

Top Tips for 2013 applicants

Free Schools

How similar will the 2013 and 2012 processes be?

Broadly similar – the main features of the application and assessment process will be the same. We have brought together the timescales for mainstream, special and alternative provision in a single streamlined process.

When will it start?

The application window for 2013 applicants will be in February 2012. The interviews and announcement of successful projects will also be earlier in the year than the last application round.

The application guidance and forms are available [here](#).

[New Schools Network](#) should be your first point of contact for advice and guidance. Groups that sought their advice last year had a vastly higher success rate than those that did not.

What have successful applications looked like?

The strongest applications for 2012 had the following features in common:

- An inspiring, aspirational, clear and succinct vision that clearly articulated the rationale for establishing the school and showed precisely what its ethos and key features would be, the community it would serve, its core curricular offer and how it would add to local provision.
- A convincing education plan that showed how the vision and curriculum would be delivered in detail, what the approach to teaching and learning would be, and how the school would measure its own success in delivering high standards well above national norms for all its children.
- Strong and verifiable evidence of demand from local parents confirming they would choose the proposed school for their children, to a point where the school would be oversubscribed or at full capacity in its first year of operation.
- The commitment of experienced educational professionals – particularly existing head teachers or school leaders, Future Leaders and Academy sponsors to lead the project through opening and beyond. A breadth of professional experience in the proposed governing body, particularly in areas of financial management, HR and project management.
- Robust financial plans consistent with the plans set out elsewhere in the application, demonstrating that costs and expenditure had been clearly thought through in detail and that the school would be financially sustainable in both the short and longer term.
- Identified an available, viable and affordable site.

Typically, weaker applications had:

- Been prepared in a rush and contained many spelling and formatting errors.
- Education visions that lacked focus, or aimed to do too much (eg offer every possible subject and/or qualification).
- Education plans that failed to set out what would be taught, when and how, had little or no mention of targets or measures of success for the school and its pupils.
- Evidence of demand sections that did not demonstrate strong existing parental demand for children of the appropriate age, or did not show specific demand for the school being proposed (ie. merely referred to a local shortage of spaces).
- No specific commitment from experienced education providers or leaders, and no progress in recruiting a suitably skilled and experienced governing body.
- Governance structures that lacked clearly defined roles and responsibilities, or presented potential conflicts of interest.
- A financial plan showing that the school would either be running at a significant deficit or that unrealistic assumptions had been made about income and costs.

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