

**Title: Saxmundham Free School**  
**Author: Department for Education (DfE)**

**Impact Assessment – Section 9 Academies Act Duty**

**Background**

1. Saxmundham Free School is a 500-place non-faith 11-16 school located in Saxmundham, Suffolk and due to open in September 2012. It is proposed to locate the school on the site of Saxmundham Middle School which is closing under Suffolk's reorganisation from 3-tier to 2-tier provision.
2. We have assessed the impact on the two schools within a 10-mile radius of the school as well as one further school which is just over 11 miles away. We have also considered the impact on both primary schools and FE colleges.
3. Of the existing schools in the locality, it is our assessment that the biggest impact will be felt by Leiston High School (LHS). Pupils at the existing Saxmundham Middle School (from which we expect the bulk of the first cohort of Free School pupils to come) traditionally transfer to Leiston High School at the age of 13. We have concluded therefore that Saxmundham Free School is likely to have a high impact on Leiston High School with the potential to have a negative effect on its long term viability.
4. If the Free School only attracts pupils that would have attended LHS, and it fills to capacity on this basis, it is likely LHS will not attract sufficient pupils to run a viable school. However, the small size of the Free School and its attractiveness to parents outside the immediate vicinity through the reputation of the Seckford Foundation means that Leiston may not become unviable. Indeed, it is likely to reduce to a size comparable with the Free School. However, an estimated increase in the surplus of places in the area over the next few years will be compounded by the establishment of the Free School and will force the two schools to compete fiercely for pupils which could act as a driver to improve standards. If LHS does not innovate to improve their attractiveness to pupils, their long-term viability could be called into question.

**Catchment Area and Admissions**

5. Saxmundham Free School's (SFS) admissions policy is fully compliant with the admissions code. Where the number of applications for admission is greater than the published admission number priority (after the admission of students with statements of Special Educational Needs where Saxmundham Free School is named on the statement) will be given in the order in which they are set out below:

- a. Looked after children

- b. Children with a sibling attending Saxmundham Free School at the time of application.
- c. Other children by distance from Saxmundham Free School. Random allocation will be used as a tie-break in category 'c' to decide who has highest priority for admission if the distance between two children's homes and the school is the same.

6. The school does not have a defined catchment area. A proxy catchment area has been created based on the distance travelled to school by a significant majority (80%) of pupils in the LA, which is 4.5 miles. As this distance only covered one other school, for the purposes of this assessment we have assessed the impact on those schools within a 10-mile radius from the proposed site. There are only two secondary schools within this distance, but based on expressions of interest received so far, it is reasonable to assume that pupils will be drawn from across this wide area.

7. The Suffolk coastal district, in which the Free School will be located, has 28.5% surplus places and this is set to rise to 31.5% without the establishment of the Free School.

## **Background**

8. The Saxmundham Free School proposal is one of two projects put forward by the Seckford Foundation (SF) which wants to adapt the education model it uses to run Woodbridge School (Independent) for the state sector. The Free School will be a 540 place, non-faith, 11-16 school opening in September 2012 with 216 places – with 51 Y7, 81 Y8 and 81 Y9 places.

9. The application showed that a substantial body of parents in Saxmundham wanted a small, local school with a focus on high academic achievement as an alternative to the nearest and larger Leiston High School. The Free School intends to offer an extended school day and the opportunity to study for the EBacc, should pupils wish to. The proposers and parents also saw that the model of a high performing independent school working with the state sector was one that could prove to be beneficial for the community.

10. The proposers preferred site is the closing Saxmundham Middle School which the LA has agreed, in principle, to the school using from September 2012.

## **Characteristics of the catchment area**

11. The Schools Organisation Review (SOR) which has been undertaken by Suffolk County Council recommended moving from a 3 tier to a 2 tier model. This has resulted in the closure of a number of small middle schools, with years 7 and 8 being transferred into existing High/Upper Schools.

12. The Saxmundham Free School would be located in the Suffolk Coastal district of Suffolk. The district currently has 28.5% surplus places in its secondary population and this is set to rise by to 31.5% in the 2015/2016

academic year.

13. The area is relatively rural (Saxmundham town has a population of just under 3,000) and parents are willing to travel some distance to attend the school. Interest in the proposal has come from parents as far south as Woodbridge and as far north as Yoxford. Judging from the expressions of interest received, the majority of pupils live within 4 miles although the Trust do expect pupils to attend from across south east Suffolk. The Trust has plans for establishing good relationships with the six feeder primary schools to the existing Saxmundham Middle School.

14. Educational standards in Suffolk are below the national average and have been for some time. It is likely, therefore, that should SFS become a successful school, applications for future years will be driven by proximity to the school with the impact being felt most acutely in Leiston, although schools in Framlingham and Woodbridge could also lose pupils.

### **Impact on other schools**

15. Below is a discussion of the likely impact of the proposed school on the closest schools to the proposed site. The table below shows that of the two schools within a 10-mile radius, opening the Free School will have a high impact on one and a minimal impact on the other. We have also considered one other school because it falls just outside the 10-mile radius:

<b>School name</b>	<b>Distance (m)</b>	<b>Impact rating</b>	<b>Capacity (11-18)</b>	<b>Surplus</b>	<b>Ofsted Rating</b>
Leiston Community High School	4.43 miles	High	1100	13.2%	2
Thomas Mills High School	6.66 miles	Minimal	1136	5.3%	1
Farlingaye High School	10.8 miles	Minimal	1940	2.2%	1

### **Leiston Community High School – impact – High**

16. Leiston Community High School is a community secondary school, age range from 13-18 (starts in year 9), which is 4.43 miles from proposed site. The school is currently a 13-18 high school, and is part of a “learning partnership” with Leiston Middle School and Saxmundham Middle School. However, following the reorganisation of primary and secondary education in Suffolk these two middle schools will close in July 2012 and Leiston High School will become a secondary school for students of 11 to 18 years from September 2012, with a capacity of 1100 (under the name Alde Valley High School).

17. The school has a 13-18 capacity of 735. However, in 2010/11 there was surplus capacity in this school of around 13%, and the school was undersubscribed for entry in Y9 with over 20% of new places being unfilled.

18. Of the current cohort of pupils 8% are eligible for and claiming Free

School Meals (FSM) which is nearly half the national average of 15.4%. The school has Key Stage 4 attainment figures below the national average – 50% of pupils achieved 5+ A\*-C grades including English and maths GCSE in 2011 compared with 58% nationally. The school's GCSE results have been below the national average for the last five years. Furthermore, only 8% of pupils achieved the E-Bacc compared to a national average of 15.4%. Only 57% of pupils make the expected levels of progression in maths, which is below the national average of 64.8%, although 81% of pupils make the expected levels of progress in English which is above the national average of 71.8%. Only 2% of pupils in the school do not have English as their first language, which is much lower than the national average of 12.3%.

19. Whilst the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C including English and maths GCSE in Leiston Community high school is lower in 2011 than it was 4 years ago, results have been improving over the last 2 years. Leiston was last inspected in September 2010, and was judged to be 'Good' overall.

20. As pupils at Saxmundham Middle School (site of the proposed Free School) usually transfer to Leiston High School it is likely to lose some of its pupils. The school has below average attainment at Key Stage 4 so parents could be attracted to an alternative, promising a core academic focus. The introduction of the new Free School may hamper the ability of the school to carry on improving if potential pupils (especially if they are at the higher end of the ability range) chose instead to go the new Free School. However, Free Schools are not allowed to select on the basis of academic ability.

21. As the school is on the Suffolk coast and attracts pupils from further inland to the West, were these pupils to attend another school Leiston High School has no catchment area to the East on which to draw. The school has a large surplus capacity and was significantly undersubscribed for entry in 2011/12 so the opening of the Free School could further exacerbate the existing surplus issue in this school and there could be a negative effect on the long term financial viability of the school.

22. The small size of the Free School (108 Y7 places per year) means that even if the school was to fill to capacity entirely at the expense of Leiston High School, Leiston could still operate as a school. The feeder pyramid caters for 210 places per year (see para 32) so if Saxmundham were to recruit successfully it could lead to two schools both of similar size which could operate as viable institutions. Leiston would be even bigger when its Sixth Form is taken into account. It is also true that if the Free School is successful it is likely to draw pupils from other schools. However, if the secondary school population in the area continues to decline this will lead to fiercer competition between the two schools but this in itself is a driver to improve standards.

23. Overall, therefore, we assess the impact of establishing the Free School on Leiston High School to be High.

**Thomas Mills High School – Impact – Minimal**

24. Thomas Mills High School is located over six miles from the Free School and has recently converted to academy status. It is a high performing school, rated as outstanding by Ofsted and achieves above average KS4 results. Therefore, assuming the school continues to maintain its current levels of performance it is unlikely that the number of pupils drawn to the Free School would be likely to have more than a minimal impact on Thomas Mills. Given the established patterns of transfer in this area, we expect the majority of Free School pupils, in the first few years, to be those that would have transferred to Leiston. Thomas Mills was significantly oversubscribed for entry in 2011 so even if they did lose pupils to the Free School they should still be able to fill most or all of their places. Overall, we assess the impact of establishing the Free School on Thomas Mills High School to be minimal.

### **Farlingaye High School – Impact – Minimal**

25. In addition to the two schools within a 10-mile radius we have also considered the impact on Farlingaye High School because it is just outside this radius (by 0.9 miles) and, situated on the edge of Woodbridge, parents may be very familiar with the work of the Seckford Foundation (which is based in Woodbridge) and therefore may want to send their children to the Free School.

26. Farlingaye High School is a larger than average secondary school with 1,899 pupils on roll. Standards are above the national average and the school was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2006 and was rated 1 – Outstanding. While some parents that live in this area, that are aware of the Seckford Foundation's reputation, may want to send their child to the Free School, the good level of education the school provides, its large size mean and the distance to the Free School mean that it is very unlikely that the establishment of SFS will have a significant negative impact on Farlingaye HS. Overall, therefore, we believe the impact of establishing the Free School on Farlingaye HS to be minimal.

### **Impact on post-16 education – Impact – Moderate**

27. All three secondary schools considered in this assessment have sixth forms, while there are no Further Education Colleges within a 10-mile radius, the nearest being Suffolk New College in the centre of Ipswich which is over 17 miles away.

28. At 175 pupils (2010), the number on roll in the 6th form at Leiston High School is below the recommended lower limit for size of 6th form (200). In 2011 68% of pupils achieved three or more A Levels or equivalent which is below the national average of 81%. The Sixth Form is open access – the only requirement for entry relates to conduct and a large number of pupils pursue vocational qualifications. Leiston has therefore developed a relationship with four other educational partners who have come together to form 'The North Suffolk Partnership.' This partnership makes use of The North Suffolk Skills Centre in Halesworth. This provides learners aged 14+ with opportunities to

develop skills in a range of specialism's including Engineering, Hairdressing, Hospitality and Catering, Health & Social Care and the Construction trades. Leiston currently sends 12 post-16 students there each year, and 25-30 students from Y10 and Y11.

29. The Headteacher of Leiston High School has expressed concern that a reduction in the number of pupils attending the school will call into question the school's ability to offer this route to pupils, as it costs £1,000 per pupil. He also claimed this could call into question the viability of the North Suffolk Partnership.

30. Both Thomas Mills High School and Farlingaye High School also run Sixth Forms. Both return very high results. At Thomas Mills, 93% of pupils achieved three or more A Levels, while at Farlingaye the figure was 99% for 2011. The entry criteria to Thomas Mills is a minimum of 4 GCSEs at grade 'C' including those subjects the applicant wants to study. The entry requirements for Farlingaye are a minimum of 6 GCSEs at grade 'C' with some grade 'B' subjects. Therefore, it is possible that pupils from the Free School could displace pupils from Thomas Mills or Farlingaye if their results are good. If these places are taken up, the long distance to travel to the nearest FE College means that, should Leiston sixth form meet pupils' needs, it is likely to receive pupils from the Free School.

31. The raising of the participation age to 18 will give added impetus to develop a coherent curriculum offer post-16, which meets the needs of all students. As SFS is only an 11-16 school, these pupils will still need to access post-16 provision. While it is possible that some pupils will travel to Ipswich, the few available places at either Farlingaye or Thomas Mills mean that the Sixth Form at Leiston is still likely to be an option if its provision meets pupils' needs post-16. While this may have an impact on the staffing structure at Leiston, it is unlikely to call into question the viability of the Sixth Form in the long term. Officials therefore believe that the establishment of the Free School would only have a moderate impact on post-16 provision in the Suffolk Coastal district.

### **Impact on Primary Schools**

32. Under Suffolk's SOR all of the primary schools in the Saxmundham area are extending their age range from 4-8 to 4-11, while both Leiston Middle School and Saxmundham Middle School are due to close. There are 9 primary schools within a 5-mile radius of the proposed site of the Free School.

33. Saxmundham Middle School currently has six feeder primaries that represent the villages in the nearby area. It is the intention of the Trust that these schools will feed in to the new Free School. Leiston Middle School currently has four feeder primaries, although the number of children in each pyramid is the same (105). The table below shows the existing feeder primary structure and the numbers of pupils in each year group once the primaries have extended their age range to become YR-Y6 from September 2012.

<b>Saxmundham Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)</b>	<b>Leiston Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)</b>
Yoxford Primary School (10)	Aldeburgh Primary School (15)
Peasenhall Primary School (10)	Coldfair Green Community Primary (20)
Saxmundham Primary School (45)	Leiston Primary School (60)
Benhall St Mary's CECVP (10)	Middleston Community Primary (10)
Kellsale Primary School (20)	
Snape Community Primary School (10)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>(105)</b>

34. The Free School's admissions policy does not list feeder primaries and accepts children on the basis of proximity to the school. Therefore, if the Free School were to be established successfully and was seen as the preferred option compared to Leiston High School, those primary schools that are furthest from the Free School, such as Yoxford or Peasenhall, could potentially lose pupils to the other closer primary schools as parents move house to give themselves a better chance of getting a place at the smaller Free School (please see the map of primary schools at Annex B). Therefore, if the Free School is successful, it could potentially have a high impact on these schools, which are two of the smallest in the area (70 pupils at capacity). Both Middleton and Aldeburgh schools are also some distance from the Free School, but as part of the Leiston Middle School pyramid there are likely to be stronger ties to Leiston High School and the impact is likely to be more moderate.

35. Because the primary schools currently operate only up until Y4 we do not have any KS2 attainment data on which to judge the likelihood of this eventuality. Therefore, the ability of these schools to make a positive early impression and to achieve a good standard of results is crucial to the future success of these schools. The Trust has committed itself to working in partnership with local primary schools as they manage the transition from 4-8 to 4-10.

### **Impact of the Seckford Foundation running schools**

36. We have also considered the impact of the Seckford Foundation becoming a provider of education in the state sector on existing schools in Suffolk. Currently, the Seckford Foundation runs Woodbridge School, which is a high performing independent school.

37. The Foundation is also planning to open a Free School in Beccles in 2012 and will submit an application to open an 11-16 school in Stoke-by-Nayland in 2013 and an 11-16 school in Ixworth or Stanton in September 2014.

38. While we cannot pre-judge the outcome of future competitive application rounds, we can conclude that by establishing two schools in 2012 and with a formal relationship with Woodbridge School, the Seckford Foundation will be better placed to provide minority subjects through the centralisation and sharing of resources that would not be possible for an

individual school. The school also plans to allow pupils access to the facilities at Woodbridge School, such as the state of the art Seckford Theatre.

39. Should all four schools be established the Seckford Foundation would be a significant provider within Suffolk and would be able to generate even greater efficiencies and consequently could offer a greater range of subjects, broadening the offer available. This would help to offset the likely narrowing of the curriculum at Leiston High School and would be likely to improve the attractiveness of Saxmundham Free School.

### **Local authority view**

40. We have kept Suffolk County Council (SCC) informed about the proposal to establish a Free School in Saxmundham. SCC has taken a pragmatic approach to the Free Schools policy generally. The LA has raised concerns about BFS's ability to provide a wide curriculum because of its smaller size but acknowledge that they have a role to play in ensuring there is sufficient breadth of offer across the whole system and has committed to working cooperatively with the school and potentially brokering links with other schools. This should ensure that a wider curriculum is available to children at the proposed school.

41. In response to our request for views on the Free School, Simon White, the Director of Children Services, set out the number of pupils in the area and how the Free School would impact upon LHS. The table below shows that if SFS recruited to capacity entirely at the expense of LHS (an unlikely scenario) the intake of pupils at LHS would be so low as to make the school unviable. The extreme example is that there would only be 7 pupils in Y9 at LHS in 2014-15 if SFS filled all its places at the expense of LHS.

42. While it is unlikely that all the pupils at the Free School will come from LHS because the Trust has received applications from parents living as far away as Woodbridge, the impact on LHS is still likely to be significant. If the Free School recruits 50% of its pupils from LHS it will still leave small year groups and potentially two schools of similar size. While this will likely narrow the breadth of the curriculum offer it will no doubt lead to fiercer competition between the two schools but this in itself is a driver to improve standards.

**Table 3. Saxmundham Free School impact on LHS by 2014-15**

<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Y7</b>	<b>Y8</b>	<b>Y9</b>	<b>Y10</b>	<b>Y11</b>
LHS numbers with no SFS	133	141	115	137	161
LHS numbers with SFS at 100% capacity	25	33	7	29	53
LHS numbers with SFS at 50% capacity	79	87	61	83	107



## Representations

43. We have received representations from Leiston Community High School opposing the Free School alongside some representations from individuals in the Leiston area. We have not received any correspondence from either of the closing middle schools or any of the primary schools in the area.

44. The objections cite the following:

- a. An additional school would be an inefficient use of resources and threaten the ability of Leiston to offer a broad curriculum
- b. The proposed educational offer at Saxmundham Free School is narrow and denies children choice
- c. Establishing a Free School in the area would undermine the SOR being undertaken by Suffolk.

45. Taking these objections in turn:

- a. While SFS would create further surplus places within Suffolk we do not accept this would be an inefficient use of resources if it were to act as a driver to raise standards. The standards of the schools in the area are below the national average and parents in the town feel they have no choice. The establishment of the Seckford Foundation as a provider of education in Suffolk could act as a real driver of improvement in the area.
- b. The Trust made the case in its application for a smaller school with a focus on depth not breadth. As it stands, it is expected that SMS pupils will transfer to Leiston, effectively denying pupils opportunity and choice. However, it is doubtful that Leiston will be able to maintain its current curriculum offer which includes vocational options which could also be seen to be denying choice to pupils. However, the Trust were clear in their application that they would work with external partners to offer off-site programmes.

We also have no reason to believe that SFS will focus on the upper ability range; children will be admitted to the school without reference to academic ability and the school has committed to working with children in need of extra support. This is a school suitable for all children in the area.

- c. The school will be an 11-16 school which fits in with the new structure being created through the SOR process. While two schools competing for pupils in the area could lead to a reduction in the breadth of subjects offered, it should serve to drive up standards. Furthermore, SFS demonstrated in their

application their desire to form links with other schools and businesses to broaden its educational offer.

## **Conclusion**

46. Overall, officials believe the nature of the proposed curriculum provision at Saxmundham Free School reflects the distinctiveness of the proposal compared to existing provision and the desire to reflect the likely intake of the school and the community's aspirations. The intimate size and core academic focus of SFS is one of its key selling points and distinguishes it from Leiston High School which presents the only option for parents at the moment.

47. However, there is likely to be a high impact on Leiston High School as the Free School will be competing for the same pupils. The continued good performance of the one other school within a 10-mile radius, Thomas Mills, and even further away in Farlingaye, means that it is unlikely the Free School will be able to draw many pupils from these schools in the short term while it establishes itself. Furthermore, as Leiston is situated on the coast, it is not in the position of being able to cast its net wider to look to bring in more pupils.

48. The likely impact of this, therefore, is that, if the Free School is established successfully the number of pupils at Leiston High School will fall, reducing its ability to offer its current broad curriculum. If the Free School only attracts pupils that would have attended LHS and it fills to capacity on this basis, judging by the figures provided by SCC LHS will not have sufficient pupils to run a viable school. However, the small size of the Free School and its attractiveness to parents outside the immediate vicinity through the reputation of the Seckford Foundation means that Leiston may not become unviable. Indeed, it is likely to reduce to a size comparable with the Free School. However, an estimated increase in the surplus of places in the area over the next few years will be compounded by the establishment of the Free School and will force the two schools to compete fiercely for pupils which should act as a driver to improve standards. Officials therefore conclude that while establishing the Free School will improve choice and could drive up standards, it will have a very high impact on Leiston High and, if they do not innovate to improve their attractiveness to pupils, their long-term viability could be called into question.

Map of Secondary Schools in the Saxmundham Area

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Map of Primary Schools in the Saxmundham and Leiston Area

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