It is not the Government or the Department for Education that instigates the disposal of school playing fields. It is the schools themselves and their local authorities that propose to convert these often surplus or un-used fields to invest in school sport or education. Local authorities must consult widely prior to making an application. This Government will only give local authorities and schools permission to dispose of school playing fields if the sports and curriculum needs of the school and its neighbouring schools can continue to be met. All proceeds of any sales must be put back into improving sports or educational facilities.

The number of disposals is falling. This Government sanctioned the disposal of 48 playing fields in three years, an average of 16 annually (two more were agreed in June 2013, making 50). The previous administration sanctioned the disposal of 242 playing fields from November 2001 (8.5 years), an average of 28 annually.

This Government has introduced new legislation to prevent schools from building classrooms on playing field land. From February 2012 schools and local authorities – including local authorities holding land for Academies - have had to seek permission from the Secretary of State for Education if they want to change the use of public playing fields by putting school buildings on them. Prior to 2012, a school could change the use of land in connection with education or recreation purposes without consent. We now require consent even where the buildings are being used for education or recreational purposes.

Schools and local authorities do not apply to sell playing fields, they seek consent from the Secretary of State to dispose. A disposal can include a lease of the playing fields to a third-party organisation with the fields, following investment and improvement, continuing to be used by the school. For example; Warblington School in Hampshire is leasing land to a local hockey club who will develop the hockey pitch for school and community use; and Kingsbury School in Barnet is leasing land to a company to redevelop a field that was subject to poor drainage and under used. They are introducing all-weather playing surfaces comprising of 5-a-side and 7-a-side pitches, a full sized football and hockey pitch and a six-court indoor tennis facility.

34 of the disposals since May 2010 are due to the closure or merger of an entire school site due to the re-organisation of education facilities by the local authority or academy trust. Five schools are leasing playing fields to sports clubs or others and will continue to use the playing fields. Eleven disposals are of small sections of playing field land that either isn’t used by the school for sport or is not needed due to other facilities in place. For instance; Great Marlowe School in Buckinghamshire is disposing of marginal sloping land that isn’t suitable as a playing field, Woodhouse School in Staffordshire is disposing of untended grassland that hasn’t been used for sport for five years, and William Howard School is selling a small piece of land it doesn’t use to the neighbouring infant school to use for outdoor play. No open school has disposed of its entire playing field, and in every case all of the money made by the local authority or school from the sale will be invested in local sports or education facilities. Every school must, by law, have access to enough playing field space to allow for its sports and curriculum needs to be met.

Since May 2010 the Secretary of State has approved 50 applications. The details are set out below.

List of 50 approved applications

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| LB Croydon Council | Approved May 2010 | | Waddon Infant School | The school closed and merged with Duppas Junior School to form the new Aerodrome School. The Waddon school site has been redeveloped along with other non-educational property in the area, to fund a new leisure centre which includes a new swimming pool, sports hall and open space for the community. The remaining proceeds from the sale have been used to fund Aerodrome School’s outdoor and indoor sports facilities. | | |
| LB Croydon Council | Approved May 2010 | | Red Gates School | The school has relocated to the site of the former Gilbert Scott Infant School and uses their playing fields. Proceeds from the sale of the site were put towards the nearby new Aerodrome School sports facilities. | | |
| Hampshire County Council | Approved May 2010 | | Warblington School | The school is leasing land to a local hockey club who will develop the hockey pitch for school and community use. | | |
| North Somerset Council | Approved June 2010 | | St Katherine CE Primary | Closed school site. Proceeds used to fund sports improvement at Winford School, including resurfacing the playground and redesigning hard and soft play areas at Winford School. | | |
| Cheshire West & Chester Council | Approved Sept 2010 | | Highfield Primary School | The school disposed of an area of surplus playing field land. The proceeds will be used to extend and remodel the main school building, and to provide new outdoor sports facilities at the school consisting of a climbing wall, nature reserve area and an assault course. The school retained 20,391m² of playing field land – the equivalent of about 3 football pitches. | | |
| Buckinghamshire County Council | Approved Sept 2010 | | Great Marlow School | The school disposed of a small area of marginal, triangular-shaped sloping land that was not suitable as playing field. Proceeds were allocated to fund an all-weather pitch, new hard court play area and the relocation of a tennis court. | | |
| Kent County Council | Approved Sept 2010 | | Beaver Green Primary | Following consolidation of two school sites into one, this site was surplus.  The proceeds of the sale funded a new playing field and hall at Eastchurch Primary School and a new playing field for Archbishop Courtenay Primary School. | | |
| Plymouth City Council | Approved Sept 2010 | | High View School | Surplus site following amalgamation (and reconstruction of a new site) of Highfield & Plym View schools. The proceeds of the sale were reinvested into sports facilities at the new single-site school. | | |
| Rochdale MBC | Approved Nov 2010 | | Heywood High School | Closed school site. Rochdale council retained 52,500m2 – the equivalent of around seven football pitches - for local community use. Proceeds of the sale of the disposed area contributed to the local authority's Building Schools for the Future programme for sports provision. | | |
| Plymouth City Council | Approved Nov 2010 | | Estover Primary School | Part of a redevelopment project to form a campus combining Estover Community College, Estover Primary School, Downham Special School and the Plymouth Hospital and Outreach School. The entire proceeds of sale were used towards the new campus, including sports pitches, an all-weather pitch, a multi-use games area, soft and hard informal and social space. | | |
| Plymouth City Council | Approved Nov 2010 | | Estover College | Refurbishment of Estover Primary & Community College campuses. (See line above). | | |
| Staffordshire County Council | Approved Feb 2011 | | Woodhouse Middle School | Sale of surplus untended grassland on the school site that had not been used for sport for five years. Proceeds used to support improved changing facilities and a new library. | | |
| Stockton-on-Tees BC | Approved Feb 2011 | | Saltergill Special School | Closed school site. Proceeds of sale to be fully invested in the improvement of drainage to sports pitches at Conyers School and the redevelopment of the cricket changing pavilion at Egglescliffe School. | | |
| Worcestershire County Council | Approved Feb 2011 | | Dingleside Middle School | Closed school site sold as part of a local redevelopment. Proceeds of sale fully invested in sports improvements at up to 15 local schools | | |
| West Berkshire | Approved May 2011 | | The Winchcombe Primary School | Closed school site following consolidation onto a single site. Proceeds of sale invested in Winchcombe School and a multi-use games area for Trinity School. | | |
| LB of Brent Council | Approved July 2011 | | Kingsbury High School | Disposal was by way of a lease to a private company that redeveloped and improved the schools playing field that was subject to poor drainage and under used. Funding introduced all-weather playing surfaces comprising of 5-a-side and 7-a-side pitches, a full sized football and hockey pitch and a six-court indoor tennis facility. The school will receive income from private hire of facilities outside school hours, to invest in future sports provision. | | |
| Gateshead Council | Approved July 2011 | | Lord Lawson of Beamish | Disposal of an area of land by lease to Birtley Athletics Club to improve sporting provision for the club and the school.  Although consent was given to this project, it did not go ahead | | |
| LB of Havering Council | Approved Oct 2011 | | Dunningford Primary School | Closed school site. Entire proceeds to contribute to newly built Elm Park Primary, including sports provision which consists of a multi-use games court, junior football pitch and hard play areas. | | |
| Nottinghamshire County Council | Approved Oct 2011 | | Clarborough Primary School | This was originally a school based on two sites. A rebuild of the school meant one site became surplus. The money has been earmarked for sports facilities at other local schools. | | |
| South Tyneside Council | Approved Nov 2011 | | Highfield Infant School | Closed school site. Proceeds to be reinvested into new and improved sports facilities at Harton Primary School, which include a nature reserve, external play equipment and general enhancements to the existing multi-use games areas. | | |
| North Yorkshire County Council | Approved Dec 2011 | | Langcliffe Primary School | Closed school site. The proceeds of sale are to be invested in improvements to changing rooms at Settle College. | | |
| North Yorkshire County Council | Approved Dec 2011 | | Low Bentham Primary School | Closed school site. Proceeds invested in sports provision at the refurbished High Bentham School. | | |
| Staffordshire County Council | Approved Feb 2012 | | Pear Tree Primary School | Two disposals (See Nursery Fields Primary) of closed school sites. Proceeds reinvested in school sports provision including Rugely Leisure Centre swimming pool and the extension of an all-weather pitch. Any remaining to be invested in local school sports improvements. | | |
| Staffordshire County Council | Approved Feb 2012 | | Nursery Fields Primary School | See line above | | |
| Hampshire County Council | Approved Mar 2012 | | St Peters CoE Junior School | Closed school site. All proceeds reinvested in Cranford Park Primary to form team game playing fields and to develop a new external environmental teaching area. | | |
| North Yorkshire County Council | Approved Apr 2012 | | Ingleton Middle School | Closed site on reorganisation from 3 to 2 tier system. The proceeds will be reinvested in changing room facilities at Settle College. | | |
| Chester West & Chester Council | Approved May 2012 | | Gorsthills Primary | Closed school site. The proceeds are to be reinvested into sports provision at several local schools, including the installation of a new playing field drainage system, developing a new outside play area and provision of tennis and netball courts. | | |
| LB of Camden Council | Approved Jul 2012 | | Netley Primary School | The local authority is to sell a small part of the school’s land (550m²). It wants to redevelop a unit for vulnerable children which neighbours the school and improve the primary school’s facilities by bringing together the foundation stage and other areas of the school, the PPRU and Development Centre into a single new building, to improve educational provision and enhance their role in the local community. Reconfiguration will bring a brand new school building, and allow an increase to the hard-surface games courts, hard play areas and habitat areas at the school. | | |
| Surrey County Council | Approved Jul 2012 | | Cranleigh Primary School | The old school site is being disposed of and a new, purpose-built school is being developed around 500 yards from the existing location. The new school will have significantly enhanced sporting provision which will include a new school gym. | | |
| Wandsworth Council | Approved Aug 2012 | | Elliott School | The school's sporting facilities are dilapidated and out of date. The sale will fund a new Multi-Use Games Area to host competitive sports fixtures such as football matches, which they cannot currently do. They will also replace their old gym with a state-of-the-art indoor facility with four sports courts. | | |
|  | Approved Aug 2012 | | Newquay Tretherras Academy | This academy is an amalgamation of two schools and some facilities are duplicated and too small for the current number of pupils and the school's curriculum needs. The proceeds from the disposal of surplus playing fields will be used to generate new playing areas, drain current playing fields which currently have limited use, and substantially rebuild and modernise its buildings, creating a state-of-the-art science lab and a community theatre. | | |
| Essex County Council | Approved Oct 2012 | | Passmores Technology College | The school has moved to a brand new school site, Passmore’s Academy, so its original site is surplus to requirements. The proceeds will be put towards the new facilities at Passmore’s Academy including a new gym, an all-weather pitch and new recreation areas. | | |
| Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead | Approved Oct 2012 | | Windsor Girls School | Some of the playing field land is rarely used by the school because of poor drainage. This area (around 1,340m², less than 3% of the school’s playing field) will be sold to the adjacent hospice. The proceeds will be spent on a new sports hall for the school, and the school will retain more than 44,600m² of playing field land – the equivalent of around six football pitches. | | |
| North Yorkshire County Council | Approved Oct 2012 | | Netherside Hall Special School | Closed school site. The pupils have transferred to the refurbished Forest Moor Special School in Harrogate. The proceeds will be put towards the cost of the new sports hall at Forest Moor School. | | |
| Birmingham City Council | Approved Nov 2012 | | Langley Special School | Closed school site. The pupils have transferred to brand new purpose built accommodation and share the campus with Coppice Primary School. The proceeds will be put towards its new indoor/outdoor sports provisions as well as the new school building. | | |
|  | Approved Nov 12 | | Folkestone Academy | The land to be disposed of is an old primary school. The Academy expanded in 2009 and merged with the primary school, which remained at its existing site.  The intention is to move the primary school into newly completed buildings on the main Folkestone Academy site. The proceeds of the sale will be put towards the cost of the new school. The new academy facilities include a multi-use games area, cricket nets, two grass pitches and an all-weather pitch. In addition, the primary aged pupils will have their own playground areas accessed from their teaching areas and secured from the secondary pupils. | | |
| Durham County Council | Approved Jan 13 | | Hamsteels Primary School | The school closed in 2007 and pupils transferred to nearby Esh Winning Primary School. There are no schools within one mile and none that want to use the site. There are no community users, and at consultation there were no objections to the disposal of the playing field. Proceeds to be used to provide a new indoor gym and music room at Elemore Hall School. | | |
|  | Approved Feb 13 | | Baxter College | The disposal will enable the construction of a new special school. Benefits to the Academy include a new multi-use games area, access to a new 13 room science block replacing dilapidated mobile classrooms, an early years hub and a vocational hub. The special school’s new pitch, hydrotherapy pool and small sports hall will be available to the community out of hours. | | |
| Essex County Council | Approved Feb 13 | | Maltings Academy | The council are disposing of a hard play area, by lease, to Braintree District Council who will build a new £9m sports centre building. The school, other local schools and the wider community will benefit from this new facility. | | |
| Rochdale MBC | Approved Feb 13 | | Balderstone Technical College | The school closed in July 2010 due to a LA re-organisation. The LA are retaining a large team game playing field area which will be used by the community and other schools. The proceeds of sale will contribute towards a 3G Multi Use Games Area at the nearby Kingsway Park High School. | | |
| Liverpool City Council | Approved Feb 13 | | New Heys Comprehensive School | The school closed in July 2010. The only group using the playing field land was the Enterprise South Liverpool Academy, who will migrate to a brand new building which will open in July. The proceeds of sale will be put towards the re-building of two existing schools (St. John Bosco Arts College & Our Lady & St. Swithin’s Primary School) onto one site. The new sports facilities will include the remodelling of a sports hall and provision of a multi-use games area. | | |
| Warwickshire County Council | Approved Feb 13 | | Griff Special School | The school closed in 2005. The playing field is not used by the community. The council wish to provide the land to a housing charity, as part of a major extra-care housing scheme for elderly residents. As there are to be no proceeds of sale, we have made approval conditional on the Council investing an amount equal to the value of the playing field into education and sport, based on the advice of the playing fields advisory panel. | | |
|  | Approved Mar 13 | | Ryden's | The Academy Trust is selling the nursery school to the existing nursery provider together with its playground which will remain in use by children attending the nursery. The proceeds of sale will be used for essential repairs and a feasibility study to redevelop the academy estate. | | |
| Surrey County Council | Approved Apr 13 | | Therfield School | The Council wishes to sell an old, dilapidated tennis court and a small area of marginal playing field (around 0.9% of the school’s provision). The proceeds of sale will be invested in a new tennis court and will part-fund a new dance and drama hall, improving sports and recreational facilities at the school. The school will retain over 121,000m² of playing field land – the equivalent to around 17 football pitches. | | |
| Dorset County Council | Approved Apr 13 | | Milldown Primary | The school closed in 2010 and the pupils relocated to new premises. The proceeds of sale will go towards the provision of a synthetic turf pitch close to the new Milldown School. | | |
| Liverpool City Council | Approved May 2013 | | Croxteth Comprehensive School | The school closed in 2010. The land will be sold and the proceeds of the sale used to help rebuild St John Bosco Arts College. This will include the remodelling of the sports hall and multi-use games area. | | |
| Liverpool City Council | Approved May 2013 | | Ashfield Special School | The school closed in 2004.The land to be sold consists of sloping marginal land. The proceeds of sale will be used as part of a capital project to rebuild Holly Lodge Girl’s College, specifically by funding the remodelling of the sports hall and Multi-Use Games Area. | | |
| Sandwell Council | Approved May 2013 | | Yew Tree Primary School (Fir Tree Annex) | The school previously operated from two separate sites. When the two sites merged a new eight classroom block and enhanced sports facilities, including a new sports pitch and a multi-use games area, were built on the original Yew Tree Primary School site. The Fir Tree Annex closed and the proceeds of sale will pay for the new facilities. | | |
|  | Approved June 2013 | | Uxbridge Academy | The academy has leased playing fields to a local football club who will invest over £2 million in new footballing facilities, for academy pupils to use during school hours. The football club also offers specialist coaching to academy pupils. | | |
|  | Approved June 2013 | | William Howard | The adjacent independent infant school bought a small piece of land from the Academy for outdoor play.  The land was at a bottom of a hill so not easily used by the academy, but it is of significant benefit as outdoor play space for the infant school. | | |
|  | | There have been six occasions where the panel has not approved the disposal but the Government has.  In every case money from the sale was earmarked to improve education and sports facilities in the local community.    **Woodhouse Middle**  The school wanted to sell surplus untended grassland that had not been used for sport for five years.  The Government approved the application and the money was dedicated to supporting a new library and improved changing facilities.    **Clarborough Primary**  This was originally a school based on two sites. A rebuild of the school meant one site became surplus.   The Government approved the sale of the surplus site and the money was earmarked for sports facilities at other local schools.    **Elliott School**  The school wants to enhance its academic and sporting provision. Its sporting facilities are dilapidated and out of date.  The Government approved the application. The sale will fund a new Multi-Use Games Area to host competitive sports fixtures such as football matches, which they cannot currently do. They will also replace their old gym with a state-of-the-art indoor facility with four sports courts.    **Ingleton Middle**  When the school was closed the site wasn’t needed. The government approved the application. Proceeds from the sale were used to improve the changing rooms at Settle College.    **Netley Primary**  The local authority wants to sell a small part of the school’s land. It wants to redevelop a unit for vulnerable children which neighbours the school and improve the primary school’s facilities. The Government approved the application. Delay could have affected the whole regeneration project with unhappy consequences for the children concerned.  **Griff Special School**  This land will be leased to a charity providing housing to senior citizens. We have agreed to this on the specific condition that council invests an amount equal to the value of the land in education or sport.  The school itself has been closed for eight years and the playing field land has not been used by a local school or the wider community in this time. Sport England did not object to the council’s planning application and at consultation, there were no objections to the loss of the unused playing field. The Panel did not object to the actual loss of this unused playing field, but highlighted specifically that the proceeds of sale would be lost to sport or educational investment as this land will be ‘peppercorn’ leased to a housing association. Acting on the Panel’s advice we made this disposal conditional on the council investing an amount equal to the value of the school land, from funds not ring-fenced for education.  5 applications not approved for disposal | | | | |
|  | | Brighton & Hove City Council | | | Patcham High School | Application withdrawn |
|  | | Cheshire East Council | | | Vernon Primary School | Application rejected |
|  | | Cheshire West & Chester Council | | | Gorsthills Primary School | Application rejected and subsequently re-submitted |
|  | | Warwickshire County Council | | | Michael Drayton Middle School | Application rejected |
|  | | Liverpool City Council | | | Croxteth Comprehensive School | Application rejected and subsequently re-submitted |