

## Supplementary written evidence submitted by the New Schools Network

The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon MP  
Chair, Education Select Committee

**Sent via email**

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020

Dear Robert,

Many thanks for inviting me to share the concerns of free school leaders with the Committee last week. I know that they are grateful the Committee recognises the additional challenges their unique circumstances pose at this time.

I have also enclosed some additional information on special free schools, and BAME staff and students in free schools. I would be grateful if you could share this with the Committee.

I hope the information provided is useful, but please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance. I can be contacted via [director@newschoolsnetwork.org](mailto:director@newschoolsnetwork.org)

Many thanks again for inviting me to attend the Committee's session.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Unity Howard', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Unity Howard  
*Director*

# Free school statistics

## Special free schools

During the Committee's session, Unity Howard was asked if New Schools Network (NSN) knows how many special free schools have been open throughout the pandemic.

NSN does not have data on how many of the 43 existing free schools have been open. However, of those special free schools that NSN has spoken to, 17 confirmed that they have been open throughout the pandemic (alongside provision for remote learning).

Attendance has varied substantially between different specialisms and locations, and has fluctuated throughout the pandemic: one free school has had only three pupils attend during school closure, while another has had over 70.

## BAME communities and free schools

Free school leaders have told New Schools Network (NSN) they would benefit from the Department for Education issuing guidance and risk assessments that take into account the additional risk to BAME staff. Some free school leaders have told NSN that BAME families have told them they are "very fearful" about returning to school, and that this is having an impact on the proportion of BAME students returning to school.

Free schools have a higher number of BAME students compared to all state funded schools, as shown in the table below:

|           | Free schools | All state funded |
|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| Primary   | 54%          | 26%              |
| Secondary | 48%          | 25%              |

Free schools are also more likely to be in the most ethnically diverse areas: 113 free schools are located in the 20 most ethnically diverse local authorities, compared to 35 in the 20 least ethnically diverse local authorities.