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FAQ Master List

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Policy

Why do we need new schools?

There is a significant minority of parents who cannot send their child to a good local school. While the wealthy can buy a house in the right postcode, or pay for private school fees, many do not have that option.

We believe every parent should have access to a good local school which offers what their child needs – the right level of attention, the right ethos and the right curriculum.

Most state schools are good – many are superb. They should continue to thrive. But in some areas we need more, and better, schools. Where parents cannot get into a good local school, new schools should be able to set up and given the freedom to offer what parents want.

Further, demographic pressures mean that we need more schools. It would be better if some of these open where teachers and parents want them rather than having them all built in the same way as the past – ie. controlled by Westminster and Whitehall.

Have independent state schools worked in other countries?

Yes – in Sweden, Alberta and the United States new schools have improved standards. A fuller summary of the evidence for new schools can be found by following the link.

<http://newschoolsnetwork.org/resources/facts-and-figures>

Do independent state schools help the most deprived students?

Everyone could benefit from Free Schools. Evidence from Sweden shows that providing new schools makes existing schools better, not worse. Under a system including free schools every parent can send their child to a school that offers what their child needs.

Evidence from the United States shows that the poorest benefit from this policy the most. Studies show that Charter Schools are more likely to serve deprived students and communities than they are middle-income students:

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- 90 percent of New York charter school students are African-American or Hispanic and the same percentage participate in the Free or Reduced-price lunch program - undermining the theory that charter schools draw more privileged students.
- The Harlem Children's Zone's Charter Schools teach students from an area with over double the national child poverty rate.
- Chicago's successful Charter Schools are in 'disproportionately minority and poor' neighbourhoods and their students are generally lower achieving on entry than their neighbourhood public school peers.
- Swedish evidence shows that school choice has NOT resulted in school segregation on first-generation immigration or parental income lines.

Link to further information

<http://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/assets/events/files/Summary%20of%20Evidence%20for%20New%20Schools%20v2%202.pdf>

How are Free Schools different from Academies

Free Schools are normally brand-new schools set up by charities, universities, business, community or faith groups, teachers and groups of parents where there is parental demand. Academies are usually a change to an existing maintained school.

Legally the structure is the same, and they are expected to meet the same requirements as other Academies. Free Schools will also benefit from the same freedoms and flexibilities as Academies, including:

- the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- freedom from following the National Curriculum
- greater control of their budget
- freedom to change the length of terms and school days
- freedom from local authority control.

Can independent state schools select?

As with other state schools, Academies and new schools are not allowed to select students by ability. All applicants for school places must be considered.

How will places be allocated at Free Schools if they are oversubscribed?

We believe that free schools will be able to use one or more of the criteria in the current Schools Admissions Code. To view the current code please follow the link.

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Please be aware that you can only admit up to 50% of your pupils on the basis of faith criteria agreed with your religious authority - and the rules on admissions for religious schools are extremely complicated. You should read the Admissions Code for more details.

Link to further information

<http://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/assets/events/files/Summary%20of%20Evidence%20for%20New%20Schools%20v2%202.pdf>

Process

Should I set up the charity now?

We understand that if the Academies Bill currently being considered by Parliament is passed then the Department will require you to establish a limited company and then, on signing a funding agreement with you (post Business Plan), you will be made an 'exempt charity'. Exempt charities are exempt from having to register with, and are not regulated by, the Charity Commission. So it is not necessary for you to apply to be a charity now.

I am a local councillor interested in new schools. How can I help?

We very much want local councillors to assist our community groups. There are four main ways that this can happen:

- provide information about potential sites;
- help with pupil projections and local demand statistics;
- make parents aware of any local newsletters or papers where they can spread the word about their campaign;
- be an encouraging voice.

I am in Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland. Can I set up a new independent state school?

Powers over schools in Scotland and Wales lie with the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. For this reason, legislation covering English schools does not affect schools in Scotland and Wales. Academies legislation only applies to England, and so it will not be possible to set up new schools in Scotland or Wales without legislation going through the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

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I want a new school for my children but I don't have experience of running a school. Can the New Schools Network put my group in touch with organisations which could advise us?

Yes. The New Schools Network can help link your group up with a range of existing providers who may be able to advise and work in partnership with you.

For more information please email us at info@newschoolsnetwork.org, or call our office on 020 7222 8666.

I want to set up a nursery. Are nurseries covered by the proposed school reforms?

No. Only Primary age children upwards are covered by these reforms.

An advantage of new schools is that they will have more freedom to innovate with the curriculum. Is there any basic minimum my new school would have to meet?

Conservative policy before the election was that Academies should have the freedom to opt-out of the National Curriculum subject to some requirements to test children. We assume this will be the new Government policy.

Free Schools will be able to offer courses such as the IB, the old O Levels and AO Levels (still done in Singapore and elsewhere), Cambridge's new 'pre-U' exam, and other international exams.

It will be expected that your curriculum is sufficiently broad to allow children to move to other state schools without too much difficulty. You will also not be accepted if you have an extremist or creationist curriculum.

If you were to offer a curriculum very similar to that offered in a leading jurisdiction around the world, such as Singapore or Finland, we assume that would be acceptable to the DfE. The details of precisely how this will work have yet to be announced.

Building Local Support

How can I contact other interested parents and teachers in my area?

Talking to people in your area is critical. The more support you can demonstrate for your school, from as many sources as possible, the more likely it is to happen. The New Schools Network can help you reach contacts in your area.

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First, you should register on our database.

Then:

Get involved at New Schools Network Connect and have a look at our Map Database to see if there are people in your area.

Where can I find media coverage about New Schools Network, Parent-Supported Schools, and Academies?

The New Schools Network posts media coverage on this website. If your group has had relevant media coverage, please let us know! We will also be starting feature series where we spotlight the progress of different groups. If you would like to be a part of this series, please contact us at info@newschoolsnetwork.org.

For updates, you can follow us on Twitter @theNSN or use our Connect Forum to connect to other parents and post your own media coverage on the wall. We want these sites to be forums for parents from groups across the country to share their experiences of starting and their ideas for new schools. Please post any relevant coverage you want on the wall.

We have also been interviewing parents and teachers from across the country who want to start schools. If you'd like us to create a video to get your views across then please let us know. Alternatively you can create your own video and we will add it to the New Schools Network YouTube channel.

Where can I find data about demand in my Local Authority?

We have provided information and data which we think will help you with your application for a new school. The information includes details such as pupil numbers and the numbers educated in and outside the local authority.

You can access this information for your school by selecting the relevant local authority where you will find the primary and secondary school data.

This information has been uploaded from readily available sources. We are not completely sure of the accuracy and please let us know if there is something you think is not correct.

We expect the Government will shortly publish all this information themselves and make the funding calculations transparent but in the meantime we hope this is helpful.

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Please do contact us if you have any questions.

Funding

How will Free Schools be funded on an annual basis?

Free Schools will get their revenue funding from three sources:

- The amount the Local Authority spends per pupil on state funded schools
When you take your child out of a state school now, and move them to another state school, money 'follows the pupil' to the new school. The same would be true for new Free Schools.

- The Local Authority 'hold back'
Local Authorities keep a percentage of school spending for 'central services' – although the amount each Local Authority keeps varies massively. Free Schools, like Academies, will get a large percentage of this 'holdback' so they can procure services elsewhere. You can find out how much your school would get using the 'LACSEG calculator'

- The Pupil Premium
All schools will get more funding for children who are from deprived backgrounds. The Department has not yet announced how this will be defined or how much money this will mean (we think the DfE may define deprivation in terms of eligibility for free school meals (FSM)).

We are expecting further announcements on funding before August.

Will there be any capital funding available for new schools? Where will it come from and how much will it be?

The Government has said the following for the period from now until March 2011:

"We will reallocate from the Harnessing Technology Fund to restart the Standards and Diversity Fund which was established in 2008 to promote new schools.

Many schools will be able to find premises to rent. For those projects that may require an up-front capital outlay, we will work with the proposer to ensure that there is a strong value-for-money case to support the investment.

For all proposals for capital funding, we would expect proposers to show how their planned approach

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- supports the education aims of the school
- meets the policy aim of increasing parental choice
- provides the flexibility, where necessary, for the school to grow and develop over time
- provides value for money including in relation to local benchmarks for rental and/or refurbishment costs.”

The fund is £50 million.

There is a full review of all DfE capital spending projects underway.

Are there different rules for Academies and free schools?

The £50 million announced is only for free schools. We understand from the Government that the rest of capital funding is under review – including that for Academies. If you want more information on this we suggest you contact the Department for Education directly.

Sponsorship and Governance

Who can set up a new school and how would they work?

A group of teachers or parents, a charity or organisation can propose to set up a new school. Providing the proposal is of high quality and meets certain criteria – for example no extremist teaching – it will be able to open and parents will be able to send their children there. The school will receive support from the Government for every child attending the new school, just as other state schools do.

Free Schools will be subject to Ofsted inspections and if they are teaching inappropriate material or are not providing a good education, they will be closed down or handed to an alternative provider.

How will new schools be governed?

Those wanting to set up new schools must establish a charitable Trust. This is the legal vehicle which will establish the new school, hold its assets, and receive funding from the Department for Education.

According to the Department:

“There are currently two Academy Trust structures: a single Academy Trust and an Academy federation. A single Academy Trust runs a single Academy, where the

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Trust's directors make up the governing body of the school. In the case of a federation, there is a single Trust that governs a number of schools. A board of directors is responsible for all of the schools in the federation, but each school has its own local governing body."

The main sponsor of an Academy is able to appoint the majority of the board of directors. Academies usually have around 13 governors but this is not required.

Those submitting formal Proposals to the DfE should establish a 'company limited by guarantee' with Companies House. If your Proposal is successful, then the DfE will make you an 'exempt charity' and the entity comprising the Company combined with the exempt charity will form the Trust. (This status cannot be applied for from the Charities Commission as you would apply to start a normal charity.)

Role of Local Authority

What is the role of the Local Authority?

New providers will be free to discuss their plans with any local partners, including the Local Authority and we encourage you to seek support and guidance from the Local Authority, at least initially.

However, the LA will not need to approve your plans. Free Schools will have more independence from LAs than standard schools, including greater freedom over the curriculum, their budgets, and staff pay and conditions.

Who will authorise and hold these new schools accountable?

The Secretary of State at the Department for Education is responsible for authorising the establishment of new schools, on the basis of a full business case (which will be completed after the Proposal form currently on the DfE website) providing:

- evidence of suitability to establish or run a school
- clear educational aims and objectives
- evidence of parental demand in an area
- evidence of financial viability
- suitable premises

Authorisation is finalised with the signing of a funding agreement between the providers of new schools and the Department for Education.

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Free Schools will be inspected regularly by Ofsted. They will have the freedom to offer what parents want, but they will also be expected to get good results.

Who will define ‘failure’?

In current Academy funding agreements, ‘failure’ is determined by inspections by Ofsted or by financial malpractice and/or fraud. We expect, at least initially, that the same will apply to Free Schools. The New Schools Network would also like to see funding agreements include benchmark results in national curriculum tests or GCSEs after a certain number of years.

Role of the New Schools Network

How can the New Schools Network help?

We provide a range of advice and guidance on how to set up a school – from business plans and budgets to site plans and going through the process. You can register with us for help and read about the first steps involved by following the links.

<http://newschoolsnetwork.org/get-involved/register>

<http://newschoolsnetwork.org/setup-a-school/First-Steps-Guide>

What is the New Schools Network’s relationship with the Department for Education?

The New Schools Network is an independent charity. Like many other charities, such as Teach First, it has been given a grant by the Department for Education to carry out certain functions, in particular to be the first point of contact for groups who wish to start schools and to provide them with information as they prepare their proposals.