

## **Proposed Saxmundham Free School**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

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#### **NATURE OF FREE SCHOOLS**

##### **What is a "free school"?**

The Government's 'free school' initiative enables interested groups to create new schools funded directly by central Government, bypassing local authority involvement, as long as they have sufficient community support. A free school is still a state school and subject to stringent quality control measures including OFSTED inspections.

#### **THE PROPOSED SAXMUNDHAM FREE SCHOOL**

##### **When will Saxmundham Free School open?**

Our intention is to open the school in September 2012. Initial plans would be to start with provision for school year groups 7, 8 and 9. At the end of the school year, the oldest year group will move up (i.e. year 9 would become year 10) and we will admit another group of children in year 7 until we eventually have a full quota of 5 year groups.

##### **How long is the school day?**

There is a breakfast club from 8.00 am but school will start at 8.40 am. There are five one-hour sessions, followed by an enrichment period in which pupils will have tutor time, games, ICT or the opportunity to study an additional language or separate science.

Twice a week, from 4.35 pm to 5.35 pm, pupils will be encouraged (but not made) to take part in extra-curricular activities such as sport, music, drama, art or young engineers. Lunch will be available at school.

##### **My child's currently a pupil at another secondary school. Can I move her/him to Saxmundham Free School?**

Yes, as long as there are places available, you have the choice to send your child to whichever school you choose.

The first step is to contact the admissions team at Suffolk County Council, who will notify your child's current school, and Saxmundham Free School, of your intentions.

##### **Can I apply for a job at the new school and will the existing teachers at Saxmundham Middle School automatically be given jobs?**

All posts will be advertised in the Times Educational Supplement and on this website. The Headteacher of the new school, supported by the governors, will make all appointments based on choosing the best person for the job. We are bound by employment law and must undertake a fair and equal recruitment campaign.

We cannot guarantee jobs for those currently employed in education in the area, but obviously

they will be able to shine at interview by emphasising their appreciation of the local community and its particular needs and desires.

**Will pupils have to wear a uniform?**

Yes. A group of parents have debated this at length and chosen a practical, easy-care and affordable uniform, with a tie and jumper but no blazer. Uniform will proudly boast the coat of arms of the Seckford Foundation.

## **CURRICULUM AND LEARNING**

**My child has special needs that are currently supported by the local authority and their school. Would this continue at the new school in Saxmundham?**

Special needs funding follows the child. That means that any child with special needs will receive exactly the same amount of funding at a free school as they would at any other state school - it's just that the money comes directly from central Government and not the LEA.

**Will the teachers be qualified?**

All teachers will have QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) or equivalent on appointment or achieve QTS in service within their first two years.

**How will my child be cared for?**

Firstly, in partnership with parents. We want clear and open channels of communication which will help share information from school to parent and from parent to school. Parents will be informed at the start of every year of the names of contact details of teachers who have direct responsibility for the pastoral care of their children at the school.

Year 7 students will be under the care of a specialist Head of Year 7 who will be appointed to liaise with local feeder primary schools and parents. Year 8 and 9 will be in eight tutor groups, under a Head of Lower School and similarly, in Year 10 and 11 there will be a Head of Upper School in charge of another eight tutor groups. Tutor groups will help break down year group segregation and help the student body to cohere.

## **GOVERNANCE**

**Will Saxmundham Free School have parent governors?**

Yes, like any school in the state system, Saxmundham Free School's governing body will include parents, staff and other members of the community.

Because Saxmundham Free School is a Seckford Foundation school, the governing body will be chaired by, and will contain representatives from, The Seckford Foundation.

**Will it be just like Woodbridge School but free?**

No. Woodbridge School is one of the premier schools in the East of England and gains exceptional academic results as well as reaching a national standard in music, drama, sport and other activity. Woodbridge is highly selective.

The Free School will try and use some of Woodbridge School's approaches to pastoral care, and like Woodbridge will give importance to extra-curricular activity (things done outside class).

The Head of Woodbridge School will be a Governor as will the Director of the Seckford Foundation.

### **What is the advantage of the Free School over other state schools in the area?**

Firstly it is size. At its biggest, the Free School will have five year groups each of just over 100 pupils, which will ensure that nearly every teacher knows nearly every pupil. We will also give the opportunity for Year 10 and 11 pupils to fulfill leadership roles with juniors.

Secondly, the curriculum concentrates on subjects that we believe are crucial for the next stage of education. We give more time to maths and English than usual, and there is the opportunity to study science, French, and Spanish alongside other subjects. There are no vocational qualifications available.

### **Will the ownership of the school building change?**

Technically speaking, no. The Seckford Foundation Free School Trust will lease the land and buildings from the Local Authority on a long lease (125 years).

## **FUNDING**

### **How much extra will the Free School cost?**

Figures released shortly before Christmas show that the capital cost of the 24 new schools opened in September will be between £110 million and £130 million. This equates to between £4.6 million and £5.4 million per school.

The set-up cost of the Saxmundham Free School represents a very small fraction of the costs associated with other new schools planned in the region - City Academy Norwich, estimated at £21 million and costs for Stour Valley Community School are estimated at £4.3 million. The costs for these schools included a new building.

The Saxmundham Free School has been able to keep its set-up costs low by opting to lease the redundant Saxmundham Middle School from Suffolk County Council on a long term, low rent agreement. This has avoided the high cost associated with purchasing a building. The building has been specifically chosen because students can easily walk or cycle to it; it is in excellent condition and has a fitting layout for a secondary school. The building work needed is therefore minimal and also very low cost.

The Seckford Foundation is leading the proposal and providing its educational expertise free of charge. They are working with the Government to streamline the process as much as possible, saving time. It is proposed the Saxmundham Free School will open on 3 September 2012, but this will be subject to the outcome of the consultation and approval by the Secretary of State for Education.

### **Is there a financial advantage or disadvantage to the school becoming a Free School?**

A Free School receives its funding directly from the Government and consequently the budget would not be 'top sliced'. Presently, approximately 10% of all maintained school budgets are retained by the Local Authority to enable them to provide a range of central services.

A Free School receives all of this funding and can determine for itself how best to spend it, but should remember that they will need to pay someone to provide the services which they used to receive from their Local Authority. This would result in more money for Saxmundham Free School, at a time when budgets are likely to be severely challenged. Control of the whole budget gives the School more choice.

**Will the Local Authority have to pay for the Free School?**

No; Central Government will provide extra funds to help the School and the Trust set up to run the School. The Government also pays for a project manager. The amount of money provided by the Government varies from project to project and has already been pledged under contract. The outcome of the consultation will not alter the fact that the money has already been spent.