

**FINANCIAL CLASSIFICATION OF SCHOOLS 2023/24 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**DIFFERENTIATED LEVELS OF FINANCIAL MONITORING & SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The Financial Classification is calculated on an academic year basis, and is updated each year. Please see Appendix 1.

2. The focus of the Financial Classification continues to be to identify schools that face the greatest level of financial challenge and to provide an initial framework for the School Funding Team to work with, and to support, these schools. In reality, our experience is that the Authority’s communication with identified schools is more interactive than the Classification prescribes. The Authority’s monitoring systems are also flexible to changes (worsening) of circumstances in schools after the Classification has been calculated for the relevant year.

3. The Classification is not a judgement of the competency of a school in managing its budget.Because a school is placed in a category of higher support does not necessarily imply poor financial management. In the main it simply reflects that the school is in a more challenging financial position, for example, due to factors such as closure of the school, having a small carry forward balance, a reducing balance or being in deficit or having recently recovered from a deficit position. It is an internal Classification, used only by Bradford MDC, to differentiate our levels of financial monitoring and to provide a framework for working with schools, using the information on the financial position of a school submitted by the school. The category of each school is not published publicly and is not used by Ofsted.

4. The key outcome of the Classification is that the School Funding Team will work more closely with schools in higher categories, to support these schools that face the greatest levels of financial challenge. We have received positive feedback from schools on the usefulness of this additional contact and support. Alongside this additional support, schools in higher categories are asked to meet additional requirements. These requirements are:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **A (i – iv)** | **B i** | **B ii** | **C** | **D** |
| **To use the LA’s (Access Group) software in setting 2024/25 Budget** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** | **X** | **X** |
| **To submit Monthly Monitoring & Bank Reconciliation Returns from Sept 2023** | **YES** | **X** | **YES (monitors only)** | **X** | **X** |
| **Termly Visit from SFT from Sept 2023 with follow up as identified** | **YES** | **X** | **X** | **X** | **X** |
| **Conversation with SFT with follow up as identified** | **X** | **X** | **X** | **YES** | **X** |
| **Current Governor to have attended the Effective Financial Governance Course** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** | **X** |
| **SFT Arithmetic Checks on school returns (with follow up as identified)** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** |

For schools that are required to submit monthly monitoring returns, please note that these are required for 4 months only. The timetable for submission of monthly monitoring reports is as follows:

* September Normal Quarter 2 return required - to be submitted by 31 October 2023
* **October Monthly Monitor Required – to be submitted by 30 November 2023**
* **November Monthly Monitor Required – to be submitted by 31 December 2023**
* December Normal Quarter 3 return required – to be submitted by 31 January 2024
* **January Monthly Monitor Required – to be submitted by 28 February 2024**
* **February Monthly Monitor Required – to be submitted by 31 March 2024**
* March Not required (year end)
* April Not required
* May Not required
* June Normal Quarter 1 return required – to be submitted by 31 July 2024
* July Not required (summer holiday)
* August Not required (summer holiday)

5. Please note the following additional information:

* The Classification for 2023/24 is calculated on the information submitted by schools in their 2023/24 Governor Approved Budgets (submitted by 15 May) and in their 2nd and 3rd Year Budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 (submitted by 30 June).
* The Financial Classification is calculated annually on an academic year basis. Schools may move between categories, year on year, depending on the information they submit each year.
* Schools may “trigger” the criteria for more than one category; most commonly where Category A or Category C schools also trigger the forecasting accuracy criteria in Category B. Where this is the case, the school’s overall position is set at the highest category, and the school will receive the higher level of support, but the school will also be asked to meet any additional requirements from the other category it triggers.
* Once established, the Category of a school will not normally be re-calculated until the next academic year (please see below for queries and appeals). However, where the circumstances or budget of a school significantly changes in year, we will assess what additional support to provide. For example, where it is announced that a school will close, or where a school submits a quarterly monitoring report, which forecasts a deficit or a very small carry forward balance (below 1% of funding or £10,000) we will increase our level of contact with the school and may ask the school to meet additional requirements.
* Appeals from schools on their category are considered on an individual case basis, on the evidence submitted by the school. We recognise that there may be exceptions and we are happy to consider evidence a school wishes to submit. For example, we have written into the forecasting accuracy criteria a re-calculation that, where additional funding has been provided by the DfE or LA, which the school can demonstrate it was not aware of when the Quarter 3 Monitors were submitted, this amount will then be discounted from the percentage calculation(s).
* The requirement to attend the Effective Financial Governance course, where a member of a school’s current Governing Body has not been on this already, begins from September 2023. Courses are run termly, and we will run additional courses for specific schools where requested. We encourage schools to access this course at the earliest opportunity. This course is available to all Governing Bodies regardless of Category.
* The Financial Classification operates independently from the Light Touch Financial Monitoring Protocol. The Classification allows us to more effectively differentiate our levels of support to schools. The LTFM protocol primarily exists to provide an incentive for schools to submit required reports to the Local Authority by the stated deadlines.

**Appendix 1**

**DETAIL OF THE FINANCIAL CLASSIFICATION**

**FOR THE 2023/24 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**Category A**

**A i) Schools in Deficit March 2023**:

**Defined as a school, which had a deficit closing balance at March 2023**

**A ii) Schools Recently in Deficit**:

**Defined as a school that had a deficit closing balance either at March 2021 or March 2022, where the school is projecting a surplus carry forward balance at March 2024 that is not at least equal to 3% of the school’s total budgeted 2023/24 I01 to I05 funding**

**A iii) Schools Vulnerable to Deficit**:

**Defined as a school that has not been in deficit in the last 3 financial years, but has a projected closing balance at March 2024 that is less than £10,000 or 1% of 2023/24 total budgeted I01 to I05 funding (whichever is smaller)**

**A iv) New or Closing schools**:

**A new school is defined as a school that is planned to open either in September 2023 or within the 2023/24 academic year. Where a newly opened school at September 2023 has not yet been open for a full academic year (e.g. where the school opened in April 2023), the school will also be in Category A for the 2024/25 academic year.**

**A closing school is defined as a school that is planned to close before September 2024.**

*Additional SFT Support and Additional School Requirements*

* *The school’s School Funding Officer will visit the Headteacher and Finance Manager on a termly basis, to work with the school to discuss financial monitoring reports in detail, with follow up action and support, where required*
* *The school is required to* 
  + *submit monthly monitoring and bank reconciliation returns to the School Funding Team, for the 2023/24 academic year*
  + *set its 2024/25 financial year budget, and its forecasted 2nd and 3rd year budget, using the Local Authority’s (Access Group) Budgeting Software*
  + *send a member of the Governing Body on the Effective Financial Governance course, where no current Governor has already attended this*

**Category B**

**B i)** **Schools with Excess Surplus Balances**

**Defined as:**

* **A school that in each of the last 3 financial years (at March 2021, March 2022 and March 2023) has carried forward an excess surplus balance above the IUB Thresholds applicable in that year**

**and / or**

* **A school that has submitted a Start Budget for 2023/24, which forecasts a carry forward balance at March 2024 in excess of 4% (Secondary) or the greater of 6% or £60,000 (Nursery, Primary, Special and PRU) of 2023/24 budgeted I01 to I05 funding, where the school has not evidenced to the School Funding Team, before the end of October 2023, a clear plan, which has been approved and minuted by the Governing Body, to spend this excess balance or to reserve the balance for a specific project, with agreed phasings over more than one year**

*Additional SFT Support and Additional School Requirements*

* *The school is required to:*
  + *set its 2024/25 financial year budget, and its forecasted 2nd and 3rd year budget, using the Local Authority’s (Access Group) Budgeting Software*
  + *send a member of the Governing Body on the Effective Financial Governance course, where no current Governor has already attended this*

**B ii)** **Accuracy of Financial Forecasting**:

**Defined as:**

* **A school that had a variance, between their actual end of year balance at 31 March 2023 and their forecast of their year-end balance in their Quarter 3 Monitoring Return, of more than 4% of total 2022/23 I01 to I05 funding**

*Additional SFT Support and Additional School Requirements*

* *The school is required to:*
  + *submit monthly monitoring returns to the School Funding Team, for the 2023/24 academic year*
  + *set its 2024/25 financial year budget, and its forecasted 2nd and 3rd year budget, using the Local Authority’s (Access Group) Budgeting Software*
  + *send a member of the Governing Body on the Effective Financial Governance course, where no current Governor has already attended this*

*\* Please note that where additional funding has been provided by the DfE or LA, which the school can demonstrate it was not aware of when the Quarter 3 Monitors were submitted, then this amount will be discounted from the percentage calculation(s). We will also discount from the calculations values where schools can demonstrate that variances are the result of errors made by the Local Authority.*

**Category C**

**Medium Term Vulnerability to Deficit**:

**Defined as a school, not in Category A, which forecasts in its submitted 2nd or 3rd year budget either a deficit carry forward balance at March 2025 or March 2026 or a surplus carry forward balance, which is less than £10,000 or 1% of the relevant year’s I01 to I05 funding (whichever is smaller)**

*Additional SFT Support and Additional School Requirements*

* *The school’s School Funding Officer will contact the Headteacher of the school to further discuss the school’s forecasted budget position, with follow up action and support, where required*
* *The school is required to:*
  + *send a member of the Governing Body on the Effective Financial Governance course, where no current Governor has already attended this*

**Category D**

**All Other Schools not falling into Categories A, B or C**:

*Additional SFT Support and Additional School Requirements*

* *The school will be encouraged to use the Local Authority’s (Access Group) Software, but there is no requirement to do so*
* *The School Funding Team will continue to carry out basic checks on Budget and Monitoring returns submitted by the school, and will follow up on any queries, if required*

* *The school will be able to access the Effective Financial Governance course and the Effective Financial Forecasting course*
* *Category D schools will be given priority in the roll out of “full budget share” bank accounts for April 2024.*