

# Case Study: The Free School Norwich

## Executive Summary

The Free School Norwich will be a new primary school for 168 pupils in central Norwich. The vision for the school is based around three core aims:

- Offering a broad and balanced curriculum;
- Emphasising and focusing on developing the individual child (partly through personalised learning opportunities in the local community, making the most of local experts); and
- Supporting the needs of working families (with low-cost, year-round extended school provision and six terms to reduce the cost of family holidays taken during traditional school holiday periods).

The school will be one of the first Free Schools to open in September 2011. This has meant that the group has had to face a large number of unknowns along the way, and it has been a steep learning curve for everyone involved. But the novelty of being one of the first schools to be approved has also resulted in a great deal of media coverage, which has generated an overwhelming level of support for the school. The school is four times oversubscribed for its first year, with a veritable army of volunteers giving their time and energy to make the project a success.

For this group, the hardest part of the process has been dealing with the media. While the Principal Designate is now confident that she knows the political leaning of different papers, which reporters to avoid, which forms of media will help to get her message across, and which ones are likely to distort that message, these are things that she would have liked to know at the beginning of the process.

The main piece of advice that The Norwich Free School would offer to groups looking to set up Free Schools is to get a good team around them, with the right skills and experience. Building a team made up entirely of parents who have not been involved in setting up and running a school is unlikely to be sufficient. And groups should not underestimate how much work the Governors will need to do!

The following case study looks at the vision for the school; the establishment of the team and the importance of putting together a group with a wide range of experience; the process of developing relationships with the LA, other schools, and the local community; the application process; the challenges of dealing with the media; reflections on the process to date; and plans for the future.

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