

Title: Beccles Free School

Author: Department for Education (DfE)

Impact Assessment – Section 9 Academies Act Duty

1. Beccles Free School is a 540-place non-faith 11-16 school located in Beccles, Suffolk and due to open in September 2012. The school will be located for two years on the site of Carlton Colville Primary School before moving to the site of Beccles Middle School in 2014. The middle school is closing under Suffolk's reorganisation from 3-tier to 2-tier provision but will be used for a two-year period by a neighbouring high school.
2. We have assessed the impact on the six schools within a 10-mile radius of both school sites. We have also considered the impact on both primary schools and FE colleges.
3. Of the existing schools in the locality, it is our assessment that the biggest impact will be felt by Sir John Leman High School (SJLHS). Pupils at the existing Beccles Middle School (from which we expect the bulk of the Free School pupils to come) traditionally transfer to SJLHS at the age of 13. However, for the first two years, the Free School will be located on the site of Carlton Colville Primary School, which is 4.9 miles away (straight line distance) from the permanent site. This site is much closer to schools in Lowestoft and it is our assessment that in the short term there could be a high impact on East Point Academy (EPA), a recently converted sponsor academy, as some parents may take advantage of the proximity of the Free School.
4. The large size of both SJLHS and EPA coupled with the small size of the Free School (540 places) should mean that the loss of pupils is absorbed without threatening the viability of either school, although their curriculum offer may have to be narrowed. However, the distinctive academic-focused offer of the Free School would create choice for parents by offering an alternative model and, in forcing other schools to innovate, could drive up educational standards across the area.

Catchment Area and Admissions

5. Beccles Free School's (BFS) admissions policy is fully compliant with the admissions code. Where the number of applications for admission is greater than the published admission number priority (after the admission of students with statements of Special Educational Needs where Beccles Free School is named on the statement) will be given in the order in which they are set out below:

- a. Looked after children
- b. Children with a sibling attending Beccles Free School at the time of application.

- c. Other children by distance from Beccles Free School. Random allocation will be used as a tie-break in category 'c' to decide who has highest priority for admission if the distance between two children's homes and the school is the same.
6. The school does not have a defined catchment area. Routinely we would create a proxy catchment area which is created based on the distance travelled to secondary school by the majority of children in the LA (80%), which is 2.3 miles. As this distance from the permanent site only covered one other school for the purposes of this assessment we have assessed the impact on the five closest schools, which covers a seven-mile radius of the both the temporary and permanent sites. There are five secondary maintained schools and Academies within 7 miles of the planned sites of the school.
7. The Waveney District, in which the Free School will be located, currently has a 38% surplus of secondary school places and this is predicted to rise to 45% by 2015/16 academic year without the establishment of the Free School.
- ## **Background**
8. The Beccles Free School proposal is one of two projects put forward by the Seckford Foundation (SF) which wants to adapt the education model it uses to run Woodbridge School (Independent) for the state sector. The application is for a 540 place, non-faith, 11-16 school opening in September 2012 with 162 pupils - a two form entry per year, across Y7 - Y9.
9. The application showed that a substantial body of parents in Beccles wanted a small, local school with a focus on high academic achievement as an alternative to the much larger Sir John Leman High School (SJLHS). The Free School intends to offer the opportunity to study for an EBacc, should pupils wish to. The proposers and parents also saw that the model of a high performing independent school working with the state sector was one that could prove to be beneficial for the community.
10. The proposers preferred site, the closing Beccles Middle School (BMS), is not available until September 2014 but PfS have found a closing primary school site at Carlton Colville, which is 4.9 miles from the original site. Suffolk County Council (SCC) has, in principle, agreed to the Trust using the school for a period of 2 years before moving to the Beccles Middle School site from September 2014.
11. While parents are not yet able to formally apply for a place at the school the number of expression of interest received by the LA (as at 30 November 2011) was 32 for Y7, 24 for Y8 and 18 for Y9. However, these expressions of interest were based on the school being located at the proposers preferred site. This is not in line with proposers' original expectations partly due to the delay over finding a suitable site. The distance from Beccles of the temporary site may also have an impact on take-up.

Characteristics of the catchment area

12. The Schools Organisation Review (SOR) being undertaken by Suffolk County Council recommended moving from a 3 tier to a 2 tier model. This has resulted in the closure of a number of small middle schools, with years 7 and 8 being transferred into existing High Schools.

13. The Beccles Free School is located in the Waveney District in Suffolk. The district currently has 38% surplus places in its secondary population and this is set to rise to 45% in the 2015/2016 academic year.

14. The majority of the population in the area is concentrated in the two urban centres of Beccles (9,000 people) and Lowestoft which is home to 64,000 people. The surrounding area is relatively rural with many small villages. Due to the confusion over the site, the expressions of interest have been fewer than anticipated, but the highest concentration of demand is from parents within the town of Beccles. There is also interest as far south as Halesworth and as far east as Lowestoft, perhaps as a result of the location of the temporary site. Parents, therefore, do seem willing to travel some distance to attend the school. The travelling time between Beccles and Lowestoft is only 15 minutes which is much quicker than the equivalent distance in other directions from Beccles because of the rural road network and we can therefore expect that the Free School will represent a real choice for parents in Lowestoft.

15. Educational standards in Suffolk are below the national average and have been for some time. It is likely, therefore, that should BFS become a successful school, applications for future years will be driven by proximity to the school with the impact being felt most acutely by SJLHS, although the weaker schools in Lowestoft could also lose pupils.

Impact on other schools

16. Below is a discussion of the likely impact of the proposed school on the schools flagged as being most at risk from losing pupils, as well as, those which are poorly performing and operating with significant surplus capacity. The table below shows that of the six schools that were assessed, it is our view that opening the Free School will have a high impact on two, and a minimal impact on the remaining four. A map showing the location of the Free School in relation to surrounding schools can be found at Annex A.

School name	Distance from Free School (Temp/Perm)	Impact rating	Capacity	Surplus	Ofsted Rating
Sir John Leman High School	6.8/0.71 miles	High	1100	13.2%	2
Bungay High School	14.7/5.60 miles	Minimal	1136	5.3%	1
Pakefield	1.8/6.36 miles	Minimal	1940	2.2%	N/A
East Point Academy	3.2/6.60 miles	High			N/A (predecessor)

					(school was in special measures)
The Denes High School	3.7/7.8 miles	Minimal	1055	21.5%	2
The Benjamin Britten High School	3.6/7.3 miles	Minimal	1200	43.75%	3

Sir John Leman High School (SJLHS) – Impact – High

17. The SJLHS is an Academy converter (converting in August 2011) which is 6.8 miles from the temporary site and 0.71 miles from the permanent site of the Free School. The school has capacity for 1,399 pupils but had a surplus of around 7% in 2010/11. The school was undersubscribed for entry 2011/12 with a shortfall of around 9%.

18. Results in the school improved between 2007 and 2010, with the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths GCSE rising from 47% in 2007 to 55% in 2010. However their results fell to 53% of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths GCSE in 2011. This is below the national average of 58% and the Suffolk average of 54%.

19. SJLHS is the closest school to the preferred site, located less than a mile away so it is likely to lose some potential pupils. Last inspected in October 2011, it received an overall effectiveness rating of ‘Good’ but has below average attainment results, so parents may be attracted by an alternative.

20. The pupils at the existing Beccles Middle School are expected to transfer to SLJHS for September 2012. The school already has surplus capacity and its most recent KS4 performances have been below national and local averages. Therefore, if the Free School opens, we expect the biggest loss to be felt by SJLHS. SJLHS will have a PAN of 270 pupils per year, so even if the Free School recruited to capacity entirely at the expense of SJLHS (unlikely) and taking into account the current level of surplus, the school could still expect to recruit between 125 and 150 pupils per year.

21. As the school currently has surplus capacity and was undersubscribed for entry in 2011/12 by 9%, the opening of the Free School would likely further exacerbate the existing surplus places issue and potentially have a negative impact on the long-term financial viability of the school. Additionally, it is located in Waveney district where the secondary population is predicted to decline over the next few years so any loss of pupils will not be mitigated by an increased demand in the area.

22. The fact that the Free School will be located in Carlton Colville (six miles away) for the first two years should lessen the impact in the short-term as the Free School will provide a more attractive option for pupils in this area and parents in Beccles may prefer to keep their children in the town.

However, once the school re-locates to its permanent site (less than a mile from SJLHS) parents will be presented with a genuine alternative in the town and the intimate ethos and academic focus of the Free School could see pupils drawn away from the much larger SJLHS.

23. The large size of SJLHS provides it with a degree of resilience in the face of losing pupils. Combined with the small capacity of the Free School (540 pupils) and the potential for the number of pupils travelling from Lowestoft to increase if the Free School is established successfully, officials consider it unlikely that the impact of BFS will be significant enough to threaten the future viability of SJLHS but the school will need to innovate if it wants to retain its current curriculum offer.

24. Overall, it is our assessment that the impact of establishing Beccles Free School on SJLHS will be high.

East Point Academy – Impact – High

25. East Point Academy is a sponsored Academy that opened in September 2011. It is 3.2 miles from the temporary site and 6.6 miles from the permanent site of the Free School. The school has capacity for 1,336 pupils (around 240 per year group). It has inherited a large number of surplus places from its predecessor school with a surplus of around 40% of total capacity in 2010/11. The school was undersubscribed for entry in 2011/12 with 143 applicants for 240 places, a shortfall of 40%.

26. The predecessor school (Kirkley Community High School) was rated as inadequate by Ofsted in its last inspection in 2011 and had been in Special Measures since 2009. It had Key Stage 4 attainment well below the national level – 33% of pupils achieved 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths GCSE in 2011 compared with 58% nationally. East Point Academy has yet to be inspected.

27. The school has inherited a large surplus capacity from its predecessor school, and was undersubscribed for entry in 2011/12 with only 143 out of 240 places taken up. The loss of more pupils to the new Free School would exacerbate the existing surplus issues and may impact on the long term financial viability of the school. Additionally the secondary population in the area is predicted to decline over the next few years so the loss of pupils to the new Free School is not expected to be mitigated by increased demand in the area.

28. Becoming a sponsored Academy may increase its attractiveness to parents and pupils but as the school is yet to establish itself, its early performance will be critical to the perception of it locally and consequently to its long-term viability. The appeal of the school to parents may also increase once there is some quality information (Ofsted and attainment) assuming this is positive.

29. As a school with no track record and one set of unsatisfactory results

the academy is in a vulnerable position. The introduction of the new Free School, initially only 3 miles away, could hamper the ability of the school to fill up its places if it takes away pupils who would have potentially gone to this school at a time when it is still establishing its reputation. Pupils from the area could still receive priority entry to the school after it moves to Beccles town if their siblings already attended the school, so we cannot say that this impact will be immediately lessened when the school moves out of its temporary site. The travel time by road from EPA to the permanent site of the Free School is also quite short (just over 15 minutes).

30. The impact on this school, therefore, has been assessed as high for both of the Free School sites.

Pakefield – Impact – Minimal

31. Pakefield High School is a new 11-16 school in south Lowestoft. The school opened in September 2011, initially with Years 7 and 8 only, using buildings which were previously the site of Pakefield Middle School. The school became the first new state high school to be built in Suffolk for over 20 years as part of Suffolk's SOR. The school has a capacity of 900 pupils and is being built in three phases, with the first phase costing £12m. The cancellation of the BSF programme threw the capital works into doubt, but SCC has approved plans to fund the building using its own capital reserves.

32. Pakefield is a new school and consequently does not have any attainment data or Ofsted judgements. With no academic reputation, the school is in a potentially vulnerable position but the significant media coverage the school has gained following the large capital investment and the promise of state-of-the-art facilities has attracted a lot of interest in the school from parents. The school was oversubscribed for entry in Y7 last year, with 212 applications for 180 places.

33. Although the school will only be located 1.8 miles from the temporary site, there is already a perception locally that Pakefield is the preferred option to East Point Academy and consequently we expect that, even if a number of pupils from the area end up attending the Free School, Pakefield will continue to be popular with parents and the impact will be felt more acutely at EPA. We cannot see any reason why the numbers of pupils from Pakefield attending the Free School would increase once it moves to its permanent site in Beccles, in fact, we expect fewer pupils from Lowestoft to attend the Free School after that point.

34. Our overall assessment, therefore, is that the establishment of the Free School is likely to have a minimal impact on Pakefield High School.

North Lowestoft Schools

35. In addition to the schools in south Lowestoft (Pakefield and East Point) we have also considered the impact on the two schools in north Lowestoft. Unlike the area of south Lowestoft, there is little history of pupils travelling to

Beccles, but because the temporary site for the Free School is less than 4 miles away from both The Denes High School and The Benjamin Britten High School, we have considered what impact the Free School will have on them.

36. The Denes High School – an 11-16 school with a capacity of 1055. It currently carries a 21.5% surplus. Performance data for the last 3 years shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 27%/43%/40%. The School was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2009 and received a grade 2– good.

37. The Benjamin Britten High School – an 11-16 with a capacity of 1200. It currently has high levels of surplus capacity (43%). Performance data for the last 3 years shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 38%/45%/46%. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2011 and received a grade 3 – satisfactory.

38. Both these schools have surplus capacity and have performed consistently below national and Suffolk averages over the last three years. Therefore, the establishment of the Free School, with its emphasis on academic subjects, could provide an attractive option for parents who are unhappy with the below-average options currently available. However, although the temporary site is under four miles away from these schools, there is little history of pupils travelling from this area to attend school in Beccles. Furthermore, the small size of the Free School and the distance that would need to be travelled suggest that it is unlikely that the Free School will draw sufficient numbers from these schools to threaten their viability.

39. We therefore conclude that the impact of establishing the Free School on both Benjamin Britten High School and The Denes High School to be minimal.

Bungay High School – Impact – Minimal

40. Bungay High School is a 13-18 school situated 5.6 miles west of the permanent site and 14 miles away from the temporary site. The school is due to become an 11-18 school in September 2012 as part of Suffolk's SOR.

41. The school has a capacity of 1043 and currently has a surplus of 12.3%. Performance data for the last 3 years shows 5+ A*-C including English and maths: 52%/70%/65%. It was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2011 and was judged to be 'Outstanding'.

42. The catchment area for Bungay High School extends to the south of Beccles and encompasses Halesworth. The Trust has received expressions of interest from families living within this catchment so, although, the school is over 14 miles away from the temporary site, once the school relocates to the centre of Beccles, we could expect the number of applications from parents in this area to increase.

43. However, Bungay High School is the only outstanding school within the area and has by far the highest attainment levels of all the schools assessed.

Assuming this level of performance is sustained it is likely that this school will continue to be a popular choice for parents. Given the Free School has a small capacity and that we expect the majority of pupils to come from Beccles town, it is our assessment that establishing the Free School will only have a minimal impact on Bungay High School.

Impact on post-16

44. SJLHS and Bungay High School both have sixth forms, while there are two Further Education Colleges in Lowestoft – Lowestoft College and Lowestoft Sixth Form College. The latter only opened in September 2011, replacing a consortium of local high schools.

45. At 254 pupils (2011), the number on roll in the 6th form at SJLHS is above the recommended lower limit for size of 6th form (200). In 2011 74% of pupils achieved three or more A Levels or equivalent which is below the national average of 81%. SJLHS has developed a relationship with four other educational partners who have come together to form 'The North Suffolk Partnership.' This partnership makes use of The North Suffolk Skills Centre in Halesworth. This provides learners aged 14+ with opportunities to develop skills in a range of specialisms including Engineering, Hairdressing, Hospitality and Catering, Health & Social Care and the Construction trades.

46. The Headteacher of SJLHS has expressed concern that a reduction in the number of pupils attending the school will call into question the school's ability to offer this route to pupils and could call into question the viability of the North Suffolk Partnership.

47. Bungay High School also runs a Sixth Form, which currently has 266 pupils on roll. In 2011 84% of pupils achieved three or more A Levels or equivalent which is above the national average. A high percentage of pupils from year 11 transfer in to the sixth form so it is very unlikely that many of these places will be taken by pupils at Beccles Free School.

48. Lowestoft College is a FE College that serves the Waveney District. It specialises in offering vocational education and training and partners with local high schools to also provide 14-16 provision. The Free School's emphasis on academic subjects is likely to attract parents that would not want their children to pursue a vocational education. It is unlikely therefore that a significant number of the pupils that attend the Free School would have transferred to Lowestoft College even if the Free School was not established.

49. Lowestoft 6th Form College is new, so we do not have any attainment data. However, it has a strong partnership with the schools in Lowestoft, from which it would expect to recruit the majority of its pupils.

50. The raising of the participation age to 18 will give added impetus to develop a coherent curriculum offer post-16, which meets the needs of all students. As the Free School is only an 11-16 school, these pupils will still need to access post-16 provision. While it is possible that some pupils will

travel to Lowestoft, the vocational nature of Lowestoft College and the absence of a track record for Lowestoft Sixth Form College means that SJLHS, situated so close to the Free School's permanent site, is still likely to be a popular option for pupils. The success of Bungay High School will still attract pupils but the number of available places will not be high because of the preference given to pupils already at Bungay. SJLHS is therefore likely to remain the most popular destination for post-16 education for pupils in the Beccles area.

51. It is our assessment that the relative lack of alternative, proven post-16 options means that the establishment of the Free School would only have a minimal impact on post-16 provision in the Waveney district.

Impact on Primary Schools

52. Under Suffolk's SOR all of the primary schools in the Beccles area are extending their age range from 4-8 to 4-11, while both Beccles Middle School and Worlingham Middle School are due to close. There are 10 primary schools within this area.

53. Beccles Middle School currently has three feeder primaries, while Worlingham Middle School has six, although some are much smaller. As the Trust is intending to attract the majority of pupils at the existing Beccles Middle School, they are trying to develop good relationships with these primaries to ease transition into the Free School. The table below shows the existing feeder primary structure and the capacity of each year group once the primaries have extended their age range to become YR-Y6 from September 2012.

Beccles Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)	Worlingham Middle School Feeder Primaries (2012 PAN)
Albert Pye Community Primary (40)	Worlingham Primary School (45)
Crowfoot Community Primary (60)	Reydon Primary School (30)
St Benet's CECVP (17)	Southwold Primary School (10)
	Barnaby and North Cove (10)
	Brampton CEVCP School (15)
	Ringsfield CEVCP School (10)

54. The Free School's admissions policy does not list feeder primaries and accepts children on the basis of proximity to the school. Therefore, if the Free School were to be established successfully and was seen as the preferred option compared to Sir John Leman High School, those primary schools that are furthest from the Free School, such as Southwold or Raydon, could potentially lose pupils to the other closer primary schools as parents move to give themselves a better chance of getting a place at the smaller Free School (please see the map of primary schools at Annex B). Therefore, if the Free School is successful, it could potentially have a high impact on these schools. While Reydon, with a capacity of 210, would be better placed to withstand a loss of pupils, Soutwold, with a capacity of only 70 pupils, could potentially become unviable. Brampton also lies outside the immediate vicinity of Beccles town so could potentially also be affected as it only has a capacity of 105

pupils.

55. Because the primary schools currently operate only up until Y4 we do not have any KS2 attainment data on which to judge the likelihood of this eventuality. Therefore, the ability of these schools to make a positive early impression and to achieve a good standard of results is crucial to the future success of these schools, particularly Southwold Primary. SJLHS does still have relatively good standing in the local community, so even if the Free School is successful parents may still be happy with a place at the school which would minimise the impact on primary schools.

56. The impact on primary schools is therefore dependent on both the success of the Free School and the perception of it locally, in comparison to SJLHS as well as the ability of each primary school to make a positive early impression following the extension of the age range to encompass the end of KS2.

Impact of the Seckford Foundation running schools

57. We have also considered the impact of the Seckford Foundation becoming a provider of education in the state sector on existing schools in Suffolk. Currently, the Seckford Foundation runs Woodbridge School, which is a high performing independent school.

58. The Foundation is also planning to open a Free School in Saxmundham in 2012 and will submit an application to open an 11-16 school in Stoke-by-Nayland in 2013 and an 11-16 school in Ixworth or Stanton in September 2014.

59. While we cannot pre-judge the outcome of future competitive application rounds, we can conclude that by establishing two schools in 2012 and with a formal relationship with Woodbridge School, the Seckford Foundation will be better placed to provide minority subjects through the centralisation and sharing of resources that would not be possible for an individual school. The school also plans to allow pupils access to the facilities at Woodbridge School, such as the state of the art Seckford Theatre.

60. Should all four schools be established the Seckford Foundation would be a significant provider within Suffolk and would be able to generate even greater efficiencies and consequently could offer a greater range of subjects, broadening the offer available. This would help to offset the likely narrowing of the curriculum at SJLHS and would be likely to improve the attractiveness of Beccles Free School.

Local authority view

61. We have kept Suffolk County Council (SCC) informed about the proposal to establish a Free School in Beccles. SCC has taken a pragmatic approach to the Free Schools policy generally but were concerned about the

potential use of Beccles Middle School from 2012 because this site had been earmarked for use by SJLHS. However, the identification of Carlton Colville as a temporary site for two years has alleviated SCC's concerns on that issue.

62. The LA has raised concerns about BFS's ability to provide a wide curriculum because of its smaller size but acknowledge that they have a role to play in ensuring there is sufficient breadth of offer across the whole system and has committed to working cooperatively with the school and potentially brokering links with other schools. This should ensure that a wider curriculum is available to children at the proposed school.

63. In response to our request for views on the Free School Simon White, the Director of Children Services, confirmed that even if all the pupils living in Beccles attended the Free School, SJLHS would still have viable year groups. The table below, provided by Suffolk County Council, demonstrates that even if BFS recruits to 100% capacity entirely at the expense of SJLHS (an very unlikely scenario), the smallest year group at SJLHS would be 104 pupils. However, this figure does not take into account either the likelihood that BFS will attract pupils from schools in Lowestoft or Norfolk. Therefore, we could expect these numbers to be higher.

Table 3. Beccles Free School impact on SJLHS by 2014-15

Scenario	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
SJLHS numbers with no BFS	212	250	244	226	251
SJLHS numbers with BFS at 100% capacity	104	142	136	118	143
SJLHS numbers with BFS at 50% capacity	158	196	190	172	197

Representations

64. We have received representations opposed to the Free School from Sir John Leman High School. We have not received any direct representations from any other schools in the area but many have acted as signatories to the letters from the Head of SJLHS – Jeremy Rowe. We have also received correspondence from the local MP, Peter Aldous, who is also opposed to the Free School as well as from a number of local parents, some in favour and some opposed.

65. The chief concern of Mr Rowe was the location of the site. The preferred site, the closing Beccles Middle School, had been earmarked by the LA for use by SJLHS for two years and Mr Rowe was concerned that this would interfere with the school's planning.

66. However, the school is now going to be located on the site of Carlton Colville Primary School for the first two years, removing this concern. Mr Rowe also submitted figures to the Department about the reduction in the size of the intake the school will suffer if the Free School is opened. These figures do not tally with the figures provided by the Local Authority (which has a

strategic overview) and predicts far smaller numbers of pupils joining SJLHS. This led Mr Rowe to claim that the school would have to make a high level of redundancies by 2018 and, as an Academy, the school would not be able to carry-over a large financial deficit.

67. The first point to make is that the figures provided by Mr Rowe seem to underestimate the number of pupils in the area (according to Suffolk County Council's figures) so the impact on his school is overemphasised. It is unlikely that the Free School will be able to recruit all its pupils entirely from SJLHS and even if it did, the pupil numbers would be sufficient to allow SJLHS to continue to operate. Furthermore, Mr Rowe does not seem to be considering how to increase the number of pupils attending his school, for example, by looking to those pupils in Norfolk, which, from September 2012 will have the same age of transfer to secondary as Suffolk, so we could expect a higher level of cross-border transfer than previously.

In terms of redundancies, rather than make a large number of staff redundant in 2018 as Mr Rowe seems to be suggesting, he should be able to plan for the gradual reduction in size of the school so could phase any redundancies that need to be made. It is also true that there is a natural 'wastage', through retirements and staff leaving for other jobs. Annual turnover in secondary schools is approximately 12.5 per cent, of which wastage is 7.2 per cent while the remaining 5.3 per cent was staff moving to different employment. While these are average figures it demonstrates that through forward planning, the natural wastage of school staff would reduce the need for a large redundancy bill. SJLHS, as an Academy, could also make a case to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) for an earmarked annual grant to cover exceptional costs.

68. Aside from the concern over the site and the reduction in the size of the SJLHS intake, other objections cite the following:

- a. An additional school would be an inefficient use of resources and threaten the ability of SJLHS to offer a broad curriculum
- b. The proposed educational offer at Beccles Free School is narrow and denies children choice
- c. Establishing a Free School in the area would undermine the SOR being undertaken by Suffolk.
- d. The school is not needed because SJLHS is already offering a good standard of education and parents have choice.

69. Taking these objections in turn:

- a. While the Free School would create further surplus places within Suffolk we do not believe this would be an inefficient use of resources if it were to act as a driver to raise standards. The standards of the schools in the area are below the national

average and parents in the town feel they have no choice. The establishment of the Seckford Foundation as a provider of education in Suffolk could act as a real driver of improvement in the area.

- b. The Trust made the case in its application for a smaller school with a focus on depth not breadth. As it stands, it is expected that BMS pupils will transfer to SJLHS, effectively denying pupils opportunity and choice. However, it is doubtful that SJLHS will be able to maintain its current curriculum offer which includes vocational options which could also be seen to be denying choice to pupils. However, the Trust were clear in their application that they would work with external partners to offer off-site programmes, while their ambition to set-up several schools could allow them to offer minority subjects through sharing resources and making savings through centralisation of services.

We also have no reason to believe that BFS will focus on the upper ability range; children will be admitted to the school without reference to academic ability and the school has committed to working with children in need of extra support. This is a school suitable for all children in the area.

- c. The school will be an 11-16 school which fits in with the new structure being created through the SOR process. While two schools competing for pupils in the area could lead to a reduction in the breadth of subjects offered, it should serve to drive up standards. Furthermore, BFS demonstrated in their application their desire to form links with other schools and businesses to broaden its educational offer.
- d. Although SJLHS has been judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted, its KS4 attainment results are below both Suffolk and national averages. Suffolk LA operates 'pyramid' structures with feeder schools and therefore it is expected that all pupils that attended Beccles and Worlingham middle schools would transfer to SJLHS. This does effectively deny parents choice. The Seckford Foundation has a strong track record of running an outstanding school and by providing competition for places should help to drive up standards in the area.

Conclusion

70. We have concluded that Beccles Free School is most likely to have an adverse impact on those schools with below average performance and operating with surplus capacity within close proximity of the Free School.

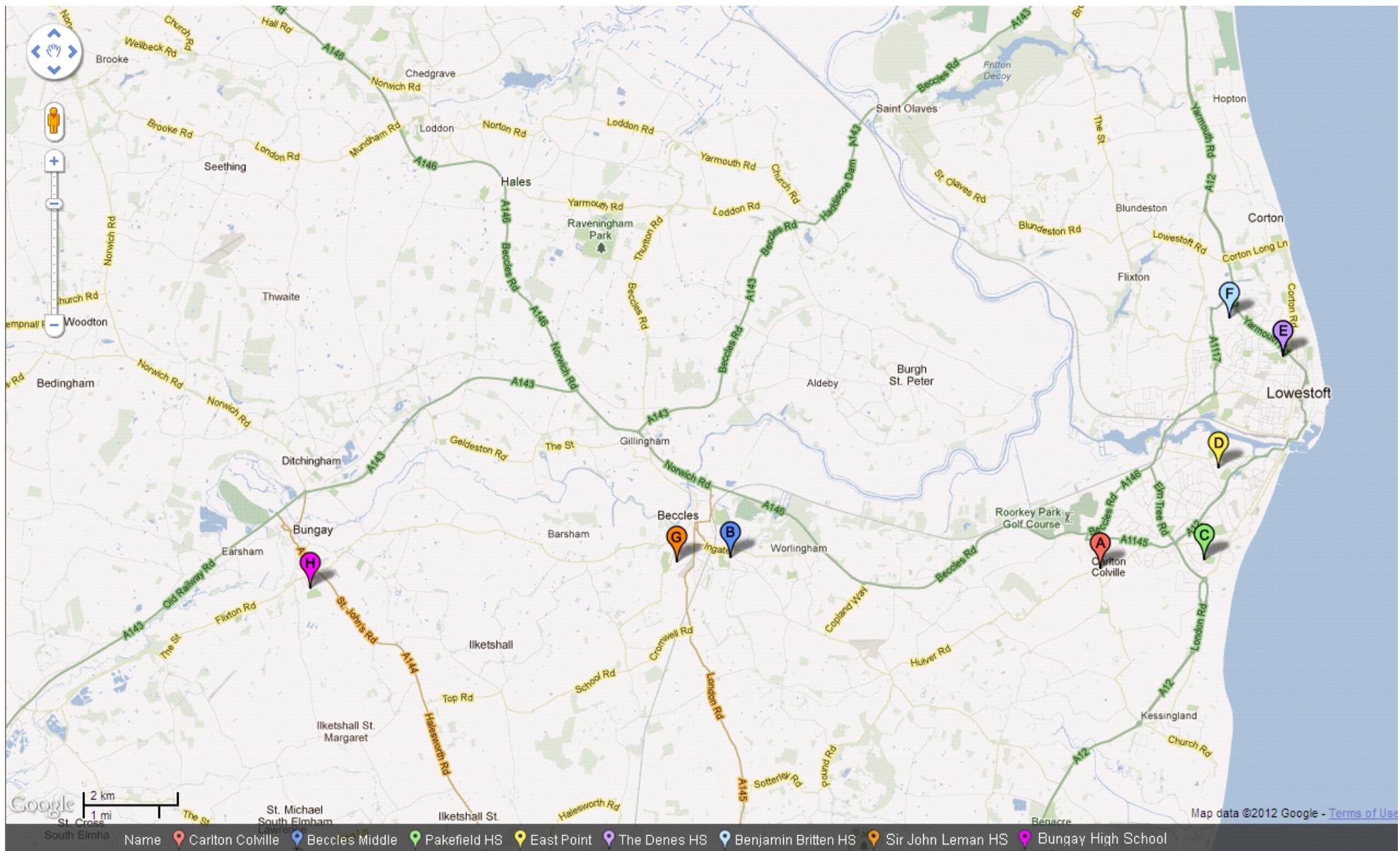
71. This risk is most pronounced with East Point Academy (close to the temporary site and with a poor predecessor school) and Sir John Leman High

School (to which the current Beccles Middle School pupils are expected to transfer). Both have surplus capacity. In the case of East Point Academy, due to the current surplus of capacity running at 40%, the impact could be significant enough to threaten the future viability of the school, although the small size of the Free School and the distance from the permanent site should mitigate this risk. SJLHS, while likely to lose the most pupils, is large enough to withstand this although it will be forced to innovate if it wants to maintain its current curriculum offer. SJLHS would still provide an attractive post-16 option for pupils at the Free School.

72. However, any negative impact of establishing the Free School could be outweighed by the positives of creating genuine choice for parents (by offering an alternative model of a small school with a clear focus on academic achievement) and driving up educational standards in the local area.

Annex A

Map of Schools in the Beccles area



Annex B

Map of Primary Schools in the Beccles Area

