



Transparency data

Mainstream free school applications: assessment of need and deprivation (wave 14 update)

Updated 5 February 2021

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This release covers how we assess:

- the need for mainstream free school applications, including an update for the wave 14 approvals
- deprivation for open free schools, updated to include those that opened in 2020

Wave 14 announcement

The announcement of the outcome of wave 14 free school applications comprised 21 approved into the pre-opening phase and a further 8 applications approved in principle.

As these 8 applications do not have final approval, they are not included within this document (and the statistics included within it) mentions wave 14 approvals.

Future updates to the transparency note will incorporate any progress on the 8 in-principle approvals.

How we assess need during application rounds

When we assess mainstream free school applications, we consider whether there is a need for new places.

Prior to wave 13, we would consider whether there was either a projected need for extra school places in general or a need for additional high-quality school places in the area where the school is proposed (quality need), as well as whether the proposed school would add to local choice and diversity. Since wave 13, applicants have been asked to demonstrate both a need for places and a quality need.

In wave 14, to assess the need for places and quality need for a new school, we first identified the likely catchment area of the proposed school, allowing us to identify open schools nearby, as well as the pupil place planning areas covered by the proposed school.

We used details about the performance of existing local schools to assess the quality need and pupil place planning areas to assess the need for places.

To calculate the likely catchment area of the school we took the 80th percentile of distance travelled by pupils in the area (the parliamentary constituency in which the proposed school is located) and used this as a radius around the proposed school. We use the 80th percentile to capture the travel patterns of most pupils within the area.

Need for places data

Our data on the need for places is taken from the school capacity survey which includes:

- information on current school capacity (we used data from May 2019 for approving wave 14 applications)
- planned capacity due to be added (including extra capacity reported by local authorities to 2021 to 2022)
- pupil number forecasts for primary and secondary aged pupils (for academic years 2023 to 2024 and 2025 to 2026)

We also factored in places that will be added (or removed) through other Department for Education (DfE) programmes, including:

- condition improvement fund projects
- the priority schools building programme 1
- the selective school expansion fund
- any free schools which opened in 2020 or were due to open by September 2020 with agreed terms in place
- any free school or academy closures

We published [school capacity survey](#) data from May 2019 in March 2020.

To make sure the assessment of need is as up to date as possible, we also contacted local authorities to get the latest information on the future need for places. Where the application said that need is related to a local housing development project, we checked the detail of this with the relevant local authority.

We used all this data to inform our assessment of the need for extra school places.

Assessing the need for places in the free schools context

For free school application waves prior to wave 6, the need for additional school places was calculated at the local authority district level. We moved to using planning areas from wave 6 because it provides more localised data than a larger local authority district, helping us to focus on the specific area from which a free school is most likely to get its pupils. Planning areas are set by local authorities based on groups of schools that reflect:

- local geography
- reasonable travel distances
- patterns of supply and demand

Prior to the 2012 to 2013 school capacity survey data collection, we did not have robust data at the planning area level available which we could use to assess free school applications.

For waves 13 and 14, applications were asked to show the need for a high proportion of the extra school places that the free school would provide. This meant showing need in the local area for at least half the capacity of the proposed school in the short to medium term. This change allowed us to increase our focus on managing the level of surplus places in the system (and preventing an oversupply) and make the best use of the existing school estate.

You can find the data we used for assessing the need for places in the 'school place planning tables' ([Tables B5 and B6](#)) of the school capacity survey. The approach used in these tables allows for examination of school place pressure, taking into account the level of spare capacity as well as places needed within the planning area. This approach allowed us to ensure wave 14 approvals were in places most in need of new schools.

Prior to wave 13, the data used was consistent with the method in tables B3 and B4 which looks only at an estimated shortfall of places and does not factor in estimated surplus, the tables allow for examination of school place pressure without offsetting any surplus against shortfall. This was consistent with the method we used for basic need capital allocations.

When considering the need for places, we consulted local authorities to get their views. If more recent local authority data or intelligence confirmed a need, the application would have met the need for places criteria, even if the school capacity survey data did not show a need.

Of the 21 approved wave 14 applications, 18 met the criteria for providing a high proportion of the extra school places that will be provided, either through school capacity survey data or intelligence from the local authority.

Quality need source data

Our quality need data came from a range of sources.

For area level indicators, we looked at data from the:

- achieving excellence areas index
- opportunity areas (including the Opportunity North East)
- social mobility index

For local school performance, we looked at:

- information on Ofsted outcomes for all schools in the local area
- data on the attainment and progress of local schools compared with national averages, including for disadvantaged pupils

Assessing the quality need in the free schools context

This is the second free school wave (after wave 13) where we asked proposers to demonstrate a quality need (as well as a need for places) in their application. Using the data sources listed under [quality need source data](#), along with information in the application, we concluded that of the 21 approved wave 14 applications, 19 were deemed to be in an area where there was a need for quality places.

Assessing the need for 16 to 19 provision

With the [further education area reviews](#) showing that in many areas of the country the availability and quality of existing 16 to 19 provision is good, we set out in the application guidance for wave 14 that it would be unlikely that we would approve new 16 to 19 free school provision (including proposals for a sixth form as part of a secondary school).

We assessed the need for places using pupil projections and information on the quality of existing provision in the area.

To assess the quality need for places, we used the data sources listed under [quality need source data](#), along with information in the application.

For wave 14, we approved two 16 to 19 provisions. These were sixth forms attached to approved applications for a secondary and an all-through school. Both met the need for additional places and were in areas deemed to have a quality need.

Location of free schools in areas with a need for additional school places

We based the figures in table 1 on the estimated need at the time we approved the application, using the most up-to-date school capacity survey data available.

86% of all 335 mainstream free schools which we approved in waves 5 to 14 were in areas where there was a need for extra school places.

For wave 14, we used data from tables B5 and B6 of primary schools and 2025 to 2026 for secondary schools. We have longer projections for secondary schools as they are based on children already in the school system.

We have given a breakdown of the need for places for each of these application waves in table 1 of the summary statistics. Some schools which we have approved into the pre-opening phase may be withdrawn or cancelled before opening.

Deprivation source data

We used the [English indices of deprivation](#) to determine the relative deprivation level of a free school location. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government produces these statistics and published the most recent data in September 2019.

These statistics measure the relative deprivation in ranked areas in England called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA). Each LSOA is split from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area).

There is no cut-off at which an area is described as 'deprived'.

Assessing deprivation

For each wave free school, we identify the LSOA where the proposed school will be located. We use the information reported on [get information about schools](#) which includes mainstream, 16 to 19, special and alternative provision but excludes university technical colleges and studio schools. We then use the published indices of deprivation tables to identify the deprivation decile of the free school's LSOA.

For free schools, we report on how many are in the most deprived 30% of LSOAs.

39% of the 557 free schools open in November 2020 are in the most deprived 30% of areas in England. For schools in temporary accommodation, the LSOA may change on moving to the permanent site, any changes will be incorporated into the next update of this document.

Summary statistics

Table 1: need for additional school places for approved mainstream free school applications (excluding 16 to 19) by wave

Wave	Number of approved applicants	Percentage of approved applicants in area with a need for additional school places	Data source
Wave 5	9	100%	school capacity survey 2012
Wave 6	30	83%	school capacity survey 2013
Wave 7	25	72%	school capacity survey 2013
Wave 8	39	90%	school capacity survey 2014
Wave 9	11	73%	school capacity survey 2014
Wave 10	17	94%	school capacity survey 2015
Wave 11	83	81%	school capacity survey 2015
Wave 12	79	94%	school capacity survey 2016
Wave 13	21	81%	school capacity survey 2018
Wave 14	21	90%	school capacity survey 2019
Waves 5 to 14	335	86%	school capacity survey 2012 to 2019

For wave 5 applicants the basic need area was the local authority district. From wave 6, this refers to the local area (which covers the planning areas in which local schools are situated).

These figures relate to the time of approval only. This means that schools which were approved but have since been cancelled or withdrawn are included.

We approved one studio school in wave 11, in previous waves we assessed studio schools separately and so have not included them in the figures.

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