



Policy statement – planning for schools development

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles) and the Secretary of State for Education (Mr Michael Gove) wish to set out the Government's commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system. This statement supersedes the Statement of 26 July 2010.

The Government is firmly committed to ensuring there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand for state-funded school places, increasing choice and opportunity in state-funded education and raising educational standards. State-funded schools - which include Academies and free schools, as well as local authority maintained schools (community, foundation and voluntary aided and controlled schools) - educate the vast majority of children in England. The Government wants to enable new schools to open, good schools to expand and all schools to adapt and improve their facilities. This will allow for more provision and greater diversity in the state-funded school sector to meet both demographic needs and the drive for increased choice and higher standards. For instance, creating free schools remains one of the Government's flagship policies, enabling parents, teachers, charities and faith organisations to use their new freedoms to establish state-funded schools and make a real difference in their communities. By increasing both the number of school places and the choice of state-funded schools, we can raise educational standards and so transform children's lives by helping them to reach their full potential.

It is the Government's view that the creation and development of state-funded schools is strongly in the national interest and that planning decision-makers can and should support that objective, in a manner consistent with their statutory obligations. We expect all parties to work together proactively from an early stage to help plan for state-school development and to shape strong planning applications. This collaborative working would help to ensure that the answer to proposals for the development of state-funded schools should be, wherever possible, "yes".

The Government believes that the planning system should operate in a positive manner when dealing with proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of state-funded schools, and that the following principles should apply with immediate effect:

- **There should be a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework.**
- **Local authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling the development of state-funded schools in their**

planning decisions. The Secretary of State will attach significant weight to the need to establish and develop state-funded schools when determining applications and appeals that come before him for decision.

- **Local authorities should make full use of their planning powers to support state-funded schools applications.** This should include engaging in pre-application discussions with promoters to foster a collaborative approach to applications and, where necessary, the use of planning obligations to help to mitigate adverse impacts and help deliver development that has a positive impact on the community.
- **Local authorities should only impose conditions that clearly and demonstrably meet the tests set out in Circular 11/95.** Planning conditions should only be those absolutely necessary to making the development acceptable in planning terms.
- **Local authorities should ensure that the process for submitting and determining state-funded schools' applications is as streamlined as possible,** and in particular be proportionate in the information sought from applicants. For instance, in the case of free schools, authorities may choose to use the information already contained in the free school provider's application to the Department for Education to help limit additional information requirements.
- **A refusal of any application for a state-funded school, or the imposition of conditions, will have to be clearly justified by the local planning authority.** Given the strong policy support for improving state education, the Secretary of State will be minded to consider such a refusal or imposition of conditions to be unreasonable conduct, unless it is supported by clear and cogent evidence.
- **Appeals against any refusals of planning permission for state-funded schools should be treated as a priority.** Where permission is refused and an appeal made, the Secretary of State will prioritise the resolution of such appeals as a matter of urgency in line with the priority the Government places on state education.
- **Where a local planning authority refuses planning permission for a state-funded school, the Secretary of State will consider carefully whether to recover for his own determination appeals against the refusal of planning permission.**

This statement applies to both change of use development and operational development necessary to the operational needs of the school.

The Government is today publishing a summary of the responses to its consultation, *Planning for Schools Development*, and will continue to explore whether there is further scope and need for the planning system to do more to support state-funded schools, and in particular, free schools in the future.