



# FREE SCHOOL FACTS AND FIGURES

LAST UPDATED 13TH MARCH 2015

New  
Schools  
Network

Free schools are new, independent state-funded schools. They are free to attend and open to all children. They enable groups of parents, teachers, charities, existing schools or other organisations to respond to the need for a new school in their community – whether for extra places, to raise standards or offer choice.

Free schools are only allowed to open if there is strong support from parents and students.

The first free schools opened in September 2011. Early evidence already suggests free schools are having a significant impact on England's educational landscape, bringing new and innovative ideas to the state sector.

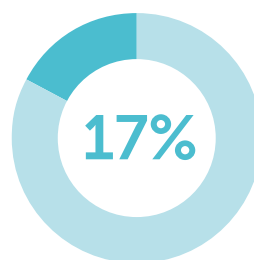
## THE BASICS



**230,000**  
NEW SCHOOL PLACES

There are over 400 free schools either open or in the pipeline. Once full they will provide over 230,000 new school places.<sup>1</sup>

Of the schools open or approved to open, 83% are mainstream schools (primary, secondary, 16-19 and all-through)



ARE  
ALTERNATIVE  
PROVISION OR  
SPECIAL FREE  
SCHOOLS\*<sup>2</sup>

Teachers have been particularly active in setting up free schools. Including existing successful schools, academy chains or education providers

**68%**

WERE FOUNDED  
BY GROUPS LED  
BY TEACHERS<sup>3</sup>

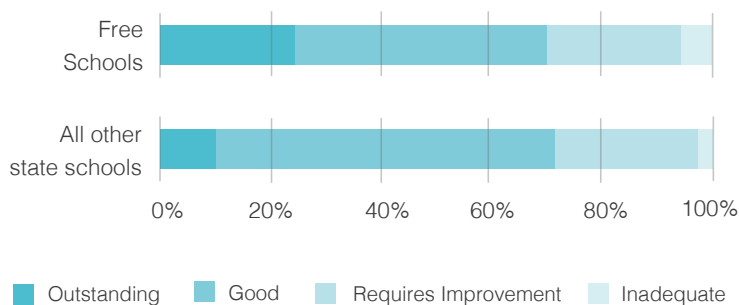


An emerging trend amongst free schools is those choosing to open as all-through schools covering both primary and secondary phases.

FREE SCHOOLS HAVE  
INCREASED THE NUMBER  
OF ALL-THROUGH STATE  
SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND BY<sup>4</sup>

**48%**

All schools that opened in 2011 or 2012 have now been inspected by Ofsted – 71% were judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. They outperformed other state schools:



**24%**

OF FREE SCHOOLS  
WERE JUDGED  
OUTSTANDING

This compares to 11% of all other state schools inspected at the same time.<sup>5</sup>

\*Alternative Provision free schools serve pupils who are disengaged with education. They have either been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream school. Special free schools serve pupils with Special Educational Needs. They are mainly but not solely aimed at pupils with SEN statements or Education, Health and Care Plans.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education press notice, *Prime Minister announces landmark wave of free schools* (March 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, *Free schools: open schools and successful applications* (March 2015)

<sup>3</sup> New Schools Network (March 2015), 289 of the 408 free schools that are either open or have been approved to open from September 2015 were started by groups led by teachers; existing or independent state schools or academy sponsors based on data collected by NSN from the schools and public sources. These include teacher groups, existing single academy sponsors, multi-academy sponsors, existing independent schools, existing maintained schools, parent-teacher groups, existing free schools, and existing non-maintained special schools.

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, *Free schools: open schools and successful applications* (March 2015) compared to all other state schools from Department for Education, *Edubase* (March 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Ofsted, *Monthly management information: Ofsted's school inspections outcomes: (October 2014)* Two full 'generations' of free schools have now been inspected – those that opened in 2011 and 2012. These were inspected between September 2012 and July 2014 under the new, tougher, Ofsted regime. These have been compared to all other schools inspected during the same period (excluding all schools that were inspected under the 16-19 framework).

# POPULARITY AND IMPACT



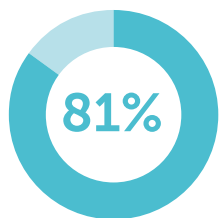
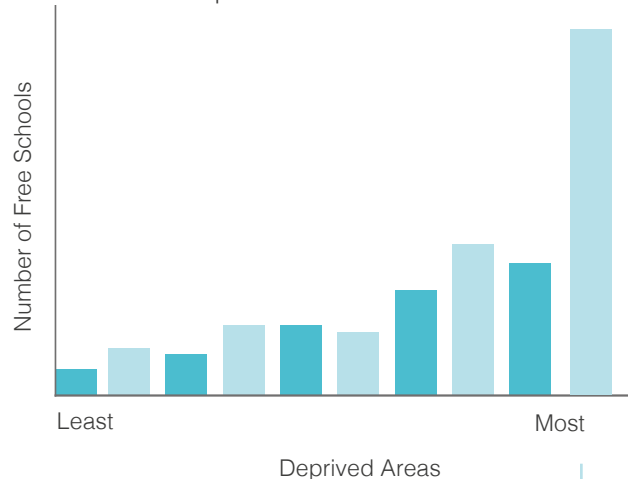
FREE SCHOOLS ARE HELPING TO RAISE STANDARDS IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND FOR PUPILS IN OTHER LOCAL SCHOOLS

At both primary and secondary level, the opening of a free school has led to gains in performance of the lowest performing schools nearby.<sup>6</sup>

The most commonly used criteria for pupil admissions, aside from proximity to the school, is to give priority to disadvantaged pupils.<sup>8</sup>



Free schools are **ten times more likely** to be located in the most deprived local authorities in England compared to the least deprived:<sup>7</sup>



81% of parents would welcome a free school in their area.<sup>10</sup>

In the first three years of the free school programme,

**10x**

MORE FREE SCHOOLS WERE ESTABLISHED THAN NEW ACADEMIES DURING THE SAME TIME FRAME.<sup>11</sup>



**3x**

APPLICATIONS FOR EVERY PLACE.<sup>9</sup>

Free schools are proving popular with parents: in September 2014 a survey of open free schools revealed that they received an average of almost three applications for every place and nine out of ten primary free schools received more applications than they had places.

<sup>6</sup> Policy Exchange, *A Rising Tide: The Competitive Benefits of Free Schools* (March 2015)

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education press notice, *Parents flock to free schools* (April 2014)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *English indices of deprivation 2010* (March 2011): 132 open or approved free schools are in Local Authority Districts with an Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score of 33 or below, 13 are in areas with an IMD score of 293 or over. IMD scores range from 1-326.

<sup>10</sup> New Schools Network *poll by Populus* (August 2014). When free schools were described to respondents, 81% of those parents expressing a view said they thought such a school would be welcome in the local area.

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, *Are Free Schools Using Innovative Approaches?* (September 2014)

<sup>11</sup> National Audit Office *Establishing Free Schools* (December 2013)

# FREE SCHOOL MYTH-BUSTING

## SHOULDN'T FREE SCHOOLS JUST BE SET UP IN AREAS WITH A PLACES SHORTAGE?

Over three quarters (76%) of all open or approved mainstream free schools are in areas with a projected lack of places.<sup>12</sup> But just as importantly they are tackling the shortage of **good school places**.

Over two million children are currently taught in local authorities that aren't suffering from a shortage of school places but are below the national average for KS2 and KS4 attainment.<sup>13</sup>



Over a quarter of England's families (1.4 million) would have preferred a different school for their child.<sup>14</sup>

## WHAT 'FREEDOMS' DO FREE SCHOOLS HAVE-CAN THEY DO WHATEVER THEY WANT?



Competition and collaboration: The majority (84%) of free schools are collaborating (or plan to do so) with other schools to improve the standard of education on offer and a recent survey revealed that nearly a third of head teachers believe they are helping to raise standards by providing competition for local schools.<sup>16</sup>

Free schools have the same freedoms as any academy but are more likely to take advantage of them to innovate and raise standards. For example, 57% of free schools run an extended day compared to 8% of other academies and 41% are offering a longer school year to sustain learning through the summer months compared to 4% of other academies.<sup>15</sup>

The use of these freedoms is carefully monitored; free schools are also required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum (with a focus on the core subjects of English, Maths and Science) and are held to account by Ofsted, the Department for Education and their Regional Schools Commissioner. They are uniquely accountable to their local communities given the level of parental support required to open a free school.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, *School Capacity Data: academic year 2012 to 2012* (December 2013)

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Simons, Policy Exchange *interview with Daily Telegraph* (February 2015)

<sup>14</sup> New Schools Network *poll by Populus* (August 2014). One-in-four parents questioned would have chosen a different school if they had had a chance, representing 1.4 million

families across the country

<sup>15</sup> Department for Education, *Are Free Schools Using Innovative Approaches?* (September 2014)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

## HOW ARE FREE SCHOOLS HELD TO ACCOUNT FINANCIALLY?



The independence that all academies, including free schools, have over their budgets comes hand-in-hand with a very high standard of accountability. Their financial reporting responsibilities are significantly more rigorous than state maintained schools and the fact that cases of misconduct have been detected so quickly is a direct result of this. They are required to publish externally audited annual accounts, unlike maintained schools, and the Education Funding Agency and Secretary of State both have powers to intervene if concerns arise.



## DON'T FREE SCHOOLS HIRE 'UNQUALIFIED' TEACHERS?

No, free schools choose the best possible candidates for the job – in some cases this includes staff who do not have traditional qualifications. They often draw on the wide range of talents in the local community through their broader curriculum – from trained sports coaches, talented musicians and artists to successful business people. A recent survey of free schools showed that the most common subject for teachers without 'Qualified Teacher Status' was PE.<sup>17</sup>

Some schools also use this freedom to employ trained scientists and mathematicians – in England, 45% of secondary school physics teachers do not have a degree in physics and more than half of maths teachers do not have a degree in maths.<sup>18</sup> This approach allows schools to hire more expert scientists who have the aptitude to bring their subject to life for their students.



## WHAT HAPPENS IF A FREE SCHOOL FAILS?

Free schools are created to raise standards and they are rightly held to the highest possible standards. The vast majority of free schools are delivering the excellent education they promised – underperformance has been identified in less than 2% of these schools. In these rare cases swift and decisive action has been taken, which is in contrast with more than 100 maintained schools that have been in special measures for over a year.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Department for Education, *Maintained schools and academies: inspections and outcomes Sep 2013 to Aug 2014* (December 2014)

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, *School workforce in England: November 2013*; table 12 of main data tables (April 2014)



## DIXONS TRINITY

Dixons Trinity Academy is an 'Outstanding' secondary school, which opened in 2012 in Bradford. Set up by an existing group of schools, they have gained particular attention for their intensive catch-up programmes designed to ensure that year 7 pupils entering the school with lower than average attainment quickly improve.

## DO FREE SCHOOLS TAKE MONEY AWAY FROM OTHER SCHOOLS?

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No, free schools receive the same funding per pupil as other state schools. What's more, these schools have cost 45% less than those set up under previous school building programmes.<sup>20</sup>

## ARE MOST FREE SCHOOLS FAITH SCHOOLS?

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No, just 1-in-5 open free schools has a faith designation – this compares to 32% of all other state schools.<sup>21</sup> Faith free schools can only select up to half their students on the basis of faith if they are oversubscribed and have to demonstrate that they have actively engaged with parents and students across their community.



New Schools Network is a charity that works to improve the quality of education – particularly for the most deprived – by increasing the number of independent, innovative schools within the state sector. We have worked with around 70% of free schools that have opened or been approved to open so far, supporting them as they develop their ideas and navigate the application process. We offer advice, training events, networking and support once they've opened, as well as access to experts such as former headteachers or bursars.<sup>21</sup>

“ WE HAVE WORKED WITH AROUND 70% OF FREE SCHOOLS THAT HAVE OPENED OR BEEN APPROVED TO OPEN SO FAR ”

<sup>20</sup> National Audit Office, *Establishing Free Schools* (December 2013)

<sup>21</sup> Department for Education, *Schools in England* (August 2014)



## EUROPA SCHOOL

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At Europa School all pupils learn in two languages all the way from Reception to Year 13, half of the week is spent learning in English and the other half in either French or German. Pupils also benefit from being taught by teachers who come from all across Europe and bring with them a range of different educational approaches.