

Appendix F: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Free school presumption

Version 1 – updated 25.02.26

Please note that the FAQs will be updated as questions are received.

- Scoring/application FAQs..... 1
- Finance FAQs..... 5
- Admissions FAQs 8
- Pre-school FAQs..... 11
- Other FAQs..... 12

Scoring/application FAQs

1. How will the applications be scored?

Applications will be shortlisted against each area of the specification and will be scored between 0 (inadequate) - 3 (excellent). If your application scores zero on any of the sections we will not continue to score your application. Any excess words and appendices will be ignored and therefore will not be considered when scoring.

2. How will the academic performance of the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) be considered?

The panel will consider pupil outcomes across the MAT for Suffolk schools (and those in the MAT outside Suffolk) over the past 3 years to see the impact of the MAT on those outcomes. Where there are a large number of applications and a MAT’s outcomes or improvement are well below the other applicants, that application may not be taken any further.

For example, if 12 MATs applied to open a free school and 10 of them were in the top half of all MATs nationally, with good outcomes for Suffolk pupils and 2 were in the bottom 25% with outcomes well below national, those 2 applications are unlikely to be progressed further.

An exception may be made where schools have recently joined the MAT or- despite being below national- there is evidence of significant improvements. Without this, a decision would be based on the view that the pupils in the existing Suffolk MAT schools need all the trust’s attention.

3. Will we receive a receipt of application?

Yes, we will confirm receipt of the application. However, it may not be possible for staff to check the contents of the submission, therefore trusts should ensure all documents are attached to their application or be clear that they are submitting documents in more than one email. Any documents submitted after the closing time and date will not be considered.

4. Who can make an application for these schools?

The DfE guidance 'Establishing a new academy; the free school presumption route – guidance for local authorities and new school proposers' states that 'Any academy trust that is already registered with Companies House is able to submit a proposal. The proprietors of local good or outstanding schools that are interested in submitting a proposal to run a new school will need to have or acquire academy trust status.'

5. We are already opening another school can we apply to run either of these schools?

We are very aware of the level of work required to open a new school, therefore trusts that are already due to open a new school, either in Suffolk, or outside the county, will need to robustly evidence that they have capacity to open an additional new school.

Should the panel believe that the trust has not demonstrated that they have sufficient capacity to accommodate the level of work required to open a new school the application may not progress to the next stage.

6. Could you confirm which specification the bid should align with? The application form directs bidders to the DfE Annex C guidance, but this guidance includes different criteria and references the inclusion of certain appendices and letters of support, which you have mentioned are not required. Please clarify which set of requirements should be followed.

Trusts should be aware of the DfE Annex C guidance, however, shortlisting will be based on SCC's own specification.

7. The specification mentions the potential for future expansion of the school. Should we assume it will be constructed as a 1 FE or as a 2 FE, with some classrooms initially closed off? Additionally, should we financially model both scenarios to account for potential additional costs if the school is built on a larger scale than originally anticipated?

The final size of the Haverhill primary school will be 1FE. The final size of the Sudbury primary school will be 2 FE, however the school will initially be built as a 1 FE and will be expanded if/when required.

8. Which tables are included within the word count?

We have reviewed the full document and can confirm that some tables are acceptable and will not be counted in the word count, provided that the information within the tables is relevant to the question. Below you will find questions which have tables provided or suggest that tables are or could be used, there is also confirmation of which will, and which will not be included in the word count;

The questions where tables are mentioned are;

Q5 - Please indicate which school(s) you are applying to run and mark your preferences in order of priority. Table is provided and **will not be included in word count**

Q8 - Do you currently run any existing schools, academies or free schools or expect schools, academies, or free school to join the trust within the next six months? If so, please complete the table, give details of all schools, including the most recent Ofsted and attainment data for each. Please continue table onto an additional page if needed. A table is provided and **will not be included in word count**

If you have been inspected under the new OFSTED framework, please include the details in the table on the following page. A table is provided and **will not be included in word count**

Q8a- Key headlines of statutory assessment data compared to national and trend. A table is provided and **will not be included in word count**

Q11 - Please explain how your organisation meets the requirements set out in the publish specification. This applies to the section of the questions relating to staffing (showing growth) a table is provided and **will not be included in word count**. Educational plan – this could include a curriculum plan and pupil build up, these can be provided in table if the trust wishes to do so, however these tables are not provided and **will be counted within the word count**.

Q12. Please explain and provide evidence of how your organisation would meet the requirements in the published specification.

This applies to the section of the questions relating to –

How the school would be organised and what the governance arrangements would look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures. **This diagram will not be counted in the word count**

Q13. Please explain and provide evidence of how your organisation would meet the requirements for each school you will be applying for, as shown in the published specification

This applies to the section of the questions relating to –

Most recent set of trust accounts **These tables will not be counted in the word count**

Financial forecast for the next 3 years which would include at a summary level: **These tables are not provided, trusts can present the financial information using tables or templates of their choice, financial information provided in these tables will not be counted in the word count, any narrative should be provided separately.**

9. **Submission of CV's - The application states that no appendices should be submitted except for financial information related to Section F. We would like to confirm how the LA would prefer us to handle CVs for key individuals, as it is considered best practice for demonstrating the strength of the proposed leadership team according to the DfE guidance. Any guidance regarding this would be very helpful.**

We do not accept appendices and will not consider these when shortlisting. We are happy for you to provide the information on the key individuals in your application in whichever way works best for you, within the word count provided. If you still require guidance on this then you may wish to consider providing a summary of the strengths of individuals within the team in your answer, and within the wordcount specified.

10. **Ofsted New Inspection Framework - Our understanding is that no schools have been inspected under the new framework to date, as it is set to come into effect in November 2025. Could you please confirm if this is the framework you are referring to?**

Changes to the inspection system were implemented with immediate effect from 2nd of September 2024, when removal of the grade for overall effectiveness from graded inspections was introduced. As there are schools in Suffolk that have been inspected since this date, the application refers to this and the tables allow for the inclusion of information on inspections, regardless of when they were carried out.

11. **Can we include links within the application?**

They can be included if the trust wishes, however we will not review links and they will not be included in the information considered for shortlisting.

- 12. The specification and application refer to vulnerable learners and SEND in both section B and section D. As there is overlap in these answers we would like to refer to the other section in each answer, is that acceptable? If not, please can you tell us the difference between each?**

We will consider both answers included for SEND and vulnerable learners, in sections B and D, when scoring, if referenced. However, trusts should ensure that they provide an answer in for each part of the specification in the application form. If no answer is provided and there is only a reference to another section, they will score a 0 and will not progress further through the application and shortlisting process.

- 13. There is a table to be completed on school data. This is for primary schools, we would like to share data on our secondary schools also, can we add a table to show this?**

You may add additional lines to the existing table, or an additional table may be provided to show secondary data if the trust wishes to share this. The contents of the additional table should provide data relevant to the question, providing quantitative data and not qualitative explanations.

Finance FAQs

- 14. Is there a finance template for the primary school application that you would like to be completed?**

There is no finance template. You may provide your financial plan in any way which you see fit. You can also provide a commentary of up to 500 words to accompany the financial forecasts, for each school you will be applying for. This will give the opportunity to explain how the plan was put together and considerations.

- 15. Can we use the DfE template?**

Yes. Trusts can use whichever template they wish to.

- 16. The specification states that funding will be for 67.5 pupils for those 3-year groups (22.5 per year group) for 3 years. Please can you confirm which year groups this applies to.**

The funding would be for a minimum of 67.5 places for three years across the school. Should the school have more than 67.5 pupils then the school would be funded for the higher actual number of pupils on roll. See FAQ Question 22 for further details.

17. Will there be a post opening grant available from the ESFA if it is a free school?

The DfE will not provide a post opening grant for the school, however they would provide a Project Development Grant of £25,000. This is to meet legal costs and is usually paid once the provisional opening date has been set.

18. Would the school be on estimated funding until the school is full?

You would receive the funding for the equivalent of 22.5 pupils for years R to 2 as mentioned earlier in FAQs (see Question 14). We will monitor numbers as the school grows and the school could apply for growth funding when additional classes are required. See FAQ Question 22 for details of amounts.

19. Will the setting up allowance be paid at the outset (even though several classrooms will be unused) or over a period of time?

This will be agreed with the successful academy trust; however, SCC envision that the school would not set up all classrooms when the school opens.

SCC are currently reviewing the numbers that the schools will open with, but the schools will not require all places when initially opened. Therefore, not all classrooms will be required on opening, and some may not be used for some time. It may therefore be beneficial for the funding for classroom set up to be paid in stages so that the school does not end up having equipment that becomes outdated.

20. If the school is built out in one phase does this mean that some areas will need to be mothballed as there will be a cost associated with maintaining and heating those spaces?

It will be up to the trust how they manage the space in the school. The school is being built as net zero and the design includes Photovoltaic panels (PV), it is hoped that this will provide electricity to the school and that this will help support costs.

21. The specification mentions furniture and fittings in the setting up allowance. Is there a separate pot (from the LA or DfE) for IT?

There is no separate pot for IT equipment such as laptops and whiteboards. The building would have the appropriate cabling, ports etc installed by SCC. The successful academy trust would liaise with the design team's IT expert to understand what is being installed.

22. Would there be any pre-opening/set up funding available for the pre-school?

There is no preopening/set up funding available for the pre-school.

23. Funding that will be available for the academy trust:

Preopening funding – to help pay for getting the school ready for pupils. The setting up allowance may not all be paid in one payment, in agreement with academy trust and LA, (see FAQ question 18.)

- Start-up allowance (such as headteacher and admin staff salary) = £200,039
- Setting up allowance (for furniture and other class equipment) = £6,824 per general class, £10,236 per specialist class (for example food technology).
- Block payment (cost for establishing office/communal space etc) = £34,122

Growth funding – to enable the school to plan whilst pupil numbers are low. If the school has more than 67.5 pupils on roll (regardless of the year the pupils are in) then the school would receive a greater amount of funding, which is based on actual pupil numbers:

- 2028/29 = 22.5 pupils x three-year groups x per pupil funding (£)
- 2029/30 = 22.5 pupils x three-year groups x per pupil funding (£)
- 2020/31 = 22.5 pupils x three-year groups x per pupil funding (£)
- See example of pupil numbers below for reference.

- First year - Funded for 67.5 pupils (guaranteed funding)

R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total pupils
10	10	10	-	-	-	-	30

- Second year - Funded for 67.5 pupils (growth funding)

R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total pupils
12	13	10	10	-	-	-	45

- Third year – Funded for 70 pupils (based on pupil numbers)

R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total pupils
20	15	15	10	10	-	-	70

If the school is having significant difficulties managing staffing and Infant Class Size regulations, then you can apply for additional Growth Funding. However, there is the expectation that where required and where numbers allow, there is mixed class teaching. Individual year groups may only be possible where sufficient pupils attend to justify this.

Project Development Grant – from the DfE to meet legal costs. This is usually paid once the provisional opening date has been set.

- £25,000 funding

24. Can we forecast a surplus in one year and carry it forward to use in the following years?

Yes, you can.

25. Regarding the £6,600 payment for the classroom set up, does it matter how we wish to receive these?

We are happy to work with the trust on when the payments for classroom set up are made. We suggest that not all classes are set up right at the start as technology changes and items purchased now, for classes that will be empty for a number of years, may become outdated. We are happy to discuss this payment with the successful trust and work with them on the timing. The payment for each classroom will only be made once and trusts should ensure that money paid early is set aside for future classroom set up.

Admissions FAQs

26. Is the PAN limited to 15 as Years R, 1, 2 move up the school, or can we take on additional pupils in those year groups after the first year (or three years)?

The PAN applies to the year of entry for the whole school year only.

The PAN has been set initially at 15 as we are trying to reduce the impact on neighbouring schools and ensure that there are sufficient places for those children moving onto the new development. We would like to work with the successful academy trust to increase the PAN or admission number as the in-catchment demand increases.

27. The specification mentions 15 pupils in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2— does this mean 15 per year group, totalling 45 from September 2027? However, the FAQs include a pupil build-up chart (pg. 7) that indicates 10 pupils per year group at opening. Could you please confirm the expected pupil numbers for the first three years?

The 15 per year is suggested as a maximum for each year group, which is why the PAN is set at 15. The example on page 7 is an example of how growth funding would work in relation to possible numbers. This has been provided as there were numerous questions regarding to how growth funding would work in relation to the numbers in each year.

28. We can see that the PAN is 15 in the first year of opening, should we assume that it increases to 30 or 60 in the second year of opening.

We are not expecting either school to be at full capacity for a number of years as the number of pupils will increase slowly as the houses are built out. We anticipate that the school will increase the PAN incrementally to ensure there is no detrimental impact on surrounding schools, and to ensure that places are available to children as they move onto the development. This will mean that the PAN will increase by a small amount each year until the school is at full capacity, which may take a number of years. The LA anticipate working with the trust to ensure that this growth is in line with demand from the new developments. Although we forecast the number of children that we expect to see resulting from the new housing, we cannot guarantee numbers in future years, therefore a flexible approach is required from any trust interested in these new schools.

29. Would the pre-school also have a restricted PAN when it opens?

No, the only restriction to numbers in the pre-school is based on floor area and staff ratios.

30. Please explain further regarding the comments about the oversubscription criteria in the school specific brief.

SCC has included a proposed catchment area within the school specification. We would ask the academy trust to include catchment within their oversubscription criteria so that children living/moving into the new developments, are given priority for the places available. There is a SCC Admissions Manager who is happy to work with you regarding your proposed oversubscription criteria, which must adhere to the Schools Admissions Code.

31. Would it be possible to prioritise catchment area above siblings in the school's oversubscription criteria?

The academy trust would be the admissions authority for the new school and would set the school's oversubscription criteria. The trust could decide to prioritise catchment above siblings, however they must ensure that the oversubscription criteria complies with the Schools Admissions Code.

32. How will admissions be overseen, especially with regard to SEND?

We do not co-ordinate in-year admissions in Suffolk. This means that the successful Academy Trust will receive in-year applications directly and will need to process them within 15 school days of receipt and write to the parent/carer with the outcome, using the oversubscription criteria when necessary.

Any in-year applications received for a child with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan must be forwarded to the Family Services Team to ensure that the statutory consultation process is followed. If the school is later named in a child's EHC plan, the Trust must, by law, admit the child, even if the year group is full.

Looked After Children (LAC) and all Previously Looked After Children (PLAC), including those children who appear to have been in state care outside of England, must be given the highest priority within the school's oversubscription criteria in accordance with the School Admissions Code. Even if a year group is full, we would expect these children to be admitted.

33. If the school has space within the building but all the places have been allocated up to the PAN of 15 how would a school admission appeal work?

The admission authority would need to include all relevant information for the appeal panel to consider. The school may have challenges admitting over PAN

due to infant class size regulations, staffing, or class organisation as the school grows, and this would need to be demonstrated within the appeal paperwork.

34. Is there scope to increase the PAN from 15 and how will the PAN grow over time?

We will monitor the build out rates from the developer and estimate when additional places are required. We would work with the school each year to confirm the PAN based on the expected children moving into the area and if there was more demand than places available based on the PAN, the admissions authority can decide to admit above PAN. As the PAN is only relevant to the normal intake year of the school, which will be Reception for a primary school, a higher admission limit could also be implemented for other year groups, taking into consideration growth, staffing and class organisation.

35. Given that the number of pupils is uncertain can we provide two financial plans to show how we would deal with two different size cohorts?

Yes, you can.

Pre-school FAQs

36. Is there anything I need to complete for Early Years?

No, at this stage we are just looking for you to indicate your interest by completing part 2, question 14 on the application form. Do not complete the expression of interest form at this time.

37. If the academy trust is successful with the application for the primary school and the pre-school how will the arrangements with the pre-school work? Will the pre-school be part of the school, or separate with its own URN?

We have requested that the pre-school meet the requirements of the governments funded childcare and to admit children from 9 months. If a school run pre-school admits children below 2 years old it is required to have a separate OFSTED registration, therefore if the trust's application to run the pre-school is successful a separate OFSTED registration to the school's OFSTED will be required.

We envision that, if run by the school, the pre-school will be considered part of the school if the academy trust runs each provision, staff to join professional development days etc.

We will red line the pre-school out of the school lease, so that if the academy trust wishes to relinquish the pre-school lease before the end of the lease period, or SCC wish to terminate the lease, it would be possible to do so without needing

to change the school lease. The pre-school will have separate utilities from the school and parking spaces for their staff.

38. How will the leaseback arrangement work if the pre-school is run by a different provider than the school, will the pre-school pay “rent” to the school?

The pre-school will be red lined out of the school lease and will be retained by the council to be leased to the childcare provider running the setting. As all services will be separate, we do not envisage the childcare provider paying the school any rent. The provider will only require access to the EY setting and car parking spaces allocated to them.

39. Will the preschool wish to share any services offered by the school, such as lunches, cleaning etc?

If the preschool is not run by the school, we would encourage both the school and preschool to work together closely for the benefit of both organisations and of the families using them. It would be down to the school and pre-school to come to agreement in relation to services shared.

40. If the academy trust applying to run the school does not wish to run the pre-school will their school application be marked down?

No, we will prioritise shortlisting the academy trusts to run the new primary school.

Once we have shortlisted the primary school applications, we will consider the pre-school application information provided by those shortlisted trusts, if applicable.

The presumptive process will be focused on identifying the trust that will provide the best education for the primary school pupils. If the successful academy trust does not wish to run the pre-school the Early Years Team will run an Expression of Interest (EOI) to identify the provider for the pre-school.

41. We intend to offer care for 9 months+, 2- to 3-year-olds and 3-year-olds +, however we are not sure if the building design lends itself to this.

We are interested to see the approach of trusts to providing childcare to a range of ages. The setting provides one large room, which can be divided with the creative use of furniture, there is a quiet area for sleep. Trusts can share how they would approach the delivery of childcare from such a space.

Other FAQs

42. Is the primary school still due to open in September 2028?

Yes, however the build out and pupil numbers will be monitored to ensure that the school is built in a timely manner, should there be any change to the opening date we will inform academy trusts as soon as we become aware of this.

43. Will the new school have SEND provision included on site?

We have not included a SEND unit in the primary school design for this school.

44. Would it be possible to view the proposed floorplans or designs of the buildings, as this will help to inform our curriculum/day to day plans?

Floor plans are at an early stage of design and will not be shared publicly at this time, if any trust wishes to see the floorplans please email us to advise and we will share the information available. Please be aware that the floorplans may change during the design process.

45. In the question relating to data for KS1 and KS2 (Q8c, page 9) the cohort size is requested, however our cohort was different in each of the years, how do we show this – do we put an average?

Trusts can enter the cohort size column or put the cohort size second column for the relevant year.

46. What is the timeline for design and planning permission?

Design has started in both schools and planning permission is likely to be submitted in spring/summer 2026, for start on site spring 2027 and delivery July 2028.

47. What days are the interviews due to be held?

Interviews are to be held the week commencing Monday 14 September. The exact dates are yet to be confirmed.

48. Where can I find Boyton Place, Haverhill pupil forecasts and housing trajectories?

See tables below. Please note that housing build out continues until 2045.

	Prior Years	Current Forecast Period					2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037
		2025	2026	2027	2028	2029								
Aggregated Potential Primary Pupils from Development (excluding prior completions)	165	29	76	142	208	261	313	365	417	469	521	568	603	638

Location	Prior Years	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037
North West Haverhill (Hales Barn), north of Howe Rd, west of Ann Suckling Way	430	73	64	70	73	66	66	66	66	66	66	44	0	0
North East Haverhill, Great Wilsey Park, Little Wrating	178	34	98	153	154	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
Total Housing Completions	608	107	162	223	227	179	179	179	179	179	179	157	113	113
Aggregated Housing Completions	608	715	877	1100	1327	1506	1685	1864	2043	2222	2401	2558	2671	2784
Aggregated Potential Primary Pupils from Development (excluding prior completions)		29.3	76.2	141.8	208.4	260.5	312.6	364.7	416.8	468.9	521.0	567.5	602.7	637.9

49. Where can I find Westland Heath, Sudbury pupil forecasts and housing trajectories?

See tables below.

	Prior Years	Current Forecast Period												
		2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037
Aggregated Potential Primary Pupils from Development (excluding prior completions)	68	27	53	66	79	106	132	159	185	211	238	264	281	281

Location	Prior Years	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037
Sudbury, Chilton Woods	225	88	87	42	45	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	54	0
Total Housing Completions	225	88	87	42	45	87	54	0						
Aggregated Housing Completions	225	313	400	442	487	574	661	748	835	922	1009	1096	1150	1150
Aggregated Potential Primary Pupils from Development (excluding prior completions)		26.7	53.1	65.8	79.5	105.9	132.3	158.7	185.0	211.4	237.8	264.2	280.6	280.6