

Exeter Specialist Mathematics School

A Free School Proposal

Sponsored by



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This document responds to the questions set out by [REDACTED] in her letters, dated 4 October 2012, to [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

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1. Exeter Specialist Mathematics School

- 1.1. The school will be a mathematically oriented, academic sixth form, providing an environment in which those with an interest in, and aptitude for, mathematics can be stimulated, developed and stretched.
- 1.2. Much of the thinking underlying the model is drawn from the Russian schools which produced some of the 20th Century's most accomplished mathematicians. For example, the so called Kolmogorov School in Moscow and the St Petersburg Lyceum 239 where Grigori Perelman, known for his work on the Poincaré Conjecture, studied.
- 1.3. Programmes of enrichment and critical thinking will allow every student time to develop their problem solving capabilities. This will be achieved through small cohorts, extended educational programmes and an inspiring and wide ranging mathematics curriculum. The aim is to offer able young people throughout the counties of Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall access to world-class preparation for entry into mathematics-based University Education at a standard which is otherwise unavailable within the mainstream state school system. It is envisaged that the School will have access to weekly boarding accommodation in order to ensure that attendance is practical for students from across the region.
- 1.4. Sponsored by the University of Exeter and Exeter College, the School will combine the strengths of the University's College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences and its Graduate School of Education with the outstanding track record of success, enjoyed by Exeter College, in delivering A Levels and the International Baccalaureate.
- 1.5. This partnership will ensure that students have the opportunity to experience academic environments, access specialist facilities and interact with professional mathematicians. They will benefit from well-established support mechanisms and wider enrichment opportunities which are important in the development of the whole person. The School will also provide an invaluable research platform which will influence mathematics teaching well beyond its walls. Furthermore, contributions from partners drawn from the wider mathematical community will provide access to a range of real-world experiences very different to those found in more traditional sixth form mathematics courses.
- 1.6. The best prepared students begin their university careers with an in-depth understanding of mathematical principles and the logical connection between its different disciplines. They have the confidence to tackle complex problems without a pre-defined structure or menu of options. For this reason, the School will target the STEP examination at the end of Year 13, along with Mathematics and related subjects at A Level. It is envisaged that the depth and breadth of their mathematical experience will accelerate students' progress as they begin their undergraduate courses.
- 1.7. Developing an effective means of selecting students for the School will be an evolutionary process. It is clear, however, that integral to this will be a programme which engages with schools and students from Year 9 onwards in order to kindle interest, nurture talent and fire-up ambition. An important aspect will be to offer positive benefit to the schools from which the applicants are drawn. This will take the form of kudos, training and

development opportunities, shared resources and clear visibility of the progression of their former students. We want the very best young mathematicians to progress to this new school.

- 1.8. As one of a small group of specialist mathematics schools in the UK, the School will begin with present best-practice models of teaching and contribute to the on-going development of mathematics pedagogy. It will raise aspirations among mathematically able young people and help enhance the supply of capable undergraduates, in mathematics and closely related fields such as statistics and computer science, with the potential to become the mathematicians whose work underpins the technological innovation of tomorrow.
- 1.9. Students will be engaged in the University research groups, giving them real life experience of mathematical problems. Working with key partners, for example, the Met Office and the Willis Trust, students will be exposed to mathematical problem solving which contributes to the economic development of industry and the digital economy and builds employability skills in our mathematics community.

“Stronger links between mathematicians and industry will be beneficial both to the partners and to the national economies. They will inspire new mathematicians and enhance the competitive advantage of companies.”

OECD 2008

2. Key features of the school – its ethos, aspirations for the achievement of pupils and the role you expect the university to play in running the school

- 2.1. The School will set out to identify young people with the potential for exceptional success in mathematics. Once enrolled, it will provide them with an environment in which mathematical ideas are part of everyday conversation – well beyond the examination syllabus. It will encourage enquiry, the pursuit of open-ended problems and engender the confidence to do these things without the scaffolding common in current approaches to pre-university mathematics teaching and assessment.
- 2.2. The University will define the mathematics curriculum to ensure that undergraduate entrants are equipped with the depth of knowledge and conceptual appreciation necessary to make rapid progress at degree level. The curriculum will cover the content required for success in the STEP examination, to be taken in Year 13, A Level Mathematics and Further Mathematics. Promoting an early understanding of the application of mathematics in the real world will be central to the School’s teaching and it is likely that most students will also take A Levels in Physics and Computer Science.
- 2.3. In addition to curriculum design, mathematicians from the University will contribute to the teaching at the School; primarily in Year 13. Graduate and undergraduate students will act as mathematics mentors to students who will, during their two years at the School, gain a gradual introduction to university academic life through attending seminars, using shared resources and accessing university facilities. Students will be encouraged to attend symposiums and lectures, such as the “Inspiring Science” lectures by outstanding

communicators of science, and to engage in University 'Grand Challenges': a programme designed to involve students in an exciting educational and social experience where they are tasked, working with academics, to challenge and provide solutions to 21st Century global dilemmas.

- 2.4. The School will recognise the importance of developing the whole person in order that the mathematician can flourish. Exeter College has the proven capacity to care for the wider needs of learners enabling them to perform to their greatest potential. Experience gained through the highly successful Reach Academy, and the College's work with students on International Baccalaureate programmes, will assist the School in balancing the intellectual and personal development of its students.
- 2.5. The College's understanding of learners leaving Year 11 is complementary to the University's knowledge of how its entrants should be equipped. The close collaboration between the University and College, including the involvement of teaching staff from both institutions, offers a unique opportunity to provide a structured transition for students through being taught, predominantly, by college teachers at the beginning of their course and university staff later on.
- 2.6. Students will benefit from the holistic package of pastoral care presently enjoyed by sixth form students at Exeter College. This ensures the effective delivery of the 'soft curriculum' including health and wellbeing, financial awareness, progression and employability skills, personal safety and community participation.
- 2.7. The School will be equipped to recognise and accommodate neurodiversity among its applicants. Based on the Exeter College model, specialist support, in the mathematics context, will be available for those with particular social and emotional support needs. Individuals presenting with Asperger syndrome, for example, will benefit from a pre-arrival programme, including meetings with parents, aimed at ensuring they are comfortable with the School's routine and surroundings when they arrive. During the pre-arrival period, an individual plan will be agreed so that the necessary on-going support is in place from the moment they begin their induction.
- 2.8. A strong and common feature of the two sponsor institutions is the extent to which the Learner Voice is used to fashion the learning experience. This concept will carry forward into the School where, through the tutor group system, student representatives will have the opportunity to meet, regularly, with senior management in order to explain and request changes which will improve their experience.
- 2.9. The OFSTED outstanding Graduate School of Education at the University will be instrumental in providing professional development support to teaching staff at the specialist school. Academics researching excellence in education will work closely with the Head Teacher and school team, in an iterative way, to develop the very best teaching methodologies and practices. Working alongside Kings College London and the Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME), we intend to form a best practice forum for mathematics specialist schools with the objective of continually improving the experience and achievements of our learners.

3. The curriculum the school will follow (including the proportion of time spent teaching each subject), qualifications which might be offered, the approach to teaching and learning and how these will help to develop mathematical thinking and prepare students to study maths (and related degrees) at top universities

- 3.1. The School will aim to develop students' ability to apply mathematical knowledge in novel and unfamiliar ways and to equip them with insight, ingenuity, persistence and the ability to work independently through substantial problems. The core mathematics content will reflect that required for STEP, A Level Mathematics and Further Mathematics. Most students will also study for A Levels in the mathematically intensive disciplines of Physics and Computer Science.
- 3.2. In Year 12, formal teaching will be delivered mainly by staff who are experienced in working with students new to sixth form study and who can help them make a successful transition from GCSE. In addition to the core classes, they will collaborate with students in other mathematics schools and meet, converse and work with staff and students from the University's mathematics department. These activities will be designed to broaden mathematical experience and provide an introduction to the ethos of university life.
- 3.3. In Year 13, the balance will shift so that the majority of the formal teaching is delivered by staff experienced in teaching on undergraduate programmes. This will not only ensure that students are prepared mathematically for university study but, also, that they are comfortable with learning in a university environment at the point of entry. Again, students will benefit from attending seminars and other interactions with the University's mathematics department as well as having access to shared resources and facilities.
- 3.4. Exposure to University research groups will provide context and realism for students. The unique offering of the University is the interdisciplinary nature of its research groups. The strength of mathematics at the University comes from a community of mathematicians working in a truly interdisciplinary research environment, across engineering, biological and physical sciences, building capacity in complex dynamic systems and providing a bridge across key research themes. In year 13, students will engage in groups as diverse as Climate Change, Biological Systems, Materials Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing, Astrophysics, Statistics and Fluid Dynamics, all demonstrating the depth and relevance of continued study in mathematics.
- 3.5. Throughout their time at the School, and in addition to their tutor, students will have access to mathematical mentors from the University. Mentors will provide 1:1 and small group support for individual development and project work.
- 3.6. Collaboration, group work and the ability to present and persuade are essential competencies to be developed among the School's students. Programmes of study will include activities which develop language, writing, presentation and team working skills as well as exposing students to conferences, seminars and other events delivered by the sponsors and other organisations.
- 3.7. Teaching strategies will combine the most effective traditional approaches with modern techniques and resources. Interactive whiteboards, tablet devices and desktop computers

will all be available along with specialist mathematical software. The capture of teachers' notes, along with other specially produced interactive materials, into a virtual learning environment will permit remote and asynchronous use of these resources by students and by potential applicants engaged with outreach programmes.

- 3.8. Students will have access to the full range of extracurricular activities enjoyed by their peers at Exeter College. These include the Ten Tors Challenge and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, a range of choirs, bands and orchestras, theatre productions and sports ranging from rugby through mountain biking to surfing.
- 3.9. A programme, similar to the Creativity, Action, Service component of the International Baccalaureate, will be included so that, over their two years in the School, students will engage in, for at least a given number of hours, activities which involve the arts and other non-mathematical creativity, physical exertion and voluntary service to others.
- 3.10. Access to non-core subject areas at A Level, including the necessary specialist teaching facilities, will be arranged through Exeter College.
- 3.11. The above is subject to detailed development to be led by the Head Teacher Designate once appointed. However, based on these assumptions, the provisional deployment of contact time throughout the week could be as described in the table below. Directed group work, attendance at seminars and private study would be additional to this.

Mathematics	9.0 hours
Physics	4.5 hours
Computer Science	4.5 hours
Embedded scientific presentation and communication skills	1.5 hours
Creativity, action, service	2.5 hours
Enrichment and Sport	2.5 hours
Tutorial	1.0 hours

4. Intended yearly intake, number of pupils when at full capacity and details of how pupils will be organised e.g through year groups, tutor groups or other class structures

- 4.1. The School will admit only those students who are able to demonstrate mathematical ability and the potential to become first rate mathematicians. Across the four counties targeted, it is anticipated that an attainable annual intake is sixty students and that the School may be fully populated by year 4. The profile of the intake, over the first four years, could be similar to that shown in the table below.

Year Group	September 2014	September 2015	September 2016	September 2017
12	30	50	60	60
13		30	50	60
Total on roll		80	110	120

- 4.2. Students will be organised into tutor groups, each of approximately 15 individuals and drawn from both years 12 and 13. This would promote peer support among tutees and

provide for some informal mentoring. It is anticipated that tutors will have a significant role to play in ensuring students make an effective transition into their new environment and in their ongoing development. This process will be supported by the pastoral care systems based in Exeter College and its specialist Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services in respect of, for example, UCAS applications.

- 4.3. The process of induction for new students is key to their settling-in as productive learners. The induction programme will ensure that students form an effective relationship with their tutor, form friendships among a new peer group, are appropriately oriented within the School, the College and, as far as is necessary, the University. Above all else, care will be taken to ensure that they feel safe and have the confidence and support they need to make a success of their first few weeks and beyond.
- 4.4. An important aspect of the wider induction programme will be a relevant residential visit during their first term.
- 4.5. The involvement of Exeter College brings a further benefit to students through contact with a body of 16-18 year old students beyond those enrolled at the Mathematics School. In addition, the College's specialist facilities, learning centres and other services will be accessible to them. Students will join their friends and other students from the College for sporting and enrichment activities including, for example, structured voluntary work and competing in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.
- 4.6. Many Exeter College students travel significant distances each day. However, for those students for whom daily travel to Exeter is not practical, the School will provide boarding facilities four nights per week. These are likely to be located alongside the University's residential accommodation but segregated into a specific and appropriate unit for 16-18 year old students. The School will ensure the presence of the necessary adult supervision and support for residential students.
- 4.7. A senior member of the School's staff will be appointed as its safeguarding officer. This role will be supported by the College's designated child protection officer and the extensive systems, services and procedures already in place in her team. Through this mechanism, the School will have access to the local multi-disciplinary team, social care, community police and health services. There will be direct access to qualified nurses and counsellors.

5. Details of the school timetable and calendar (length of school day, term, year) and plans for extended hours

- 5.1. The rural nature of the south west requires that, to some extent, the school day is constrained by travel time and the availability of public transport.
- 5.2. The core school day, therefore, is likely to be 09.00 to 16.30 Monday to Friday.
- 5.3. A wide range of facilities will be available beyond these times at both the University and the College including sports centres, libraries, technology-rich learning areas and services

to support both day and boarding students.

- 5.4. At present it is assumed that the School will operate across the three terms of the traditional academic year totalling 36 weeks.
- 5.5. All of these provisions will be subject to development once the Head Teacher Designate is in post and detailed planning is underway.

6. Admissions policy and plans for identifying and selecting pupils

- 6.1. The School will select students based on demonstrable mathematical aptitude, academic and career aspirations and their potential to thrive in the specialist mathematical environment.

- 6.2. The selection mechanisms used initially will include:

An entrance examination such as the UK Mathematics Trust, Intermediate Challenge / Pink Kangaroo

Predicted and achieved GCSE grade in Mathematics

Predicted and achieved GCSE grade in Science (Triple)

An interview of significant length during which it is possible to determine the mathematical capacity of students which is sometimes different to that which may be apparent from performance at GCSE. The interview will also be used to assess the appropriateness of the match between the applicants and the specialist ethos of the Mathematics School.

- 6.3. Developing the effectiveness of the selection mechanism will provide valuable research opportunities in assessing mathematical potential and matching learning programmes to learners. It is envisaged that this development work will be carried out in collaboration with other mathematics schools as well as being supported by the University's Graduate School of Education.
- 6.4. The over-arching aim of the selection process is to ensure that those young people with the greatest potential to contribute to the UK's mathematical future are given the chance to do so irrespective of their circumstances.
- 6.5. Successfully identifying the pool of potential applicants will be heavily dependent upon outreach work with schools across the region. Exeter College presently recruits students from over 80 secondary schools and existing relationships with these schools will be used to promote the mathematics outreach programme.
- 6.6. The University presently undertakes an extensive programme of outreach work with secondary school students. This is aimed at raising the educational and career aspirations of young people through inspirational mathematics and science. Activities include school visits on the theme of 'what is university mathematics?', residential summer schools, Big

Bang South West (which is an interactive celebration of science and technology) as well as the National Science and Engineering Week and F1 in Schools. School and community events are supported by enthusiastic science and engineering student ambassadors. These current students provide a first-hand insight into studying undergraduate science and university life, dispelling any myths and encouraging school pupils to aspire towards an exciting career in science.

- 6.7. Beginning in schools at Year 9, it is likely that the annual pool of applicants will include some whose socio-economic circumstances have compromised their academic performance. Equally, and especially so with mathematical disciplines, it is likely that some very able applicants may present with additional support needs; for example, resulting from Asperger syndrome.
- 6.8. From initial outreach activity to interview, the selection process will aim to test for high potential and match it with the support required to realise that potential. This may be through the financial support of the bursary scheme, including perhaps three or four supported residential places each year, or specialist support provided by Exeter College's extensive learning support services.
- 6.9. This approach will promote the widening of participation in the best mathematics education available at sixth form and, subsequently, university level. Making available, to all mathematically able young people in the south west, mathematics education opportunities which would not otherwise be accessible.
- 6.10. Those who follow the outreach programme, and apply but are unsuccessful in gaining a place at the School, will have automatic access to the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) services at Exeter College. As with any applicant needing to re-assess their plans, the College will make every effort to redirect them to courses which meet their needs. Similarly, if it becomes clear in the first term that the School is not the right place for a particular student, then the College will support them in making an appropriate transition.

7. Proposed staffing structure (including involvement of university staff or students) and how this will deliver the curriculum

- 7.1. The School will be led by a Head Teacher who will be a mathematician and will carry a teaching load. This is a critical appointment which will be made through a selection process agreed and managed between the sponsors on behalf of the Trust. The successful applicant must be an accomplished leader and manager with personal credibility in a mathematical field, exceptional teaching capability and the ability to promote a vision of mathematics which will inspire young people to excel.
- 7.2. Ensuring a resilient structure requires that a Deputy Head or Senior Teacher be appointed. This post will also require the attributes of an able mathematician and inspirational teacher and will carry a greater teaching load than the post of Head Teacher.
- 7.3. It is envisaged that the number of permanent full time teachers will be small; perhaps between four and six when the School is fully populated. Additional capacity will be drawn

from the College and University giving the advantage of being able to access particular specialism as and when they are required. This model offers the opportunity to develop CPD strategies which link with episodes of teaching in the specialist environment; in some cases requiring accreditation as a pre-requisite to teaching there, in other cases providing research and professional development credit for work undertaken.

- 7.4. Each of the permanent academic staff will carry a tutoring responsibility alongside their subject teaching.
- 7.5. Existing performance management and quality assurance strategies will be transferred from the sponsors in order to ensure that the School is delivering the required outcomes.
- 7.6. In addition to the core teaching personnel above, arrangements will be made for members of the University staff to play a significant role in promoting the wider mathematical ethos of the School; being present for activities and events, presenting seminars, running competitions etc. The precise manner in which the financial aspects of this will work has yet to be determined.
- 7.7. A central component of the intended experience for learners is that they will be supported not only by their tutor but, also, by mathematics and academic mentors. These are likely to be drawn from the University's student population subject to an appropriate selection process and the necessary safeguarding checks. Mentors will support group and project work and also be available to assist students during independent study time.
- 7.8. In addition, the School will require learning support workers, who are also a specialists in mathematics, administrative support staff, laboratory technician and cover for caretaking and security duties. It is anticipated that the boarding component of the School will be delivered as a discrete service from one of the sponsors or a third party.

8. Likely capital and revenue costs and details of how financial plans will support the vision for the school and ensure it is financially viable and offers value for public money

- 8.1. Although an independent trust, the School will have very close links with the two sponsoring institutions; for this reason, it will require a building which is within easy walking distance of the University and the College. Since both are located close to Exeter city centre, this will also ensure good access to public transport links.
- 8.2. It is unlikely that it will be possible to find a site suitable for a new build within the target area of the city. Work has begun, therefore, to identify an available existing building which has the potential to provide the necessary teaching and ancillary accommodation as well as being an inspiring setting for learning.
- 8.3. Work undertaken so far, indicates that the required accommodation is likely to equate to around 800m². This will be configured as class teaching spaces, physics lab, computing lab, social and group work space, learning resources centre, tutorial, office and administration spaces.
- 8.4. One such building has been identified to date. [REDACTED] is a Grade II listed building located in a secluded corner of a city centre park and adjacent to the city's central

library. At 819m² the house, on first inspection, has the potential to accommodate the School and provide a unique learning environment. The apparent potential for refurbishment and conversion to this use would, of course, require validation through a structural survey and detailed discussion in respect of planning and listed building constraints.

- 8.5. Initial enquires indicate that the cost of acquiring a 125 year lease is likely to be in the region of [REDACTED]. The College has significant experience of successfully managing the delivery of new builds and refurbishments which, along with the University's team of Chartered Surveyors, may provide valuable local support for the project management team once they are appointed.
- 8.6. Early modelling indicates that, when operating at the full capacity of 120 learners, the School's cost per learner will be in the region of [REDACTED]. Since recruitment will be dependent upon a growing reputation, it is expected that full capacity may not be reached until year 4 and that shadow funding, in the spirit of that described in the Free School financial guidance, will be required to offset the higher cost per learner in the start-up period.
- 8.7. Both sponsor organisations are financially strong: through their role as members of the Trust and through their appointed directors, they will ensure the appropriate oversight of the School's financial wellbeing. It is anticipated that the College (which itself has outstanding financial health) will play a major part in the day to day running of the School and transfer many of its tried and tested processes into the management of the School's business.

9. Details of how the maths school will operate alongside and collaboration with Exeter University and Exeter College

- 9.1. A project group has been established to guide the initiative in its early stages. The group comprises the Exeter College Principal, the College Manager and Head of Mathematics and Computer Science from the University, academic staff from each institution, a former local head teacher and others. Having generated this paper, the group will continue to work towards the establishment of the Trust.
- 9.2. The School's Trust will be sponsored by the University of Exeter and Exeter College. It is envisaged that each institution will nominate one or more directors for appointment to the Board. In addition to an independent chair and the School's Head Teacher, further directors are likely to include community representatives from each of the four counties, at least one parent, one student and one or two representatives of the wider mathematical community (for example, the Met Office).
- 9.3. Exeter University and Exeter College bring common aspirations and complementary strengths to the Mathematics School project.
- 9.4. Both are high performing institutions setting out to provide learners with an outstanding experience and world-class outcomes. Both have a strong tradition of delivering

mathematics education to their respective markets, both recognise that national potential is being lost because young, able, mathematicians are not receiving the stimulus and encouragement they need: both are committed to action!

- 9.5. The University can provide access to mathematicians and a mathematical environment, mentor and prepare entrants for undergraduate study, show them what they might achieve in the future and inspire potential high performers to study mathematics on degree courses.
- 9.6. The College can take GCSE candidates from across the region, settle them in to a new institution, equip them to be independent learners, keep them safe, develop their whole person and provide a rich, sixth form education with the expectation of outstanding outcomes.
- 9.7. In combination, these strengths offer an ideal mix to ensure successful outcomes for students of the School.
- 9.8. The two institutions already collaborate on a number of initiatives including the STAR programme which aims to assist students in negotiating their pathway to the offer of a degree course place from the University.
- 9.9. In practical terms, day to day running of the school, its building, services and wider support for 16-19 year old students, including safeguarding, will be overseen by Exeter College. The mathematics curriculum, its links with mathematics, engineering, science and computing specialisms in the University, and development of the mathematical environment, will be overseen by the University. Both institutions will offer access to resources and facilities as needed.
- 9.10. The University's Graduate School of Education will support the development of teaching practice by conducting research and developing CPD opportunities linked to the School. This is an important aspect of building a wider community of partners and bringing the region's secondary schools around to having a positive view of the Mathematics School. Staff from schools which engage in the outreach programme, and encourage their most able young mathematicians to apply, will be able to tap into a range of CPD opportunities for mathematics specialists offered by the School of Education in collaboration with the Mathematics School. In addition, it is planned that there should be an annual conference, based in Exeter, with the aim of sharing best practice in teaching the most able young mathematicians.
- 9.11. The wider partnership with the contributing secondary schools will be critical to successful recruitment. Initially, schools may feel threatened by the potential loss of, perhaps, one or two of their best performing mathematicians each year. The outreach programme will address this by offering schools access to activities and experiences for students and teachers in years 10 and 11, along with the CPD mentioned above, and by following through with the schools so that they share in the progression of their past students. Over time, it is hoped that schools will aspire to having students move to the Mathematics School and value the kudos that this brings.

10. Next Steps

10.1. We propose to open the School in September 2014 and have an outline project plan that includes the appointment of a Head Teacher and acquisition of premises in mid 2013. We feel this is a challenging but realistic timeframe that will require significant resource throughout early 2013.

10.2. With this in mind we would like to request contractual arrangements which will:

fund a programme of outreach across Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset, working with the University Outreach Manager and Widening Participation team to raise awareness of the initiative amongst students, parents and teachers. We will exploit existing outreach projects run by the Mathematics Departments at both Exeter College and the University, such as the annual Royal Institution Master Classes for Year 9 students, with the objective of achieving an intake of 30 students in 2014

establish the necessary legal vehicle and governance arrangements to establish the Trust

develop a detailed project plan initially covering outreach, premises, staffing, admissions, curriculum development and enrichment

10.3. Both the University Council and College Board are fully supportive, have approved involvement in the Mathematics School and are keen to see the proposal progress in line with our objective of opening in September 2014.