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Poorest areas in line for school funds

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Regeneration areas could benefit from reforms to the government's schools rebuilding programme, it has emerged.

Poor performing schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods could be fast-tracked for investment as a different approach is considered for the second round of the £45bn Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative.

A consultation document launched by schools minister Jim Knight links BSF investment to wider regeneration schemes.

Plans for local authorities to rebuild the whole school estate in one go may be replaced with a strategy to prioritise four or five new schools in each area and give more thought to how the funding could benefit wider communities.

More than 1,000 school building projects are under way in 72 local authorities and the government wants the remaining 76 to submit bids from August.

'We now want to target children and schools with the greatest needs, wherever they live, to benefit as soon as possible,' said Mr Knight.

'Instead of waiting, we want to give them more scope to target pockets of deprivation and underperforming schools now – by giving the remaining local authorities the chance of early entry as soon as they are ready.'


Wider criteria would be used to prioritise projects – including areas with major regeneration schemes; schools with the poorest infrastructure and areas planning wider community facilities, including children's centres and extended school facilities. Although some critics argue that BSF's original pledge to renew every secondary school by 2015 – which was revised to 2020 – could now slip further, the change has received support.

Ken Dytor, chair of the British Property Federation's regeneration and development committee, said the move showed 'clear recognition of the work the BPF has been doing to promote the benefits of allowing developers to use government funds for infrastructure projects as a catalyst for bigger regeneration schemes... this overhaul of the BSF programme could be a vital move in unlocking new money, new homes and new communities'.

Martin Evans, partner in charge of education for architects Watkins Gray International, which has worked on BSF projects since it began, told New Start it was a move he had long been calling for.

The management of BSF, www.dcsf.gov.uk

by **Ian Alexander**

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