



Department
for Education

Suffolk County Council

**Free school presumption: Specification for proposers
wanting to establish a new school for Westland Heath
(formerly known as Chilton Woods), Sudbury, Suffolk.**

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Table of abbreviations

- DfE – Department for Education
- EAL – English as an additional language
- EIA – Equalities Impact Assessment
- EY – Early Years
- FE – Form of Entry
- FSM – Free School Meals
- GAG – General Annual Grant
- IDACI - Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
- LA – Local Authority
- KS1 – Key Stage One, which is comprised of year groups; Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.
- KS2 – Key Stage Two, which is comprised of year groups; Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6.
- PAN – Published Admissions Number
- PSHE – Physical, Social and Health Education
- S106 - Section 106 funding, which is a type of developer contribution
- SEN – Special Educational Needs
- SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- SCC – Suffolk County Council

Section A - Introduction

Suffolk County Council (SCC), referred to as The Council, has a statutory duty to provide a school place for every child living in the County who is of school age and whose parents want their child educated in the state funded sector. In order to ensure the Council meets its statutory duty, the officers monitor the pupil forecasts and planned new housing developments to ensure that it can identify when there is the need to provide additional school places and to respond in a timely manner. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 also requires local authorities to adopt a strategic role, with a duty to promote choice, diversity, and fair access to school provision. The 2011 Education Act changed the arrangements for establishing new schools. As a result, whenever a Local Authority (LA) identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy.

The Council also has a statutory duty under the Childcare Acts 2006 and 2016 and the Education Act 2011 to secure sufficient childcare to enable parents to work or to undertake education or training which could lead to employment (section 6). The Council must ensure that there is sufficient free Early Years (EY) provision for all three-year-old and four-year-old children to access a funded childcare place, in addition, those two-year-old children who meet the eligibility criteria. The EY offer has recently been extended. From September 2025, all eligible working parents of children aged nine months up to three-years-old should be able to access funding for 30 hours per week of childcare for 38 weeks of the year.

Following the progress of the development known as Westland Heath, formerly known as Chilton Woods, Sudbury, the Council has identified an increased need in primary school places and seeks to establish a new one form entry (FE) 210 place, mainstream, 4 to 11 years, mixed primary school, with a 30 place EY setting on site and community facilities on site.

It is planned, based on current forecasting, that the school will open to Reception and key stage 1 aged children in September 2028.

The school will be built as a 1FE 210 place primary school, to meet the forecast demand for places as a result of the new housing, however the Published Admissions Number (PAN) will be limited on opening and will increase in line with housing growth

and increased pupil numbers. The dedicated EY provision on the site will initially accommodate up to 30 children. The new school and pre-school are currently in design, therefore the successful academy trust will not have the opportunity to influence the design of the new school.

The Council welcomes proposals from all potential academy trusts including for voluntary aided schools and academies with a faith designation.

The local area

Sudbury is a market town in Suffolk. The town is located on the River Stour near the border of Essex. Sudbury is the largest town in the Babergh district, and its wider functional area extends to nearby settlements including Great Cornard.

The resident population within the town plan area is approximately 24,000 (2021 census data, <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/sudbury-area-transport-plan-24-02-25.pdf>) and is projected to increase in the coming years particularly due to major developments such as Chilton Woods, where this school is located.

The town is situated approximately 15 miles south of Bury St Edmunds and around 60 miles northeast of London. Sudbury benefits from strong transport connections, including a railway connection to London via Marks Tey station. A range of bus services also operates in Sudbury providing connections to destinations including Bury St Edmunds, Colchester and Clare.

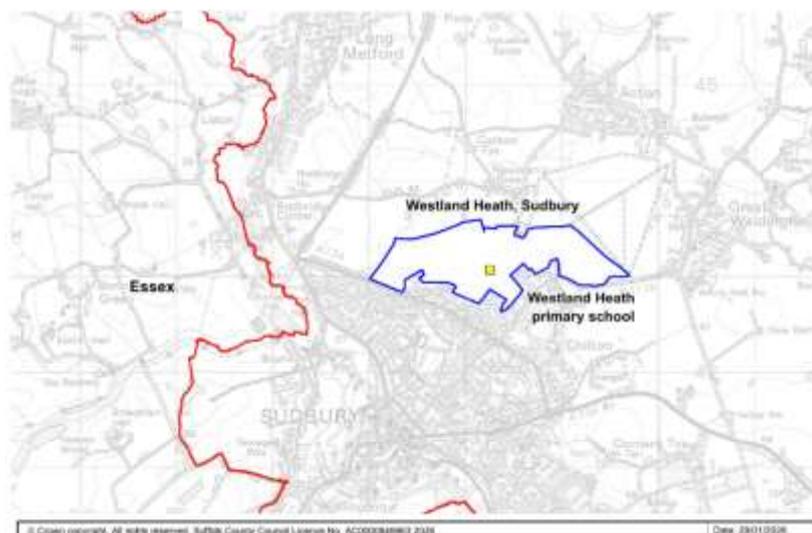


Figure 1: The Sudbury local area, showing the Chilton Woods development, now known as Westland Heath, Sudbury. The map also shows the proximity of the development to

the neighbouring Local authority (LA). The yellow square indicates the approximate location of the proposed new primary school.

According to the Babergh Local Plan 2011–2031 in recognition of the area’s strategic development potential, a comprehensive mixed-use scheme has been allocated on approximately 131 ha of land in the Chilton and Woodhall area in north of Sudbury (<https://www.babergh.gov.uk/documents/d/babergh/core-strategy-and-policies-final-feb-2014>).

Planning permission was granted in 2018 for the construction of 1,150 dwellings on a net area of around 31 ha at the Chilton Woods Mixed Development site, located north of Woodhall Business Park, Sudbury, Suffolk. In addition to this residential development, the scheme also includes 15 ha of employment development, a village centre, a community woodland, a sports pavilion and playing fields, allotments, a primary school, a pre-school and associated retail and community facilities. The development will be delivered in three phases over a 17-year construction period, commencing in 2019 and scheduled for completion in 2036.

The existing primary schools are not well connected to the new housing. In order to make provision for pupils coming from this new community, and to provide space to expand if more housing is agreed, the county council has agreed to commission a new 210 place primary school with a 30-place pre-school located on the development.

The authority is therefore seeking proposals from appropriate academy trusts to open the school and state if they have an interest in running the EY setting. (The inclusion of the EY setting in the application is optional). This school would be deemed a free school.



Figure 2: Map of the proposed development of Westland Heath Development, accessible at <https://www.taylorwimpey.co.uk/new-homes/sudbury/westland-heath>

Existing education provision in the area

Details of existing school provision in the area can be found in Appendices A and B. These provide data for Free School meals (FSM), Special Educational Needs (SEN), English as an additional Language (EAL) and Key Stage 2 outcomes as well as a map showing the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

The closest secondary schools are Ormiston Sudbury Academy and Thomas Gainsborough School.

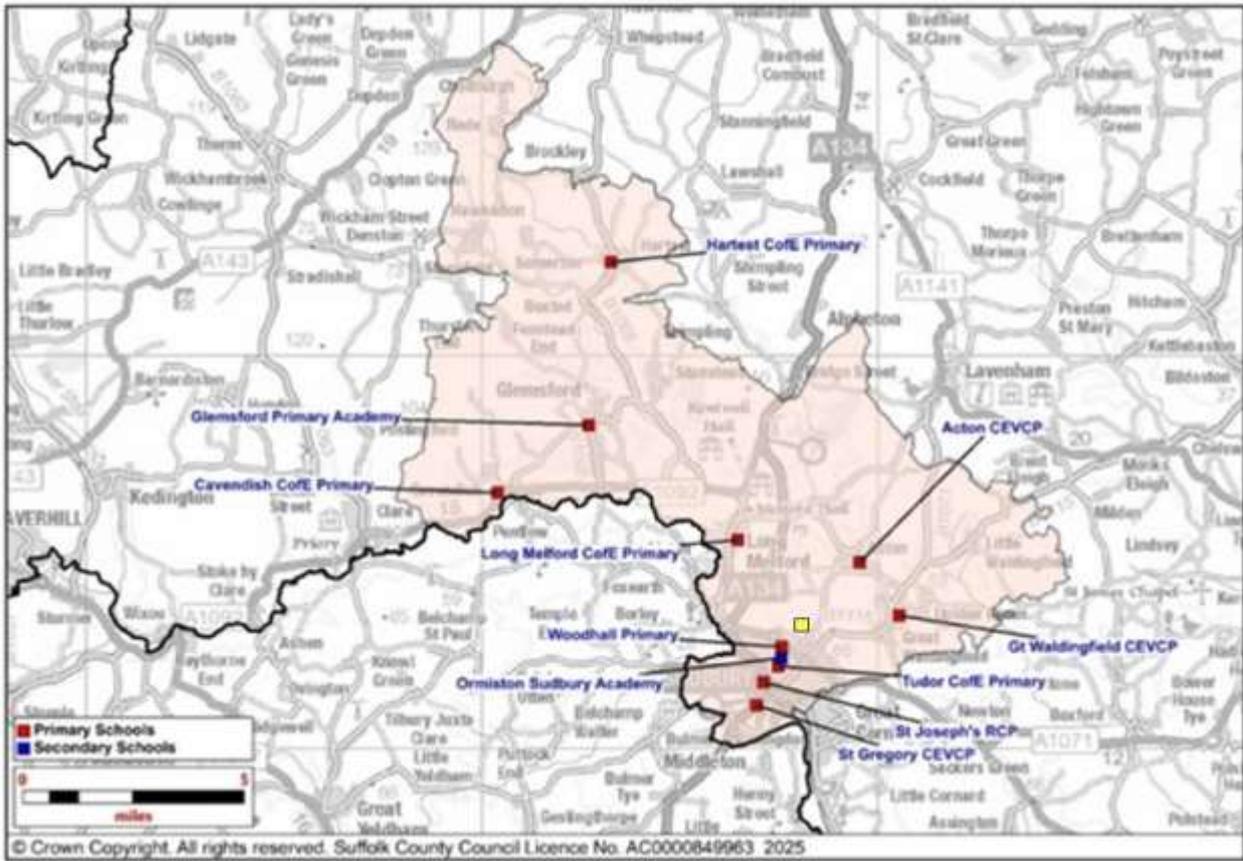


Figure 3: Schools in Ormiston Sudbury Academy planning area. The location of the proposed new school is shown as a yellow square.

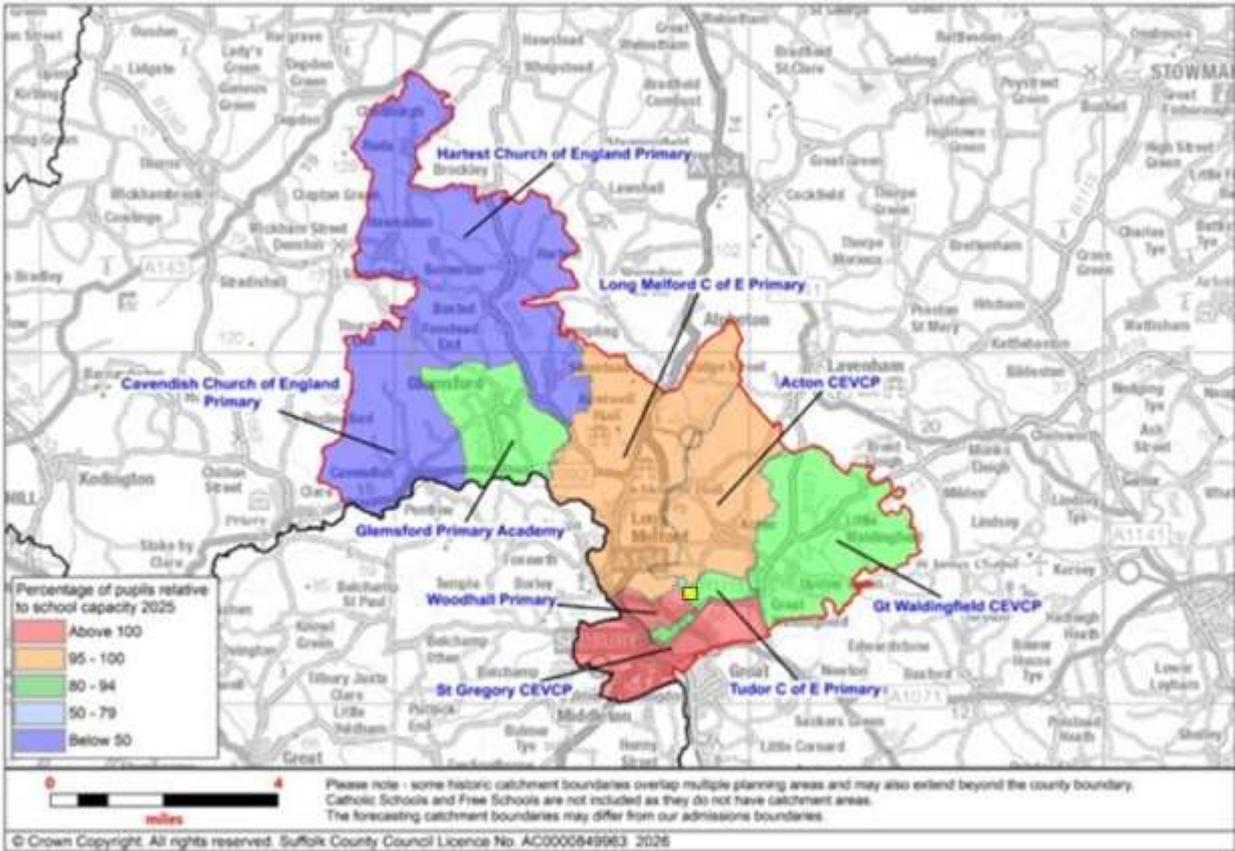


Figure 4: Primary school capacity utilisation in Ormiston Sudbury Academy catchment areas (2025 Forecast) The location of the proposed new school is shown as a yellow square.

The map above, figure 4, illustrates the current capacity of primary schools in the Sudbury planning area. It shows the number of pupils forecast to attend a school relative to the number of places in the catchment primary school, taking into consideration trends and parental preference. Please note that the map does not include St. Joseph’s Catholic Primary school due to the broader catchment areas of Catholic schools in comparison to other schools.

Timetable

The timetable and process for advertising and assessing applications is as follows:

<p>Stage 1 – Invitation for Proposals</p>	
<p>24 February 2026</p>	<p>Launch of process: National and local announcements using Department for Education (DfE) and SCC websites.</p>

10am, Tuesday 26 May 2026	Deadline for receipt of proposals.
Stage 2 – Assessment	
From 27 May 2026 to 07 June 2026	Processing and validating applications to ensure compliance with our guidance.
Week commencing 08 June 2026	Assessment of proposals and selection of preferred proposers
Week commencing 27 July 2026	Assessment period begins for DfE
Week commencing 24 August 2026	SCC to invite shortlisted academy trusts to interview.
Week commencing 14 September 2026	Assessment Panel Interviews. Interview dates will be confirmed in March 2026.
December 2026 Cabinet, date to be confirmed	Recommendation to SCC Cabinet and confirmation of preferred academy trust.
December 2026, following Cabinet meeting	Proposals are sent to the Regional Director for the East of England for consideration and decision. (Note: DfE decisions are informed by the High Quality Trust Framework, information available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/commisioning-high-quality-trusts)
Stage 3 - Decision by Regional Director (for the Secretary of State)	The regional director on behalf of the secretary of state will consider the LA assessments and recommendations and decide which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school. The regional director as above will inform the LA and the successful proposer of the decision, and the LA will inform unsuccessful proposers. There is no specified timescale for this part of the process.

The application form and appendices can be found on Suffolk County Council's website <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/academies-and-free->

[schools](#). Completed forms should be returned to schools@suffolk.gov.uk no later than 10am Tuesday 26 May 2026, applications received after this time will not be considered.

Note: the local authority led free school presumption is a different route to the DfE's free school programme. Further information about how to establish a new school via the DfE's free school programme route can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school>

If you would like further information or wish to discuss your application, please contact Penny Bates, Schools Planning Manager Penny.Bates@suffolk.gov.uk or Pete Mumford, Head of Schools Infrastructure Pete.Mumford@suffolk.gov.uk
Children and Young People's Services, Suffolk County Council, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 2BX.

Section B - The School

Opening date

The new school is planned to open in September 2028. However, trusts should be aware that demographic forecasts and build out rates are reviewed regularly and may identify the need for the school to open on an alternative date.

Site/Location

SCC has secured a site of 2.3Ha. Indicative plans for the new school can be found below. As the school is currently in design it is likely that there will be changes to the design shown.



Figure 5: Illustrative site plan for school.

Note: This is may not be the final layout as the school is still in design stages.

The indicative timescale for developing the buildings are as follows:

- Initial design is in progress
- Planning application to be submitted: Spring 2026
- Appointment of contractor (two stage tender): 1st stage April 2026
- Expected planning decision: Summer 2026
- Mobilisation on site: January 2027
- Building works to commence: February 2027
- Handover to allow school fit out: April 2028
- Occupation of the building: July 2028

Please note that that there is expected to be significant archaeological investigations that may impact the timescales indicated above.

Details of the planning application will be added to the website once the application has been submitted for prospective academy trusts' information. Considerable work has already been undertaken; this means that the successful academy trust will have limited opportunity to influence the design of the school. The school will be built to current DfE Building Bulletin 103 requirements for primary schools.

Capacity and PAN

The school will open as a 210-place school. The Council will want to work with the academy trust to balance the availability of places against local demand. This will require a flexible approach based on the pace of house building in the area.

Although the school will have capacity for 210 places, we anticipate that the new school will open initially with **15 places** in each year group for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. The school will then build up to a capacity of 210 primary places over a number of years, as the development progresses and demand for places increases. Academy Trusts will need to work with the Council to manage the availability of places, to ensure that the new school does not impact on surrounding schools and ensure that children moving onto the development can access a place. This arrangement will be reviewed with Suffolk County Council prior to the school opening subject to demand for primary school places.

The school has a masterplan design to allow expansion to 420 places, with 60 EY places as demand requires. The build out rate of the new development will be monitored as will pupil

numbers. The expansion of the school will be timed so ensure that places are delivered as demand increases.

Catchment area

The Council expects the school to serve the community in the area bounded by the development known as Westland Heath. It is intended to establish a catchment area for the new school that reflects this within the admission arrangements and SCC seeks the Trust's support in this. The development boundaries are shown in figure 1 above.

Age range and Gender

The age range of the school will be 4-11. The school will provide places for boys and girls (mixed).

Pre-School

A 30-place pre-school will be located on site. The number of families taking up the 30-hour offer will influence the actual numbers on role. An Early Years (EY) provider will be expected to open from 8am to 6pm all year round. Academy trusts would be expected to provide childcare for children aged from 9 months old up to school age.

Academy trusts will be expected to confirm whether they wish to run this provision at the time of application. If they are identified as the Councils preferred trust to run the school, they will then be asked to provide additional information about their EY proposal. The documents can be found on the SCC webpage, <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/academies-and-free-schools>. These do **not** need to be completed or submitted with school application.

Please note that you will be invited to complete an expression of interest form if you are successful at interview and wish to run the pre-school. Only information pertinent to the primary school application should be included in the primary school application form, do not include information regarding proposed pre-school provision in your application.

The pre-school area will be 'red-lined' out of the academy transfer. A lease-back arrangement will be in place should the trust identified to run the school also be accepted to run the EY setting. Break clauses will be included in the lease to provide for the possibility that the trust wish to relinquish management of the setting in the future.

If the EY proposal from the trust identified to run the school does not meet the requirements of SCC or, should the successful academy trust not wish to run the pre-school, a provider would be sought through an expression of interest process which will be carried out by SCC's EY team.

Support for vulnerable learners and those with special educational needs

The new school must provide an inclusive learning environment in which all pupils, including those with special or additional educational needs and those with disabilities, are supported and enabled to make appropriate progress. The needs of vulnerable children and young people should be met locally wherever possible. The new school should have a strong focus on equalities, early intervention, and supporting the needs of the local community.

Community use

Academy trusts must ensure the school plays a key role within its immediate community and the wider local economy. The school will be expected to provide access for community groups as appropriate and in line with safeguarding and security protocols.

Proposed admission arrangements

Academy trusts must have oversubscription criteria that are reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair and which comply with all relevant legislation.

The successful academy trust will be required to follow the DfE School Admissions Code and the School Admissions Appeal Code. The successful academy trust will also be required to participate in Suffolk County Council's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for the normal admissions rounds although they are not required to do so for admissions in the year of opening. They will also have to follow the Council's In-year Fair Access Protocol.

Transport arrangements

The council's transport policy is available at <https://www.suffolkonboard.com/school-travel/policies/>

The successful academy trust will be expected to produce a School Travel Plan, which is likely to be a condition of the planning approval. The new academy will be expected to encourage safe and sustainable travel to school. The successful academy trust will be expected to work

with neighbouring schools when agreeing the timing of the school day and professional development dates to enable efficient use of school transport.

Equality and Diversity

As a County Council, we are committed to ensuring fair and accessible services for everyone in Suffolk. The weight given to the equalities and inclusion policy within the Council specifically compliments our organisational priority in respect of supporting vulnerable people. We also have a responsibility to ensure that the companies and organisations that we commission to provide services on our behalf, take the same positive approach to equality. All potential academy trusts will be required to demonstrate their commitment to promoting equality and diversity and to eliminating unlawful discrimination.

Working in Partnership

A key component of selection will be the academy trust's willingness to work in collaboration with other providers and local partners to develop services which meet the needs of local children, young people and families in a coordinated way. In particular, the successful academy trust will be expected to liaise with all local providers of pre-school education and to work with high schools to plan effective pupil transition.

The successful academy trust will also be expected to support the strategic responsibilities of the Council to ensure sufficiency of high-quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information. The successful academy trust will also be expected to work with the Council to manage the PAN whilst the school grows, which will include limiting the PAN throughout the growth of the school to ensure that places are available to children on the new development. This may mean that a flexible approach to class organisation is required, included mixed year teaching.

Section C - Vision

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance (www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-pre-opening-guide), also shown as appendix D.

As a minimum, SCC is looking for an academy trust who can deliver:

- A strong educational vision and a curriculum delivery based on high standards of attainment for each key stage.
- Plans for appropriate engagement with the local community and parents during the pre-opening period and any on-going engagement
- Excellent support facilities to meet the needs of all children, including looked after children, those with Special Educational Needs, etc
- A commitment to and evidence of excellent outcomes and high quality teaching and learning both at the new school and in the trusts existing schools.

Section D - Education Plan

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance (appendix D). You may also wish to refer to appendices B and C which provide information on existing pupil demographics.

As a minimum, SCC is looking for an academy trust who can provide:

- An ambitious, broad and balanced, deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake. This could include a curriculum table, pupil build up chart, examples of current practice where relevant, and how this will be adapted for a new school.
- Strategies for measuring pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets.
- A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels; with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective performance management). This could also include an organogram and staff build up chart to reflect the increased staff team as the school grows. A table is provided in the application form to reflect staffing numbers.
- A school that is fully inclusive, where the needs of all children are fully provided for, not just in terms of SEND but also wider equalities issues.
- Enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs.
- The school's approach to: PHSE; the Prevent Duty; safeguarding and welfare; and promoting fundamental British values (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs).
- Evidence of strategies used in place, to work with families to improve attendance.

Section E - Capacity and Capability

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance (appendix D).

As a minimum, SCC is looking for an academy trust who can provide:

- Details of the process you would follow and resources you would draw on and/or deploy to support the opening and development of the new free school by the opening date, link this to past experience if possible.
- Clear evidence that you have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety.
- Details of how the school would be organised, including the governance arrangements, a diagram of the proposed structures should be included.

Section F - Funding and Costs

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance (appendix D).

Please provide:

- Most recent set of Trust accounts.
- Financial forecast for the next 3 years which would include at a summary level:
- Pupil number projections (in conjunction with LA info)
- Income projections GAG funding and other income streams such as other grants and income from services
- Staff costs
- Premises costs
- Education and Learning Resources
- Supplies and Services

There is no finance template. You may provide your financial plan in any way which you see fit. You may provide a commentary of up to 500 words to accompany this if needed.

Capital Funding

The county council will provide the land and buildings for the school build i.e. 210 places plus early years' provision. The cost will be met through a mixture of LA basic need funds and S106 contributions.

Lease Arrangements

The site will be made available to the agreed academy provider on a 125-year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the 2010 Academies Act. There will be a lease-back arrangement for the pre-school.

Other Allowances

The Council will provide the following funding to set up and establish the new school;

- A **start-up** allowance of £200,039 - to cover the employment of a Headteacher and administrative support in advance of the school opening.
- A **setting up** allowance will also be made for each classroom. The basic cost for primary school classrooms is £6,824 per class, with £10,236 for specialised classrooms such as Food Technology. This is to pay for the desks, chairs, and other equipment in each classroom in the school. The calculation is based on average costs.
- A **block payment** of £34,122 for a primary school to cover the cost of establishing office and communal space etc.

Please note these figures correct as of February 2026, and are reviewed annually and may be subject to change. Trusts' should ensure that the funding provided is sufficient to meet all of their costs, as there is no funding over and above what is set out above.

Pupil related funding for growth.

Although the Council wishes to limit the PAN initially to 15 and increase this in line with expected growth on Westland Heath, we recognise the challenges related to opening a new school including financial pressures. The Council will therefore fund the school initially for 75% of 30 places for the year groups, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. This is equivalent to funding for 22.5 pupils per year group or total of funding for 67.5 places guaranteed each year for 3 years unless numbers exceed this. This will be reviewed following the school census, should the census numbers exceed this then payment for the higher pupil numbers would be made instead of the 75%.

The Trust will be expected to organise the class teaching in a manner that is efficient, ensuring that there are sufficient places to accommodate new families moving onto the development, but not in such a manner that is unsustainable for the trust or the pupils. Trusts should consider mixed class teaching where appropriate, taking into consideration statutory requirements such as infant class size legislation. Should more than 3 class bases be required, the usual growth funding process would be followed to apply for additional funding. The guidance for growth funding can be found here, <https://suffolklearning.com/finance/schools-accountancy/school-funding/growth-policy/>

An example of growth funding can be found in Appendix F - FAQs, see finance section.

Section G - Impact and Equalities Assessments

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The current Suffolk County Council EIA for Boyton Place and Westland Heath is attached at Appendix E.

Appendices

Appendix A – Application form for proposers

Appendix B – FSM, SEN, EAL and Key Stage 2 (KS2) outcomes for existing schools in the area.

Appendix C – Map showing IDACI index

Appendix D – Annex C of the Department for Education (DfE) free school presumption guidance

Appendix E – Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) **due to be available online from March 2026**

Appendix F – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)