



Department
for Education

Free schools: Location in areas with need for additional places

September 2014

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School Capacity data in England

Most free schools and free school places are in areas where there is a need for more school places. Information on school places in primary and secondary schools in England and forecasts of pupil numbers in planning areas¹ is collected and published annually by the Department for Education. Data from the 2012/13 academic year was published in December 2013. Visit [GOV.UK to access the data](#).

Wave 7 free schools

Of the 25 Wave 7 mainstream² free schools which have been approved, our analysis shows that 18 (72%) are located in, or are adjacent to, planning areas where there will be a need for additional school places (termed “basic need”) by 2017/18.

Basic need source data

The Department’s basic need data comes from the annual school capacity survey (SCAP) which includes:

- a. information on current school capacity in the May of the year it is collected (we have used data from May 2013 to assess Wave 7 applications);
- b. additional planned capacity due to be added up to 2015/16; and
- c. pupil number forecasts to 2017/18 for primary and to 2019/20 for secondary aged pupils.

Data on capacity in May 2013, capacity to be added by 2015/16 and forecasts to 2015/16 were published in the primary basic need scorecards in April 2014. Visit [GOV.UK to access the primary basic need scorecards](#).

The scorecards set out, for each local authority, the expected number of places needed in 2015/16 – i.e. the difference between the total number of places expected to be available and the projected number of pupils in 2015/16 (see the technical notes in the scorecard for further information).

Assessing the need for additional school places in the free schools context

We use the same dataset as that on which the published scorecards are based (SCAP 2013). The scorecards are reported at Local Authority level by aggregating up from planning areas. In the free schools context, we focus on the need only in planning areas

¹ Planning areas are sets of schools that local authorities have grouped together for the purpose of planning pupil places in their authority.

² We do not report on the basic need data for special, alternative provision and 16-19 free schools.

local to the free school (i.e. the planning area in which the school is located, or to which it is immediately adjacent).

Although most of the Wave 7 approved free schools will open before 2017/18, we use forecasts of pupil numbers for 2017/18 in order to take a longer-term view and recognise that areas which are not in need currently may be so by 2017/18. This is because these schools are likely to start experiencing pressure on pupil places by 2015/16 (as the number of pupils gets closer to the supply of school places and surplus places disappear).

Change to the previous method for assessing need

For free school application waves prior to the sixth round, we have calculated the need for additional schools places at local authority district (LAD) level using the 2011/12 School Capacity data collection. Data for the 2011/12 academic year was published in March 2013. Visit the [GOV.UK website to access this data](#).

We moved to using planning areas from Wave 6 to assess the need for additional school places because this data is more granular and ensures we are focused on the area from which a free school is most likely to draw its pupils, rather than a larger LAD. Prior to the 2012/13 School Capacity data collection, we did not have robust data at planning area available with which to assess free school applications.

Seven in ten of the already open free schools have been opened in areas where there was a need for additional school places. This includes those which opened in September 2014.

For those approved in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh rounds of applications which are to open in the future, eight in ten have been assessed at application stage to be located in areas where there is a need for additional school places.

Taking all free schools which have been approved to date (September 2014), 75% have either opened in areas where there was a need for additional school places or plan to open in areas where there is a projected need for additional school places³.

Future publications

The basic need scorecards at primary school level will be updated annually. The basic need scorecard was only published at primary school level based on SCAP 2013 because there were very few LAs with plans to deliver additional secondary places by 2015/16. DfE will keep this under review, with a view to publishing the scorecard at secondary level in future.

³ For those free schools which are not yet open, we have assessed the need at the time the application was submitted to the Department using the most up to date capacity data available.

Related publications

When the successful Wave 6 applications were announced in June 2014, the Department published a similar note setting out how the need for the [Wave 6 free schools was assessed](#).



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