



13 July 2012

As the Director of the Free Schools Group, I am absolutely delighted to be able to tell you that your applications to establish the Olive School, Blackburn, and the Olive School, Hackney, have been successful, and that the Secretary of State has decided they should proceed to the next stage of the Free Schools process. This is a significant step on the journey to opening these schools, and reflects the confidence we have in your vision. I am very happy to be delivering this news in the same week that the Funding Agreement for your first Free School, Tauheedul Islam Boys High School, has been signed. These are really significant achievements and I congratulate you for them both.

I am afraid, however, that we will not be taking your other four applications further on this occasion. You explained in your applications and at interview how you would work to successfully open all six schools concurrently. However, our experience in the Academies programme indicates that such rapid expansion brings a serious risk of groups becoming overstretched, especially where groups are not already running a chain of schools. Ministers have therefore decided that Free School chains should expand at a steady pace. We therefore ranked your applications, taking into account their respective qualities and a range of contextual factors set out in the 'How to apply' guide, including overall costs and the need for more school places in each area. This is the approach we have taken for all groups seeking to establish new chains in this round.

I appreciate that this letter will cause both celebration and disappointment. I would like to thank you for the great commitment and energy which you and your entire group have shown in developing your applications and at interview. We will appoint a contact for you from within the Department; they will soon be writing to you to confirm what happens next and to outline any conditions that may be linked to the progression of your projects. Please do not take any formal steps until you hear from them.

I will be informing Blackburn and Hackney local authorities about your success and Ministers will inform the relevant MPs.

You should already have the Pre-opening Launch Event for Free Schools opening in 2013 (on 20 and 21 July in the BIS Conference Centre, 1 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0ET) in your diaries - I know that the New Schools Network asked you to save the date. I very much look forward to meeting you again at that event - registration starts at 9.30!

Best Wishes

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mela Watts', with a stylized flourish at the end.

MELA WATTS CBE
Director
Free Schools Group