

Title: Cobham Free School
Author: Department for Education (DfE)

Impact Assessment – Section 9 Academies Act Duty

1. Section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 places a duty upon the Secretary of State to take into account the likely impact of establishing the additional school would be on maintained schools, Academies, institutions within the further education sector and alternative provision in the area in which the additional school is (or is proposed to be) situated.

Background

2. The Cobham Free School proposal is a 4 – 11, mixed, non-faith primary school. The plan is to admit 23 pupils to reception and to each of years 1 and 2 in 2012, building to full capacity of 161 in 2016. The school will open in a former police station in central Cobham. The proposer group includes a mixture of teachers, friends and relatives.

Catchment Area, its Characteristics and Admissions

3. The school's admissions arrangements are compliant with the Admissions Code, other than a derogation, agreed by Ministers, in respect of the oversubscription criteria, as per below.

4. The oversubscription criteria include prioritising children who qualify for the Pupil Premium. This is permitted in the new Admissions Code for admissions in 2013. Ministers have agreed that Cobham Free School could admit on this basis a year before the new Code permits.

5. When the school is oversubscribed, after admission of pupils with Special Educational Needs, where the school is named in the Statement, priority will be given to those children who meet the following criteria:

- a. Children in public care or formerly looked after;
- b. Children of multiple birth (i.e. twins, triplets etc. applying for admission in the same year group);
- c. Siblings of those children who are already at the school;
- d. 20% of places will allocated to children eligible for **Pupil Premium funding** living in the Cobham Fairmile Ward, the Cobham and Downside Ward, and the Oxshott and Stoke D'Abernon Ward;
- e. Children who live nearest to the school, based on straight-line distance. This criterion will be used if a tie-break is necessary in criteria b-d above.

6. The school will run a waiting list which will operate in accordance with their oversubscription criteria.

7. The school does not have a self-defined catchment area. For the purposes of the impact assessment, we have created a proxy catchment area. The average distance travelled to primary school in Surrey is 1.0 mile. The furthest distance travelled to primary school by a significant majority (80%) of pupils in Surrey is 1.5 miles. Of the 55 pupils who have so far selected the school as one of their choices, the furthest lives 4.1 miles away from the site by straight line distance.

8. All the children, except for two, are within 1.5 mile radius of the Free School, and we have therefore assessed the impact on all primary schools within a 2 mile radius. It is officials' view that it will be unlikely that schools situated over 2 miles away from the Free School will be impacted or will be more than minimally impacted.

9. Cobham falls in the Elmbridge Borough of Surrey. Elmbridge has a 4.1% excess of primary places (as of May 2011). However, the primary school population is projected to grow significantly over the next five years.

10. Any potential negative impact on local schools should be mitigated by the growing population (see table provided by the Local Authority below).

May 2011 Forecast (places)	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Demand	8716	8974	8581	9469	9681
Surplus/Shortage	98	-160	233	-655	-867
% Surplus/Shortage	1.1%	-1.8%	2.6%	-7.4%	-9.8%

11. If no new primary school places were added there would be a 9.8% shortfall of places by 2015/16.

12. Up to 56,600 new dwellings are currently planned in Surrey by 2026, with the particular focus on housing growth on the London fringe and the A3 corridor. This will have an effect on Elmbridge Borough as the demand for housing places pressure on all services and public infrastructure – particularly schools.

13. Surrey County Council (SCC) has previously taken steps to mitigate the impact of the deficit of places by installing temporary provision in schools and providing additional classes at schools in the Elmbridge Borough. This was more than sufficient to meet the demand at the time.

14. To meet demand in the future, Elmbridge Borough are keen to increase primary provision in the Walton and Hersham and Dittons and Weston Green areas, but have not identified Cobham as one of the areas which is likely to have a high shortage of primary school places in the future.

15. Based on figures provided by the Office for National Statistics, births in Elmbridge have fluctuated around 1500 per annum for a number of years.

More recently, birth rates have increased, reaching 1768 births in 2008 – an increase of 21% since 2001. This increase in births will lead to a continuously increasing number of children starting primary and secondary schools in Elmbridge in the foreseeable future. It should be noted that this increase is unlikely to be evenly spread across the Borough. Therefore some of the areas in Elmbridge will experience more pressure than others. Specific figures for Cobham are not known.

Local Authority View

16. Surrey County Council was invited to provide views on the Free School proposal. They responded on 19 March. They have concerns over the small numbers of pupil intake and its impact on surrounding schools, in particular, St. Matthew's Infant School. Their latest projections suggest demand may be lower than one form of entry, between 17 and 28 Reception places over the next 10 years. Their understanding is that the Free School will pick up four to five pupils for whom they have projected places.

17. Surrey County Council have stated that whilst they do not have a policy objection to Free Schools, they believe that 'Free Schools should serve a real need, particularly at this time when demand for school places in the maintained sector is rising and capital funding is limited'. They have a general concern about the efficiency of schools operating at such small sizes longer-term and how educational funding will continue to be shared out fairly between the sectors.

18. On the Cobham Free School proposal, the Local Authority has expressed a concern regarding the perceived lack of sufficient consultation by the Trust with local schools and with the wider Cobham community.

Representations

19. We received one direct representation from the St Matthew's School, which is against the proposal. It is of the view that there is enough provision in the area. It also has plans to expand but feels that Surrey County Council will now withhold those in favour of the Cobham Free School.

20. The formal consultation process took place from 7 February to 16 March 2012. The group held a public consultation open day for the local community as part of their formal consultation but carried on with further marketing activities to engage local businesses and schools.

21. As part of their consultation, the Trust sent the consultation document, the questionnaire and the school prospectus to 13 local primary schools and nurseries in Cobham and surrounding areas. They also sent them to the Effingham Learning Partnership, which is a confederation of 11 local primary schools.

22. In addition, the consultation documents were emailed to 57 organisations including secondary school, special schools and 6th form

colleges. They were all also invited to a consultation event on 25 February. Many of the stakeholders (including some without email addresses) were then personally visited and given or later sent a hard copy of the prospectus.

23. Of the 52 responses to the consultation, 32 were in favour of the school and 20 were against. Of the 20 against, the majority were concerned about the necessity of this Free School where there was currently good provision and the increased traffic in an already congested area.

24. The findings of the consultation show there is significant support for the project amongst prospective parents, but opposition from local schools. The Trust has developed a long term marketing plan which will ensure continuous engagement with the community and with local schools.

Impact on other schools

25. We have considered the impact the Free School may have on all schools within a 2.0 mile radius of the proposed Free School. Below is a discussion of the likely impact on the nearest primary schools to the proposed site. The table below shows that opening the Free School will have a minimal impact on 2 schools, a moderate impact on 2 schools.

School name	Distance from Free School	Impact rating	Capacity	Pupils on roll	% of Y6 pupils attaining Level 4	Last Ofsted inspection overall rating
Burhill Community Infant School	1.9 miles	Minimal	266	257	N/A	Good
The Royal Kent CofE Primary School	2.04 miles	Minimal	210	207	86%	Outstanding
St Matthew's CofE Aided Infant School	1.82 miles	Moderate	90	84	N/A	Good
St Andrew's CofE Primary School	0.2 miles	Moderate	396	337	66%	Good

Schools where the impact is moderate

26. The impact of the Free School on the **St Andrew's CofE Primary School (a Voluntary Controlled School)** has been assessed as moderate, based on the following reasons:

- It is nearest to the proposed Free School site at 0.2 miles
- There was a surplus of places equivalent to 14.9% of total capacity in 2010/11
- It reached Good status in its last Ofsted inspection (Feb 2010)

27. It is not a faith based school, but has a Christian character, and for that reason parents may still be attracted to an alternative to the Free School. As it was oversubscribed for entry in 2011/12, if it does lose some pupils to the new Free School it should still be able to fill most, if not all, of its places.

28. The **St Matthew's CofE (Voluntary) Aided Infant School** is 1.82 miles from proposed site. It is a small school with capacity for 90 pupils, with a surplus of 6 places. It has been assessed as moderate for the following reasons:

- it was assessed as Good at its last Ofsted inspection (Nov 2008); and
- it is a very popular school having received 103 applications for 30 places in 2011/12.

29. It feels threatened by the Free School, as their plans to extend had been supported by Surrey County Council but have more recently been turned down and they feel the proposed Free School is to blame for that, although Surrey County Council has not stated that this was a reason for turning down their plans.

30. The school only goes up to Yr 2 and for this reason parents may be attracted to the alternative Free School which is going to offer classes up to Yr 7, by 2016. However, as it's rated good by Ofsted and has above average KS1 results, parents may prefer to send their children to a school with a proven track record of providing a good quality education over a new, untested Free School. Also the school is located a significant distance away from the proposed Free School (1.82 miles) and the average distance travelled to a school in Surrey is 1 mile. For these reasons, officials feel there will be moderate impact on the school.

Other Schools where the impact is minimal

31. Of the 2 other schools considered, both have been assessed as being minimally affected by the opening of the Free School, for several reasons:

- their distance from the proposed Free School;
- Ofsted inspection ratings;
- Attainment; and
- Oversubscription.

32. Both these schools are unlikely to lose a significant number of pupils to the Free School. For example, one of them – the **Royal Kent CofE Primary School** was assessed as Outstanding at its last Ofsted inspection in 2008 and has only 3 surplus places. It was hugely oversubscribed in 2011/12 with 126 applications for 30 places.

Impact on Secondary Schools, Special Schools, Alternative Provision and FE institutions

33. The Cobham Free School will be a school admitting children of primary age. It will begin with an intake of one reception, one Yr 1 and one Yr 2 class and will build up over subsequent years admitting one class (23 pupils) each year. It will have no specialist SEN provision but will work to accommodate the needs of pupils where the school is named in their statement of SEN. As such, it is unlikely to have any direct impact on local secondary schools, Special Schools, alternative provision and even less likely to impact post-16 and FE institutions.

34. The introduction of a new primary school may, however, have an indirect impact on local secondary schools in terms of the types of primary feeder schools in the area for local secondary schools. Surrey County Council has already considered the increasing demand in the area for secondary places which the rising population in the area will create. However, there is currently no state secondary school in Cobham.

35. Up to 56,600 new dwellings are currently planned in Surrey by 2026, with the particular focus on housing growth on the London fringe and the A3 corridor. This is particularly the case in areas such as Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell and Reigate & Banstead, where there are pressing demographic challenges in the future. This demand for housing places pressure on all services and public infrastructure – particularly schools. The ability to meet demand will be of increasing importance to Surrey.

Conclusion

36. The impact on the majority of primary schools should be minimal or moderate because although there is a small surplus of primary school places in the area at present, there is a projection of deficit of places in the long term. Any impact will be spread across a number of schools. Many of these schools are significantly oversubscribed so even if they did lose pupils to the Free School, they should still be able to fill most or all of their places. It should also be noted that as the school wishes to open with only a 3 year entry, while some schools may experience a moderate impact, their long-term viability would not be affected.

37. Additionally, the primary population is set to increase over the next few years in the district by 11.1% so any loss of pupils to the Free School should also be mitigated by the increased demand in the area. Whilst the LA is not fully supportive of the school, it is envisaged that the proposed school will help it manage this increase.

As a result of the extensive impact assessment carried out for the proposed Cobham Free School, officials recommend that the Secretary of State enters into a Funding Agreement with the Cobham Free School Trust.