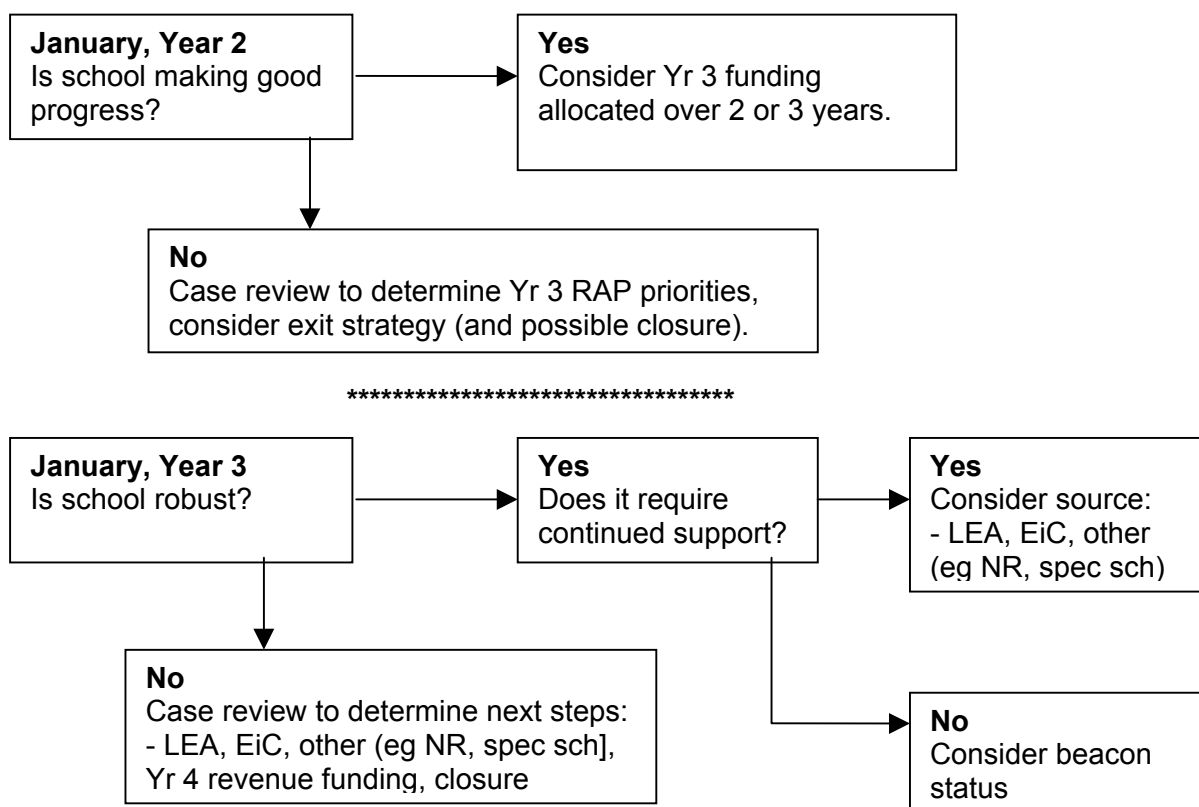


FRESH START SCHOOLS: PROPOSALS FOR EXIT STRATEGIES

1. The Fresh Start programme is designed to support schools during their first three years whilst they are most vulnerable. Different schools move forward at different rates. Some will emerge from the programme in robust health, find it easy to survive with little additional support and be in a position to participate in new initiatives. Others will have greater problems, requiring a lengthened support programme. Some might not have made sufficient progress and have to close.
2. As each school has different needs and faces different circumstances, they will adopt a range of exit strategies. Some of the stronger schools may seek to become Beacon, Specialist or Training schools. Others, with further to go, might seek inclusion in Excellence Clusters, or seek to spread their final year's Fresh Start funding across two or three years to manage the reduction in income more effectively – especially with regard to staffing issues.
3. Some communities attract additional grant aid – Neighbourhood Renewal, European Social Fund etc – and schools may wish to use these funding streams to continue initiatives begun under the Fresh Start programme – or indeed start new ones. It may also be possible to extend existing schemes, eg widening the scope of the beacon schools initiative to include supporting other low performing schools in raising standards, or introducing a “*working towards specialist school*” category. Schools in EiC areas may be supported through the allocation of partnership funding.

Timetable towards agreeing an exit strategy

4. The following flow chart outlines the proposed process for Years 2/3 of the programme in order to identify the most appropriate exit strategy for a school:



5. Whichever exit strategy is agreed, in each case the decision must be based on clear criteria, involve governors, the LEA and DfES, and be based on evidence from OFSTED. Therefore, at the end of Year 2, there will be a review of progress to determine future strategy. Final decisions on funding will be taken by DfES.

6. For most schools, the Year 3 RAP will be the exit strategy plan. It would be formulated within a general review of the School Development Plan and involve a range of issues, such as revisiting and developing the vision, assessing resource availability, succession planning to maintain staff stability etc.

7. The four key questions to be asked in formulating the exit strategy are thus: what has been achieved so far; what still needs to be done; is it realistic; and how are we going to get there?

New Fresh Start Schools

8. For new FS schools, we suggest that:

- the LEA handling plan should include a preferred exit strategy at the outset;
- there should be a presumption that establishing the school and securing basic improvements in teaching and learning etc should take priority over other issues such as considering specialist school status;
- RAPs should be accompanied by an LEA commentary, including a section on the exit strategy.

Specialist Schools

9. Specialist school applications are assessed against the following criteria:

- the acceptability of suitable sponsorship to the value of £50,000;
- the quality of the school and community development plan included in the application, and the extent to which it demonstrates how the school plans to:
 - raise and maintain standards of achievement in the chosen specialism;
 - specify measurable objectives to which are attached dated and quantifiable targets in relation to provision, take-up and outputs;
 - improve the quality of teaching and learning in the specialist subjects;
 - broaden post-16 take up of specialist subjects, including expanding vocational opportunities;
 - demonstrate a shared commitment of staff at the school and their partners in drawing up the school and community development plans;
 - involve sponsors in its future development, including through links with the governing body; and
 - work with at least five non-specialist schools, at least one of which should be a secondary school and specific groups in the wider

community to share resources and facilities leading to quality and measurable learning outcomes based on identified need;

- visits to applicant schools which are short-listed on the basis of the initial assessment of their school and community develop plan; and
- the location of the applicant school, including some preference to schools in areas of social deprivation as measured by pupils' known eligibility for free school meals.

10. Other available information, including OfSTED inspection reports and published performance data, is also taken into account. Specialist schools are expected to demonstrate improved standards and it is unlikely that a school whose examination results are on a declining trend will be successful in its application unless there are good reasons to explain the trend and the application of part of a convincing strategy for improvement (eg as part of an EAZ improvement strategy).

11. Revised guidance on the criteria for specialist school applications will be published around the end of May 2002 and any school seriously interested should consult the new edition for any relevant changes.

Beacon Schools

12. The starting point for suitable criteria for identifying schools for Beacon status is the need to identify high performing schools, providing a good quality of education and delivering high standards for all their pupils. School inspection evidence has a key role in the identification of high-performing schools. However, a number of additional factors are taken into account, including geographical location, the social background of schools and school improvement to ensure a truly representative network of schools around the country and to help direct the focus of the initiative where it is needed most.

13. There are currently three routes for identifying eligible schools:

- a. appearance in the most recent HMCI annual report (ie 2000/2001) as a particularly successful school;
- b. past and present school performance in relation to school circumstances; and
- c. LEA nominations.

School performance data in relation to school circumstances

14. We identify GCSE/GNVQ results for secondary schools and KS 1/2 results for primary schools as the most reliable measures of performance, and consider Free School Meals (FSM) as the best available indicator of school circumstances. Further details about specific performance criteria for each phase of school can be found at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/beaconschools.

Corroboration of suitability for Beacon status

15. With the assistance of OFSTED, we use available school inspection evidence to confirm the short-listed schools' suitability for Beacon status in terms of overall high performance and delivery of consistently high standards of teaching.

The short-list of schools eligible to apply

16. Following examination of school performance data and the annual OFSTED reports, the Department produces a list of schools meeting these criteria. The Department then applies criteria regarding geographical location and type of school so as to avoid creating imbalances in the network (eg an excess of Beacon schools in individual LEAs/regions) to produce a short-list of schools eligible to be invited to become Beacons. The resulting short-list is sent to LEAs for their comments on the schools identified and to seek nominations for schools to supplement that short-list. All schools nominated by LEAs are checked against OFSTED inspection data and performance data to ensure that they are suitable for Beacon status.

Fresh Start Schools

17. Unless a school appears in the HMCI annual report or is able to satisfy the performance criteria, a Fresh Start school that is interested in pursuing Beacon status should, having taken account of the criteria mentioned above, contact its LEA to register their interest for the future.