

Section	Disclosures about Schools
Question	Free schools pre-opening funding
Date received	

Request

The Department has been asked about expenditure on the Michaela Community School free school project prior to the February 2012 decision to defer opening.

Release

Date of response:	02 August 2013
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Release

The Michaela Community School free school trust announced its decision to defer opening of the school on 24 February 2012. Prior to this decision, the school was aiming to open in South London. The Department for Education's expenditure on the Michaela Community School project up to that point was £168,339.64. Michaela Community School is now on course to open in Brent in September 2014. Expenditure up to February 2012 includes much work that has on-going utility to the project. This includes the development of marketing and consultation materials which could be used as the basis for their current marketing and consultation in Brent as well as educational and staffing plans, governance arrangements, policies and procedures and other material which can be used by the school when it opens in Brent. It would be therefore be unreasonable to say that this money had been wasted.

The Department provides pre-opening funding to cover costs in the run up to opening a free school. Pre-opening funding is not just provided for free schools, it is imperative for the success of any new state school. The funding is designed to cover everything that a school will need to buy up to the point at which the school opens. The Department expects all expenditure to be essential to the project and be based on what represents the best value for money for the school. This funding can be used for the cost of any project management support for education services and for other costs.

In determining the amount of pre-opening funding free schools received, we seek to achieve best value for money and to reduce the overall costs of setting up a new school. This is why free schools that entered pre-opening in 2012 and beyond receive a set amount and then decide how best to use the funds to deliver their project. The set level of pre-opening funding for new projects varies according to the phase and nature of the school.

New local authority maintained schools and new sponsored academies have historically received similar funding as it is recognised that it is important to recruit to key posts, such as the principal designate, in advance of the school

opening to ensure its gets off to the best possible start. All new schools – not just free schools – receive pre-opening funding. For example the funding provided to free schools is similar to that provided to new opening sponsored academies and less than that provided to sponsored academies between 2007 and 2009, Ashcroft Technology Academy, Wandsworth received £501,912, The Bridge Academy, Hackney received £544,686, Darwen Aldridge Community Academy, Blackburn with Darwen received £562,783 and The St Lawrence Academy, North Lincolnshire received £576,969. For new maintained schools separate funding figures are not available but these will often be planned over a longer period and the school would have direct support from council officers in relation to issues such as pupil recruitment, project management and staff recruitment and the local authority would cover the costs of employing a head teacher in the run up to the opening of the school.

The Department publishes information about the full cost of every Free School project shortly after the school opens. In this case, the total cost provided after the school opens will include the expenditure set out above.