

# First phase of school transformation launched

Tens of thousands of pupils are set to benefit from new, modern, energy efficient school buildings as 50 schools are confirmed for the first wave of the Prime Minister's ten-year rebuilding programme, to level up opportunities for all.

Transforming education for thousands of pupils, the first 50 projects announced today are supported by £1 billion in funding and mark the start of the School Rebuilding Programme, which is due to deliver 500 rebuilding projects over the next decade. The schools include primary, secondary and specials as well as a sixth form college in West Yorkshire, with more than 70 per cent of the schools in the North and Midlands. The initial rebuilds and refurbishments will create modern education environments, providing new facilities from classrooms and science labs, to sports halls and dining rooms. The schools will also be greener, helping meet the Government's net zero target.

Over 15,500 children will also benefit from 21 new free schools, the government has confirmed today, with ten opening in some of the most deprived areas. Three are in Opportunity Areas, where the Department works to remove barriers that could stop young people from achieving their potential.

More than £10 million will also be invested to support school sports and swimming facilities in England, and will be distributed through Sport England. This targeted investment to selected schools will build on existing funding to help schools open their facilities outside of school hours, and encourage pupils to be more physically active.

Today's announcement for a revamp of schools across the country comes as the department continues to plan to welcome students and teachers back to face to face education as soon as possible. Testing and strong safety measures will be in place as before, to make sure that schools remain as safe as possible despite the challenges brought by the new variant. This first phase of the school rebuilding programme, the commitment to 21 new free schools and extra support for physical activity, provides a boost for us all to build back better, concentrating on levelling up opportunities for all.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today we are launching the first phase of our ambitious new schools programme, with 50 rebuilds and 21 new free schools.

The rebuilding projects are just the start of our major ten-year programme, transforming hundreds of schools and improving the education of tens of thousands of children. Alongside this, over 15,500 children will now benefit from 21 new free schools across

the country as we look to build back better after the pandemic.

I am determined to get all children back into education as soon as possible, and will make sure we do not let the pandemic stand in the way of giving every young person the opportunity to succeed, progress and fulfil their potential.

Unity Howard Director of New Schools Network said:

This is fantastic news for communities across the country. Free schools have an incredible track record of driving up standards, and we have seen over the past decade just how popular free schools are with parents.

The groups planning these new free schools should be proud today; the free school application process is demanding, and this year they have dealt with additional uncertainties owing to the pandemic. I wish them the very best of luck as they begin working towards welcoming children through the doors of their new schools in the years to come.

The 21 new free schools announced today reflects the Government's continued commitment to the free school programme. 558 free schools have already opened across the country to date.

Project planning for the 50 rebuilds is already advanced on a number of schools following site visits last year, so construction can begin on the first projects from autumn 2021. The programme will help create jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities across England, with suppliers offering training and apprenticeships as part of their work on the rebuilds. The majority of the first 50 rebuild projects under the programme are expected to be completed within three to five years.

Alison Rigby, Headteacher of St John Fisher Catholic High School, Wigan said:

We cannot express our sheer delight that our young people will have access to modern, state-of-the-art facilities in the future. We all know buildings don't educate children, people do, but the environment in which children learn and are encouraged to grow is vital in producing decent human beings.

It is great that our school has been identified for this investment – we have a unique sporting heritage – we have produced international Rugby league, Rugby Union and Netball players and athletes – despite our modest sporting facilities!

This new build project will boost our curriculum offer and provide

fantastic facilities in which our learning community will continue to flourish, and, most importantly, build confidence in our young people because they will feel valued and invested in and – ultimately, loved.

The investment of over £1 billion to support the first round of the School Rebuilding Programme comes on top of the Government's commitment to allocate £1.8 billion for school repair and upgrade projects over this coming year. It represents a sustained investment in our schools, creating classrooms and environments that support the country's world-leading teachers to deliver the best possible education.

Further details about the School Rebuilding programme will be set out later in 2021, including how evidence about schools' condition needs can be provided to support prioritisation for future rounds of the programme.

Projects will range from replacing or refurbishing individual buildings through to whole school rebuilds. The department also plans to consult this year to gather views on how schools are prioritised for future rounds of the long-term programme. The sports facilities funding will be distributed through Sport England and their county level networks, Active Partnerships, who will work with local schools to identify who are most in need. Schools in disadvantaged areas, or areas with high inactivity among children, will also be given the opportunity to bid for funding. The investment can also support schools with opening in a Covid-secure manner, such as with additional signage, touch-free entry and cleaning equipment.

The funding can also support facilities to improve accessibility, especially for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This could include buying adaptive sports equipment, like sensory balls for the visually impaired or wheelchair-accessible equipment.

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