

Press release: Damian Hinds announces drive to create more good school places

Thousands more good school places will be created in the areas that need them most as the application criteria for the latest round of free schools are published today (31 January 2019), as part of a programme of expansion of school capacity that is on track to add 1 million more places this decade – the fastest growth in school places for two generations.

Targeting the areas with the lowest educational standards and a need for more good school places, the Education Secretary Damian Hinds is calling on even more multi-academy trusts, businesses, charities, universities, teachers, parents or faith groups to step forward and open new schools – adding to the over 250 free school projects that we are already working with groups to open.

More than 400 free schools are already open and helping to raise educational standards for young people, as recent Key Stage 4 results showed. Free schools are among the highest performing state-funded secondary schools in the country, with pupils making more progress at the end of Key Stage 4, on average, than their peers in other types of state-funded schools in 2018. Four of the top ten Progress 8 scores at any state funded school were achieved by free schools – Dixons Trinity Academy in Bradford, Eden Girls' School in Coventry, William Perkin Church of England High School in Ealing and Tauheedul Islamic Boys' School in Blackburn.

The latest round of applications will build on this by encouraging applicants, in parts of the country that have not previously benefited from the free schools programme, to consider opening new schools that deliver higher standards and a manageable workload for teachers.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Free schools have helped to raise standards for pupils in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country by handing power back to head teachers and school leaders and empowering communities. Many parts of the country have already taken advantage of the Free School Programme – and have reaped the benefits – but I now want more young people benefit from a great free school opening in their area.

I have seen for myself some of the great work Free Schools do and their innovation and a different way of thinking about teaching and learning are a fantastic addition to our education system. Last week I called for more schools to convert to an academy to benefit from the additional freedom and autonomy that academies offer. I

have the same message for any group considering applying to open a free school: you are best placed to make the right decisions for pupils and local communities, so I want you to help young people make the most of their talents.

Today's publication builds on the Government's commitment to create more good school places, with 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

It also follows the publication of performance data from secondary schools in England which showed that standards continue to rise, with more pupils achieving strong results in English and maths, more pupils performing well in the EBacc, converter academies performing well above the national average and disadvantaged pupils in multi-academy trusts (MATs) making more progress than the equivalent national average.

Last week new figures published by the Department for Education shows that more than 50% of children in state-funded schools in England are now taught in an academy or free school – with standards rising faster in many sponsored academies than in similar council-run schools.

Since its inception in 2010 the free schools programme has delivered:

- Four hundred and forty-three new free schools – many of which are in disadvantaged areas, giving parents greater choice
- Of the mainstream free schools approved since 2014, 86% have been in areas where there was a need for more school places.
- Ofsted information for the end of the November 2018 shows that 86% of mainstream primary, secondary and all-through free schools are rated good or outstanding, including a small number which have had a new URN since they were last inspected.

Luke Sparks, Executive Principle at Dixons Trinity Academy in Bradford, said:

This new wave of free schools offers communities the opportunity to benefit from great new schools challenging educational standards in the areas where it matters most.

Starting a school is an exciting and humbling opportunity to re-examine what makes a truly outstanding education; seven years ago, we asked a group of families to put faith in us and our mission to do so. Our results, so far, have honoured that commitment – proof that schools in Bradford can, and should, match any in the country.

As a start-up, some things were tough: each staff member, system and policy had to be recruited or written, but it was also a chance to craft a school culture composed of the highest standards. In our achievement-orientated culture, it is cool to be smart; all students work hard to climb the mountain to university or a real alternative: seeking great lives centred in our strong values.

We are incredibly proud of, and indebted to, our students, our staff and our families for everything we have achieved together at Dixons Trinity. We look forward to celebrating with, and learning from, the next wave of free schools.

In October, 65 local authorities submitted an expression of interest to open a special or alternative provision free school – the Department for Education will shortly launch applications for trusts to open schools in over 30 areas with the strongest case for a new school.

Separately, the Department for Education is also inviting applications to open new maths schools, building on the success of King's College London Mathematics School and Exeter Mathematics School.

The application window for wave 14 will open in Spring 2019. The deadline for submitting applications will be 30 September 2019.