

Applicant Guidance

Creating your vision

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**New
Schools
Network**

Your vision

Your overarching vision should be laid out in section C of your free school application. Here you must demonstrate that you have a good understanding of the needs of the pupils and community your school will serve. Identifying these needs is a core part of your application and will form the basis for all other decisions – the way you organise your curriculum, staffing, how you allocate the budget, what premises are appropriate, and so on. This guide is designed to help you build an initial vision so you can plan the other elements of the school and start talking to parents. All of NSN's resources for developing a free school application can be found [here](#).

We advise that you refer to the DfE's [How to Apply Guide](#) to ensure that your vision is meeting the criteria for this section. The DfE advise that this section should be no longer than three pages long and you should ensure that your vision is focussed and well structured.

Your vision should comprise:

- **Key features** – you should inform the assessor of the key details of the school you are proposing and of the proposer group. You must also set out your plans for a nursery (if you are proposing a primary or all-through school) or sixth form provision (if appropriate).
- **Rationale** – You should explain why you want to set up a school in this area, and why your school in particular is needed.
- **Pupil needs** – It is important to convey a strong understanding of the needs of the children in the area and explain how your school will address these needs and enhance the life chances of all pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged.
- **Vision for the school** – You should set out the guiding principles of the school, explaining what you want your school and pupils to achieve, and how your school will assist pupils to fulfil their potential and close the attainment gap. You must ensure your vision is evidence based.
- **Innovation** – You should explain how your school will add to the wider schools system. If you believe your proposal will bring innovation to the school system you should explain this here.

The proposal

It is useful for the assessor to be introduced to the school you are proposing early on in the application. You should ensure that the assessor is able to read your application knowing details such as the age of your pupils, the type of school proposed, the location of the school, the proposed year of opening, and who the proposers are.

Rationale

This part of the application is your opportunity to inform the assessor why a new state school is needed in this area and why your school, in particular will benefit the pupils in this community. In order to do this, you must provide information about your anticipated pupil cohort, which you will expand upon later in section E.

The need for a new school

The DfE's criteria sets out how they will assess the need for a free school.

- **Basic need** – A high proportion of the places at the proposed school will be needed to meet a projected shortfall of school places from your proposed year of opening.
- **A need for good school places**– All approvable applications must be in one of the local authority districts in Achieving Excellence Areas category 5 or 6 identified by the DfE as having the lowest standards and the lowest capacity to improve. These are listed in [Annex G](#). If your application is not in one of these areas, you will need to provide strong evidence that your proposed school would serve an area with a 'pocket' of low educational standards.
- **Innovation** – If you will have a genuinely innovative approach you must demonstrate that your school will be nationally significant and will raise outcomes for pupils in your area. All applicants are welcome to supplement their basic need and quality arguments by explaining how their proposal will add diversity and choice to the schools available in the area, explaining how they will offer something different in terms of intake, ethos, size, curriculum or pedagogy if this is relevant.

You will have already presented a case for why your school is needed in sections B1 and B2. In these sections you will have provided clear data and detailed evidence to support your case. In section C, you should discuss the most compelling strands of your need argument, giving a higher level analysis that highlights the key points. Where necessary, you can signpost to other sections of the application where you expand on them in more depth.

It is important to note that the DfE expects the minimum size for each primary year group to be a minimum of 2 forms of entry (60 places), and the minimum size for each secondary year group to be a minimum of 4 forms of entry (120 places). If your maximum school capacity is different to the DfE expectations, you must provide a rationale for your chosen size within Section C.

Nursery provision

There is a presumption by the DfE that all applications for primary and all-through free schools will include a nursery. Therefore, if you intend to establish a primary or all-through free school, you must also set out your plans for establishing a nursery. If you are incorporating a nursery within your free school, you should also specify whether the provision will be open year-round or during term time only, and provide a rationale for this decision. If you are proposing a primary or all-through school but without a nursery, you must provide a strong rationale for this, including where there is already sufficient high quality nursery provision in the area.

Basic need does not apply to nursery provision. In order to evidence the need for a new nursery you should contact your local authority about any childcare sufficiency assessments it has made. You should also reference how many 2, 3 and 4 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds you will expect to attend your nursery.

16 – 19 free schools

The DfE have stated that there will be a high bar for 16-19 provision and any approval will be by exception. Basic need does not apply for post-16 pupils. To develop your rationale and show that there is a need for your 16-19 free school, you should review the current 16-19 provision in the area and current pupil outcomes and explain how your free school will increase choice and improve the quality of local provision. You can refer to the DfE's further education area reviews found [here](#). You should also present demographic data showing the number of students eligible to attend your school upon opening. You can also include information about the number of students currently eligible for post 16 study in your area, compared with the number of pupils currently studying in a post 16 setting.

Vision for the school

Once you have identified the reasons why a new school is needed in your area, you should be able to define your vision statement. It is important to link your vision back to your rationale to explain why your school and its vision will meet the needs of your pupils and the local area. This should

include how your school will assist disadvantaged children to fulfil their potential and close the attainment gap. You must also ensure that your vision is both evidence based, and consistent with the rest of the application.

The needs of the children in your area

It is important that you identify the needs of the children in your area and determine demographic features of your expected pupil cohort such as high levels of disadvantaged pupils or pupils with English as an Additional Language. You will need to provide further details of your expected pupil cohort in section E1. However, within your vision, it is useful to identify why your proposed school will be appropriate to meet your pupil’s needs and to highlight any key features of your school that are specifically tailored to these needs.

Your vision will provide the basis for your initial communications with parents, the LA, or other appropriate stakeholders when you are engaging with the community and gathering support for your proposal.

A strong vision should be:

- Clear
- Focussed
- Aspirational
- Specific to the needs of the pupils and community you will serve.

It should comprise:

- Your **vision statement** – a short summary of the guiding principles that inform your school’s approach to education.
- Your **key features** – how key elements of your vision feature within the school.
- Your **outcomes** – what success for your pupils and the school looks like. Here are some example vision statements:

Vision statement	Key features	Outcomes
“Within our local authority, unemployment rates are 1% higher than the national average and it is crucial for us that all of our pupils are well	“One way in which we will support them is by ensuring that each student accesses a relevant, well-monitored work placement	“This will ensure that pupils are ready to enter the world of work having gained skills and experiences which are values in our community. As a result, at least 90% of pupils

prepared for life outside school”	in partnership with our local employers”	our will be in education or employment upon leaving.”
“State schools in our area experience a diverse population and our school will work hard to develop an inclusive environment and encourage our pupils to involve themselves within their local communities”	“The school will celebrate its diversity through several culture days throughout the term and will offer pupils the opportunity to achieve a Mayor’s Award as recognition to their active citizenship and contribution to society ”	“As a result, our pupils will be respectful and welcoming to their peers and engage with their local community to become more confident citizens. We expect 80% of pupils to achieve a Mayor’s Award and 50% of pupils will achieve a Gold Mayor’s Award”

Vision for the trust

If you already have open schools the DfE asks that you provide the overarching vision of the trust. This should include a description of the type, phase and Ofsted judgements of the school(s) you already run, including any you have in pre-opening. You should also provide an overview of your plans for expansion, considering whether you anticipate more schools joining your trust or opening more free schools. You should explain how the new school proposed fits in with this overarching vision with reference to school type, timescales, and location. If you are proposing a school that will open in an area in which you do not currently operate you should set out your plans for how this school will be supported.