



partnerships for schools

This case study looks at how Partnerships for Schools' [Free School Kit](#) website helped a teacher-led group to complete their application to set up a new Free School in London.

School information

Type of group: Teacher-led

School type: Mainstream, all-through (ages 4 to 18)

School name: Newham School 21

Identified location: Stratford, London Borough of Newham

Education vision: To provide the skills, attributes and leadership qualities to ensure that its students go to top universities and have successful careers.

A teacher-led group's use of the Free School Kit

Background

Ed Fidoe, an Education Consultant, has been working with Peter Hyman, former strategist and speech writer for Tony Blair, with the aim of setting up a Free School in London in September 2012. The group has been planning the school since last summer [2010] shortly after the Free School policy was announced - a policy which allows teachers, charities, parents and education experts to open schools in response to demand within a local area. The group submitted their application on 1 June 2011, the deadline for Mainstream Free School applications for September 2012 opening.

Partnerships for Schools (PFS) launched the Free School Kit website in February 2011, an online tool which allows anyone proposing to open a new Free School to explore the geographical area where they propose setting up a new school, helping them to understand more about the existing educational landscape.

The Free School Kit makes available for the first time a unique set of information – including pupil attainment, the percentage of pupils eligible for

Free School Meals, Ofsted ratings, and information about surplus places – for every school in England, as well as initial indicative data on possible sites that could house new Free Schools.

The application process

Ed explained that his group found that there was a great deal to consider when applying to set up a Free School, including evidence of parental demand, location and premises for a school, educational vision, a budget and more.

He said: "What's been helpful is having the help from PFS, particularly when narrowing down to a specific location and site. As we are a teacher-led group we didn't have an exact location in mind, we knew that we wanted our school to be located somewhere in London that had a need for a new school.

"In terms of the time we had to complete the full application to set up a school, time was tight for us, without the help of the Free School Kit we would have had to do all the work of finding a site and making a case for that location ourselves by hand, which would have been a laborious process."

Use of the Free School Kit

Narrowing down to a location wasn't easy to do to begin with, Ed explains. He said: "Before the Free School Kit existed, groups wanting to set up Free Schools would have to source this information through each individual local authority, our group was about to start this task which would have been really involved and taken a lot of time."

"Early on in our search for a location PfS introduced me to the Free School Kit. This online tool enables you to see quickly where there is a need for a new school at a micro-level, if there is a deficit or surplus of places, the demographics of each school, where pupils are getting their first choice school and where they aren't, and much more. So you can see at a glance how good the schools are in each area you're looking at. The tool really helped us to find the right location for our school quickly."

The identified location

Once the group had the knowledge of individual areas across London, provided by the Free School Kit, the group settled on Stratford within the London Borough of Newham as the location for their Free School.

Given the new school's target pupil age (4 to 18) and scale (1,200 pupils at full capacity), Stratford has the right combination of basic need and parental demand together with supportive local stakeholders and potential sites large enough to accommodate the project.

The quality of Free School applications

Ed explains that an extremely important part of the application process is making the case for a new school. He said: "If there is no case for a new school then it's going to be very difficult for groups to get the evidence together to make an application."

"This is exactly what the Free School Kit is helping groups to do. The tool shows where there is a geographical gap, as you can physically see where each school is and therefore groups can prove that there aren't schools serving a particular area; it shows where there is a poor quality of schools in a certain area; or groups can see where pupils are leaving and entering different areas."

"All of this information is readily available as part of the tool and this is pivotal when putting together a logical case for a school, which groups need to provide as part of their applications."

The next steps for the Free School Kit

The second phase of the Free School Kit, which currently under development by PfS, will also incorporate more up-to-date information about government vacant properties and surplus land to help Free School groups find a site for their new school.

Ed explains that groups will find it significantly easier to find a site for a new school when they are able to click on a specific location and then search the available sites. He said: "It would have been a dream to view all the available sites in our area, with pricing and contact details."

"Even without this functionality, it feels as though this is a bespoke tool for me and my group. I feel that what we are doing is quite new and unusual, considering this it's fantastic to have a tool which meets our needs so specifically. It's amazing how quickly the tool was ready to use. It really will make a huge difference to the pace that groups can move forward."

Further information

To try out the Free School Kit, go to <http://fsk.partnershipforschools.org.uk>

The deadline for Mainstream and 16-19 Free School applications was 5pm on 1 June 2011. The deadline for Special and Alternative Provision Free School applications is 16 June 2011.

Further information regarding Free Schools is available from the Department for Education website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/freeschools>