

# Guidance on becoming an Accredited School Provider or an Accredited Schools Group in the primary phase

Information on the  
accreditation system





# Foreword from the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families



Schools working in partnership with each other and with other partners to ensure the best outcomes for their pupils is at the heart of our vision for the 21st century schools system. We know that partnerships extend opportunities for pupils, parents and staff. They can also extend the reach of the best school leaders, enabling them to share their skills and expertise to support school improvement for the benefit of pupils, parents and communities.

Our proposals for Accredited School Providers (ASPs) and Accredited Schools Groups (ASGs) build on the success of formal collaborations in the primary and secondary phases. Outstanding primary schools are beginning to lead and support improvements in schools which could do better, through formal federations and trusts. Where this is happening, it is having a positive impact for both schools in the partnership. In secondary, Academy sponsors and lead partners of National Challenge Trusts are growing groups and spreading excellence in some of the most challenging schools. We want to encourage this and enable local authorities (LAs) to select organisations from a pool of providers who have been accredited because they have the track record and capacity to drive improvements in this way. It is not acceptable for primary schools which underperform for a number of years to continue to do so. There are many good and outstanding primary schools driving improvement in a range of contexts. We must look to the success of these schools and spread this excellence and expertise across the system.

Schools are increasingly working together and collaborating and these new chains of schools will help us drive up standards further and be more efficient by sharing leadership, excellent teachers and IT systems.

We want to see LAs acting as strategic commissioners using their intervention powers to ensure that schools causing concern are supported to improve. That way we can be assured that every child will make progress and fulfil their potential. Children and their parents deserve no less. So LAs must act when schools are not performing and decide on the best course of action to address this and bring about rapid and sustained improvements in these circumstances. The School Report Card will give a broader picture of school performance than the current league tables – not just GCSE results, but pupil progress, the views of parents and discipline too. LAs have significant powers to act, and they also have the tools at their disposal to bring about change. This might be through the LA school improvement services; contracting with a third party, such as another school within the borough or a National Leader in Education to provide improvement support; or deciding the school requires more fundamental change such as becoming part of a majority trust or federation led by a strong institution with the capacity to support improvement. Under the

primary accreditation system, LAs will now be able to select from a pool of ASPs and ASGs when looking for a lead partner for a majority trust or federation. This way LAs and parents can be assured that their schools are getting the very best support possible to help them succeed for their pupils.

It is right too that parents drive change where it is needed. Just as we have changed the law to support the establishment of the first parent promoted schools we are now pioneering a new generation of co-operative trust schools with parents and the local community directly involved in the running of the school. But we will now go further so that where a significant group of parents say they are dissatisfied with their local school leadership, the local authority will have to ballot all parents on whether they want to bring in one of our proven and trusted providers to turn things around.

In addition, where our new survey of Year 6 parents shows dissatisfaction with the choice of schools in a particular area, the local area will have to produce an action plan including bringing in accredited providers to take over existing schools.

We held a consultation on our proposals for ASPs and ASGs in secondary and on whether this should be expanded to primary. We have listened to stakeholders, who told us about the huge benefits and contribution they believe ASPs and ASGs could make to primary school improvement.

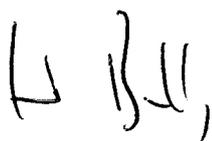
So I am today launching the accreditation system for primary ASPs and ASGs, and inviting proposals from organisations seeking to become accredited. ASGs, in which the lead organisation will be accountable for three or more other schools, will be those organisations who are already leading improvement in two or more primary schools through a formal partnership, can demonstrate the impact of this, and have the capacity to undertake further work of this type. ASPs will either be already leading improvement in one primary school, or have the capacity and expertise to do so. We expect many primary ASPs and ASGs will be led by strong primary schools but we are also encouraging other institutions with relevant expertise and capacity, such as strong secondary schools and Academy sponsors, to come forward to lead improvement in primary schools. We set out in the schools White Paper that we do not believe that it would be efficient or cost-effective to use stand-alone Academies to tackle underperformance in primary schools. So whilst setting up new Academies has been a key feature of our National Challenge Programme and helped improve performance in our secondary schools, so that now only 247 schools are below the floor compared to 638 two years ago – applying the same approach in primaries would not be efficient or effective. Our proposal to use Accredited Providers; strong schools partnering with weaker schools is more ambitious and better suited to the challenges in the primary sector. Where Academies lead majority trusts with one or more primary schools, those schools will remain as LA maintained schools: their status and powers will be the same as other maintained schools as will the role that LAs play in relation to them.

In these more formal partnerships, which are brought about as a result of LA intervention, we know that the lead partner must be accountable for the improvement in the school it is supporting and have the track record, capacity, educational expertise and school improvement experience to secure rapid, sustainable improvement.

I am grateful for the responses to the consultation which told us that partners believe the proposals will move us in the right direction and that it is right to also have an accreditation system for primaries. We need to implement the proposals in the right way and that means ensuring that organisations which are accredited have demonstrated their track record and capacity. We will assess this in the accreditation process, ensuring providers have:

- a strong vision for leading improvement in schools;
- strong governance, leadership and management;
- a successful track record of improving outcomes for children and young people;
- educational expertise and school improvement experience; and
- the capacity to achieve transformational change in the schools they are supporting.

I believe these are exciting developments for primary education and for the school system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Balls'.

Ed Balls,  
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

# 1. Introduction: What are Accredited School Providers and Accredited Schools Groups?

- 1.1** We want to ensure that rapid, sustainable improvement is made by schools which are currently underperforming. We have seen that one way this is successfully achieved for some of the most challenging schools is when these schools enter into a formal partnership commissioned by the local authority (LA), with another school college or university or a private or third sector organisation. These formal partnerships involve the creation of a federation or trust where the lead partner appoints the majority of governors to the school. We have learnt that for these formal partnerships to be successful in supporting primary school improvement, it is important that the lead partner:
- has a successful track record in their own field;
  - has the capacity to be able to lead a partnership of this kind;
  - is able to be held fully accountable for ensuring the improvement through the governance mechanisms;
  - has, or is able to access, the knowledge and experience of supporting significant school improvement; and
  - has experience and expertise of primary education and an understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- 1.2** Many excellent primary schools are already leading these partnerships and have the capacity and track record to support more schools in this way. We know that there are many other high performing primary schools and some other organisations that also have the potential to do this. We want to make it easier for LAs and schools to be able to select organisations to work with in this way, which are recognised as having the necessary qualities to lead these partnerships and we want to build momentum so that schools and authorities are encouraged to consider this intervention for their most vulnerable schools. We also want to ensure that the best leaders and organisations are able to have more influence across the school system as a whole through driving forward improvements, increasing the number of really excellent schools, and growing groups of these, in both the primary and secondary sectors.
- 1.3** Organisations who are new to this type of work, or have worked with one school in this way, can become Accredited School Providers (ASPs), leading improvements in one or two schools, and building up the experience and capacity to become an Accredited Schools Group (ASG) if they wish. Those organisations already leading improvement in two or more schools and wishing to grow further can become ASGs.

- 1.4** The expectation is that a partnership led by an ASP or ASG will be a long-term commitment. We know it takes time to bring about improvement in schools which have been consistently underperforming for some time. We therefore expect these partnerships to last for at least five to ten years, with the great majority being permanent partnerships. This system is not aimed solely at supporting schools to come out of special measures and to get above the floor target – rather it is about the lead partner enabling all the schools in a group to reach the same level of excellence and to continue to develop. We expect that in time pupils attending one school in a group will have the same quality of experience and outcomes as those attending the other schools in the group. We also expect that schools that join groups to improve will in time become strong themselves and contribute expertise and capacity to other schools in the group. This is already happening in some groups of schools in the secondary sector and in federations in the primary sector.

## 2. Who does accreditation apply to?

**2.1** We expect that the majority of organisations wishing to be ASPs and ASGs will be maintained primary schools. However, there are some other educational organisations who will have the capacity and expertise to lead improvement in primary schools, or who are already leading improvement in two or more maintained primary schools through a formal collaboration. These organisations will need to demonstrate their available capacity and expertise in primary education and their track record in having done this successfully in the schools they currently support.

### Who is eligible to apply to become an Accredited School Provider?

**2.2** The following organisations may seek accreditation as an ASP:

- maintained infant, junior, middle, primary and secondary schools;
- independent primary and secondary schools;
- further education and sixth-form colleges;
- universities;
- existing secondary Academy and maintained school trusts;
- private and third sector organisations;
- educational consultancies, charities and other educational organisations that are not directly accountable for governance in a school, college or university; and
- Church of England (CofE) and Roman Catholic (RC) Dioceses, other faith groups and other organisations that are accountable for governance in primary and secondary schools.

### Who is eligible to apply to become an Accredited Schools Group?

**2.3** Primary schools which have the track record of leading improvement in two or more schools, and the capacity to do further work of this kind, can seek accreditation as an ASG.

**2.4** In addition, CofE and RC Dioceses, other faith groups, educational organisations and maintained school trust and federations and Academy Trusts that are accountable for governance in two or more primary schools.

## Note on Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses

- 2.5** Dioceses will need to seek accreditation in order to be considered for new faith provision (that is, additional to the existing Church estate, not replacement new provision for existing Church schools) through (a) Academy projects or (b) majority trust or federations, established as an intervention in response to low standards and for which they require additional DCSF funding to establish.
- 2.6** In cases where a LA, the responsible Diocese and DCSF have serious concerns about an existing CofE or RC school and decide that they want to establish an Academy or majority trust or federation in its place, Dioceses (in consultation with the National Society or Catholic Education Service, as appropriate) will be given the first opportunity to put together a sponsorship or partner package that protects the faith ethos of the school whilst also addressing the standards concerns. If the Diocese is unable to identify Academy sponsorship or a trust or federation lead partner that meets the accreditation criteria then it would not be possible to proceed with (a) an Academy or (b) a majority trust or federation solution established as an intervention in response to low standards and for which they require additional DCSF funding to establish. In this event, the LA and Diocese together would need to look at other options to improve the school, including forming a partnership with other accredited providers.

## Which criteria should organisations demonstrate?

- 2.7** The accompanying document *Guidance on becoming an Accredited School Provider or an Accredited Schools Group in the primary phase: criteria for accreditation* sets out the criteria that each type of organisation should demonstrate when seeking accreditation.
- 2.8** All proposals should demonstrate evidence against the criteria for vision and capacity in Part One. They should also demonstrate evidence that they meet the educational track record criteria in Part Two (which gives examples for each sector on the areas of leadership and management; pupil achievement and partnership working).
- 2.9** Maintained primary schools which are National Support Schools do not need to set out their evidence against leadership and management and pupil achievement which will already have been assessed as part of the NLE application process.
- 2.10** Please note that non-educational institutions may seek accreditation as part of a consortium, in their own right or with an educational co-partner. If they seek accreditation in their own right, they should set out what their education strategy is and how they will access the relevant primary expertise and school improvement experience required to successfully raise standards.
- 2.11** Proposals from consortia led by non-educational institutions should include the section completed by the non-educational lead organisation under Part Two on track record, and also the relevant section completed by the education co-partner (as well as completing Part One on vision and capacity).

**2.12** Accredited providers may choose to work with an educational co-partner at any point. These co-partners do not need to seek accreditation, but we would expect them to meet the criteria on track record.

### **What leadership and governance arrangements will accredited providers use to lead improvement in schools?**

**2.13** Organisations should seek accreditation who wish to lead the following formal school improvement partnerships, commissioned by the LA as an intervention in response to low standards:

- Majority trusts – where the school is established as a trust school with a lead partner and other partners working to ensure sustainable school improvement. A majority trust school is a LA maintained foundation school that is supported by a charity, referred to as a Trust, that appoints the majority of governors;
- Federations – where one LA maintained school acting as a lead partner federates with another LA maintained school to support its improvement. A federation is where two or more maintained schools are governed collectively under a single governing body.

**2.14** Please note that DCSF only expects lead partners of majority trusts and federations to be accredited where the majority trust or federation is being established as a result of a formal school improvement intervention.

**2.15** Accreditation does not apply retrospectively to organisations which have already established a majority federation with another school or are the lead partner in a majority trust.

## 3. What is the process for becoming accredited?

- 3.1** Organisations that wish to be accredited either as an ASP or as an ASG should submit a proposal to DCSF demonstrating that the organisation has the relevant expertise, track record and capacity to support improvement in underperforming primary schools, including those in very challenging circumstances, and is able to make the long-term commitment this requires.
- 3.2** DCSF will assess applications for accreditation against the published criteria, and if necessary further information or clarification will be sought. Applications will then be put to the Secretary of State for a final decision. Proposals for ASGs will also be reviewed by an Advisory Group prior to a recommendation being put to the Secretary of State.
- 3.3** If a proposal is unsuccessful, written feedback on the assessment will be given by the person who has assessed it, which will be reviewed by the Advisory Group. If the organisation considers the assessment, or result of it, to be unfair, they may submit their concerns in writing to DCSF.
- 3.4** Application rounds will be held on a termly basis. However, if an organisation which is not accredited wishes to lead a majority trust or federation, it may be possible to seek accreditation outside the termly application rounds, through consultation with DCSF.
- 3.5** We expect that LAs will ask schools with the expertise and capacity to lead formal partnerships in their borough with schools which are underperforming, as part of their response to the World Class Primary Programme.

### How do I submit a proposal and where can I find out further information?

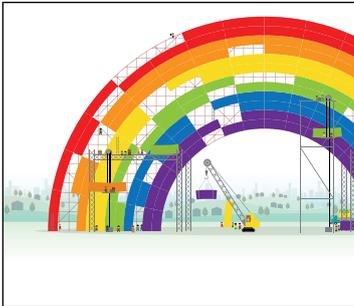
- 3.6** Organisations seeking accreditation should demonstrate their evidence against the criteria in a proposal. These do not need to be extensive, and should contain only relevant information requested.
- 3.7** A proposal template is available to download from the DCSF website. The criteria for accreditation, and guidance on how this can be demonstrated in the proposal template, is also available to download.
- 3.8** DCSF personnel are available to discuss the accreditation process with interested organisations. Please email [accreditation.SYSTEM@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:accreditation.SYSTEM@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk).











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