



Department
for Education

Mainstream free school applications: assessment of need and deprivation

Wave 12 update

April 2017

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How need is assessed during application rounds

When assessing mainstream free school applications, the department considers whether there is either a projected need for additional school places (i.e. basic need) and/or a need for additional high quality school places in the local area. This formal process for assessing the need for a free school was introduced in 2013 for the fifth wave of free school applications¹. The department also considers other criteria when approving applications, for example whether the school will add to local choice and diversity, and the full criteria used for each wave were published on gov.uk.

A large majority of the free school applications approved in waves 5-12 were in areas with basic need for more school places.

When assessing both the basic need for places in the local area and the standards of local schools, we define local schools as those that fall within the 'straight-line' distance of the proposed free school location within which at least 80%² of the pupils in the area travel to school (at the relevant phase, primary or secondary). This is intended to act as a proxy catchment area for the new free school. The local area is then defined as the planning areas in which these local schools are situated. Planning areas are set by local authorities based on groups of schools that reflect local geography, reasonable travel distances and patterns of supply and demand. Some planning areas, particularly for secondary schools, are local authority wide.

The rest of this document explains the assessment of need for mainstream free schools (excluding 16-19 free schools, where the need criteria are different)³.

Basic need source data

The Department's basic need data come from the annual school capacity survey (or SCAP) which includes:

- a. information on current school capacity in the May of the year it is collected (we used data from May 2016 to assess wave 12 applications);
- b. additional planned capacity due to be added over the next three years (which for the SCAP 2016 data means up to academic year 2018/19); and

¹ Prior to the fifth wave, basic need for places and the standards of local schools were taken into account as contextual factors but were not a part of the assessment criteria.

² We considered several alternatives to the 80% distance to construct our proxy catchment area including the median. We decided on the 80% distance to account for the limitations of the 'straight-line' distance which may not reflect the actual travel distance and to capture the travel patterns of the vast majority of pupils within the area.

³ University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools have been assessed separately from other free schools so are not included in the figures provided with the exception of waves 11 and 12 where Studio School applications were assessed alongside free schools.

- c. pupil number forecasts for primary and secondary aged pupils (for SCAP 2016 data this means to academic year 2020/21 and 2022/23 respectively).

SCAP data from May 2016 were published in April 2017. Visit [GOV.UK to access the data](#).

In order to ensure the assessment of need is as up to date as possible, free school assessors within the Department also contact local authorities directly in some cases to obtain their latest information on future need for places. This intelligence is then used to inform our assessment of the need for additional school places. In addition, where the free school proposer cites that the need is part of a section 106 agreement related to a local housing development project⁴, the Department will contact the LA to confirm this development. (This additional information is shown in Table 2 of Annex A for waves 8-12, which are the ones for which we have sufficiently reliable local intelligence.)

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

For Wave 12 we have used the SCAP data from May 2016 to assess basic need. We focused on the need in the planning areas local to the free school.

For free school application waves prior to the sixth round, the need for additional school places was calculated at local authority district (LAD) level. We moved to using planning areas from Wave 6 because these data are more granular and this helps to ensure that 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 level available with which to assess free school applications.

Although most of the Wave 12 approved free schools will open before 2020/21, we used forecasts of pupil numbers for 2020/21 in order to take a longer-term view and recognise that areas which are not currently in need of additional places may be so by 2020/21.

This is also consistent with the methodology for latest basic need capital allocations (announced in [April 2017](#)) which are based on the projected need for places by 2020/21.

Location of free schools in areas of basic need

All the following findings are based on the projected need at the time the application was approved and use the most up to date capacity data available at that point. For Wave 12,

⁴ A section 106 agreement falls under the [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)

we used data from May 2016 looking at projections to 2020/21 for both primary schools and secondary schools (though for secondary schools the projections actually extend to 2022/23⁵).

76% of the 267⁶ mainstream free schools opened up to April 2017 have been opened in areas where there was a need for additional school places. This includes four new schools opened in September 2016 that were established under the free school presumption⁷.

Taking all 293 mainstream free schools which were approved in waves 5-12 (when basic need for places had become part of the assessment criteria), 86% are located in areas where there was a need for additional school places^{8 9}. At the time of approval, these schools were set to create over 200,000 additional places¹⁰. A breakdown of the need for places for each of these application waves is given in Table 1 in Annex A.

Deprivation source data

The Department uses the '[English indices of deprivation](#)' to determine the relative deprivation level of a free school location. These statistics on relative deprivation are produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the most recent data were published in 2015.

The English indices of deprivation measure the relative deprivation in small areas in England called lower-layer super output areas (Isoa), of which there are 32,844. Each Isoa is given a rank from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area).

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

5 Longer projections are possible for secondary schools as they are based on children already in the school system.

6 Published lists show 268 mainstream free schools. This includes one free school that was approved as a UTC.

7 Where local authorities have identified the need for a new school, the presumption arrangements require them to seek proposals to establish a free school. As such, all schools established under the free school presumption are considered to be in areas of basic need.

8 All through schools were considered to be in areas of basic need if there was a need for additional primary school places in the area.

9 One studio school was approved in Wave 11; in previous waves studio schools were assessed separately and so are not included in the figures.

10 Note that some schools which are approved may be withdrawn or cancelled before opening and the proposed capacity of schools may change between the point of approval and the point of opening. The estimate of additional places includes expected capacity in sixth forms at the time of approval.

Assessing deprivation in the free schools context

For each open free school (including mainstream, 16-19, special and alternative provision, but excluding University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools) we identify the Isoa in which the site is situated, as reported in [edubase](#). The published indices of deprivation tables are then used to identify the deprivation decile of the free school's Isoa.

In the free schools context we report on how many are located in the most deprived 30% of Isoas.

48% of the 344 free schools open in April 2017¹¹ are located in the most deprived 30% of areas in England¹².

Future publications

The Department publishes basic need data each year from the annual school capacity survey (SCAP).

This note will be updated upon approval of free schools from subsequent waves of applications and in September when the next set of free schools open. We expect to provide the next update in September 2017.

Related publications

Similar explanatory notes have been published alongside announcements of successful applicants from Waves 6 to 8 and Wave 11. The key findings from these notes have been incorporated into the annex of this note.

¹¹ This includes four new schools opened in September 2016 which were established under the free school presumption.

¹² For the purposes of this report, the Isoa used is that in which the school was situated in September 2016. For schools in temporary accommodation, the Isoa may change on moving to the permanent site.

Annex A: Summary statistics

Table 1: Basic need for approved mainstream free school applications (excluding 16-19) by wave^{13 14}

	Number of approved applicants	Percentage of applicants in basic need area	Data source
Wave 5	9	100%	SCAP 2012
Wave 6	30	83%	SCAP 2013
Wave 7	25	72%	SCAP 2013
Wave 8	39	90%	SCAP 2014
Wave 9	11	73%	SCAP 2014
Wave 10	17	94%	SCAP 2015
Wave 11 ¹⁵	83	81%	SCAP 2015
Wave 12	79	94%	SCAP 2016
Waves 5-12	293	86%	SCAP 2012-16

13 As explained on page 4, for wave 5 applicants the basic need area was the LAD. From wave 6 onwards this refers to the local area (which covers the planning areas in which local schools are situated).

14 13 of the 293 schools approved over waves 5-12 have since been cancelled or withdrawn. These figures relate to the time of approval only, not to schools subsequently opened.

15 One studio school was approved in Wave 11; in previous waves studio schools were assessed separately and so are not included in the figures.

Table 2: Basis of need for approved mainstream free school applications (excluding 16-19) in waves 8-12

	Basis of need	Number of approved applicants	Percentage of approved applicants
Wave 8	Basic need	35	90%
	Local Authority intelligence (on the need for places)	2	5%
	Standards of local schools	2	5%
Wave 9	Basic need	8	73%
	Local Authority intelligence (on the need for places)	1	9%
	Standards of local schools	2	18%
Wave 10	Basic need	16	94%
	Local Authority intelligence (on the need for places)	0	0%
	Standards of local schools	1	6%
Wave 11	Basic need	67	81%
	Local Authority intelligence (on the need for places)	9	11%
	Standards of local schools	2	2%
Wave 12	Basic need	74	94%
	Local Authority intelligence (on the need for places)	2	3%
	Standards of local schools	3	4%



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