

## The UK's first Greek school

**A** CYPRIOT architect is planning England's first Greek Orthodox state secondary school under the government's new Free Schools initiative.

Originally from Limassol, Yiannis Pareas (photo) is the chairman of the volunteer committee behind the bid. The committee submitted a proposal earlier this month to the British department for education and has already cleared the first-review hurdle.

If all goes to plan, the 50,000-odd Greeks of north London will soon have their own state-funded school. While the school will adhere to the British national curriculum, students will also learn about the culture and language of Greece and the Greek Orthodox religion.

No such school exists in the United Kingdom currently.

Pareas and other project organisers held a round of meetings to explain their vision to local Greek community groups in an attempt to make access as wide as possible.

### 'A boost for Greekness'

"The feedback has been absolutely positive," Pareas tells the Athens News in a telephone interview from his north London office. "One of the require-

ments for our application is to show demand from the community. So we went around to various schools to meet with parents who are likely to send their children to our school. They were all very supportive and enthusiastic - they want to preserve our language and our culture."

"It will be a great boost for Greekness in London," Pareas says. The idea for the school "has been floating around for a long time", he explains. "The government is now giving funds for Free Schools for a variety of faiths that live in the greater London area, like Muslims and Jews and Sikhs. We thought this was the right time for us to do something about it. We started working on it in February after a meeting with Archbishop Gregorios."

If all goes to plan, the new school will open in September 2012. It will cater to pupils aged 11 to 16, mainly drawn from Greek families living in north London and south Hertfordshire. The plan is to enrol some 150 students at year seven (grade 7) in the first year.

"We don't have a school for the Greek-speaking people in London," he says. "We have one primary school for children 5-11 years old, but the school is in south London and far away from where most of the Greek families live.

It is also paid for by the Greek and Cypriot governments.

This time the majority of the money will come from the British government. The school is much needed."

The idea has received the backing of Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain, head of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom.

Now Pareas and other Greek community volunteers are looking for potential sites in Enfield or Barnet - mainly unused schools and other buildings that will need minimal renovation. Last week, he showed potential sites to education department officials.

"We are still in the early stages," Pareas says. "The application has been sent and is being examined by the department for education. It's a good indication for us that they are showing an interest and want to look at the buildings we have found. We will know in July whether the application has been approved. If it is approved, there will be a final interview in August."

Pareas and the volunteer committee have enlisted the assistance of the Russell Education Trust to help them set up the school. "They are partly affiliated with the government. They understand the government's requirements and they will help us to arrange the



curriculum and select teachers."

**FREE** Schools are state-funded schools set up in response to what local people say they want and need in order to improve education of children in their community. These schools are non-profits and independent.

Free Schools can be primary or secondary schools. They can be located in traditional school buildings or appropriate community spaces such as office buildings or church halls. They could be set up by a wide range of individuals and organisations, including charities, universities, businesses, educational groups, teachers or parents.

Free Schools are expected to be open to pupils of all abilities from the area and cannot be academically selective. The British department for education has received 300 Free School applications for the 2012-13 academic year.

## Egypt's revolution may save Neolithic treasure

**E**GYPT'S popular uprising may have arrived just in time to save a Neolithic site that holds the country's oldest evidence of agriculture and could yield vital clues to the rise of Pharaonic civilisation.

The site lies in a protected nature reserve along the shore north of Lake Qarun that until recently had remained virtually untouched, even though it lies only 70km from Cairo, Egypt's fast-expanding capital. A month before the protests that toppled President Hosni Mubarak erupted in January, the Egyptian government carved 2.8 km<sup>2</sup> of prime land from the reserve and awarded it to property developer Amer Group for a tourist resort.

Since Mubarak was ousted, three government ministers who sat on a committee that approved the sale have been jailed while they battle corruption charges not related to the Amer deal.

One of them, Housing Minister Ahmed el-Maghrabi, told Reuters in January that archaeology officials had given the re-development the necessary green light.

Egypt's archaeology chief now says that was untrue. "I did not give any permission to anyone. The excavations are not finished," Zahi Hawass, head of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, told Reuters. Property developers have come under increasing public scrutiny for their land purchases from Mubarak's government, and some firms have relinquished tracts of land.

Egyptian conservation groups have decried the Amer deal, saying it was done without proper oversight and that the arrival of large numbers of holidaymakers would wreak heavy damage to a wide swathe of the delicate desert landscape.

"This is the thin end of the wedge. It is the de-

struction of Egyptian natural heritage for future generations," said Ali Fahmi, director of the conservation group Friends of Lake Qarun. "It sets a precedent in desecrating a protected area."

### Whale, primate fossils

Egypt's cabinet in 1989 declared 1,110km<sup>2</sup> north of the lake a nature protectorate, an area that also contains unique geology, Pharaonic basalt quarries from the Old Kingdom and fossils of early whales and primates. Archaeologists say the remains of rain-based Neolithic farming in the reserve may hold vital clues to a technological leap that led to irrigation-based farming along the Nile.

Around 4,000BC, humans occupying a strip along the northern shore of the lake seized a window of only a few centuries of rainfall to grow grain in previously inhospitable desert, archaeologists say. "We have the evidence of the earliest agriculture activity in Egypt. So it's before the Pharaohs, it's before the early dynastic period when Egypt becomes a state," said Willeke Wendrich, an archaeology professor at the University of California in Los Angeles.

"What we have on the north shore of Fayoum is something unique worldwide. What we have is a Neolithic landscape which, because it's desert, has not been overbuilt," she said in an interview.

Khaled Saad, department manager for prehistory at Egypt's Supreme Council for Antiquities (SCA), said that four years ago the tourism ministry decided it wanted to build hotels and tourist attractions on a 20km<sup>2</sup> tract stretching 10km along the lake's northern shoreline.

It formed a committee to approve designating the land for development that included Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, tourism minister Zoheir Garrahan, Maghrabi and other officials, Saad said. In December, the Tourism Development Authority (TDA), which is under the Tourism Ministry, awarded Amer Group the land under a 99-year concession, charging \$28,000 in the first year, rising to an annual \$92,000 in the fourth to 10th years.

