

Title: Steiner Academy Frome
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Impact Assessment – Section 9 Academies Act Duty

Introduction

1. Section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 places a duty upon the Secretary of State to take into account what the impact of establishing an additional school would be likely to be on maintained schools, Academies and institutions within the further education sector in the area in which the additional school is (or is proposed to be) situated. Any adverse impact will need to be balanced against the benefits of establishing the new school.

Background

2. Steiner Academy Frome would be a 4-16 all through Steiner ethos school in the town of Frome, Somerset. It plans to open with an intake of 130 pupils across 5 year groups (reception to year 4), with a subsequent intake of 26 pupils per year until 2015, at which point they will start admitting 52 pupils per year. The school aims to reach capacity by 2026, when they will have 624 pupils, although the proposers are looking into ways in which they can increase the speed at which they build to capacity.

3. The school is due to open in September 2012 but will need to be in temporary accommodation for the first year as their preferred permanent site will not be available by then. The school will be situated on the site of a former primary school in Corsley, approximately 4 miles away from Frome centre, before moving permanently to the Old Frome Victoria Hospital site the following year.

4. The proposers are a group of parents and educationalists who currently send their children to an independent Steiner school in nearby Bruton, or who have links with existing Steiner schools and kindergartens.

School Admissions Policy

5. Ministers are currently considering whether or not five members can be granted founder status. Should the number of founders be agreed after Funding Agreement is entered into, we will need to vary the Funding Agreement at a later date so that this can be reflected. Otherwise the admissions arrangements are compliant with the School Admissions Code.

6. If fewer applications than the published admission number are received, Steiner Academy Frome will offer places to all who apply. In the event of oversubscription, the following criteria will apply, in order, after the admission of pupils with a statement of special educational needs where that statement names the Free School:

- a. Looked After Children – Children in the care of a local authority, or who have been previously and are now formerly adopted or the subject of a guardian order
 - b. The Child or Children of a Founder of the Academy Trust
 - c. Children whose sibling(s) are on roll at the academy on the date of admission. Siblings include not only natural brothers and sisters but also step- brothers/sisters, or brothers/sisters who have been legally adopted, so long as they are living at the same address as the family unit. However, cousins or other relatives at the same address will not be given priority.
 - d. Children living nearest to the Academy, measured by straight line distance using a GPS system between the front door of the child's home and the main gate of the Academy site (proposed) Victoria Hospital, Park Road, Frome.
 - e. Children not satisfying a higher criterion.
7. In a tiebreak situation admission will be decided through the drawing of lots.
8. Steiner Academy Frome will operate a waiting list for each year group. Where in any year the school receives more applications for places than there are places available, a waiting list will be determined solely in accordance with the oversubscription criteria. Where places become vacant they will be allocated to children on the waiting list in accordance with the oversubscription criteria.

Temporary Site

9. The school will be in temporary accommodation for the first year, 4.3 miles away from its permanent site. The temporary site is in Corsley, which is in Wiltshire LA, as the map shows below (the yellow star is the permanent site, and the green star is the temporary site). However, we have not taken this into account when assessing the impact on local schools because under the oversubscription criteria the distance criterion that determines admission is still measured from the permanent site.

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Basic Need

10. The primary school population in Mendip is projected to grow by 3.2% over the next five years. The neighbouring districts of Bath and North East Somerset, Sedgemoor and South Somerset have are projected to grow by 8.5%, 4.9% and 3.5% respectively over the same period. Any potential negative impact on local schools will be mitigated by the growing populations in Mendip and its neighbouring areas.

11. The secondary school population in Mendip is projected to remain fairly stable over the next seven years with a very slight decrease of 0.3% projected. The secondary school population in the neighbouring district of Bath and North East Somerset is also projected to remain fairly stable (-0.2%) over the same period, and for Sedgemoor and South Somerset there are projected falls in pupil numbers of 4.8% and 5.7% respectively. However, as the primary population is projected to increase over the next few years, this should eventually lead to an increase in the secondary population. Given that the school will not take in secondary aged pupils until 2015/16, the secondary pupil population at that time might be projected to grow over the following years and any potential negative impact on local secondary schools may be mitigated by this growing population.

Impact on local schools

12. Given that proximity to the school is a key criterion for admission, our determination of the schools within scope was based on the maximum distance travelled to school by 80% of pupils in Somerset. This is two miles for primary schools and four miles for secondary schools. However, because it is a relatively rural area a four mile radius did not provide us with a sufficient sample of local secondary schools; therefore the impact on all secondary schools within a six and a half mile radius has been included.

13. However, it should be noted that pupils who attend the Steiner Academy Hereford (the only existing state funded Steiner school in the country) travel much further than the local authority average, and we can reasonably infer that this may also apply to Steiner Academy Frome, where parents may be willing to travel longer distances in order to access this particular pedagogy. Of course the more popular and oversubscribed the school is, the less likely this will have an impact. The Free School's admissions are now closed and the analysis shows that the impact on local schools has been fairly evenly spread, and therefore less on each individual school. St Johns C of E School is the state school losing the most pupils, with 15 of its pupils being offered places at the Free School. However it is already oversubscribed and therefore will feel less impact.

14. The Meadow School in Bruton should also be taken into account, as an existing independent Steiner school in the local authority. Many parents who currently send their children to Meadow (or who would be likely in the future to send their children to Meadow) will be attracted to non-fee paying Steiner

education in Frome, and will try to gain admission there for their children. If pupils from the existing independent school transfer to the Free School, this too will dilute the impact on local maintained schools, and in fact we already know that 26 Meadow pupils have been offered places at the Steiner Academy Frome.

15. Finally 12 home educated pupils and 4 pupils from Laurel Farm Kindergarten (another independent Steiner school nearby) have been offered places at the Free School. This further lessens the impact on local state schools.

16. What the admissions figures do not tell us is the likely impact on local middle or secondary schools, and therefore while the ratings for primary schools take into account recent admissions data, the ratings for secondary schools remain speculative, based on the information we currently have to hand.

Summary of the potential impact on primary schools located within 2 miles of the Steiner Academy Frome

School name	Distance from Free School	Impact rating
Schools with a minimal rating		
Trinity C of E First School	0.49 miles	Minimal
Schools with a moderate rating		
Vallis First School	0.34 miles	Moderate
St Johns C of E First School	0.35 miles	Moderate
St Louis Catholic Primary School	0.38 miles	Moderate
Christ Church C of E First School	0.72 miles	Moderate
Hayesdown First School	1.15 miles	Moderate

Summary of the potential impact on secondary schools (including middle deemed secondary) located within 6.5 miles of the Steiner Academy Frome

School name	Distance from Free School	Impact rating
Schools with a minimal rating		
Writhlington School	6.06 miles	Minimal
Schools with a moderate rating		
Selwood Anglican/Methodist Middle School	1.07 miles	Moderate
Oakfield School (middle deemed Secondary)	0.41 miles	Moderate
Matravers School	6.33 miles	Moderate
Frome Community College	1.21 miles	Moderate

17. Further details about capacity, performance and Ofsted ratings for

each school can be found at Annex B(i), along with our analysis of the impact the Free School is likely to have. Our analysis suggests that with the exception of two schools (Oakfield and Frome Community College) none of the schools within scope will be affected by the new Free School in terms of their long term financial viability, and the overall impact of the Free School on the local area will be minimal. An evaluation of the impact on Oakfield and Frome Community College is in paragraphs 43-45.

Section 10 Consultation

18. Prior to submitting their application, the SAF steering group organised a number of events to discuss and promote the proposed Free School. Community outreach programmes were initiated to make the school known to deprived and disadvantaged families. Their marketing strategy included holding an information stall on market days in town, leafleting and canvassing door to door. A public consultation was also held, attended by over 200 parents in January 2011. A newsletter also goes directly to 500 families informing them of the progress of the application.

19. As part of their statutory consultation SAF have been seeking the views of primary and secondary schools local to the proposed site. They have also sought the views of parents, community groups, local businesses, home education groups and the local farming community.

20. The group ran an initial 6 week consultation that ended on Tuesday 14 February. Due to developments in their admissions policy (the proposed inclusion of founders' children) and site (temporary accommodation in the first year on a different site) they ran a second 5 week consultation that ended on Thursday 3 May. During that period the proposers carried out the following activity:

- Several press releases were issued to the local media
- Produced a consultation leaflet, which was sent to local schools, community groups, faith groups, Somerset County Council education staff, Wiltshire County Council, local libraries, local ward councillors and MPs, Mendip District councillors, pre-schools and nurseries.
- Held four public drop in meetings open to anyone from the community, covering Frome and Corsley.
- Set up a consultation website that included detail about the Steiner ethos, admissions arrangements, curriculum etc.
- Sent out questionnaires to stakeholders (hard copy and through the website)

First consultation period

21. Some stakeholders raised concerns about the process by which the consultation was carried out. Most of these concerns went to the Academy

Trust, but some were also raised with the Department. Some residents claimed that they hadn't heard anything about the consultation in the local media. There was also concern about the location of the first public meeting, which was held in a conference room at the Archangel Hotel, Frome, with complaints that the lighting was poor and that it was an intimidating atmosphere. The Academy Trust responded to this feedback by holding a second drop in meeting in Frome public library and offering one to one meetings to stakeholders who had not been able to attend any of the events.

22. As well as drop in sessions there were questionnaires, the results of which are summarised below. A total of 157 consultation questionnaires were received. Overall, when asked whether the Secretary of State should enter into a Funding Agreement with the Free School, to enable it to open in September 2012, respondents were mostly against the idea with 84 against and 68 in favour out of a total of 156 who responded to the question.

23. Those that supported the school did so due to:

- a shortage of places locally;
- the value of the Steiner curriculum; and
- the welcome opportunity of competition.

24. Those that were against the school thought:

- that money would be better spent on schools already within the community;
- it would have a detrimental effect on admissions and funding on the well established schools in the community;
- that there is sufficient choice already; and
- that personalised learning, including the development of Forest School activities, was already on offer in Frome

25. The responses to the questions about the traditions of the Steiner movement were more positive, with 50 – 50 in favour and against. One local teacher said 'I think Steiner education offers the best student-focused environment where the pressure of external exams and the like are forgone in favour of real teaching and learning' but conversely one message stated 'They are anti-intellectual, anti-science and provide the wrong message to young people....'

26. Although 103 out of 151 respondents supported the school's ethos of nurturing individual creativity in a culture of collaborative learning there was confusion as to what the proposers actually meant by this. The 'no' responses tended to state that this particular ethos is not unique to a Steiner school environment and therefore doesn't mark it out as special, leading some respondents to question the value of having the question there at all.

27. A recurring theme which ran through the responses to the questionnaires involved the diversion of existing funds from schools in Frome to the proposed school. Some respondents argued that those who wanted Steiner education for their children should pay for it themselves.

28. Other concerns from the questionnaires:

- How will children from deprived backgrounds with SEN (but not stated) be supported?
- The site is not a good place for the school
- Why should the park be used for pupils' recreation when it belongs to the people of Frome? What about safeguarding?
- There are not enough children in the town to necessitate another school.
- How will dyslexic, dyspraxic and dyscalculic children be supported?

29. The vast majority of those who supported the school in responses to the questionnaires were parents of primary aged children.

30. During the drop in meetings issues were also raised around traffic management. Local residents were keen to see plans to manage traffic around the busy site. There was even enough strength of feeling around this that respondents to questionnaires felt that the school should not open in September 2012 as it will take longer to sort out the serious traffic problems. All residents in Park Road, the proposed permanent location of the school, were sent a letter advising them that a separate traffic management plan would be consulted on in the coming weeks. There are also concerns amongst the local residents over planning permission for the site. The consultation report outlined that the proposer group is working with local councillors on this.

31. One of the drop in sessions also revealed worries about the proposed Free School creating a 'class divide' with middle class parents moving to be near the school and local parents missing out. One comment was 'this is not a school for local people. This is a school for a minority who want free Steiner education.' Many were vocal in their opposition to a new school which they felt was not needed in an area of, in their view, outstanding results and surplus places.

Second consultation period

32. A total of 51 consultation questionnaires were received and the two drop in meetings attracted over 60 people. However the proposers report that the majority of stakeholders were mainly interested in finding out how to apply to the school rather than commenting specifically on the plans.

33. Traffic planning came out as a key issue concerning Corsley residents.

There were worries that the increased traffic caused by the school in its temporary site would have an adverse impact on the area. In particular there were concerns that the Little Cuckoos pre-school nearby would be negatively affected by the sudden increase in activity in the area, although the pre-school itself has expressed a desire to work together with the Free School and provide mutual support. The proposers confirmed that they are working with planners to ensure that this is properly managed and that it would be a key consideration for planners.

34. In response to specific consultation questions:

- 28 out of 50 respondents supported the proposal to open a new all-through Academy in the area (17 were against and 5 did not know).
- 27 out of 48 respondents did not support the Academy being located in temporary accommodation for the first 12-18 months (16 were supportive and 5 did not know). Those against were concerned about the disruptive effect on the pupils, the lack of certainty over whether or not the permanent site could be secured, and the increase in traffic in the area.
- 21 out of 48 respondents supported the Steiner educational approach (14 were against and 13 did not know).
- 21 out of 47 respondents agreed that the Steiner Academy Frome should open in September 2012, but 20 did not agree and 6 did not know. Those against the proposal cited sufficient supply of schools in the area already, and the fact that the permanent site was not yet ready.

35. The proposers also consulted on the inclusion of founders' children as one of the priority criteria in their admissions arrangements. Responses were broadly split between those that supported it because they felt it was right that those that had worked hard on the school should be able to secure a place for their own children (as long as the numbers of founders was capped and not excessive) and those against because other state funded schools did not allow this and it was a form of nepotism that should not be allowed in state funded schools.

Conclusion

36. Overall, it is clear that there is some opposition to a new Free School in Frome (although not necessarily because it is Steiner), and equally there is opposition to the school locating itself in Corsley temporarily while the permanent site is being made ready. Key issues centred on the diversion of funds from existing schools in the town, planning and traffic management. The group are keen to address this and they are now working hard to produce plans which they hope will alleviate residents' concerns.

Views from Somerset LA and individuals who have written to the Department

37. Somerset local authority and NHS Somerset have written to the Department, both expressing their reservations over the proposed school. The local authority feel that, although there will be a need for places at the lower end of the primary age range in the academic year 2012/13, this will be met by additional classrooms in Christchurch First School and there is no basic need in the middle and upper phases. They believe that an all through school offering 640 places would exceed demand. However, as Free Schools are about raising standards and increasing the choice and diversity in the educational landscape of any given area, this is not in itself a reason to stop the Free School from going ahead.

38. The LA also raised a number of practical queries about who has responsibility for home to school transport, safeguarding and places planning, to which we have responded.

39. NHS Somerset is concerned about the possible effect that a number of unimmunised children in one area could have. They are of the opinion that a Steiner school would attract children of families where immunisation is not the norm, but there is no concrete evidence to suggest that this will be the case.

40. Senior leaders from local schools have also voiced their opposition, in particular the head teacher and assistant head from Oakfield School, the middle school nearest to the proposed site. They voiced concerns that opening the school will be money badly spent as there is currently no shortage of spaces in Frome schools. They also feel that many of the attributes of Steiner are part of school life in Frome now – the use of nurture and Forest Schools for example. The co-chairs of the Frome Community Learning Partnership (FCLP), a forum encompassing all schools in Frome, have also written to the Department raising the issue of why a Free School is being planned for Frome when within the FCLP there is already evidence of good or improving standards with the majority of the schools in the partnership judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted. We have responded to these concerns by emphasising the importance of parental choice and of bringing a diversity of education into the area, when at the moment the only Steiner option nearby is a fee paying independent school.

41. There is some opposition from those who are anti Steiner in the broader sense, in particular citing anthroposophy and racism as part of the Steiner ethos. However, SAF have been at pains to point out that none of these teachings will be promoted or tolerated at the school.

Conclusion

42. The figures show that, in Mendip District Council, there was a surplus of places in the primary and secondary phase of 7.8 % and 8.4% respectively in the academic year 2010/11. However, if no new provision was added at primary by 2015/16 there would be deficit of places of 3.9% of total capacity so there is potentially a need for new places at primary school level in the

area. Conversely, for the secondary phase, the number of surplus places will increase to 20.6% of total capacity by 2015/16. The addition of the Free School will further increase the surplus capacity. Therefore, whilst there may be a need for additional places at primary school level there is clearly no immediate basic need in the area at secondary level.

43. However, Steiner Academy Frome will have a separate ethos from schools in the area and offers something different to the faith schools, of which there are several in the primary and middle phases. It has a distinct philosophy which means parents will bring their children to the school from a wider catchment area than the Somerset average (one mile for a primary school and two miles for secondary). The state Steiner school in Hereford attracts pupils from an average distance of 6.87 miles for 5–10 year olds and 7.04 miles for 11–15 year olds, compared to average distances of 1.5 miles and 3.1 miles travelled to primary/ secondary schools respectively in Herefordshire. The Meadow School in Bruton should also be taken into account, as an existing independent Steiner school in the local authority. As has been borne out by the admissions data, many parents who currently send their children to Meadow will be attracted to non-fee paying Steiner education in Frome, and will try to gain admission there for their children. The fact that pupils will transfer from the independent sector to the Free School dilutes the impact of the Free School on local maintained schools. We also know that the Free School has appeal for a number of home educating families, which again reduces the impact on local schools.

44. Having said this, we believe that there may be some impact on two secondary schools in the area – Oakfield School and Frome Community College. Oakfield School is a middle school 0.41 miles away from the proposed site. It is currently undersubscribed with a relatively large number of surplus places. Frome Community College is a secondary school (13–19) which is undersubscribed and close to the proposed Free School, meaning it could be affected by the competition. The Free School could affect the long term financial viability of the school. However, the growing primary school population, together with the time delay before this becomes a potential issue, could mitigate the impact. Also, the specialist nature of the Steiner offer will not appeal to all parents, so large numbers of parents from the FCC catchment area are less likely to apply to join the Free School.

45. Both schools are likely to be affected in some way by the Free School, and unsurprisingly both have written in to the Department to question why the school is needed in an area that already has a surplus of places. Oakfield School in particular has been rated good with outstanding features by its latest Ofsted report, and appears to be improving under the leadership of an ambitious head teacher. The introduction of the new Free School may hamper the ability for the school to carry on improving if pupils choose to go to the new Free School instead.

46. However, the creation of a new school will not only bring an entirely new pedagogy to the area, but will also provide a quality additional choice for parents. This factor must be weighed up against the possible impact on existing schools. Both Oakfield and Frome Community College also have

much larger year groups than the proposed Steiner Academy Frome, which lessens the proportional impact (although of course their existing surplus places should be taken into account), on the assumption that pupils are attracted from further afield than these two schools' likely cohorts.

47. Taking its specific ethos, the likelihood that parents are willing to travel further for Steiner education and the relatively small size of the school (2FE) into account, the impact of the proposed Free School on existing schools is likely to be minimal, even on those that are nearby and doing less well. The ethos of the school means that it is more likely that pupils will be taken from a wider area, and not concentrated in any single school's catchment. This is particularly pertinent given the proximity of an existing independent Steiner School, which may well lose pupils to the Free School.

48. The fact that SAF does not include a sixth form means that the school should not affect the long term viability of FE institutions in the area. Equally, we would not expect the Free School to impact on special schools or alternative provision in the area. In fact the reverse is true and the proposed Free School may be able to broker positive partnerships with those institutions to the advantage of all parties.

49. Overall, we believe it is appropriate for the Secretary of State to enter into a Funding Agreement with the Academy Trust.