

The National Free Schools Application Process

KENT – Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells

Tuesday 19 July 2016

Emma Sharp and Naomi Kanava

Department for Education



Department
for Education

Overview

1. Context
2. What are free schools and who can set them up?
3. The process
4. Application criteria
5. Submitting more than one application
6. What makes a successful application?
7. Top tips
8. Busting the myths
9. Pre-opening phase
10. Help and support available



1. Context: expanding the free schools programme

- There are currently 304 open free schools, providing over 153,000 school places. 54 of these schools are in South East and South London (SESL) region
- The government is committed to opening at least 500 new free schools, providing a further 270,000 school places.
- There are 11 open free schools and 1 open UTC in Kent.

We are:

- Getting high quality providers to do more and encouraging new high quality providers to join the programme
- Working closely with local authorities to understand their need for school places and holding events like this to share information and intelligence



2.i What are free schools?

- New schools – same legal status as academies
- Meet demand – 74% of free schools are located in areas with a need for new schools places
- Raise standards or offer an alternative choice locally - all schools that opened in 2011 or 2012 have now been inspected and 71% were judged as 'Good' or 'Outstanding'
- Support the most deprived - 67% of free schools have been set up in the third most deprived areas in England
- Provide unique support for students with particular needs – 51 of open free schools are AP or special schools



2.ii Who can set free schools up?

- Outstanding schools/groups of schools
- Approved academy sponsors/Multi-Academy Trusts
- Community and faith organisations
- Charities
- Businesses
- Parent-led groups

Educationalists have been particularly active in setting up free schools - 68% have been started by groups led by teachers, existing successful schools, academy chains or existing providers.



2.iii Different types of free school

Category	Brief explanation
Mainstream	Primary, secondary, 16-19 or all-through schools that are independent of local authorities and are academies in law.
Studio Schools	An innovative model of educational provision, developed by the Studio Schools Trust, combining academic and vocational qualifications taught through practical project-based learning, typically for 14-19 year olds.
Special	Specially organised to offer educational provision for pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND). They are designated for specific type(s) of SEND.
Alternative provision	Cater principally for children of compulsory school age who, for reasons such as behaviour or medical needs, would not receive a suitable education in a mainstream school. They may also cater for 16-19 year olds.
Independent converters	Registered independent schools currently educating five or more pupils full time, or one pupil with a statement of EHC plan, are entitled to join the state sector as a state school.



3. The process

Written assessment

- Free school applications are assessed against the relevant [assessment criteria booklet](#) for the proposed type of school.
- If the application is assessed as one of the strongest, we will invite the group to interview.

Interviews

- Interviews are tailored based on the quality of the application, and the strength and track record of the proposer group. In some cases we may approve the project without interviewing the group.

Decisions and pre-opening

- RSCs advise ministers on which applications should move into pre-opening. The Secretary of State makes the final decision.
- Successful applications progress to the 'pre-opening' stage, the stage between approval of the initial application and the opening of the school. Free School Groups provide a dedicated point of contact, along with support from the Education Funding Agency, to help secure a suitable site and to open the school successfully.

When to apply

- The average time in pre-opening is approximately 26 months so to open a school in September 2019 you would need to be submitting an application this September (wave 12).
- Wave 13 will likely open in March 2017.



Changes to the application process

Streamlining processes to make it easier for groups to apply and open new schools without lowering the quality bar.

4. Summary of assessment criteria

Criteria	Brief Description
Vision	This is the overarching vision for the school and how it informs the education plan.
Education Plan	<p>The education plan must explain how the school will achieve its education vision and provide the information relevant to the following criteria: D1 - the curriculum; D2 - measuring pupil performance; D3 - the staffing structure; D4 - ensuring inclusivity; D5 – (AP/Special only) the particular needs of the children coming to the school have been carefully considered and will be met appropriately.</p> <p>The education plan must be affordable within the funding allocated to free schools and consistent with the financial plans.</p>
Evidence of Need	<p>We assess whether there is need for the school by weighing two main factors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a basic need for places; and, 2. the standards of local schools. <p>(AP/Special – demand from commissioners)</p> <p>The other two factors we will also consider are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. if the school will add to local choice and diversity; and, 2. whether it has been demonstrated that the school will be popular. <p>The assessment will consider evidence provided in the application, as well as data held by the department and information provided by local authorities.</p>
Capacity and Capability	The application needs to demonstrate that the group has the capacity and capability to set up and run the school(s), and that the group has access to appropriate educational, financial and other expertise, either within the group or externally.
Financial Plans	Accurate financial plans that are consistent with the rest of the application, demonstrate financial viability, and are based on realistic assumptions about income and expenditure.



5. Submitting more than one application

Applicants are welcome to complete **one application form covering more than one school**, to avoid duplication.

Applicants can:

- **Submit one application covering all schools if all the proposed schools:**
 - are of the same phase and type;
 - will follow the same or similar curriculum plan; and,
 - will be staffed in the same or similar way.

- **Submit different applications for each school if:**
 - each of the proposed schools are of a different phase or type; or,
 - each of the proposed schools will follow a different educational model.

- **Submit a mix of combined and single applications if:**
 - some of the proposed schools will be of the same phase and type, and follow a similar educational model, but others will be different.



6. What do successful applications look like?

In addition to being strong throughout, successful applications will usually have:

- Good track record of open schools
- Strong and effective governance
- Robust school leadership plans
- Evidence of need (in some form)
- Detailed understanding of cohort
- Needs of all pupils will be met
- Available expertise to open school
- Appropriate school staffing structure
- Viable and sustainable finances
- Broad and balanced education plan



7. Top tips

- Expertise in the phase/type of education being proposed (a secondary setting up a primary will need to bring in primary expertise etc.).
- If you are doing something different think it through – can it actually be delivered?
- Understand how you can deliver your education plan with fewer pupils and less money – what compromises would you make, how would you decide?
- Speak to your RSC about capacity, if you haven't already.
- Speak to you local authority about:
 - The need for new places;
 - Potential sites; and,
 - Their future plans.
- Think about location – is the free school near your existing schools/or do you have plans to grow in a new area?
- Know your local area and the children who are likely to attend your school.
- Engage with the community and surrounding schools.
- Seek the help of people that have done it.



8. Myth-busters

- Maintained schools can set up academies and convert to become academies later
- You do not need to have a site before you apply
- If you want advice before deciding to submit an application you can ask us
- You do not need a letter of support from the RSC to apply (though you may have a letter confirming your capacity)
- You do not need the local authority's support to apply – though we recommend that you do speak to the LA before applying



9. Pre-opening phase

- **The Project Development Grant (PDG) is a fixed-rate grant to help cover essential non-capital costs up to the point at which the school opens.**
- The grant will normally be paid in four instalments or nine instalments if the school is opening over a period of longer than one year.
- The amount of PDG you receive will vary depending on whether the trust is opening a secondary, primary, AP etc. Current rates are below:

Type of school	(a) Project development grant funding for first school opening in a given academic year	(b) Project development grant funding for each additional school opening in the same academic year
Primary	£220,000	£150,000
Secondary and all-through	£300,000	£200,000
Special	£220,000	£150,000
AP	£220,000	£150,000
16-19	£250,000	£170,000

- Typically projects use their PDG funding to pay for: project management, educational services, staff recruitment (including the principal designate), salary costs, marketing costs including open evenings;
- **You can view the pre-opening guidance on GOV.UK**



10. Help and support available

- Please email the RSC office (RSC.SESL@education.gsi.gov.uk) if you'd like to discuss your application or ask us any questions about the application process.
- If you are thinking of applying, register your interest @ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school>
- Updated application and assessment guidance can be found on GOV.UK.
- Additionally, the New Schools Network provide free advice and support for those interested in establishing a free school.



New Schools Network:

How we can help



New
Schools
Network

A good school for every child

How can NSN help

Support for all groups:

- Our series of 'Roadshow' training events
- An hour long 1:1 meeting with one of our advisers
- Advice from our team via phone and email
- Resources on our website covering how to set up a school

Development Programme:

- A named personal NSN Adviser
- A personalised support plan
- Up to 6 hours of specialist meetings
- Written feedback on draft applications
- Access to workshops/events
- A mock interview
- Networking with other free schools



How to access our support

Development Programme

Next enrolment window in October, for applicants aiming to submit an application in March 2017 or beyond.

Support for all applicants

Email info@newschoolsnetwork.org or call 02075379208

Visit www.newschoolsnetwork.org for resources and guidance

