learning.</p> <p>Appointment wellbeing and behaviour HLTA to support the development of the TA and pastoral team.</p>	<p>TAs have access to training in order to ensure they are fully prepared for their role in the classroom</p> <p>TAs are employed to add value to the classroom and support what teachers do (more time for teachers to teach, report page 7)</p> <p>TAs in this instance, are supporting pupils to develop independent learning skills and ability to self-regulate through structured interventions (e.g. SIT, BLAST, phase 1 phonics)</p> <p>Best use of TA report</p>	<p>1,2,3,4,6</p>
<p>Commissioning of independent careers advisor (Career Wave) to provide independent advice and guidance to secondary pupils</p>	<p>Good careers provision outweighs the starting disadvantage gap by meeting young people's individual needs.</p> <p>High quality careers education is helping young people become more career ready and achieve positive destinations. As students progress through secondary school, their career readiness grows (21%pts increase between Year 7 and Year 11)</p> <p>Young people's career readiness rising as result of careers education The Careers and Enterprise Company</p> <p>Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience multiple vulnerabilities, significantly limiting their readiness and ability to learn but also impacting school absenteeism, and the likelihood of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) later in adolescence [3]. There is also evidence to suggest that disadvantage can decrease young people's aspirations [4].</p> <p>APPG-REPORT-SEPT-23.pdf</p>	<p>4,6</p>

Targeted academic support (for example, tutoring, one-to-one support structured interventions)

Budgeted cost: £27,897.60

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
1:1 and small group tutoring support delivered by qualified teachers	Research supports high-quality teaching approaches delivered by qualified teachers and can result in a +5 month gain (See various research reports from EEF and others)	1,2
Further development of a range of language acquisition intervention including speech and language programmes	EEF Preparing for Early Literacy report. Language provides the foundation for thinking and learning and should be prioritised EEF Early Literacy Report Oral language interventions can result in +6 months gain.	1,2
Development/purchase/CPD on augmentative and alternative communication aids – research and trial of electronic apps and aids for pupils who demonstrate capacity to access this	Bercow report 2008 AAC https://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2013_Shining_a_Light_on_AAC.pdf	

Wider strategies (for example, related to attendance, behaviour, well-being)

Budgeted cost: £75,241.96

Activity	Evidence that supports this approach	Challenge number(s) addressed
Structured interventions to support sensory, social and emotional development delivered by level 2 and 3 TAs that supports high-quality teaching	Where TAs are working individually with pupils the focus should be on retaining access to high-quality teaching, for example by delivering brief, but intensive, structured interventions. Used in this way, research shows that TAs delivering targeted interventions can have +3/4 months impact.	1,2,3,4,5
Increased access to counselling for pupils	Best use of TA report Although limited, research demonstrates social and emotional learning approaches can also have a +4-month gain.	
Delivering Early Bird, Early Bird + and Teen life programmes to parents to support understanding of children's social,	SEL report	

emotional and sensory needs.		
Further investment in access to sensory/therapeutic spaces and classroom therapeutic provision, 2 x minibus lease	A large body of literature indicates that pupils with sensory integration disorders (SID) and learning disabilities (LD) benefit from sensory integration therapy (SIT) and multisensory activities (Ayres, 1979; Longhorn, 1988; Cheatum and Hammond, 2000; Bundy et al, 2002; Reynolds and Reynolds, 2010).	1,2,3,4,5,6
Increase access to varied and rich experiences to support the development of language and communication for all, alongside preparing for adulthood	All evidence linked to development of language acquisition, Early literacy and communication support this action.	1,2,3,4,5,6
Develop Character Education – embed character education within the curriculum to enhance	Character Education impacts on engagement, academic attainment and outcomes. Insight Briefing Paper JA SE.pdf	1,2,3,4,5,6
Granular focus on attendance data supported by case studies, increased engagement with families and regular discussion at SLT level with a particular focus on PA. CPD/discussions increase staff and parental understanding of the importance of good attendance to support welfare as well as educational outcomes (and the impact of non-attendance on families)	The DfE analysis below looks at the attainment of pupils at the end of KS2 and KS4 and the absence each pupil accrued across the whole key stage. This highlights the importance of good attendance as higher overall absence across a school career leads to lower attainment and progress. Pupils with a high persistent absentee rate are less likely to stay in education. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/absence-and-attainment-at-key-stages-2-and-4-2013-to-2014 Based on extensive research, parental engagement has a positive impact on average of +4 months' additional progress. Parental engagement	3,4,5 1,2,3,4,5
Continue programme of workshops for families, parents and carers. Workshops to be focused on a range of academic, therapeutic and wellbeing areas.	There is robust evidence that regular participation in sport and physical activity can support individuals to have improved physical health and better mental wellbeing. The UK CMOs'8 reported that the evidence to support the health benefits of regularly taking part in physical activity had become more compelling. They stated that performing regular physical activity is associated with improved attainment, concentration, and learning, improved	
Continuation of stay and share sessions, story and sign		

	<p>mental health, and a healthier weight status. Wider benefits for young people doing regular physical exercise, reported by the CMOs,' included improved learning and attainment; managing stress; self-efficacy; improved sleep; the development of social skills; and better social interaction.</p> <p>Enhancing physical education provision and improving access to sport and physical activity in school. DFE (March 2024)</p>	
<p>Commissioning of Live it and Get Active sports after school club</p>		

Total budgeted cost: £205,531.68

Part B: Review of outcomes in the previous academic year

Pupil premium strategy outcomes

This details the impact that our pupil premium activity had on pupils in the 2024 to 2025 academic year.

Impact statement 2024-25	
Intended Outcomes	Evidence of impact
Improved levels of language, communication, pupils sense of self and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils demonstrate significant progress in their communication and language development, as shown through PIVATS progress, MAPP, Functional Skills, and EHCP outcomes, reflecting growth from their individual starting points. • Communication is deeply embedded across the academy, with pupils showing developing oral language and communication skills, and a progressive, inclusive approach to AAC enabling pupils to express themselves effectively. • Staff proactively use their understanding of how language and communication influence learning to narrow gaps and enhance progress for disadvantaged pupils. • Pupils increasingly communicate confidently and appropriately in a range of settings and with a variety of people within the academy and the wider community. • A strong and effective pupil voice culture empowers pupils, fostering self-belief, confidence, and a sense of agency in decision-making and daily interactions. • Pupils advocate for themselves and express their sense of self through varied communicative means — making choices, sharing opinions, and showing confidence during performances, community engagement, work experience, and collaborative events. • The academy instils and nurtures core values that prepare pupils to succeed and thrive in their future lives, both personally and professionally.
Pupils make good progress in their phonic and reading comprehension, development through a clear focus on early reading skills and a structured, progressive approach to all reading areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 % of pupils on the semi-formal curriculum meet or exceed their PIVATS reading targets, as evidenced through CASPA data, reflecting strong, sustained progress in reading attainment. • Personalised MAPP data, case studies, and learning journeys show that pupils on the EYFS and informal pathway make strong progress in early reading, achieving meaningful steps forward from their individual starting points. • 100% of pupils undertaking Functional Skills Entry level 2 accreditation achieved or surpassed their targets and 86% of pupils studying Entry level 1, demonstrating secure application of reading and literacy skills in real-life and academic contexts. • Pupils who are developmentally ready build solid foundations in early reading, enabling confident progression into comprehension. • A consistent, embedded and structured approach to comprehension supports all learners, underpinned by a clear understanding that language and communication development are essential precursors to reading success.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-quality texts and rich reading experiences are embedded across the curriculum, fostering a love of reading and deepening pupils' understanding and vocabulary through meaningful contexts.
<p>Pupils are ready to learn, are able to better regulate their sensory and emotional needs (with support), have a growing sense of self and therefore make good progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils benefit from regular access to a wide range of appropriate therapies, which effectively support their holistic development and overall well-being. • Staff confidently deliver a range of therapeutic interventions, applying specialist knowledge and skills to enhance pupils' engagement, regulation, and progress. • Therapies are carefully identified and delivered based on accurate assessments of individual need, ensuring that each pupil receives personalised and effective support. • Pupils experience a rich variety of environments and developmental opportunities that promote growth across physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. • Reductions in behaviour incidents recorded on CPOMs for targeted pupils reflect improved emotional regulation and access to learning. • Monitoring evidence shows that pupils are engaged, focused, and able to participate in learning activities, demonstrating the positive impact of therapeutic approaches within the academy. • Pupils make excellent progress towards their individual targets, with therapy and wider support contributing directly to their personal and academic development. • Timely and appropriate external referrals ensure that pupils' needs are met effectively through multi-agency collaboration.
<p>Families are well supported by the academy, are aware of services they can access, and attendance is improved (particularly PA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-school attendance is strong, with figures reaching 93% or above, reflecting pupils' high engagement, enjoyment of learning, and consistent participation in academy life. • Persistent absence (PA) levels remain reduced at 17%, demonstrating effective early intervention and sustained support for families to overcome barriers to attendance. • Families are well-informed and have developed the knowledge, understanding and strategies needed to support their children's well-being, attendance, and progress at home. • Timely referrals and clear signposting to external services ensure that families receive appropriate and effective support, strengthening pupils' stability and readiness to learn. • A strong sense of community and connection exists within the academy and beyond, with families benefiting from mutual support networks and collaborative partnerships that promote shared success.
<p>Pupils with Special educational needs and disabilities are successfully prepared for transitioning out of school and into adulthood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stable and well-embedded careers programme ensures that pupils develop the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to make informed decisions about their post-school opportunities and future pathways. • Pupils achieve success in a range of accreditations that align with their interests, aspirations, and relevant employment sectors, supporting meaningful progression beyond school.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils engage in diverse work-related experiences, including workplace visits, encounters with employers, and enterprise projects, which broaden their horizons and strengthen employability skills. • Pupils benefit from encounters and experiences with a variety of adult support services, ensuring they are well-informed about available resources to aid transition into adulthood. • Pupils are well-prepared for independent or supported living, developing essential life skills that promote autonomy, confidence, and readiness for adult life. • Pupils' health and well-being are actively promoted through the curriculum and wider enrichment opportunities, enabling them to lead balanced, positive, and fulfilling lives.
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Externally provided programmes

Programme	Provider
Sensory Integration Therapy	Treetops Occupational Therapists
Movement skills	Madeline Portwood
BLAST	Developed in Stockton
Sports sessions and after school club	Live it and Get Active
Counselling	Trust counsellor
Speech and Language	NHS
Inclusive Cycling	Middlesbrough sports village (Stockton Wheelers)
Horse Riding	The Unicorn Centre
Residential visit	Carlton Outdoor Centre
Residential visit	Beamish Living Museum
Residential visit - London	Private provider
Meadow project	Middlesbrough Arts
Intergenerational Project	Middlesbrough First
Sensory play centre visits	Pendragon/Senses
Careers advisor	Career Wave

Further information (optional)

To support the growing needs related to Autism within the academy community, this year we have completed the application process for Autism Accreditation (awaiting outcome).

The academy will deliver Early Bird+ and Teen Life training, in addition to Early Bird, to families following training with the national autistic society this academic year. This gives us an initial three-year license to run the training allowing us to offer increased support for families.

This academic year, the academy will continue to develop its careers and enterprise offer, particularly offering work experience in years 9 and 10, and enterprise opportunities throughout the academy.

The academy has continued to engage with a range of external providers and charities to develop all environments in the academy to allow independence, preparation for adulthood, academic progress, emotional regulation and therapeutic access.