

Pre-Opening Resource

Useful external resources for groups in pre-opening

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**New
Schools
Network**

Useful external resources for schools in pre-opening

Opening your free school on time and within budget is a challenging task. Our experience of working with schools during the pre-opening phase has taught us that it is easy to underestimate the quantity and complexity of the work involved. This document offers an overview of different documents and statutory guidance from a range of organisations which you may find helpful for various tasks during the pre-opening period.

NSN has identified **seven critical work streams** that need to be completed in the pre-opening phase in order to give your school the best possible chance of long term success. These are:

- Staffing and education plans
- Site and buildings
- Student marketing and admissions
- Governance
- Finance and procurement
- Project management
- Communications and consulting

The information below is arranged in these seven work streams. For all work streams, further guidance and tools produced by the New Schools Network are available to download elsewhere on our [website](#). Further personalised support and advice is available for many of these work streams through our paid-for services. In particular, groups can access support around site on our Site Advisory Service and project management in our Project Management Partnership.

As you embark on the pre-opening period, you should ensure you have fully read the Department for Education's pre-opening guide which is available [here](#).

Organisations such as the [Institute of School Business Leadership](#) (ISBL), the [National Governance Association](#) (NGA) and the [Department for Education](#) (DfE) all provide vast libraries of useful resources for schools in pre-opening.

Staffing and education plans

During the pre-opening period, your group will need to turn the education plan you outlined in your application into reality. To achieve this, you will need to recruit a principal designate, find other teaching and non-teaching staff members, and draw up detailed education policies. You will also need to submit a strong Education Brief to the DfE and prepare for Ofsted inspections both before and after your school opens.

Having the right principal and staff in place is critical to the early success of a free school. You can find our guides to recruiting a principal designate and school staff elsewhere on our [website](#). In this section, you can find links to recruitment and retention strategies and information around managing staff pay from other organisations.

Passing your Ofsted pre-registration inspection and ensuring you are prepared to perform well in your first Ofsted inspection as an open school will underpin all your work developing your education plan in pre-opening. Here you can find all the information you need to read from Ofsted about ensuring these go smoothly.

[DfE: Schools and college careers and employment](#): The DfE has a number of resources on their website useful when establishing your staffing structure and policies alike.

[DfE: Implementing your school's approach to pay](#): This document has been produced to help schools and governing bodies review and revise their processes for decisions on teachers' and leadership pay.

[DfE: Statutory policies for schools and academy trusts](#): This guidance includes advice on all the policies that schools must have in place to meet statutory guidelines and requirements.

[DfE: Free school staffing issues](#): Guidance on underwriting a principal designates salary and an overview of the two pension schemes that trusts are required to offer by law.

[Gov.uk: Teaching vacancies](#): This is a government run platform for schools and trusts to post teacher vacancies for recruitment.

[Ofsted: Education inspection framework \(EIF\)](#): This handbook describes the main activities undertaken during inspections of schools in England under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. It sets out the evaluation criteria that inspectors use to make their judgements and on which they report.

[Ofsted: Improving schools - A guide to recent Ofsted reports to support school improvement](#): This guide features examples of how some of the best schools have achieved excellence in teaching and in improving outcomes for children and young people.

[Ofsted: Pre-registration regulatory check sheet for an academy/free school/studio school/university technical college](#): This regulatory check sheet should be used for a pre-registration inspection of a free school applying for registration.

Site and buildings

Many groups find that the process of finding a site and overseeing building and construction is the most stressful and time-consuming task of the pre-opening period. You will need to work closely with Free Schools Capital (FSC), your Project Manager, and Technical Director at the DfE to find the right site for your school. Delays in finding or securing a site can delay the development of your whole project. To avoid this, it is important that you are aware of what you need to do to maximise the chance of securing a site in good time that will allow you to carry out your vision effectively. We have compiled some of the key documents that provide advice around securing a site, acquiring a site, site planning and procurement.

[Department for Communities and Local Government \(DCLG\): Guide to planning for free schools](#): This guide provides information about planning permission for your school site.

[DfE: School design and construction](#): A collection of guidance and tools to support school design and construction.

[Education and Skills Funding Agency: Primary and secondary school design](#): A collection of resources for school design including area guidelines and guidance for fixtures, fittings and finishes.

[University of Oxford: School building guidance](#): This guidance focusses on the pedagogic implications of creating new schools.

Student marketing and admissions

A fundamental task of the pre-opening period is recruiting your first cohort of pupils. Pupil recruitment affects almost every other aspect of your project: they determine your financial viability, your curriculum planning, and staff recruitment. Your group will need to work hard to ensure that you market your school effectively and accurately and NSN has produced some guidance about how you might do this which is listed below. Ultimately, what works best will depend on your local circumstances.

During pre-opening you will also need to develop an admissions policy and finalise your admissions arrangements. The links below are from the DfE to support free schools putting together their first admissions policy. You can find templates to use as a starting point, as well as statutory guidance that you must follow and additional advice and guidance on common issues and common models of admissions. Further templates and plans are available through the NSN Essentials Advisory Service.

[DfE: Free school admissions and referral policies](#): This collection of guidance should help you to draft your first set of admission arrangements. It applied to mainstream, special and alternative provision (AP) free schools as well as UTCs.

[DfE: Free school admissions: common issues](#): This document helps you work through some specific issues you may require additional advice upon in drafting and applying your admission policies.

[DfE: Free school admissions models](#): This document's aim is to provide assistance to schools in drafting their first set of admission arrangements.

[DfE: School admissions code](#): This page contains the statutory guidance that all schools must follow when devising and implementing their admissions policies.

[DfE: School admissions appeals code](#): This page contains the statutory guidance that all schools must follow when organising and running admissions appeals.

[DfE: Using the pupil premium, service premium or early years pupil premium in admission arrangements](#): This advice has been produced to help admission authorities wishing to give admissions priority for children eligible for a pupil premium.

[NSN: Marketing and communications guidance for free schools in pre-opening](#): This guidance includes advice to planning, developing and putting into practice marketing and communications for

free schools in pre-opening. It will include advice for using various different platforms as well how to ensure your message is tailored to your school's vision and your target audience.

Governance

Establishing a strong governance structure in the pre-opening period is essential to the continued success of your trust and of your free school. During pre-opening, you will need to submit a complete governance plan to the FSC for approval. If you run one or more academies already, you will need to consider how you will manage the growth of your trust during the pre-opening period.

The below links include advice and guidance around recruiting trustees and governors from the National Governors Association as well as competency frameworks and handbooks compiled by the DfE. Case studies of successful multi-academy trusts (MATs) and good governance in different contexts are also available, including an in-depth look at Ofsted's requirements for governing structures and efficiencies. In addition, elsewhere on our [website](#), you can find NSN's guides to developing your single-academy trust (SAT) or multi-academy trust (MAT).

[DfE: Academy Articles of Association: Model One:](#) The document provides a template with standard articles of association for free schools.

[DfE: Characteristics of successful multi-academy trusts:](#) This document provides guidance to multi-academy trusts throughout the different stages of development.

[DfE: Competency framework for governance:](#) This document sets out the knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed for effective governance in maintained schools, academies and multi-academy trusts.

[DfE: Exclusion from maintained schools, Academies and pupil referral units in England 2017:](#) This document from the Department for Education provides a guide to the legislation that governs the exclusion of pupils.

[DfE: Governance handbook for academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools:](#) The Governance handbook is guidance from the Department for Education. It sets out the government's vision and priorities for effective governance by:

- Outlining the core role and functions of the governing board
- Summarising and providing a first point of reference on all the legal duties on boards, signposting to more detailed information, guidance and resources
- Providing information on the support available to boards to be effective

[DfE: Governance leadership development programme:](#) The DfE's Governance leadership programme offers training to governors in leadership roles such as chairs, vice chairs or committee chairs.

[DfE: Guidance for free schools in pre-opening:](#) A Governance plan – checklist for trusts can be found on pages 150-158 of the DfE's guidance for schools in pre-opening. This must be completed and submitted to FSC.

[DfE/NGA: Leading governors: The role of the chair of governors in schools and academies:](#) This booklet reviews the role of the chair of governors and showcases case studies to highlight best practice governance.

[Inspiring Governance: Recruiting governors:](#) Inspiring Governance is a free, online service that connects schools and trusts in England with skilled volunteers in your area who are interested in becoming a school governor or trustee.

[NGA: The right people around the table:](#) This guide offers advice for building a successful governing body.

[NGA: Skills audit and skills matrix:](#) This tool is designed for governing boards to help identify any knowledge, experience and skills gaps to ensure strong governing boards.

[Ofsted: Improving governance:](#) A summary of a school governance survey highlighting common challenges and showcasing examples of highly effective governance.

Finance and procurement

As you enter the pre-opening period, you will receive a Project Development Grant (PDG) from the DfE designed to cover all non-capital costs associated with setting up your free school. You need to consider carefully how you will spend your money as efficiently as possible and to ensure best value for money. Below are some links to guidance and advice about how to plan and run an efficient procurement process.

As well as this, you will need to consider how you will manage the finances of your school when open. Links below include advice about revenue funding for the three different types of free schools and links to the financial template you can use to budget your first few years of opening.

[DfE: A guide to free school revenue funding 2019 \(mainstream\)](#): This guide sets out how the revenue funding for new free schools will be calculated and paid based upon funding rates for the 2018 to 2019 academic year.

[DfE: A guide to free school revenue funding 2019 \(special\)](#): This guide sets out how the revenue funding for new special free schools will be calculated and paid based upon funding rates for the 2018 to 2019 academic year.

[DfE: A guide to free school revenue funding 2019 \(alternative provision\)](#): This guide sets out how the revenue funding for new AP free schools will be calculated and paid based upon funding rates for the 2018 to 2019 academic year.

[DfE: Free school financial template \(mainstream and 16-19\)](#): This is a budgeting tool to help you to demonstrate that your education plan and staffing structure will be affordable within the funding available from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

[DfE: Free school financial template \(special\)](#): This is a budgeting tool to help special free schools demonstrate that their education plan and staffing structure will be affordable within the funding available from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

[DfE: Free school financial template \(alternative provision\)](#): This is a budgeting tool to help AP free schools demonstrate that their education plan and staffing structure will be affordable within the funding available from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

[DfE: School resource management self-assessment tool](#): This tool can be used by school staff and governors to assess how schools are managing resources effectively.

[DfE: Academies financial handbook](#): This handbook is a key document that sets out the financial framework for academy trusts reflecting their status as companies, charities and public bodies.

[Crown Commercial Service: Buying goods and services in education](#): This link contains guidance and promotional material on buying goods and services from the Crown Commercial Service.

[DfE: Find a DfE-approved framework](#): A search tool for schools to find quality-checked suppliers of goods and services.

[DfE: Buying for schools templates and forms](#): This collection will help you follow the correct procedures for buying goods and services for your school and includes: procurement guidance, templates, forms, related documents and related guidance.

[DfE: Buying for schools guidance](#): A collection of resources for specific goods and services including catering, electricity, gas, etc. Resources will help you to plan and run an efficient procurement process including: planning the process, writing the specification, direct selection from a framework, running a mini-competition between suppliers on a framework, running your own procurement process for lower value tenders, high value and EU tenders and managing your contract.

[DfE: Fittings, furniture and equipment \(FFE\)](#): This guide outlines the procurement route for fittings, furniture and equipment.

[DfE: Microsoft memorandum of understanding \(MoU\)](#): An explanation of the DfE's MoU with Microsoft, where all schools in the UK can take advantage of discounts and better licensing terms across a wide range of Microsoft's academic software.

[DfE: Procurement training for schools](#): Training for school staff who are responsible or accountable for budgets or buying (includes Power point presentations and accompanying notes).

[DfE: Schools financial health checks](#): The DfE has provided some guidance and advice for procuring external support when managing school finances.

[DfE: School procurement](#): The DfE have a variety of resources including example contracts, bid evaluation templates and recognised service providers to support school procurement.

[DfE: Selecting a school MIS:](#) Guidance for schools selecting a new management information system (MIS).

[DfE: School resource management: top 10 planning checks for governors:](#) Advice and guidance for school governors to support annual budget planning and ensuring financial efficiency in schools.

[DfE: Sponsored academies funding - Advice for sponsors:](#) This document gives sponsors information about the DfE funding that is available to academy trusts for full sponsored, intermediate and fast track academy projects, including grant payment and reporting arrangements.

[DfE: Schools' buying strategy:](#) Guidance to support school leaders and business managers to secure best value for money by improving how schools buys goods and services.

[DfE: Using technology in education:](#) A collection of guidance to support schools increase their use of technology. Guidance includes advice to choosing the right broadband, cloud software services and data protection as well as ICT requirements for schools.

[ESFA: Leasing guidance for academy trusts:](#) A collection of guidance to support schools and academy trusts choosing to lease equipment.

[ESFA: Academies Financial Handbook:](#) The ESFA Academies Financial Handbook that describes financial requirements for academy trusts.

[ESFA: List of questions found in the FMGS online form:](#) A list of questions that trust's can use to ensure they are compliant with the Academies Financial Handbook.

[Official Journal of the European Union \(OJEU\):](#) Procurement must comply with the Public Procurement Regulations, which incorporate the requirements of the European Procurement Directive. Advice on procurement thresholds can be found on the OJEU website.

Project management

Having strong project management is critical to ensuring all tasks in pre-opening are completed efficiently to allow your free school to open. Your project manager needs to have a strong understanding of the various risks and tasks that your project will involve. An outline of the major

risks and tasks can be found in the DfE's pre-opening guidance as well as in NSN pre-opening budgeting tools which can be found elsewhere on our website.

DfE: Pre-opening guidance: This guidance includes many of the tasks that your project management team will need to carry out in order to ensure your free school opens on time.

Communications and consulting

Before your free school can open, your group must run a section 10 consultation to inform the local community of your plans and receive responses. This consultation is an important part of the pre-opening stage both to raise local awareness of your plans and to satisfy the legal requirements around setting up a free school. In addition to the formal consultation, you will find that communication with the local community, parents, other schools and other stakeholders will be of paramount importance to ensure that you recruit to full capacity and establish a school that can work well with other local providers.

While the DfE do not issue guidance over the consultation, there are several examples of section 10 consultations carried out by free school groups in the past that can be found on the internet. We have included several links to section 10 consultations conducted by groups NSN has worked with below. In addition, you can consult the NSN consultation guide which is freely available online as well as our marketing guidance for advice on how to communicate well.

DfE: Guidance for free schools in pre-opening: A section 10 consultation checklist can be found on page 159 of the DfE's guidance for schools in pre-opening. You can use this checklist to make sure that you have addressed all required areas in your consultation with local stakeholders. NSN has a copy of the checklist available on our website [here](#).

Legislation.gov: Academies Act 2010: You can find details of your legal duty to carry out a section 10 consultation within the Academies Act 2010.

Section 10 consultations conducted by past free school groups:

- [The Laurus Trust: Cheadle Hulme Primary School section 10 consultation](#)
- [The Laurus Trust: Laurus Cheadle Hulme section 10 consultation](#)
- [New Collaborative Learning Trust: New College Doncaster section 10 consultation](#)
- [Tenax Schools Trust: Bishop Chavasse Primary School section 10 consultation](#)

[NSN: Section 10 consultation: General guidance](#): NSN has produced some guidance on how to carry out an effective consultation. It outlines some of the key issues you will need to consider and some advice from free schools that have carried out high quality consultations in the past.

[Click here to provide feedback about this resource](#)

New Schools Network Delivery Programme

New Schools Network (NSN) has supported free school groups in pre-opening since 2014. NSN’s unrivalled knowledge and experience has been informed by our work with over 70% of open and approved free school groups throughout the application and pre-opening phases.

The NSN Delivery Programme has been designed to address the challenges of the rigorous pre-opening process. The NSN Delivery Programme fills gaps in capacity and/or capability, providing a range of support options to prepare schools for a successful opening. We provide tailored support whether you are newly approved to open a free school or if you are already deep into the pre-opening phase, and to all phases and types of free school.

Delivery Programme services offer support for each key milestone across pre-opening:

Services following your approval into pre-opening

- Project Set-Up
- Project Development Grant
- Governance (Advisory or Plan Delivery)
- Site and Buildings
- Pupil Recruitment and Marketing
- Section 10 Consultation

Services for your final year of pre-opening

- Site and Buildings
- Funding and Finance
- Education Brief
- Media Training
- Readiness to Open Meeting

You can [download our brochure](#) for more information on each service. If you are interested in one or more of NSN’s pre-opening services, please contact us at helpdesk@newschoolsnetwork.org or call 020 7537 9208. We would be happy to discuss how we can support your free school project and send you a price list of our services.