

Case Study:

St Luke's Church of England School, London

Executive Summary

St Luke's Church of England School will be one of the first Free Schools to open in September 2011. It will be a small primary school serving the local community in Camden (London) where there is a severe shortage of school places. The school will be based in the redeveloped Grade II* halls and garden of the local church and will open with 15 pupils in Reception in September 2011, growing to 105 pupils in due course.

As a Church of England school, St Luke's School has benefited greatly from the support of the London Diocesan Board of Schools throughout the application process and the pre-opening stage. The group behind the school has also worked hard to develop relationships with the Local Authority, other schools (including employing a local independent school's bursar for three hours per week), and the local community (a local restaurant helped design the school's kitchen and menu). The group stresses the importance of being part of a family of schools (in this case a family of Church of England schools as well as a family of local schools) for support and sustainability when the first cohort of parents move on.

St Luke's School adopted the approach of having a very small team to run the project in order to ensure that decisions were made efficiently and the project could progress effectively. This was possible because the small team had access to the expertise (financial, legal, etc.) of the Diocesan Board which covered any possible skills gaps. The wider group was frequently consulted, but the project managers retained control of the decision-making process to keep momentum up. They also chose not to engage with the media since the people they wanted to communicate with were their immediate neighbours and they preferred a more personal approach (open days).

St Luke's School wanted an experienced head to support the school in its early days. This can be a challenge for a small, new school, but they have addressed this by appointing an interim head, with a background as a successful head teacher, on a part-time basis for four terms.

The advice that St Luke's School would offer to other prospective Free School groups is to develop a small local team, work hard with the local community, and never forget your vision.

The following case study looks at the vision for the school; the refurbishment of the premises; the importance of building a small, local team and developing good relationships with the local community; decisions about media engagement; and the challenges of recruiting experienced staff for a new school.