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**Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for Schools

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Dr Carolyn Wilkins  
Chief Executive, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Level 3, Civic Centre  
West Street  
Oldham  
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Your ref: Council – School Places - 21060323

✍ May 2016

Dear Dr Wilkins,

Thank you for your letter of 6 April, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding school places. I am replying as the Minister of State for Schools.

I was pleased to read about the measures that Oldham Council has put in place to ensure there are sufficient school places for all children in its area. It is essential that local authorities have a good understanding of the future demand for school places, so that they are able to act quickly to either establish a new school, or propose the expansion of existing provision to meet increased demand.

While local authorities are not able to compel academies to expand, they have always relied on their strong relationships with local schools to deliver the places needed, and this will not change as more schools convert to become academies. The coalition Government doubled basic need funding to £5 billion between 2011 and 2015, which helped to create nearly 600,000 additional school places between May 2010 and May 2015. We have committed to providing a further £7 billion in funding, which, in addition to our investment in free schools, we expect will deliver 600,000 new school places.

Local authorities are already able to commission new schools where there is sufficient demand for places, and have a legal duty to do so under the free school presumption process. Since this process was introduced in 2012, over 100 schools will have been proposed, built and opened by local authorities by September 2016.

Where local authorities clearly identify a need for a new school in their area, they will publish a specification for the new school and run a competition to identify strong providers. The Department and Regional Schools

Commissioners work with local authorities, using their combined local knowledge, to ensure that the strongest field of potential sponsors is identified and the best sponsor is selected. The Department's guidance for the free school presumption process is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/juulf73>.

Local authorities can also encourage strong providers within their areas to establish free schools through the central free schools process, which is managed and funded by the Department. There are also limited circumstances where a local authority can open a school outside of the free school presumption process. Details of these circumstances are set out in the Department's guidance on opening and closing maintained schools, which is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/i59uhpk>. We would, however expect that in nearly all circumstances where new schools are established, they will be established as free schools.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Gibb', written in a cursive style.

**Nick Gibb MP**