

Message from Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

I was very pleased to announce earlier this month that a further twenty-five of the schools joining the Trust School Programme will be following the co-operative model.

This is really exciting news as it shows that the co-operative model isn't just a niche model. I am confident that we will meet the aspiration I signalled in September of having at least 200 co-operative trust schools up and running, or in the pipeline, in the next year.

Trust schools are becoming increasingly popular as they are demonstrating how they can help to raise standards and offer new opportunities to pupils and staff.

Co-operative school trusts put power in the hands of those who know best what is needed in their area, by allowing local communities to come together and have direct power over the running of their local schools. They mean that everybody with a stake in the school's success – parents, teachers, support staff, and even pupils – can all get involved in the running of their school. And most importantly, they can help to raise aspirations, improve standards and ensure that parents have more choice of good local schools.

To underline our commitment, I am delighted that my Department will be assisting the setting up of the new Network to support and develop co-operative trust schools, Academies and other educational institutions. We will be providing £25,000 of funding to kick-start its work and welcome the establishment of the network as providing a distinct contribution to bringing diversity to education provision – a distinct contribution to 21st Century schools.

The Network will provide a forum in which Co-operative Trust Schools can share experiences, exchange good practice, work together on ways of embedding their values into the curriculum, and enjoy the benefits of scale in the market place.

The common interest amongst the Network's members is not geographic or sectoral but their commitment to a shared set of values. With the principles of co-operation at its heart, and following in the footsteps of the movement's pioneers, the Network can be confident of a far-reaching future, supporting its members in delivering first-class education.

I would like to send my congratulations to the Co-operative Trusts who will be the founding members of the Network – leading a major new initiative in mainstream education in this country. The founding members of the consumer co-operative movement started with a tiny shop in Rochdale – and look where that is now! You are the new Pioneers, and I wish you the same success with the Co-operative Schools Network.