



Department
for Education

Suffolk Special Free School

**Contextual information for applicant
groups applying to open a new
Special Free School**

Suffolk County Council

May 2023

OVERVIEW

The Department for Education is inviting applications from proposer groups to open a new special free school in Suffolk.

Applicant groups can access the key school specification information, along with the full 'How to Apply' guidance, on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). You should read these documents carefully before completing mandatory pre-registration.

The school specification document sets out the key factual details about the proposed school, including the proposed size, SEND designation, age range, suggested top-up funding, and proposed site.

This document provides applicant groups with additional contextual information provided by Suffolk County Council, which includes:

- The rationale, context and need for the school;
- Details on the commissioning of places, including the involvement of any other LAs commissioning places;
- A brief description of the existing provision in the area;
- Future expected growth in pupil numbers; and
- How the LA expects places within the school to be filled.

RATIONALE, CONTEXT AND NEED FOR THE SCHOOL, INCLUDING PROPOSED COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

Suffolk County Council have identified the need to establish a new special school for children and young people with severe learning difficulties (SLD) in the east of the county. Students with severe learning difficulties are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and may have associated difficulties with mobility and communication.

In January 2019 Suffolk County Council agreed a new framework for the development of its specialist provision. This framework describes a pathway of specialist provision for each of the four main profiles of need identified within the SEND Code of Practice 2014.

In 2022, the SEND Sufficiency Plan has been reviewed and refreshed and has outlined a significant growth in the requirement for SLD provision. This has predicted rise of 23.9% for those with SLD between 2022-25. Suffolk currently has 5 SLD schools and 3 MLD schools within the county. All of these schools are full and have been expanded to support the growth being seen as much as is possible on the school sites. Over the next five years there will need to be an additional provision of an extra 14 classrooms for SLD learners (126 learners equivalent) to meet the likely growth need. Suffolk County Council acknowledges that, despite significant investment, the specialist provision and services available across the local offer are not presently meeting the needs of all children and young people with SEND. As the demand continues to grow the pressure on the system will continue to increase.

The location was determined as there is not currently an SLD School along the A12 between Ipswich and Lowestoft. This means this group of students have the furthest to travel to access provision.

The new school will offer much needed provision for those who have the highest educational and care needs within the county. Increasing the provision for SLD by 126 places will enable these children to access provision closer to their homes and their communities, without the need to travel long distances, potentially out of county. This will enable the family networks to remain stronger and the links to their own communities.

At present, it has been identified that not only are Suffolk local offer schools at capacity, the same is being seen for the more costly independent provision. Despite the need to place some pupils within independent provision, the majority of these are also full. This has resulted in some pupils remaining within the mainstream school environment and being inappropriately placed. This increases the pressure on

mainstream schools to be able to support significant needs, not only on their staffing but also on their resources.

Being able to develop a new school will reduce the need for those with SLD to remain in mainstream provision, therefore enabling mainstream schools to be able to more successfully support those who are mainstream appropriate, or those with a slightly lower level of need than SLD. In creating a new school for those with SLD, and therefore enabling more children to remain closer to home, this will have an impact on the social, health and transportation needs within the county.

A specialised school located between Ipswich and Lowestoft will reach a wide geographical area and ensure more children with SLD will receive a suitable education. Many children who are in Independent settings are those who could be appropriately placed within an SLD school within Suffolk's Local offer.

The creation of this school will support the development of Suffolk's local inclusion system and ensure that children can be educated closer to home. Suffolk are committed to not only reducing the travel for individual children, but also to reduce the effects of this travel on the environment. Creating places closer to home will reduce pressure on families, already overstretched budgets and will support our reducing carbon footprint.

EXISTING PROVISION, EXPECTED FUTURE GROWTH IN PUPIL NUMBERS, AND HOW PLACES IN THE NEW SCHOOL WILL BE FILLED

The county of Suffolk currently has over 300 schools and specialist settings providing education and support to approximately 100,000 pupils aged 4 to 16 years of age. The county is expected to continue to see large amounts of housing growth in coming years, with the potential for a further 50,000 homes to be built over the next 5 to 10 years based on local plan allocations and estimates.

This growth has a huge impact on the infrastructure needs of the county with plans for 20 or more primary schools and at least 4 new secondary schools in place to meet the needs of families arriving in the new developments. There will also need to be significant investment in special and alternative provision with contributions sought from housing developers to mitigate the demands arising across the county. However, there is already a pressing and urgent need for additional provision even before this new housing emerges with growth being seen across all ages for young people with additional needs.

Currently Suffolk has 14 special need schools, 5 being SLD 3 being MLD. Suffolk will need to generate at least 550 additional specialist places to accommodate that growing demand by 2025 and the 126 places at this special school is part of that strategy.