A Budget That Finally Listens to Schools

26 November 2025



Today's Autumn Budget will not solve every challenge facing England's schools overnight, but for the first time in years school leaders can open the red box and feel something close to relief – and even cautious optimism.

Let's be clear about what Rachel Reeves has done: she has protected the core schools budget in cash terms and, most importantly, removed the two biggest uncertainties that have kept headteachers awake at night – teacher pay and pension costs.

The headlines you can take straight to your governors tonight

- Teacher pay and pension increases for both 2024 and 2025 are now fully funded. No more raiding reserves or cutting teaching assistants just to stay solvent.
- A new £567 million Schools Budget Support Grant hits your bank account in 2025–26 and is then rolled permanently into your core National Funding Formula baseline from 2026–27 onwards. This is not a one-off sticking plaster – it is new, recurring money baked in forever.
- Every local authority receives at least a 7% per-pupil cash increase for ages 2–18 next year (rising to 10% in the highest-need areas). For the average secondary school that means £300,000–£500,000 extra on top of the pay awards.

High-needs and SEND – the biggest single-year step forward many of us have ever seen A £1 billion boost to high-needs funding, including a £230 million full-year equivalent for special schools and alternative provision, is the largest injection on record. It won't wipe out a decade of accumulated deficits overnight, but it dramatically slows the rate at which mainstream schools have to top-slice their own budgets to keep EHCPs afloat.

Early years expansion – genuine help is on the way The extra £1.8 billion to deliver the 30-hour childcare offer for children from 9 months means maintained nurseries and primary schools with early years classes finally get the funding rates they need to stay open and employ qualified staff. This protects mixed-age settings and stops the domino collapse into Reception numbers that so many of us feared.

Bricks, books and playgrounds – small but deeply symbolic wins £5 million to refresh secondary-school libraries, £18 million to upgrade playgrounds, and £40 million for rooftop solar on 200 schools. Taken together, these remind us that the Treasury now understands learning happens in libraries, on playgrounds and under solar panels – not just at desks.

What this actually means for you – practically – in 2025–26

1. You can set a balanced budget next spring without compulsory redundancies (in almost every case) for the first time since 2020.
2. You can honour the 2025 teacher pay award without panic or creative accounting.
3. You can plan with confidence: the permanent roll-in of the Support Grant from 2026–27 gives multi-year revenue visibility we have simply never had before.
4. You can start reinvesting in curriculum, staff CPD and pastoral support instead of constantly fire-fighting in-year deficits.

None of this is transformational on its own. Real-terms per-pupil funding remains below 2010 levels, class sizes are still too high, and the teacher recruitment crisis has not vanished. But this Budget stops the rot. It buys precious breathing space. And, above all, it restores the most valuable commodity school leaders have been denied for years: certainty.

From The School Network's conversations with hundreds of members this

afternoon, the mood is unanimous: “We’re not popping champagne yet – but for once we’re not bracing for bad news either.”

In the recent history of school funding, that feels like progress worth recognising – and building on.

The School Network Supporting school leaders with clarity, community and confidence