



Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Ms Wendi Ogle-Welbourn
Executive Director:
Children, Families and Adults Services
Shire Hall, Castle Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB3 0AP

12th October 2020

Dear *Ms Ogle-Welbourn,*

St Bede's Inter-Church Free School, Soham, Cambridgeshire

I do hope you are well at this challenging time.

I am writing to update you on the latest position in relation to the progress of this free school.

I am sure you will be aware that with any such application, the basic need for places is examined regularly. This review included comparing the Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) report, along with the department's Residual Pressure Model (RPM) data and it does appear that both the DfE and CCC agree there is a basic need for places. We know you have communicated plans to meet this need through local school expansions up until 2026/27.

It is a finely balanced decision between expanding existing academies or opening a new school. However, having reviewed the risks involved with proceeding with the free school I have decided that this project should continue towards an opening date of September 2023.

Whilst I recognise standards in the Soham area are improving, I believe opening a free school with an Ofsted rated outstanding provider will help raise standards even further. I would also like to offer parents more of a choice which includes a faith school.

I am aware of the anxiety around basic need expressed by some of the existing local schools who have opposed the building of a Free School in Soham from the outset. In response to this, the St Bede's Inter-Church School Trust have agreed to reduce the size of the free school proposal from 6FE to 4FE.

Also, when taking all five planning areas (Bottisham, Ely, Soham, Witchford and Cottenham & Impington) into consideration it looks possible that the 600-place free school may still not meet the need for all places enabling other local academies to expand where appropriate.

I do hope that we can work together on this project to achieve the best outcome for children and schools in the Cambridgeshire area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Berridge', written in a cursive style.

ELIZABETH BERRIDGE

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE