

Specialist Provision Plan

Wards All

Service: Admissions & Education Sufficiency, Access Service

Portfolio: Councillor Kaur

1. Aim

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the current position of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) specialist provision planning within the Local Authority.
- 1.2 A local authority has a general duty, under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure there are sufficient school places, in its area, sufficient schools 'in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education'.
- 1.3 The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the current position and options to support the development of education provision for our most vulnerable children.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of this report and decides whether there should be further information or updates.
- 2.2 That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the number of places we currently have in Walsall, the number of places we require in the borough and the recommendations on how to meet the requirement of places. Walsall currently have 1,264 commissioned places across the borough, with 215 additional places approved to be provided through Specialist Resourced Provision expansion and the conversion of the former Rowley Robins building. A potential 266-500 places are required to meet projected demand over the next five years.

3. Know

Following on from the paper brought to the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2023, this report provides an update on the ongoing work surrounding pupil place planning for SEND.

The ongoing focus of the school organisation service is to review the requirement for SEND places across the borough in terms of pupil place planning and future proofing our place requirement. Working closely with the

Inclusion Service, a five-year plan has been created to ensure our statutory responsibility for having sufficient school places is met.

3.1 Our vision

Our vision is that all children and young people in Walsall will, irrespective of their learning needs or abilities, gain the skills and confidence to live well in their community. They will be supported and nurtured through an educational system that responds to their circumstances and prepares them for adulthood. Our ambition is to create a culture where there is effective, high quality learning provision, combined with meaningful and purposeful school partnerships, focused on the direct pursuit of improved outcomes for all Walsall's children and young people.

We must ensure that Walsall's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) offer continues to improve the experience and outcomes for children and young people. We know that good provision requires a strong and effective culture of inclusion that supports all children and young people to thrive. All children and young people deserve the support they need to be confident, resilient individuals with their own ambitions and aspirations as they develop into adulthood irrespective of their learning needs or abilities.

We hold a strong commitment towards enhancing special educational provision. Our objective is to ensure that every child and young person in Walsall with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan receives outstanding support within their local community. We firmly believe that the needs of most pupils with an EHC plan can be met through local mainstream provision which aligns with the legal presumption and SEND Code of Practice. However, we acknowledge that some learners may require additional support, and for this, we aim to create a tiered system of provision, growing in specialism and support. We are committed to ongoing identification of new settings that can provide the best outcomes and ensure adequate specialist placements are available for all pupils in Walsall, thus reducing the need for independent specialist provision. Our goal is to make the best use of our own resources and skills to provide quality services to all children and young people who require support. Our special schools will become centres that share their skills and knowledge to our mainstream schools. We are committed to ensuring that appropriate provision is available for children and young people between 0 and 25 years, supporting them through carefully planned key transitions.

3.2 Our approach to SEN placements

This report provides an update on the ongoing work surrounding our specialist provision and pupil place planning for SEND. The ongoing focus of the team is to review the requirement for SEND places across the borough in terms of pupil place planning and future proofing our place requirement. Working closely with the SEN and inclusion service, a five-year plan has been created to ensure our statutory responsibility for having sufficient school places is met, this will be continually reviewed to ensure it is accurate.

This report also looks at the need for specialist school places in Walsall over the next 3 years. These are places in Special schools and in Specialist Resourced Provisions (SRPs) that are attached to mainstream schools for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We want to ensure that all our children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes, and the aims of our placement strategy are:

- Mainstream first - We want all our children and young people to be able to access a mainstream setting if this is the best option for them. We want to have a fully inclusive approach within our schools, colleges and early years settings, and for every mainstream setting to make their best endeavours to meet children and young people's special educational needs.
- All ages, all types - We are committed to offering appropriate educational places for children and young people including early years and Post 16. Our settings will be equipped to ensure carefully planned transitions take place and that all children are prepared for adulthood. We will look to widen our Primary Need boundaries in terms of our Special Schools to develop 'multi-need' provision to assist in placing complex learners.
- Locality based learning - We believe that where possible, children should be educated within their local community, bringing a sense of belonging and value. We want our families of children with SEND to be supported and welcome to local schools. We want to reduce the amount of time children spend in transport. We will open SRPs and Hubs across the borough that can meet a range of needs.
- Shared skills - We recognise that our specialist settings and hubs have skills and resources that can be widely shared to enhance the support of children in mainstream settings.
- Graduated placements - Our model of placements includes four main types that increase in specialism and support. These are wholly mainstream, SRPs, Specialist Hubs and wholly special school. These settings give children opportunities to continue with elements of mainstream learning which will enhance their specialist support.

3.3 Pupil Place Requirements

The number of Walsall children and young people with an EHC plan is approximately 4,745 (end October 2024) and has increased by 59% over the last 3 years.

Of those pupils aged 5 to 16 with an EHC plan 56.4% are currently accommodated in a mainstream school place, with 41.6% requiring a specialist place in a special school or SRP with the remaining 2% in Elective Home Education (EHE) / Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

Significant work has been undertaken to review the additional specialist places needed for the next 3-5 years.

Modelling work has been undertaken to forecast the numbers of EHC plans that are expected to be issued in the coming years, and to estimate the number of these pupils who will require a specialist place.

This modelling estimates the need for provision for complex needs across the four broad types of SEND:

- Cognition & Learning
- Communication & Interaction including Autism
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- Sensory and physical needs

The latest forecast modelling suggested that a potential of an initial 1,985 pupils with ECH plans will require a specialist school place in the 2027/28 academic year

These places are for both special schools and specialist places within mainstream.

Currently, our special schools have specific designations for the type of need they meet – we will address this over time, aiming to have generic provisions where appropriate (whilst avoiding dilution of specialisms).

3.4 Current Pupil Place Availability

The number of commissioned places available across special schools, specialist resourced provisions (SRPs) and the medical PRU in Walsall at the start of the 2023/24 academic year was 1,121 as set out in a paper taken to Cabinet in March 2024.

Following Cabinet approval for the expansion of SEND places, the number of commissioned places at the start of the 2024/25 academic year has increased by 143 to 1,264 as set out in the tables below.

Table 1 Commissioned Numbers: Special Schools

SPECIAL SCHOOLS						
SCHOOL NAME	COMMISSIONED PLACE NUMBER					
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Castle	178	189	204	222	222	231
Elmwood	67	72	72	77	77	82
Jane Lane	120	120	136	166	175	186
Mary Elliot	127	127	137	140	140	140
Oakwood	85	100	130	150	208	239
Old Hall	98	98	103	103	103	103
Phoenix	41	41	41	41	47	49
TOTAL	716	747	823	899	972	1,030

Table 2 Commissioned Numbers: ARP/SRP

ARP/SRP IN MAINSTREAM						
SCHOOL NAME	COMMISSIONED PLACE NUMBER					
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Bentley West Primary	10	10	10	10	10	10
Rushall Primary	15	15	16	23	24	24
Lindens Primary	10	10	10	10	10	10
St Francis of Assisi Secondary	13	13	11	11	0	0
Shire Oak Academy	10	10	10	10	10	10
Pool Hayes Academy	10	10	10	10	10	10
New Invention Infant	0	0	0	8	8	8
Christ Church CE Primary	0	0	0	8	8	16
Short Heath Junior	0	0	0	8	8	8
Meadow View Primary	0	0	0	0	8	8
St James Primary	0	0	0	0	0	16
Moorcroft Wood Primary	0	0	0	0	0	8
Rosedale CE Infant	0	0	0	0	0	8
Ogley Hay Nursery	0	0	0	0	0	8
TOTAL	68	68	67	98	96	144

Table 3 Commissioned Numbers: Medical PRU

Medical PRU						
SCHOOL NAME	COMMISSIONED PLACE NUMBER					
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Shepwell	60	60	60	60	70	90
TOTAL	60	60	60	60	70	90

As the tables show, significant work has been undertaken over the last five years to meet the growing need for specialist places through a 43% increase in commissioned numbers across Walsall special schools and an 82% increase in places across SRPs in mainstream schools and the medical PRU.

As part of plans to meet additional demand, Cabinet in December 2022 and March 2024 approved funding of £7.2m to increase the number of places in SRPs in mainstream schools by 224.

56 of these SRP places have been delivered with a further 62 places to follow as shown below.

Table 4 Planned SRP Places

PLANNED SRPs		
SCHOOL NAME	PLACES	POTENTIAL OPENING
Blue Coat Junior	16	Jan-25
Walsall Studio School (Shepwell satellite)	30	Jan-25
Ormiston Shelfield Academy	16	Sep-26
TOTAL	62	

The local authority is engaged in conversations with several schools regarding the development of the remaining 106 SRP places previously approved.

Cabinet in March 2024 also approved funding of £1.14m to convert the former Rowley Robins nursery site to provide 47 pupil places for SEND. Works have commenced on this scheme and are due for completion in January 2025. This provision will operate as a satellite site of Old Hall Special School and cater for children with complex SEN needs.

3.5 Forecast shortfall of places

The model forecasted a need for an initial 1,985 specialist places in the 2027/28 academic year, with an existing 1,121 specialist places at that time, suggesting a requirement for an additional 740 places.

Over recent months the SEN service has developed a more rigorous approach to its decision-making process for EHCP, therefore reducing the rate of EHCP growth.

The forecasted impact potentially reduces the initial required places from 1,985 to 1,745.

The LA currently has 1,264 commissioned specialist places.

The current agreed SRP expansion schemes and the Old Hall satellite provision at Rowley Robins is programmed to deliver 109 places, taking the number of commissioned places to 1,373.

The balance of the SRP programme aims to provide a further 106 places, which would take the total commissioned places to 1,479.

This leaves an estimated requirement for an additional 266-506 specialist places to the 2027/28 academic year depending on the potential reduction of EHCP demand growth.

These forecasts are an indicative need for places based on a historical trend model of requests for EHCP assessments and actual EHCPs that are issued. We will be revisiting the model, monitoring the impact of the work above, and redefining the place needs on a 6 monthly interval.

The local authority will continue to look at meeting demand across the 4 key areas:

- LA commissioned special schools
- Resourced provision in mainstream schools
- Alternate Provision
- Independent special schools

As part of work to meet the estimated shortfall of places, the local authority is continuing conversations with Independent Special Schools to commission

places with these providers where pupil's complex needs cannot be reasonably met through 'in-house' provision. The current forecasting model accounts for this through an assumption that a proportion of all pupils with EHC plans will require independent provision. The level of this assumption is kept under constant review.

3.6 Potential Schemes

In assessing the options for place creation, the school organisation team and corporate landlord considered the potential for the permanent expansion of existing special schools, within site constraints, along with opportunities within the council property portfolio to repurpose buildings to create new provision. Following the production of initial desktop studies, Head Teachers of all special schools were consulted regarding their views on the scheme options produced, appetite and organisational capacity for expansion. Heads indicated their desire to support the process and engaged with teams to create proposed options at their schools to undertake the works required.

In March 2024, cabinet approved £3.95m to progress detailed feasibility studies and design work for the expansion of the special schools to allow for a more accurate cost estimate and procurement exercise to be undertaken.

The table below sets out all schemes that are progressing with feasibility works to address the remaining forecast shortfall of places.

The schemes identified currently over-provide for the estimated number of places required as these figures are based on initial studies. The scope of schemes may reduce through the detailed design process, whilst schemes may not proceed for various reasons.

As described above the range of forecasted places is between 266-506 therefore a flexible approach to programming and delivery will be taken to respond to future variations in forecast need for places as the model is refined, and the impact on EHCP growth is monitored.

Table 5 Potential Schemes

Site	Scheme	Total Places	Indicative Cost	Cost per place
Phoenix Academy	Provision of KS1 block with two/three classrooms, breakout space and toilets. Internal alterations to existing to improve educational environment	33	£3,300,000	£100,000
Elmwood School	New teaching block linked to existing circulation space to include 6 classrooms, breakout spaces, toilets. Internal remodelling of building to include 4 classrooms, toilets and admin.	56	£3,900,000	£69,643
Castle School	Provision of 14 additional classrooms, a DT room, dining hall and servery, toilets, storage and admin space in new build accommodation. Internal refurbishment of 9 rooms to ensure	100	£8,800,000	£88,000

	subject adjacencies (DT, Food Tech, Science)			
Jane Lane School	Provision of 5 additional classrooms, behaviour support area, admin and storage in new build accommodation. Provision of sports hall including changing and toilets. Internal refurbishment/remodelling of 2 classrooms, hygiene room/toilets, admin area	45	£4,200,000	£93,333
Shepwell School	Standalone block to include 6 classrooms, intervention and group room, toilets.	70	£3,000,000	£42,857
Old Hall School	Two storey extension to provide 11 classrooms, breakout space, toilets. Internal alterations to create two larger classrooms, extension to hall and staff facilities	96	£9,900,000	£103,125
Mary Elliot School	Extension to existing building to provide 4 additional classrooms, 2 hygiene rooms and storage. Dining hall extension.	30	£3,500,000	£116,667
Oakwood School (EDC Phase 6)	Two storey extension to existing building to provide 22 classrooms, toilets and cleaners cupboards.	176	£19,800,000	£112,500
Total		606	£56,400,000	£93,069*

The figures in this table are the initial estimated costs which include, construction cost, planning/building control fees, fees to statutory providers such as gas and electricity, professional fees and 20% contingency.

The figures in this table also include increases for indicative inflation expected over the estimated delivery period.

The indicative costs presented above are broadly in line with the most recent Educational Building and Development Officers Group (EBDOG) National School Delivery Cost Benchmarking report dated November 2023. In this report, the average cost per pupil place through re-build and extension of SEN Schools is calculated at £96,806. We therefore use £96,806 as the benchmark to identify Value for Money (VFM).

* Our indicative program cost per pupil place of £93,069 shows a positive VFM position.

The schemes outlined represent a mix of expansions across the special school estate, within the constraints of the individual sites and with a view to manageable increases in pupil numbers following conversations with individual school leadership teams. The schemes taken forward will be based on outcome

of feasibility studies that consider site constraints, building solutions and value for money of the proposed project costs.

Specialist Free School

A new Special School in Walsall Local Authority has been approved by the DfE. The school will offer 304 full time places plus 8 FTE nursery places – totalling 312 places across the school.

The school will cater for complex needs - autistic spectrum disorder, severe learning difficulties, social, emotional, and mental health, speech and language communication needs, moderate learning difficulties, profound and multiple difficulties.

The introduction of the Free School will relieve pressure on Walsall special schools, through creation of places and for capital funding.

There will additionally be a reduction in the displacement of children who current travel outside of the area for school places, as more places will be available within the borough. Currently 527 children from Walsall Local Authority travel to a special school outside of the area.

It is suggested presently that the Free School is to open in September 2027 but is subject to the DfE carrying out feasibility studies and proceeding with a design solution, procurement strategy and agreement on construction processes.

If Free School is approved, the capital programme for expansion projects will be reviewed in line with review of forecasted need for places.

4. Financial

Cabinet has committed a capital budgetary provision of £13.74m to provide 197 places through the expansion of Oakwood Special School at the EDC, Rowley Robins and improvements to Oakwood Special School, along with additional SRP places.

To make up the potential shortfall of 266-506 special places over the next five years, current estimated cost for the pipeline is £56.4m.

Cabinet approved 7.5% of the pipeline's estimated build cost was approved to deal with the remaining gap in circa £3.96m to progress the feasibility studies to RIBA stage 4, detailed design, to allow for a more accurate cost estimate and a procurement exercise to be undertaken.

HNPCA (High Needs Provision Capital Allocations) and Basic Needs are non-ringfenced grant given under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, by the Department for Education (DfE) to Local Authorities (LAs) to support the expansion of school places. On completion of the feasibility work for all projects

and when further information is known on the Free School, a further report will be taken to Cabinet for approval of funding to deliver the projects in Walsall.

5. Decide

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the current position and agrees that the increase of places at specialist provision is necessary for the Local authority to meet its statutory duties of providing sufficient school places for all Walsall residents.

The committee may decide to ask that a further briefing on place planning be offered to members.

6. Respond

Consultants have been commissioned to undertake detailed designs and costings for the special schools based on current feasibility study options.

Work will continue with mainstream schools to identify and secure capacity for expanded SRP places.

The committee may decide to request further information as pertains to individual planning area and school expansions.

7. Review

Continued development into the review of SEND place requirement across the borough to future proof SEND provision for Walsall will continue through the special provision group and annual reviews of the pupil projections are due to be included in the annual School Capacity (SCAP) survey which is submitted every July for mainstream places.

The SEN Modeler will also be reviewed on a bi-annual basis to ensure that the requirements of places are aligned with the projections. Updated forecasts will be reported through School Estate Strategy Group, Children's Capital and Assets Board and Children's DMT. The forecast numbers will also be reflected in future reports to Cabinet regarding SEND Sufficiency.

Capital needs will be taken to Capital board.

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