

Education Secretary Michael Gove outlines 'formidable' school reforms

PA

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Education Secretary Michael Gove today outlined what he described as "a formidable reform programme" for schooling.

Mr Gove, who announced the first 16 free schools which he hopes will open in a year's time, promised greater decision-making powers for the best performing schools and simplified Ofsted inspections.

He also fleshed out his idea for a British version of the international baccalaureate which will award a school leavers' certificate to pupils with good GCSE grades in English, maths, science, a modern or ancient language and a humanities subject.

He said the GCSE qualification was still a "resilient" qualification and the scheme would take the best from both systems.

Mr Gove said he was "deeply concerned" about falling numbers taking languages and wanted to make sure Britain could compete with successful Asian markets in scientific fields.

Mr Gove said education had been going backwards, adding: "As a nation instead of comparing ourselves with the past we should be comparing ourselves with the best."

Speaking at Westminster Academy, west London, to an audience largely from teaching organisation Teach First and other educational establishments, Mr Gove said teachers should be allowed to start their own schools, as solicitors or GPs could start their own practice.

"If you were a teacher and you wanted to start up a new school, until this government came to power it was impossible," he said.

Teachers could now start a school "free of the stifling bureaucracy that has irritated them in the past", he said.

In a written ministerial statement today, Mr Gove said 16 proposals for free schools, some from teachers, had been chosen to progress to the next stage of the process where they would be asked to develop a full business case and plan.

"All of these proposals have been driven by demand from local people for improved choice for their young people and I am delighted that so many promising proposals have come forward at such an early stage."

The 16 schemes announced today are: Bedford and Kempston Free School, Bedford Borough; The Childcare Company, Slough; Discovery New School, West Sussex; The Free School Norwich, Norfolk; Haringey Jewish Primary School, Haringey; I-Foundation Primary School, Leicester; King's Science Academy, Bradford; Mill Hill Jewish Primary School, Barnet; Nishkam Education Trust, Birmingham; North Westminster Free School (ARK), Westminster; Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick School, Warwickshire; Rivendale Free School, Hammersmith and Fulham; St Luke's School, Camden; Stour Valley Community School, Suffolk; West London Free School, Ealing or Hammersmith and Fulham; Wormholt North Hammersmith Free School (ARK), Hammersmith and Fulham (to be known as Burlington Primary Academy).

Mr Gove said further announcements would be made about other "promising" proposals at a future date.

During today's speech, the Education Secretary said he would strengthen regulator Ofqual which would be encouraged to compare British qualifications with those from other countries to make sure British school-leavers could compete in a global market.

Mr Gove promised to close the learning gap between rich and poor with the "pupil premium" handing extra money to schools teaching deprived pupils to spend as they thought most productive to give students "the support they need".

"Schools should be engines of social mobility," Mr Gove said.

He added that all pupils must leave primary school having achieved standards which allowed them to benefit from secondary education.

All schools, including primaries, could apply for academy status with priority for the best achieving, he said, while academy sponsors would be asked to step in to help failing schools.

Mr Gove also promised to reassess health and safety rules which were hampering children's opportunities to play competitive sport and to enjoy out of classroom activities.

He said there were "tough decisions" and "big challenges" ahead.

More information about the proposed reforms will be in a White Paper due for publication in autumn.