

# Case Study: Wapping High School, London

## Executive Summary

Wapping High School is a proposed co-educational secondary Free School in the Tower Hamlets area of London. The vision is to provide a school that is inclusive (representing the diverse demographics of the area) and that delivers strong academic results through an emphasis on personalised learning. Wapping High School hopes to open in September 2012 with 81 Year 7 pupils (27 pupils per class), and plans to grow to 405 pupils.

The group originally came together two and a half years ago when, as parents with children in the same primary school, they recognised that there was a problem with a lack of secondary school provision for families in the local area. The local secondary schools are very stratified (in terms of ethnicity and the number of pupils on free school meals), and there is a projected shortage of places from 2013. The Free Schools policy presented a good opportunity to address these local problems.

In addition to the main Directors of the Trust, the Wapping group has established a Steering Committee with a range of expertise and experience. They have also benefited from pro bono project management support from Contour Education.

The group found the new application process to be a phenomenal amount of work, and establishing evidence of demand was the most time consuming and laborious element. They spent months visiting primary schools and sports centres, distributing flyers (printed by a local estate agent), running ads in local papers, and surveying parents. They advise that the amount of time required for this should not be underestimated. The group found that setting frequent small deadlines and targets helped to keep the project on track.

The Wapping group developed good relationships with many local schools, including one secondary school that provided example figures to help them complete their financial plan. They also benefitted from a local donor who funded the development of their website in order to promote dialogue about education and schools in the area. Developing a relationship with the Local Authority presented more of a challenge.

Identifying a suitable site for the school has been a particular challenge for this group, and they would recommend that future Free School applicants identify a viable premises solution as early as possible.

The following case study looks at the vision for the school, the establishment of a strong steering committee including pro bono support, the challenge of building a relationship with the Local Authority, the process of establishing demand, the development of an educational plan, the group's approach to media coverage, and the frustration of the application regulations surrounding premises.