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Communities and
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Dear Mr Carmichael,

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Planning for new free schools

Thank you for your letter of 16 September to the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP about planning for new free schools. I am replying as Minister for Housing and Planning.

I welcome the Committee's interest in the delivery of this Government's ambitious plans to open an additional 500 free schools during the lifetime of this Parliament. This will build on the impressive delivery to date and the strong joint working that is already in place between the Department for Education and the Department for Communities and Local Government. This reflects the part the planning system continues to play in supporting the timely provision of free schools to increase choice and opportunity and improve standards for all.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Education set out the Government's commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system in August 2011. This commitment remains in place today and was underlined further in the National Planning Policy Framework. We have set a clear expectation that all parties within the planning system should plan positively to support the timely provision of free schools. To demonstrate this, where a local planning authority has refused planning permission for a free school, we have recovered the appeal for the determination of the Secretary of State.

Further support was brought forward in May 2013 with a broad range of permitted development rights granting national planning permissions. These allowed for most buildings to be used as a state funded school for a single academic year; for a broad range of buildings used for business or leisure to change permanently to a state funded school; and for a range of building works associated with the change of use.

I continue to work closely with Ministers at the Department for Education, and met with Lord Nash this week to progress this work. We want to ensure that free school development brought forward meets the expectations of national planning policy and that where new homes are being planned full consideration is given to future schooling needs of the new residents and the contribution free schools can make.

BRANDON LEWIS MP