



## ***Notice of a Meeting***

### **Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Friday, 28 March 2025 at 10.00 am**

**Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND**

**These proceedings are open to the public**

If you wish to view proceedings, please click **on this [Live Stream Link](#)**.  
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

#### **Membership**

*Chair:* Councillor Nigel Simpson

*Deputy Chair:* Councillor Jenny Hannaby

*Councillors:* Liz Brighthouse OBE      Andy Graham      Michael Waine  
Ian Corkin      Sally Povolotsky  
Trish Elphinstone      Roz Smith

*Co-optees:* Hana G      Toby Long      Peace Nnaji  
Fraser Long      Katie N

**Notes:**      ***Date of next meeting:* 11 July 2025**

**For more information about this Committee, please contact:**

*Committee Officer:*      *Scrutiny Officer*  
   *[Scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk)*

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

Date Not Specified

## What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

- All services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to children, young people, education, families and older people.
- Enables the council to scrutinise its statutory functions relating to children, adult social care and safeguarding. Includes public health matters where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- This committee will also consider matters relating to care leavers and the transition between children's and adult services

## How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am 4 working day before the date of the meeting.**

## About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 63 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 678,000 residents. These include:

|                  |                      |                       |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| schools          | social & health care | libraries and museums |
| the fire service | roads                | trading standards     |
| land use         | transport planning   | waste management      |

Each year the Council manages £0.9 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 9 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

## About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

## What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets up to 4 times a year or more. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

**If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting**

**A hearing loop is available at County Hall.**

# AGENDA

## 1. Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.

## 2. Declaration of Interests

See guidance note on the back page.

## 3. Minutes (Pages 1 - 12)

The Committee is recommended to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and to receive information arising from them.

## 4. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak at this meeting can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

To facilitate 'hybrid' meetings we are asking that requests to speak or present a petition are submitted by no later than 9.00 a.m. four working days before the meeting, i.e., 9.00 a.m. on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2025. Requests to speak should be sent to the Scrutiny Officer at [scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

If you are speaking 'virtually', you are asked to submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that your views are taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9.00 a.m. two working days before the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than one A4 sheet.

## 5. Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations (Pages 13 - 14)

Attached is the Cabinet response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee report on Draft Education Other Than at School. The Committee is asked to **NOTE** the response.

## 6. Committee Action and Recommendation Tracker (Pages 15 - 20)

The Committee is recommended to **NOTE** the progress of previous recommendations and actions arising from previous meetings, having raised any questions on the contents.

## 7. Committee Forward Work Plan (Pages 21 - 24)

The Committee is recommended to **AGREE** its work programme for forthcoming meetings, having heard any changes from previous iterations, and taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report.

The Cabinet Forward Plan can be found

here: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgListPlanItems.aspx?PlanId=433&RP=115>

The most recent BMMR, submitted to Cabinet is January 2025, can be found

here: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AId=31293>

## **8. Update on Children's Homes (Pages 25 - 30)**

The Committee has requested an update on children's homes. The Committee has invited Cllr John Howson, Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, to present the report and has invited Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Jean Kelly, Deputy Director for Children's Social Care, and Charlotte Davey, Assistant Director – County Services, to attend and answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

## **9. Report of the Virtual School (Pages 31 - 74)**

Cllr John Howson, Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, and Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet member for SEND Improvement, have been invited to present a report on the Virtual School and to provide an update to the Committee on the extended responsibilities laid on the Virtual School as well as ones that are anticipated to come into force under new legislation.

Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion, and Clare Pike, Acting Headteacher of Oxfordshire Virtual School, have been invited to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

## **10. School Place Planning and Delivery (Pages 75 - 100)**

The Committee has requested a report on School Place Planning and Delivery. Cllr John Howson, Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, has been invited to present the report. The Committee has also invited Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion, and Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager, to attend and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

## **Councillors declaring interests**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

### **Members Code – Other registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships
- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.

- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

### **Members Code – Non-registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

# Agenda Item 3

## EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 28 February 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.15 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Nigel Simpson - in the Chair  
Councillor Jenny Hannaby  
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE  
Councillor Ian Corkin  
Councillor Trish Elphinstone  
Councillor Andy Graham  
Councillor Sally Povolotsky  
Councillor Roz Smith  
Councillor Michael Waine

**Co-opted Members:** Hana G  
Katie N  
Peace Nnaji

**Other Members in Attendance:** Sylvia Buckingham, Co-opted Member of HOSC  
Councillor Kate Gregory, Cabinet member for SEND Improvement  
Councillor Damian Haywood  
Councillor John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services  
Councillor Mark Lygo

**Officers and others in attendance:** Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People and Transformation (Deputy Chief Executive)  
Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services  
Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion  
Maria Bourbon, Oxfordshire CAMHS Service Manager for Oxfordshire University Hospital Foundation Trust  
Steve Crocker, Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board  
Karen Fern, SEND Designated Clinical Officer for BOB ICB  
Jules Francis-Sinclair, Co-Chair of Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum  
Nick Field, Children's Services Operations Manager  
Jean Kelly, Deputy Director Children's Social Care  
Caroline Kelly, Head of Integrated Commissioning – Start Well  
Matthew Tait, Chief Delivery Officer (ICB)  
Chris Wright, Associate Director of Place – Oxfordshire (ICB)  
Stephen Good, Home to School Transport Programme Manager  
Philip Earnshaw, Operational Manager - Contracted and Fleet Services  
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

*The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.*

## **1/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**

(Agenda No. 1)

The following members of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had sent apologies that they were unable to attend for item 8: Cllr Hanna, District Cllr Barrow, District Cllr Poskitt.

## **2/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(Agenda No. 2)

Katie N declared that she had two non-registerable interests, one concerning Home to School Transport, and the other as a member of the SEND Youth Forum.

Sylvia Buckingham declared that she was also a Patient Safety Partner with Oxford University Hospitals, and a Trustee for Healthwatch Oxfordshire.

## **3/25 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes for the meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2025 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record.

## **4/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 4)

Cllr Damian Haywood commented on the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) report, seeking clarity on "incremental progress" and noting the absence of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and dashboards. He highlighted a discrepancy in Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) success rates—100% for some cohorts but only 20% overall—and queried delays. Cllr Haywood emphasised that, whilst the improvement programme benefited SEND children, they were disproportionately affected by failures. He pointed out the lack of targets or metrics in Theme 1 and noted the decline in EHCP completion rates from 40% to 20%.

Katy Bentley attended to share her experiences and challenge claims that only a few parents were affected by changes, arguing many parents and carers felt exhausted and frustrated. She discussed delays and lack of transparency in securing an appropriate placement for her deaf daughter despite clear evidence of her needs, highlighting issues with her daughter's EHCP and a rushed transition to a specialist base after an appeal. Criticising the decision-making process as opaque and complicated, Ms Bentley expressed frustration with inadequate communication from the local authority. She emphasised the negative impact on her family and called for respect, honesty, and transparency in the SEND process, urging the committee to focus on outcomes and ensure the system works effectively for all families.

Melody Drinkwater, representing Oxfordshire SEND Parent Action, criticised the SEND update report for its overly positive tone and lack of detailed KPIs. She noted improvements in response times but highlighted worst-case scenarios and a decline in the completion rate of EHCP within 20 weeks. Ms Drinkwater raised concerns about the quality of EHCPs, with fewer than half rated as good or outstanding, and emphasised the need to measure success by outcomes rather than inputs. She criticised the Council's communication approach and plans for co-production, urging a focus on the impact of actions on children and young people and better engagement with affected families.

Rachel Hornibrook her son, an 11-year-old Year 6 student with medical and physical needs. Despite good academic performance and no behavioural issues, her son had been isolated since August 2024, receiving one-to-one tutoring in a portacabin without social interaction, leading to concerns from tutors and parents about the quality and appropriateness of his education. She reported that a section 47 inquiry remained unanswered. Ms Hornibrook criticised the alternative provision as a form of exclusion and appealed to councillors for intervention to reintegrate her son into mainstream education.

## **5/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN** (Agenda No. 5)

The Committee **NOTED** that the Capital Programme report would come to the committee as two reports in March, and that the Committee was obliged to receive the Local Government Ombudsman report and action plan at its first substantive meeting of the municipal year. It was also **NOTED** that while the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) report not being on the forward plan was an oversight, there was no confirmed date for the item to come back, with the need to ensure it has been done at a suitably high quality level and co-produced. The Committee emphasised the importance of the EOTAS report coming back to scrutiny before it went to cabinet.

With the upcoming election in mind, the Committee highlighted the importance that once a new committee membership was appointed, members should receive a thorough briefing on all matters and data to identify areas for scrutiny.

Members also suggested a list of other potential agenda items they felt it was important for the committee investigate which included:

- Opportunities for Artificial Intelligence in education;
- Children's and adolescents' mental health assessment;
- Educational psychologists;
- Positive activities for young people;
- Teenage pregnancy support;
- Accommodation and youth offending services;
- Leaving care services;
- Healthy school and child protection targets;
- Residential homes;
- Data driven investigation on attendance and exclusion relationships between schools;

- Update on Wood Eaton and other special schools;
- Issues around child protection and pathways developed within institutions;
- Deep dive into young people's transition from education to the workforce, particularly those leaving care and those not going into further education.

Members emphasised the importance of a balanced work plan and the breadth of the Committee's remit.

## **6/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER** (Agenda No. 6)

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker.

## **7/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS** (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **NOTED** that there were no Cabinet response expected for this meeting.

## **8/25 LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP SEND UPDATE** (Agenda No. 8)

The Committee had invited Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet member for SEND Improvement, and Cllr John Howson, Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, to attend to present the report on the Local Area Partnership (LAP) SEND update.

The Committee also welcomed the following to the Committee:

- Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services;
- Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion;
- Matthew Tait, Chief Delivery Officer (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board);
- Chris Wright, Associate Director of Place – Oxfordshire (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board);
- Jean Kelly, Deputy Director Children's Social Care;
- Karen Fern, SEND Designated Clinical Officer (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board);
- Maria Bourbon, Oxfordshire CAMHS Service Manager for Oxfordshire University Hospital Foundation Trust (Oxford University Hospital Foundation Trust);
- Jules Francis-Sinclair, Chair of Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum;
- Caroline Kelly, Head of Integrated Commissioning – Start Well;
- Nick Field, Children's Services Operations Manager;
- Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People and Transformation (Deputy Chief Executive);
- Steve Crocker, Independent Chair, SEND Improvement and Assurance Board.

Members of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend the meeting of the Committee and to participate in this item, at the discretion of the Chair. Cllr Mark Lygo and Sylvia Buckingham attended and the Chair agreed that Cllr Damian Haywood could participate too. Cllr Hannaby, the Deputy Chair, was also a current member of HOSC.

The Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement thanked the speakers and noted the value of hearing real-life experiences. The focus of the report was on observing the progress made by the LAP in addressing issues identified since the 2023 inspection. The Director of Children's Services provided a strategic overview, recognising the challenges and improvements since the July 2023 inspection, which had identified widespread deficiencies. The Director outlined the complexity of the system and the ongoing efforts to enhance it.

The report documented the progress made, focusing on systemic changes and improvements in timeliness and quality of services. The Director of Children's Services pointed out the significant increase in the number of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) over the past 10 years and the commensurate volume of work being managed. The report also acknowledged the need for better communication and transparency with parents and carers.

The possibility of using Artificial Intelligence to speed up diagnostic pathways was raised and the Oxfordshire CAMHS Service Manager and the Associate Director of Place – Oxfordshire (ICB) explained that Oxfordshire had been pioneering in using AI for initial screening of neurodevelopmental pathways, such as autism and ADHD, with an ongoing project with the University of Liverpool. There were, though, questions about appropriateness from a clinical perspective and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance was clear about the importance of who needed to be involved in assessment and what skills that person needed. Practical steps included single assessor models and offering support at the earliest opportunity.

The Children's Services Operations Manager also confirmed that there was ongoing work to improve the IT systems for the EHCP process. This included using an online portal for applications and exploring the functionality for annual reviews and notifications. The aim was to automate certain aspects to make the process more efficient.

*Steve Crocker, Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board, joined the meeting online at this stage.*

Members explored the shortage of educational psychologists and whether, given the shortage, the local authority would accept privately-funded assessments during the Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (ECHNA) process. The Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, and the Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board highlighted efforts to increase recruitment of educational psychologists and the use of paraprofessionals to help manage the workload. Additionally, they mentioned that, whilst private assessments could be utilised, the local authority would still require its own assessments to ensure familiarity and consistency with the school system and local context.

The Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board and Chief Delivery Officer addressed queries from members about data, data quality, understanding baseline KPIs, the source of baseline data, and the challenges in measuring and interpreting KPIs. They acknowledged challenges with data quality, especially real-time data from NHS colleagues partly owing to the repercussions of cyberattacks, and mentioned ongoing efforts to improve it. They explained that baseline data often came from publicly available Department of Education (DfE) statistics and other verified sources.

The Torbay Council's pilot locality model for SEND was raised by the Committee and what level of benchmarking against other authorities was explored.

It was emphasised that benchmarking against other councils was indeed standard practice and performance using publicly available data was regularly considered. Whilst acknowledging that Torbay's locality model might offer valuable insights, it was not directly comparable due to differences in size and context. However, the SIAB Chair and the Director expressed openness to learning from other councils' successful initiatives and incorporating relevant practices where applicable.

Members asked if prioritising Year 6 to Year 7 EHCP transitions affected the timeliness of other plans, which had decreased to 20%. The Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board confirmed that the 100% success rate for arranging these transitions by the deadline did not impact others. It was explained that different teams managed these tasks and a separate plan existed to improve overall timeliness. The drop to 20% was attributed to increased demand and resource limitations.

*The Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board left the meeting at this stage.*

The Committee sought clarification as to why the KPIs for the LAP SEND had not been included in the report, and thus reported to the committee, despite their existence in the improvement board along with other relevant metrics. In response to questions, the Director of Children's Services explained that the KPIs which were routinely reported to the SIAB had not included in the report because some of the data was unverified and required validation. It also lacked detailed analysis and so there was a concern that presenting it without context might have been unhelpful.

Increased funding in the Council's recent budget for SEND allowed the doubling of the number of schools benefiting from enhanced pathways, promoting inclusion in mainstream schools, without top-slicing school budgets. It was emphasised by officers in response to questions that, whilst Oxfordshire had made significant progress, there was still work to be done.

*Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People and Transformation (Deputy Chief Executive), joined the meeting at this stage.*

The Committee inquired about the removal of the RAG (red, amber, green) rating from the reports. The Director of Children's Services responded that the RAG rating

was removed because it did not effectively convey progress and improvements. The previous RAG-rated reports were challenging to interpret and did not clearly demonstrate the improvements. Instead, a narrative style was adopted to present the information more clearly and to better outline the progress and milestones achieved.

There was a detailed discussion about financial disincentives for schools with many students having EHCPs, specifically regarding Teaching Assistant (TA) workload and pay. The Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion acknowledged these challenges, noting that TA hourly rates were increased in September 2024. The Director of Education and Inclusion mentioned that a 10% increase in funding provided to schools for TAs was intended to help schools cover the costs of TAs, with the aim of eventually reaching the full cost. It was noted that the Council could not directly increase salaries, as this would require national negotiation. It was also explained that the national funding system, including the notional £6,000 school contribution, had not been updated since 2014. Despite these issues, the Council was working within government-set funding regimes to support schools as much as possible.

The Committee was keen to explore further whether those schools with more children with EHCPs were disadvantaged financially.

Members asked about the cost-effectiveness and outcomes of initiatives in the report, and the risks linked to many EHCPs being deemed to have been poorly assessed, including financial and personal risks to the Council and potential judicial reviews. The Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion stated that measuring cost-effectiveness was challenging but noted independent special school places were three times more expensive than state-funded ones, suggesting possible savings.

It was noted that the Council was not currently meeting the 20-week target for EHCP completion but achieved 100% within 30-35 weeks. Risks included judicial reviews and financial costs, however the primary focus was on meeting children's needs promptly.

Members requested specific statistics and milestones related to reducing the 40% to 20% figure for EHCPs, as well as details about the expansion of the assessment team capacity and ongoing monitoring. The Children's Services Operations Manager reported that the assessment team had increased from five to seven permanent roles, with additional support from agency staff. It was mentioned that there had been a 27% increase in EHCP requests compared to the previous year, affecting the timeliness of assessments. However, with the expanded capacity and the addition of 17 new agency educational psychologists, the team had cleared the backlog of assessments. This improvement was expected to positively influence the 20-week completion rate in the upcoming months.

Members asked about the enhanced pathways and whether, within the constrained budget system, money was rationed to be used further down the line. Members also inquired as the impact of services from staff turnover rates in the SEND services. It was confirmed that there was no rationing of money within the constrained budget system, although the Council had to ensure the appropriate use of public resources.

Additionally, that the enhanced pathways aimed to provide early help to reduce long-term costs.

Regarding staff turnover, it was noted that there was significant turnover in the SEND service, particularly among educational psychologists and SEND caseworkers, who could often find higher-paying roles in neighbouring authorities. It was also noted that, whilst CAMHS had faced significant challenges with workforce turnover particularly following the pandemic, progress in reducing vacancies and expanding services had been made.

*Mathew Tait, Chief Delivery Officer (ICB), left the meeting at this stage.*

There was discussion about whether the information included in the report was entirely accurate as it was not recognised by all members. Specific issues raised included whether or not the SEND Youth Forum Seal of Approval had been approved by the Forum. Concern was also raised about how fully the Forum had been able to feed into the work of the SIAB and how future information about the Forum could be improved and approved by the forum members.

The Director of Children's Services responded that the information in the report was accurate, emphasised that the SEND Youth Forum did have a work plan and that it had developed some initiatives. Examples were provided of individual issues raised by the youth forum which had led to actions, including separating out the preparing for adulthood and employment opportunities. It was explained that the seal of approval was based on designs created by members of the forum, but it might have been adjusted for printability. It was confirmed that the SEND Youth Forum had not been sent the Scrutiny report for approval before its submission to the Committee.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- The Director of Children's Services would share with the Committee the KPIs reported to the SIAB and the RAG rated Priority Action Plan tracker;
- The Scrutiny Officer was requested to work with the Director of Children's Services to ensure an answer was provided to the Committee's question about inclusive schools and potential financial disadvantage.

The Committee **AGREED** to recommendations under the following headings:

- The Council will publish the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as well as the RAG Rated Priority Action Plan Tracker and ensure they are accessible to the public.
- The Council will set out how the views of the SEND Youth Forum, and its members, will be taken into account and how they will be presented, including any consultation prior to the publication of any reports about the Forum.

*Cllr Povolotsky, Cllr Corkin, and Cllr Lygo left the meeting at this stage.*

*The Committee adjourned at 12:20 and reconvened at 12:33.*

**9/25 REVISED HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT & POST 16 TRAVEL POLICIES FOR CONSULTATION**  
(Agenda No. 9)

Cllr John Howson, Cabinet member for Children, Education and Young People's Services, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director Education and Inclusion, Stephen Good, Home to School Transport Programme Manager, and Philip Earnshaw, Operational Manager - Contracted and Fleet Services, were invited to present a report on the proposed Home to School Transport policy and the post-16 policy statement that were currently the subject of public consultation.

Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People and Transformation (Deputy Chief Executive), also attended for this item to support and answer any questions.

Cllr Haywood and Sylvia Buckingham, on behalf of OJHOSC, remained with the committee for this item as guests of the Chair.

The Cabinet member for Children, Education and Young People's Services introduced the report, explaining that the consultation was live and covered revisions to the home to school transport policy and the post-16 travel policy. It was noted that the policies had not been consulted on since 2014. The consultation focused on six areas, including language updates, direct payments to parents, alternative provision, post-16 SEND transport charges, split villages, and the spare seat scheme.

The Home to School Transport Programme Manager provided additional details, mentioning that the consultation had received 492 responses so far and had been well-received in engagement events. They elaborated on the six areas of the consultation, including the refresh of policies, direct travel payments, alternative education provision, and the proposal to introduce post-16 contribution charges. The importance of gathering views and feedback from the consultation was emphasised.

In discussion with the Committee, the following issues were explored:

Members asked about the effectiveness of the engagement methods, including the use of social media and other engagement strategies, and requested details on their implementation and impact. The Home to School Transport Programme Manager responded that the consultation had received 492 responses so far, and the engagement events had been well received. It was mentioned that the Council had directly communicated with current service users and used various methods to promote the consultation. However, the Home to School Transport Programme Manager acknowledged the need to check the effectiveness of these methods and ensure wider distribution, including the use of social media platforms like Instagram.

Members agreed that the Committee should wait for the consultation results before discussing and debating the recommendations in detail, to avoid influencing the outcomes. However, the Committee was content to acknowledge and support the public consultation as recommended by the report.

Members raised a concern about the lack of flexibility in current transport arrangements, citing an example where a parent could drive their child to school for part of the week but not the entire week. Members asked whether individual transport plans could be allowed to cut costs. The Operational Manager acknowledged the rigidity in the current system and mentioned that there was ongoing work to explore more flexible options, such as personal transport budgets and mileage allowances. It was noted that other counties, like Somerset and Wiltshire, were being looked at for best practices in managing personal transport budgets. The Operational Manager agreed that the suggestion of part-week transport arrangements was a good point and would be taken into consideration.

Members requested an update on an initiative, from a previous administration, where special schools managed their own transport, which was setup following a Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG). Members inquired as to whether the initiative had been successful and what had come of the initiative and CAG. However, Officers were unaware of the previous initiative but would endeavour to find out what happened to it.

Members raised the issue of youth consultation for the home to school transport policy, specifically questioning why the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum (OxPCF), which did not have a remit for working with young people, was mentioned as conducting targeted events. Members also inquired about the specific Youth Parliaments involved and how they would be engaging in the consultation. The Home to School Transport Programme Manager clarified that OxPCF was involved in pushing the consultation message out to their network, rather than directly engaging with young people. The Home to School Transport Programme Manager mentioned that they had met with the SEND Youth Forum before Christmas 2024 to introduce the policy and consultation.

Members asked what would happen if a school and the council did not agree on the transport arrangements for a young person, and what the implications were for the young person caught in the middle of the disagreement. The Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, along with the Home to School Transport Programme Manager, explained that while the child was on the school roll, the school was responsible for providing alternative provision. If the child was no longer on the school roll, the responsibility shifted to the local authority. The Council would liaise with the school to ensure the child's needs were met.

Members suggested that the policy should include a clear process for resolving such disagreements to ensure the young person was not adversely affected.

Members were curious about the methods being used to ensure a good response rate from parents and carers of children with special educational needs regarding the home to school transport consultation. They inquired whether any specific strategies were in place to engage with this group, whether social media was being utilised, and whether local parish councils had been involved, in improving consultation engagement.

The Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, and Home to School Transport Programme Manager explained that all current users of the service were directly

communicated with via email or letter. The survey included questions to identify respondents' roles, such as whether they were parents of children with SEND. Officers added that the majority of parents attending the consultation events were parents of children with EHCPs. Regarding social media, it was mentioned that the consultation message was being shared on various social media platforms, although the specific use of Instagram was not confirmed.

Members raised questions regarding the integration of the home-to-school transport system with public transportation and its digitalisation to enhance efficiency and equity. They proposed aligning the home-to-school transport routes with public transport systems, complemented by digitalisation, to improve coordination and operational efficiency. This approach aimed to address issues such as public transport providers being unaware of the number of student users, which had led to inconsistencies in service availability. Additionally, the significance of training bus drivers to adequately handle the specific needs of students, including those with special educational needs, was emphasised. Such training was essential to improve the safety and quality of the transport services provided to students.

Cllr Graham and Sylvia Buckingham left the meeting at this stage

Members queried the significant budget growth for home to school transport and questioned what had led to such significant increases. The discussion highlighted that the budget for home to school transport had grown significantly due to the increasing demand for services. The high expenses were attributed to the need for specialised transport for students with special educational needs and the overall complexity of managing and coordinating transport services across the county.

The item was concluded with agreement from Members that the results of the home to school transport consultation would be brought back to the committee for further discussion and analysis. This was expected to occur in the July meeting, as it would not be feasible to compile the results by the March meeting. The committee NOTED the progress made so far and emphasised the importance of ensuring wide distribution of the consultation to young people and other stakeholders.

The Committee AGREED to the following actions:

- Officers would discover what happened to the Cabinet Advisory Group and initiative for special schools to manage their own transport and report their findings back to the Committee.
- The Home to School Transport programme Manager committed to checking which specific Youth Parliaments were involved in the consultation and how they would be engaged.
- The Council will engage with Parish Councils to encourage participation with the Home to School Transport consultation as part of the consultation process.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

### Issue: Draft EOTAS Policy (Education Other Than At School)

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet member for SEND Improvement; Cllr John Howson, Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services

**Date response requested:**<sup>2</sup> 21 January 2025

#### Response to report:

*Enter text here.*

#### Response to recommendations:

| Recommendation   | Accepted, rejected or partially accepted | Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)   |
|--|--|---|
| 1. That the Council should re-write the draft EOTAS policy by no later than the end of February 2025 and that it, as well as the |  | As was explained and agreed at the meeting of the Education and Young People O&S Committee on 28 February 2025, the intention is to continue to coproduce the policy and to bring it to |

<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| accompanying guidance, should be co-produced and that external experts should be invited to participate in that process.             |  | EYP for its consideration in the early summer of 2025 before it is submitted to Cabinet for approval. |
| 2. That the Council, in tandem with re-writing its draft EOTAS policy, should also write a co-produced Alternative Provision policy. |  |   |

## Recommendation Update Tracker

### Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Nigel Simpson, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The recommendation update tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress accepted recommendations. The tracker is updated with recommendations accepted by Cabinet. Once a recommendation has been updated, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker. If the recommendation will be update in the form of a separate item, it will be shaded yellow.

|            |                       |                     |                 |
|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b>KEY</b> | <b>Due to Cabinet</b> | <b>With Cabinet</b> | <b>Complete</b> |
|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|

#### Recommendations:

| Meeting Date | Item        | Recommendation   | Lead   | Update/response             |
|--------------|-------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| 22-Nov-24    | Draft EOTAS | 1. That the Council should re-write the draft EOTAS policy by no later than the end of February 2025 and that it, as well as the accompanying guidance, should be coproduced and that external experts should be invited to participate in that process. | Lisa Lyons;<br>Kate Reynolds;<br>Joanna Goodey | Refer to response in item 5 |
|              |             | 2. That the Council, in tandem with rewriting its draft EOTAS policy, should also write a co-produced Alternative Provision policy.  |  | Refer to response in item 5 |

|     |                |              |          |
|-----|----------------|--------------|----------|
| KEY | Due to Cabinet | With Cabinet | Complete |
|-----|----------------|--------------|----------|

| Meeting date | Item                               | Recommendation   | Lead  | Update/response           |
|--------------|------------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| 28-Feb-25    | Local Area Partnership SEND Update | 1. The Council will publish the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as well as the RAG Rated Priority Action Plan Tracker and ensure they are accessible to the public.  | Lisa Lyons;<br>Kate Reynolds;<br>Matthew Tait | Sent to Cabinet 25-Mar-25 |
|              |                                    | 2. The Council will set out how the views of the SEND Youth Forum, and its members, will be taken into account and how they will be presented, including any consultation prior to the publication of any reports about the Forum. |   | Sent to Cabinet 25-Mar-25 |

## Recommendation Update Tracker

### Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Nigel Simpson, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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|            |                |                    |                 |
|------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| <b>KEY</b> | <b>Delayed</b> | <b>In progress</b> | <b>Complete</b> |
|------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|

**Actions:**

| Meeting date | Item                               | Action   | Lead                         | Update/response |
|--------------|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 28-Feb-25    | Local Area Partnership SEND Update | The Director of Children's Services would share with the Committee the KPIs reported to the SIAB and the RAG rated Priority Action Plan tracker  | Lisa Lyons                   | In Progress     |
|              |                                    | The Scrutiny Officer was requested to work with the Director of Children's Services to ensure an answer was provided to the Committee's question about inclusive schools and potential financial disadvantage. | Lisa Lyons;<br>Richard Doney | In Progress     |

|     |         |             |          |
|-----|---------|-------------|----------|
| KEY | Delayed | In progress | Complete |
|-----|---------|-------------|----------|

| Meeting date | Item  | Action  | Lead          | Update/response |
|--------------|---|---|---------------|-----------------|
| 28-Feb-25    | Revised Home to School Transport & Post 16 Travel Policies for Consultation | Officers would discover what happened to the Cabinet Advisory Group and initiative for special schools to manage their own transport and report their findings back to the Committee. | Richard Doney | In Progress     |
|              |   | The Home to School Transport programme Manager committed to checking which specific Youth Parliaments were involved in the consultation and how they would be engaged.                | Stephen Good  | In Progress     |



## Recommendation Update Tracker

### Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Nigel Simpson, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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| KEY | Update Pending | Update in Item | Updated |
|-----|----------------|----------------|---------|
|-----|----------------|----------------|---------|

| Cabinet<br>Response<br>Date  | Item | Recommendation | Lead | Update |
|------------------------------|------|----------------|------|--------|
| 6                            |      |                |      |        |
| There are no pending updates |      |                |      |        |
|                              |      |                |      |        |

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## Work Programme 2024/2025

### Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Nigel Simpson, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

#### **COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

| Topic   | Relevant strategic priorities   | Purpose   | Type                  | Report Leads                           |
|---|---|---|-----------------------|--|
| <b>28 March 2025</b>  |   |   |                       |  |
| Annual report of the virtual school                         | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. | To receive the annual report  | Overview and Scrutiny | Lisa Lyons, TBC                        |
| Progress of capital projects (schools and children's homes) | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. | To review the progress made on capital projects   | Overview and Scrutiny | Lisa Lyons, Kate Reynolds, Martin Goff |
| Post 16 data  | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. | To review the Post 16 data  | Overview and Scrutiny | Lisa Lyons, TBC                        |
| <b>TBC: 13 June 2025</b>                                    |   |   |                       |  |
| Oxfordshire Education Inclusion Partnership Update          | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. | To ensure effective collaboration and strategic planning for inclusive education across Oxfordshire | Overview and Scrutiny | Lisa Lyons, TBC                        |

|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|--|---|--|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Local Government Ombudsmen Action Plan | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. | To ensure accountability and improvement in addressing special educational needs and related complaints  | Overview and Scrutiny | Lisa Lyons, TBC |
| Draft EOTAS Policy                     | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. | To ensure accountability and improvement in addressing special educational needs and related complaints; to ensure effective collaboration and strategic planning for inclusive education across Oxfordshire | Overview and Scrutiny | Lisa Lyons, TBC |
| <b>11 July 2025</b>                    |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   | <b>26 November 2025</b>  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   | <b>27 February 2026</b>  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   | <b>27 March 2026</b>   |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |
|  |   |  |                       |                 |

**SUB GROUP / WORKING GROUP**

| <b>SUB GROUPS / WORKING GROUPS</b> |                                      |                    |                 |                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>Name</b>                        | <b>Relevant strategic priorities</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Outcomes</b> | <b>Members</b> |
|                                    |                                      |                    |                 |                |

**BRIEFINGS FOR MEMBER INFORMATION**

| <b>BRIEFINGS</b>          |  |   |   |                          |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Name</b>               | <b>Relevant strategic priorities</b>   | <b>Description</b>                                  | <b>Outcomes</b>   | <b>Members</b>           |
| Personal Budgets          | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential | To be briefed on funding pressures.                 | To identify any areas that need to be referred to the Committee | Members of the Committee |
| Inclusive Schools Finance | Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential | To understand and analyse pressures within schools. | To identify any areas that need to be referred to the Committee | Members of the Committee |

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## **EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 28 March 2025**

### **Update on New Children's Homes**

#### **Report by Lisa Lyons**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**1. Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

Read, consider and note this update, which is provided for information only, no decisions are required.

#### **Executive Summary**

2. This report has been drafted to provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the progress of development of five new Oxfordshire County Council children's residential homes so far, describe the work that is in progress and highlight any delays and the causes of these.

#### **Background**

3. Oxfordshire County Council has always owned and operated Residential Children's Homes, offering both short term assessment placements and long-term residential care. Three homes (Glebelands, The Moors and The Oaks) have provided up to 16 placements for children. Plans to expand the provision were made in response to the cost and sufficiency issues associated with Residential Children's Homes nationally.
4. On 22 December 2022, Cabinet approved a Business Case to develop the Children's Service residential Care Home capacity, by the purchase and adaptation of 4 children's homes costing a total of £10.450m; 50% of this total was matched by the Department for Education (DfE). Oxfordshire County Council has made a capital commitment of £5.225m.

#### **Updates on the progress for each new Residential Home**

##### Aspen House (West Oxfordshire)

5. Aspen House was the first of the new children's homes to open. It provides residential care for up to 4 children aged 12-17. The home offers both medium and long-term placements, including emergency admissions, and supports children with mobility challenges. It has now been open for 6 months and has been full since it opened. Aspen House was inspected in October 2024 and received a good judgement by Ofsted.

#### Peak House – South Oxfordshire

6. Once open Peak House will be a 1-2-bedroom short term children's home, providing care for children with a range of complex needs or who require same day admission. Children who will live at Peak House will benefit from a quieter and more bespoke care setting and are likely to have had a range of adverse childhood experiences.
7. Peak House is ready to open, pending OFSTED registration, all building work is completed, and the home has furniture ready for children to move in. Registration paperwork is with OFSTED and the team at Peak House are working with social workers and managers to match children currently living out of Oxfordshire with a view to them returning into the county. OFSTED could visit the home any day for the pre-registration inspection and as soon as the registration is received children can start moving in.

#### Willow Bank – Vale of the White Horse

8. Once open Willow Bank will be the second 1-2-bedroom short to mid-term children's home, providing care for children with a range of complex needs or who require same day admission. Children who will live at Willow Bank will benefit from a quieter and more bespoke care setting and are likely to have had a range of adverse childhood experiences.
9. Building work at the Willow Bank site has not finished but is on track to be completed by the end of this month so that the care team will receive the keys, after this the building will need furnishing, decorating and OFSTED registration. There have been no delays with the completion of the building work at Willow Bank, and it is hoped that the home will be operating in Autumn 2025. (pending Ofsted registration).

#### Great Mead – South Oxfordshire

10. Once open, Great Mead will be a 4-bedroom mid to long term children's home, providing care for children with a range of complex needs.
11. Building work at the Great Mead site has been slow to progress, due to planning issues and wildlife concerns (there have been bats living in the roof and possibly great crested newts in a pond). It is unlikely that the building work will be completed until late summer 2025, following this the care team will need to furnish and prepare the building before registering with OFSTED. It is unlikely that Great Mead will open until Winter 2025.
12. Children We Care For living outside of Oxfordshire and who would benefit from returning will be prioritised to live at Great Mead. Transitions will begin at intervals as soon as the Ofsted registration is received.

#### Oathill Lodge – West Oxfordshire

13. Oathill Lodge will provide the same service as Great Mead, just in a different location. It has not progressed as quickly with the planning and building process, however it is likely that the home will also be open in Winter 2025.

Again, Children We Care For living outside of Oxfordshire will be prioritised to live at Oathill Lodge.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

14. The new Children's Homes project is firmly rooted in the Children's Social care Sufficiency Strategy, which details plans to create more local homes for Oxfordshire children, so that they can benefit from living alongside residents and the excellent support infrastructure in the county.

15. Building local Residential Care Homes also speaks to Oxfordshire's Strategic Plan, specifically the following priorities:

Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.

All new children's homes have been built to the highest building specifications that ensure projects are taking the environmental impact of any work and the completed building into consideration. All five new homes have electric charge points on location and electricity/gas supplies have been introduced with the least possible disruption to the environment

Support carers and the social care system.

All new children's homes support carers because local jobs have been created for people who would like a job in social care, and for birth families of the children living in the residential homes, because they will be moving nearer which will improve family time opportunities. The Social Care system is also supported by this project because providing local homes means that children live closer to their social care support team, which in turn means that teams are physically closer to the children they are working with.

Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

This project means that a number of children placed outside of Oxfordshire can move back into the county, if this is safe and in their best interests. This provides Children we Care For with improved opportunities to reach their full potential, because they can access local resources, including our excellent schools and therapeutic services (ATTACH for example).

## Financial Implications

16. The table below provides a summary of the budget for each of the units, together with the forecast spend. 50% of any underspend must be paid to the DFE, this is part of the agreement made with them.

|  | Home       |            |            |         | Total |
|--|------------|------------|------------|---------|-------|
|  | Peak House | Willowbank | Great Mead | Oathill |       |

|                                       |                    |            |            |            |           |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| OCC Capital Investment                | £1,026,000         | £1,026,000 | £1,586,500 | £1,586,500 |           |
| DfE Funding                           | £1,026,000         | £1,026,000 | £1,586,500 | £1,586,500 |           |
| Total                                 | £2,052,000         | £2,052,000 | £3,173,000 | £3,173,000 |           |
| Forecast Capital Spend                | £1,858,833         | £2,204,179 | £3,090,270 | £2,605,923 |           |
| Variance                              | Small home balance | £-40,989   | £-82,730   | £-567,077  | £-690,796 |
| DfE reimbursement (50% of underspend) |                    | £20,494    | £41,365    | £283,539   | £345,398  |

17. In total this project has a projected underspend of £690,796, as stated £345,398 of this will be paid back to the DfE. As this is a projected underspend it is possible that this figure may change, however the team are confident that as this figure has remained the same for several months, it is unlikely that there will be any significant variations in the forecast.

18. While Aspen House is a new Children's Residential Home, it was not part of the above business case, this is because the council agreed to fund this project, prior to DfE funding becoming available. The budget for the Aspen House project was £3,000,000 and the total spend at completion was £2,930,000 leaving an underspend of £70,000.

19. This is a review of progress on capital projects, and as such does not cover revenue financial implications in this report.

Comments checked by:

Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Children's Services  
Date: 20/03/2025

## Legal Implications

20. There are no potential legal implications.

Comments checked by: Craig Cochrane, Head of Law and Legal Business Partner, Child Care Team (Legal Services)

Date: 18 March 2025

## Staff Implications

21. Staff have been appointed and are subject to the onboarding process to ensure they are in post by the time that the children's homes open.

Comments checked by:

Nazia Turley, HR Business Partner, Children's Social Care, 17 March 2025

## Equality & Inclusion Implications

22. Planning for the growth in Oxfordshire County Council's Residential Care home established has centred around principles of equality and inclusion, with the driving force for expansion being the need for Children We Care For to be living in Oxfordshire and enjoying the same level of support and opportunities as resident children. The increase in the number of beds in Residential Children's homes means that more children can return.

23. Children's homes have been built taking equality and inclusion into consideration, with adaptations having been made for physically disabled children and sensory assessments being undertaken during construction to make sure home environments are calm and peaceful and do not cause any undue stress or anxiety to the children living in the home.

LISA LYONS  
Director of Children's Services

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

Contact Officer: Charlotte Davey  
Assistant Director – County Services

March 2025

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## **Divisions Affected -**

### **EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 28<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

#### **2023-24 Virtual School Report**

**Report by Clare Pike, Acting Head of the Virtual School**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **1. The Cabinet Member/Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**

1.1 Note the content and approve the Virtual School's priorities to secure further improvements to the educational outcomes of Oxfordshire's children we care for, previously cared for children and children with a social worker.

1.2 Raise any questions with the lead officer – Clare Pike, Acting Head of the Virtual School.

### **2. Executive Summary**

2.1 This report provides an evaluative account of the work of the Virtual School from September 2023 to August 2024, informing priorities for the next academic year.

2.2 This report mainly relates to Priority 7 in the Council's Strategic Plan 2023 – 2025 – Creating opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

### **3. Reporting**

3.1 There is a statutory requirement of Virtual Schools to produce an annual report. This report details the work of the Virtual School over the last academic year (September 2023-August 2024) to improve educational outcomes for the following cohorts:

- Children we care for
- Previously cared for children
- Children with a social worker

3.2 It is important to note that the remit of the Virtual School was extended in September 2024 to include children in kinship care. This cohort will not be included in this report.

3.3 In addition to the presentation of the report to this committee, it is also presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and submitted to the library of evidence in preparation for any inspection.

3.4 The data presented in this report is based on the information recorded at the time of collection. It is important to note that the accuracy of the data is contingent upon the accuracy of the recorded information. Additionally, the cohort being analysed is fluid and subject to change. The Virtual School is actively working to align our data reporting processes across all of our cohorts to ensure consistency and reliability. However, due to the dynamic nature of the cohort, some variations may still occur.

## 4. **Oxfordshire Virtual School**

### **Context**

4.1 The work of the Virtual School is guided by several key pieces of legislation and statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE). These documents outline the responsibilities and best practices for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, as well as children with a social worker. The primary guidance and legislation include:

- [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children](#): This statutory guidance details the duties of local authorities and Virtual School Heads (VSHs) to support the educational outcomes of children in their care.
- [Children's social care: virtual school head role extension](#): This guidance extends the role of VSHs to include promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker and, since September 2024, those in kinship care. It provides direction on collaboration with education settings to improve these outcomes.

These documents form the foundation of the work carried out by the Virtual School, ensuring that all referred to children receive the support they need to achieve their full educational potential.

### **The Virtual School's Core Duty**

4.2 The Virtual School's core duty is to promote the educational achievement of all Oxfordshire children we care for (CWCF), wherever they reside.

The Virtual School partners with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that Oxfordshire CWCF, aged 0-18, receive timely and stable access to education that meets their individual needs.

**Our mission is** to support our CWCF for in overcoming the unique challenges associated with their lived experiences, fostering a consistent and nurturing environment where they can thrive and realise their full educational potential.

We are committed to continuous improvement and the holistic development of each child, always striving to enhance educational practice for the benefit of the children and young people we serve.

#### **4.3 Our vision is to ensure that every CWCF can:**

- ACCESS: Has access to high quality educational provision
- ENGAGE: Can engage positively with education
- EXCEL: Makes excellent progress in all aspects of their education

#### **4.4 Our aims are:**

- To support every CWCF to secure a suitable educational placement which meets their educational and pastoral needs and enables them to thrive. 16–18-year-olds and care leavers are supported to access education, training and employment opportunities in-line with their future career aspirations.
- To ensure that CWCF can engage positively with their education and that barriers to education are removed.
- Through the delivery of a programme of support, guidance and training, develop the capacity of schools and Further Education (FE) providers to meet the needs of targeted vulnerable groups of children in Oxfordshire – CWCF, previously cared for children, children in kinship care and children with a social worker.
- To ensure that the gap in the attainment and progress of CWCF is diminished.
- To enable CWCF and care leavers to experience a range of cultural experiences to strengthen a sense of wellbeing and worth.

#### **4.5 Care Leavers**

The Virtual School has several duties to care leavers aged 18-25. We must ensure that these young adults receive ongoing support, including regular Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews if they wish to continue their education. The Virtual School also provides advice, advocacy and signposting around education, training and employment opportunities. Additionally, we offer guidance and support to help care leavers navigate their transition to independent living, ensuring their educational and personal development needs are met.

#### **4.6 The Virtual School's Extended Duties**

In addition to the Virtual School's core duty, the Virtual School has extended duties. They are to:

- promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children (statutory)
- champion children with a social worker and promote their education (non-statutory)

Since 2018-19, the Virtual School has had an additional statutory duty to [promote the education of previously looked after children](#) in Early Years provision and throughout the compulsory years. In Oxfordshire, we refer to this cohort as previously cared for children.

Since 2021-22, the Virtual School has had an additional non-statutory duty to [promote the education of children subject to a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan](#), aged from 0 up to 18, in educational settings and those who have

previously had a social worker. This includes children who are disabled and have, or have had, an allocated social worker.

The role of Virtual Schools expanded further in September 2024 to specifically include championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care.

**4.7 The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024** proposes several changes to the extended duties of Virtual Schools. It proposes:

- Making statutory the duty to children with a social worker and children in kinship care; and
- A potential role for Virtual Schools regarding children leaving custody.

## 4.8 Virtual School Team

The Virtual School's structure includes an Executive Leadership Team with a Virtual School Head (currently covered by the Deputy Head) and a Deputy Head. The Extended Leadership Team comprises leads from the Post-16, Secondary, Primary, Extended Duties and Business Support Teams. There is also a Participation and Engagement Team, which supports an apprentice post.

## 2023-24 Virtual School Headline Stats

### 4.9 Children We Care For (CWCF) and Care Leavers supported by the Virtual School Context (September 2024)

| Key Stage          | CWCF       | Male       | Female     | EHCP       | K - SEN Support | Number in County | Number Out of County | CWCF in Ethnic Minority Groups |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| EYFS*              | 41         | 20         | 21         | 1          | 14              | 30               | 11                   | 12                             |
| KS1                | 35         | 16         | 19         | 7          | 17              | 27               | 8                    | 8                              |
| KS2                | 95         | 48         | 47         | 34         | 40              | 58               | 37                   | 27                             |
| KS3                | 145        | 77         | 68         | 72         | 49              | 77               | 68                   | 26                             |
| KS4                | 156        | 87         | 69         | 65         | 49              | 97               | 59                   | 42                             |
| KS5                | 268        | 191        | 77         | 70         | 44              | 175              | 93                   | 145                            |
| <b>Totals</b>      | <b>740</b> | <b>439</b> | <b>301</b> | <b>249</b> | <b>213</b>      | <b>464</b>       | <b>276</b>           | <b>260</b>                     |
| <b>Percentages</b> |            | <b>59%</b> | <b>41%</b> | <b>34%</b> | <b>29%</b>      | <b>63%</b>       | <b>37%</b>           | <b>35%</b>                     |

| Post-16                      | Care Leavers | Male       | Female     | EHCP       | K - SEN Support | Number in County | Number Out of County | Care Leavers (aged 18-25) in Ethnic Minority Groups |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|---|
| <b>Years 14, 15, 16, 17+</b> | 545          | 355        | 190        | 132        | 47              | 391              | 154                  | 256 <sup>+</sup>                                    |
| <b>Percentages</b>           |              | <b>65%</b> | <b>35%</b> | <b>24%</b> | <b>9%</b>       | <b>72%</b>       | <b>28%</b>           | <b>47%<sup>+</sup></b>                              |

\*40 x pre-F3's to be added in September as a result of DfE expectations that we host PEPs for CWCF in settings from 9-months of age

<sup>+</sup> Estimated numbers based on the percentage of care leavers as at 23-09-2024 (Performance Data colleagues explained that this data cannot be pulled retrospectively)

## 4.10 Extended duties cohorts supported by the Virtual School Context (January 2024)

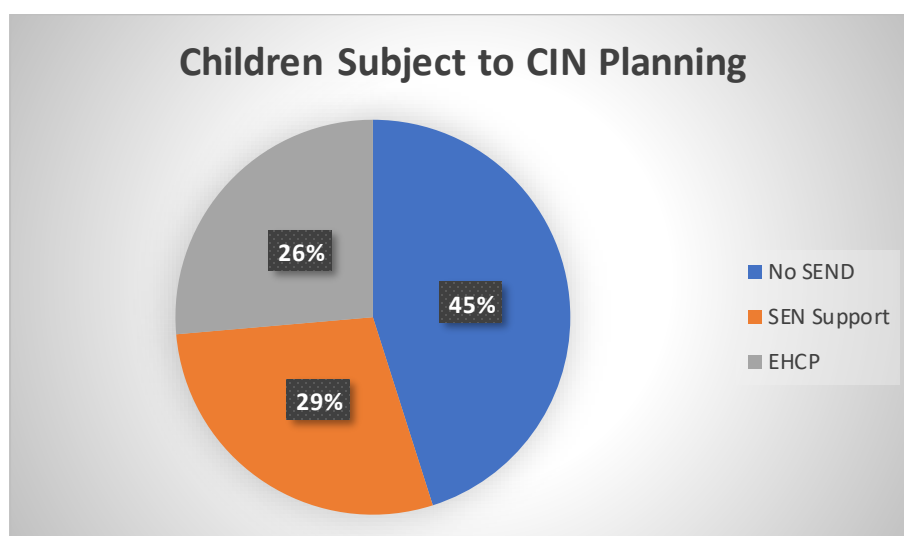
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### Previously cared for children: 2,108

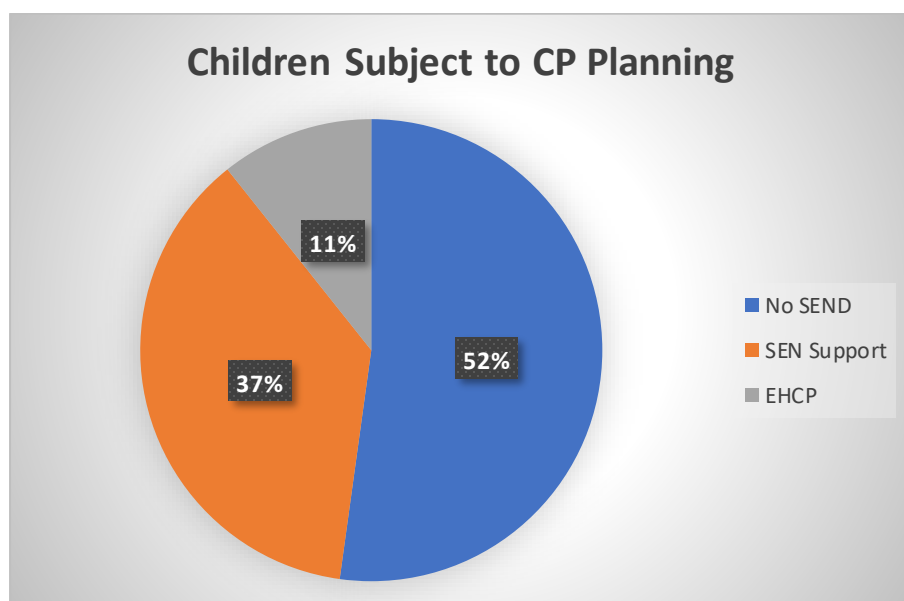
- Children subject to an Adoption Order: 491
- Children subject to a Special Guardianship Order: 369
- Children subject to Child Arrangement Order: 206
- Children subject to Other Arrangement Order: 1,042

### Children with a social worker: 1,556

- Children subject to Child in Need planning: 1,064



- Children subject to Child Protection planning: 492



## **5. 2023-24 Virtual School Priorities, Actions, Impact and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Children We Care For (CWCF) and Care Leavers – Priorities**

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In 2023-24, we identified the following priorities to help move us closer to our stated vision and aims:

- To ensure that all CWCF children have access to a suitable educational placement in a timely manner and without undue delays.
- To ensure that the needs of CWCF and care leavers are adequately met so that they can engage positively with their education. As a result, children and young people attend school regularly and exclusions of CWCF are minimised.
  - Increase pupil attendance and reduce persistent absence across all key stages and in all types of settings.
  - To ensure that no CWCF are permanently excluded from their educational settings and suspensions are significantly reduced.
- To ensure that all CWCF and care leavers can make good progress in their learning and achieve high levels of attainment across all key stages.
- To enhance the capacity of schools and other LA partners within Oxfordshire and beyond to better understand and meet the educational needs of our most vulnerable groups – CWCF, care leavers, children with a social worker and previously cared for children.
- To engage CWCF and care leavers in a range of cultural experiences to enhance the mental health, wellbeing and sense of self-worth.

### **5.2 Children We Care For (CWCF) and Care Leavers – Actions**

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During the last academic year, the Virtual School has undertaken much work to ensure that every CWCF can access high-quality educational provision, engage positively with education and excel in all aspects of their education. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Ensured all CWCF have a dedicated Virtual School Case Worker.
- Ensured that all CWCF have timely Personal Education Plan (PEP) review meetings, in-line with statutory guidance.
- Initiated and supported multi-agency professional meetings to find the best way forward to support education plans for individual CWCF with complex needs.
- Represented our children and Education Services at weekly Children's Resource Panel meetings and in weekly meetings to review children in unregistered placements.
- Promoted regular school attendance for CWCF.
- Captured Pupil Voice to inform practice across the school-system and Local Authority (LA).
- Facilitated training sessions and a conference to enable and empower education practitioners to utilise best practice working with our children, wherever they reside.

- Worked with partner agencies to ensure children requiring a school move were placed into a suitable school within 20 days.
- Worked with partner agencies to reduce the time taken to find a suitable school for children with an EHCP.
- Reviewed and strengthened our protocol on exceptional circumstances for term-time absence to ensure consistent practice that aligns with the needs and best interests of CWCF.
- Ensured alternative educational provision was put in place immediately when a new school placement could not coincide with a care move.
- Put in place timely interventions to support smooth transitions at key points in children's education journeys as well as interventions to stabilise school provision or support sustained reintegration back into school.
- Reduced the number of CWCF receiving suspensions and prevented permanent exclusions.
- Initiated the Relational Schools Programme to embed trauma-informed, relational and restorative practices in participating Oxfordshire settings.
- Participated in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) programme to redistribute unaccompanied children, ensuring they have timely access to suitable education.
- Commissioned a four-week English language and integration programme for newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people to help them prepare for and transition into mainstream school placements.
- Promoted activities to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of CWCF.
- Organised engagement events for CWCF to ensure professionals are acutely aware of their feelings and wishes, wherever they reside.
- Facilitated Brookes and Beyond for Year 10 learners. Brookes and Beyond is an Oxford Brookes University access project designed to recruit students from under-represented groups. It involves regular experiential workshops throughout the year (Brookes Engage) and a residential summer school for CWCF and care leavers.

### **5.3 Children We Care For (CWCF) and Care Leavers – Impact**

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During the last academic year, the Virtual School has had the following impact on CWCF's access to high-quality educational provision, engagement with education and outcomes:

- Excellent collaboration between LA teams across Education Services and Children's Social Care, and strong professional relationships with schools.
- Increased the percentage of school moves completed within 20 days from 78.2% to 86.9%.
- Reduced the average number of days for a school move for CWCF without SEND from 16.6 to 5.4 days.
- Improved the average number of days taken to complete a school move for CWCF with an EHCP by 50%, from 70.8 days to 34.35 days.
- Used Pupil Premium Plus funding to support 84 children and young people in accessing interim provision while awaiting a suitable school place, and/or accessing timely interventions to support smooth transitions at key points in their

educational journey, as well as interventions to stabilise school provision or support sustained reintegration back into school.

- Attendance of primary-aged CWCF was 95.78%, above the national average of 92.8%.
- Reduced the number of CWCF receiving more than one suspension.
- Oversaw notable improvements in the percentage of children reaching expected standards across all key stages.
- In the Summer Term, 74% of primary-aged children made 'Good' progress, 73% of secondary-aged children, 85% of Year 12 young people and 80% of Year 13 young people, as recorded in their Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- We supported 111 young people through their Year 11 studies, with 82 in the reported cohort. 92% of Year 11s achieved one or more qualifications, up from 87.7% in 2022-23.
- Four of our young people achieved eight or more GCSEs at Grade 4+. Two unaccompanied young people achieved above a Grade 4 or above in English.
- Successfully supported 73 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people from 9 different countries in accessing and graduating from the Orientation Programme and progressing into educational settings. 100% success rate.
- 80% of CWCF and care leavers aged 16-18 were engaged in employment, education and/or training, a 3% increase on the previous year
- Increased the number of Oxfordshire care leavers starting, attending and graduating from university. We supported 10 care leavers in starting university – adding to the 34 in Higher Education at this time. 4 care leavers graduated in July 2024: two with a First-Class Honours, one with Second-Class Honours and one from the University of Oxford.
- One of our care leavers, who had been pursuing an undergraduate degree in Fine Art, was selected to collaborate with John Lewis and their unique designs now feature on John Lewis brands.
- Facilitated access for 15 Year 10 learners to the Oxford Brookes University access project: Brookes and Beyond.
- Facilitated 31 training sessions and a conference, with high satisfaction rates among participants. 210 agencies and 409 professionals accessed Virtual School training in 2023-24. The average rating out of 10 (re: knowledge and understanding) for delegates before training was 5.46 and 8.68 after the training.
- Early indicators for the Relational Schools Programme showed improved attendance, reduced behaviour incidents/suspensions and improved staff well-being in participating schools. One participating secondary school saw external suspensions reduce from 200 in 2021/22 to 191 in 2022/23 to 96 in 2023/24. In 2023-24, one participating primary school saw behaviour incidents reduce from 379 in Term 1 to 222 in Term 5, attendance increase from 93.29% to 94.15% and suspensions reduce from 14 days in Terms 1/2 to 2.5 days in Terms 5/6.
- The Virtual School has promoted, arranged or facilitated a range of activities designed to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of CWCF. This includes access to:
  - Youth Voices;
  - The Music for Wellbeing Programme;
  - Welcome Packs for all children new into care;
  - BookTrust Letterbox parcels;
  - Dolly Parton's Imagination Library;
  - Phoenix Comics for all children in Key Stage 2;
  - Good luck cards for all Year 11s;

- Year 6 to 7 transition packs for secondary starters, and much more.
- Our team is represented on the Fostering Care Panel and Lifelong Links Steering Group.
- Our Participation and Engagement Officer and Apprentice organised and facilitated a number of engagement events over the year involving 204 children.
- From Pupil Voice captured via PEPs, Youth Voice engagement events/interventions, the Bright Spots Survey feedback, CYP&F comments/feedback at/after events, professional feedback and one-off testimonials, we have a wealth of feedback from children, carers and other professionals. For example:
  - "I achieved a first-class degree as a care leaver, which required a lot of motivation, independence and resilience. I was fortunate to have a close relationship with my previous foster parents, who always supported me and provided temporary accommodation when I needed a break from university life. The academic support I received from university was amazing. Having access to a mentor at university every week was incredibly beneficial. Both the Virtual School and my leaving care personal assistant supported me through university checking in with me. After graduation, I struggled to find a job related to my field. The Virtual School has been a huge help for tailoring my CV and cover letter and sending me vacancies and opportunities." – Care Leaver Graduate
  - "I think the Orientation Programme (OP) is such an unbelievably invaluable resource that we are so lucky to have for our Oxfordshire based young people. It allows us an invaluable opportunity to have educators assess their learning style and needs so that we can consider which is the best provision for them to move on to one of the colleges and schools in Oxfordshire. Staff from the OP share a report on the child which we pass on to colleges who have themselves shared how helpful this is for getting to know the child." - Social Worker
  - "My English is much better, I learnt many things and a lot of vocabulary... I wasn't able to sleep early, and I tried the method (no phone and fizzy drinks) and now I can sleep better, it was helpful" – Young Person who accessed the Orientation Programme

Here are some more headlines for CWCF based on the 2024 attainment data and findings:

## **Strengths**

### **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Attainment:**

- CWCF cohort is closer to the national average compared to other vulnerable groups, indicating effective targeted support.

### **Year 1 Phonics:**

- CWCF cohort performed 1% above statistical neighbours, showing some success in targeted interventions.

### **Year 2 Phonics:**

- Exceptional performance, far exceeding national average and statistical neighbours, highlighting highly effective support and interventions.

**Attendance:**

- High primary attendance rate at 95.78%, indicating good engagement at the primary level.
- Very low primary unauthorised absence rate at 0.20%, suggesting effective attendance management.
- Secondary attendance was 82.97%, above the national average of 78.4%.

**Suspensions:**

- Recent decrease in suspension rates from 14.8% in 2022/23 to 8.83% in 2023/24, suggesting that recent interventions may be having an impact.

**Focus for Future Efforts****Year 1 Phonics:**

- Comparison with statistical neighbours shows slight underperformance.

**KS2 Attainment:**

- Performance significantly below national average and statistical neighbours, indicating a need for enhanced support and interventions. That said, we know that 79.1% of our Year 6s had identified SEND needs, 51.2% had an EHCP. We know that 100% of Year 6s made 'Good' progress from their starting points and 69% made marked improvements in attainment.

**KS4 Attainment 8 Point Scores:**

- Performance 4% below national average and 5% below statistical neighbours.

**KS4 English & Maths 9-5 Attainment:**

- Performance 4.1% below national average and 1.1% below statistical neighbours. There are many factors that could explain the slight dip in GCSE results. 17 children experienced a school move in Year 11, 11% were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children compared to 4.6% in 2022-23 and 42% had EHCPs compared to 35% in 2022-23.

**Secondary Attendance:**

- Year 11 attendance was down from 79.02% to 74.72%. We know that 17 CWCF experienced a school move in Year 11 which will have impacted these figures.
- High secondary persistent absence rate at 43.42%, highlighting a critical area for intervention.
- High secondary unauthorised absence rate at 5.59%, suggesting a need for ongoing attendance monitoring and bespoke support.

**Exclusions:**

- In 2023/24, we had our first permanent exclusion of an Oxfordshire CWCF. This child attended an out-of-county secondary school. The Virtual School advocated for the child at the Governors' Disciplinary Committee (GDC) but the Headteacher's decision to permanently exclude was upheld.

**Consistency in Suspensions:**

- Fluctuation in suspension rates suggests a need for consistent and sustained efforts to manage and support CWCF pupils effectively.
-

Please refer to the Annexes for more data and graphical presentations.

## **5.4 Ofsted**

### **Feedback on the Work of the Virtual School from the [Ofsted Inspection \(12 to 23 February 2024\)](#)**

The February 2024 Ofsted inspection of Oxfordshire local authority children's services provided positive feedback on the work of the Virtual School. It mentioned that the Virtual School demonstrated high ambition, aligned with its vision, 'Access, Engage, Excel' and that this ambition is reflected in the significant benefits children have experienced through the strong partnership between the Virtual School and local schools. Partnerships have been instrumental in helping CWCF remain in education and reducing suspensions and exclusions. Stakeholders expressed high regard for the Virtual School's efforts, particularly valuing the support provided to school staff, the robust lines of communication and the extensive training opportunities available. The involvement of the Virtual School in the creation and timing of personal education plans was also greatly appreciated.

Additionally, the inspection highlighted the effective support provided to care leavers who arrive in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. It commented that the collaboration between the Virtual School and education providers is crucial in helping these children and care leavers develop their talents and achieve their career aspirations.

## **5.5 Children We Care For (CWCF) and Care Leavers – Recommendations**

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In 2024-25, we have been working on the following recommendations to further enhance the support and educational outcomes for Children We Care For (CWCF) and care leavers:

- Continue to ensure that all CWCF have access to suitable educational placements in a timely manner. Aim to further reduce the average number of days for school moves, particularly for those with an Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The reduction in average days for school moves for CWCF without SEND in 2023-24 demonstrates the effectiveness of current strategies. Further improvements will minimise disruptions in education.
- Implement targeted interventions to increase pupil attendance and reduce persistent absence across all key stages, particularly secondary. Focus on strategies to prevent permanent exclusions and significantly reduce suspensions.
- Ensure that all CWCF and care leavers make good progress in their learning and achieve high levels of attainment across all key stages by supporting effective Personal Education Plans (PEPs) - regular reviews, targeted (SMART) interventions and collaboration with educators and caregivers to address individual needs and promote academic success.
- Continue to utilise Pupil Premium Plus funding effectively to support interim provisions and smooth transitions.

- Enhance the capacity of schools, other education settings and partners to better understand and meet the educational needs of CWCF and care leavers. Continue to provide ongoing needs-based training and professional development opportunities.
- Reduce the number of NEET 16–18-year-olds and care leavers by providing targeted support and interventions, and to increase the number of CWCF starting, attending, and graduating from university by fostering a culture of high aspirations, offering comprehensive guidance and ensuring access to necessary resources and opportunities.
- Engage CWCF and care leavers in a range of cultural experiences to enhance their mental health, wellbeing and sense of self-worth. Promote activities that improve emotional health and organise engagement events to capture pupil voice.
- Maintain robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of interventions and identify areas for further improvement. Use data-driven approaches to inform practice and policy decisions.
- Find creative ways to celebrate best practice in all settings that meet our children's needs, wherever they reside.

## **5.6 Previously Cared for Children - Priorities**

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In 2023-24, we worked on the following duties to improve educational outcomes for previously cared for children:

- To respond to parental requests for advice and information for previously cared for children.
- To respond to requests for advice and information from early education and compulsory education providers in respect of previously cared for children.
- To make general advice and information available to early education and compulsory education providers to improve their awareness of the vulnerability and needs of previously cared for children.

## **5.7 Previously Cared for Children – Actions**

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During the last academic year, the Virtual School has undertaken numerous initiatives to improve educational outcomes for previously cared for children. These efforts include improving school attendance by bringing together professionals and offering comprehensive training and support to social workers, school staff and other stakeholders. We have actively promoted ways to access Pupil Premium Plus funding for previously cared for children, guiding schools on its appropriate use to enhance offerings for this cohort. We have ensured we have up-to-date webpages to provide accessible information and resources to address frequently asked questions. We utilised Section 31 funding to increase capacity for providing advice and support to parents/carers, educational settings and other professionals by part-funding a Senior Educational Psychologist who specialises in care-experienced children.

Additionally, we have maintained termly registers of children subject to adoption, special guardianship and other child arrangement orders. We have collaborated with

other Virtual Schools in the South-East to co-produce guidance documents for schools and caregivers of children who have left care through a permanency order.

## **5.8 Previously Cared for Children – Impact**

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During the 2023-24 academic year, the Virtual School made significant contributions to the support of previously cared for children. Our webpage saw a notable increase in engagement, with 279 unique hits, up by 37 from the previous year.

We were proactive in publishing and promoting educational advice widely, ensuring that parents, carers and professionals were well-informed. Our termly Parents' and Carers' Newsletter was published and promoted, enhancing communication and support. We responded to seven enquiries from parents and carers, and an additional 16 enquiries from education settings and eight from other professionals.

Our termly Designated Teacher (DT) Newsletter provided valuable updates and information to professionals working in education settings. Participation in the South-East Virtual School Network facilitated collaboration and the sharing of best practices. Furthermore, our work to establish a network of relevant Virtual School colleagues across the Adopt Thames Valley region strengthened regional support structures.

Training provided by the Virtual School was accessed by 210 agencies and 409 professionals, with high satisfaction rates reported. This training was crucial in equipping professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to support previously cared for children effectively. Our collaboration with the ATTACH Senior Educational Psychologist continued, with funding for 1.5 days of support dedicated to promoting the educational achievement of previously cared for children.

A new training course, 'Best practice for schools on working with adoptive and special guardian children and families', was attended by 31 professionals, all of whom reported 100% satisfaction. To raise awareness of the vulnerabilities and needs of previously cared for children, we attended relevant education forums to cascade key messages. The Relational Schools Programme, accessed by 22 settings and 12 professionals within the first two cohorts, showed early positive impacts, indicating the programme's potential for fostering supportive educational environments (as outlined in Section 5.3).

The 2024 Virtual School Conference was a notable success, with 162 professionals in attendance and 100% satisfaction reported. We specifically invited colleagues from The Rees Centre to share findings from their 2021 research into the work of Virtual Schools, which we contribute to annually.

## **5.9 Previously Cared For Children – Recommendations**

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In 2024-25, we have been working on the following recommendations to further enhance the support and educational outcomes for previously cared for children:

- Continue to respond promptly to parental requests for advice and information. Increase the capacity to handle enquiries by leveraging additional resources and training.
- Maintain and expand the publication and promotion of educational advice through newsletters, updated webpages and other communication channels to ensure that all stakeholders are well-informed about the vulnerabilities and needs of previously cared for children.
- Increase the frequency and reach of training sessions for social workers, school staff and other stakeholders. The success of the new training course for schools working with adoptive and special guardian children proves the importance of our professional development offer.
- Continue to focus on best practices for supporting previously cared for children and promoting effective use of Pupil Premium Plus funding.
- Continue to strengthen collaboration with other Virtual Schools and regional networks to share best practices, and co-produce guidance documents and tools.
- Continue with monitoring and evaluating mechanisms to track the impact of interventions and identify areas for further improvement. Use data-driven approaches to inform practice and policy decisions.
- Find creative ways to celebrate best practice across Oxfordshire.
- Promote activities and programmes that enhance the emotional health and wellbeing of previously cared for children. Organise engagement events to capture pupil voice and ensure their needs and wishes are addressed.

## **5.10 Children with a Social Worker – Priorities**

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In 2023-24, we worked on the following duties to improve educational outcomes for children with a social worker:

- To make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience.
- To promote practice that supports the engagement of children with a social worker in education.
- To level up outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child with a social worker can reach their potential.

## **5.11 Children with a Social Worker – Actions**

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See below summary of the work undertaken by the Virtual School to champion children with a social worker and promote their education.

During the last academic year, the Virtual School has focused on:

**a) Making visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience with the aim to enhancing partnerships between educational settings, local authority agencies and associated partners where everybody holds high aspirations for these children.**

This has been made possible by finalising and promoting a revised training and support programme for schools and CEF professionals and exploring innovative additions to our training programme (e.g. Virtual Reality headsets). We also updated and widely promoted the 'Children with a Social Worker' webpage and gathered termly web statistics from Google Analytics, alongside feedback from service users.

We attended the termly Schools' Safeguarding Forum meetings to inform Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) about the disadvantages that children with a social worker experience and engaged with a sample of DSLs for feedback on how we could better collaborate. We reviewed and re-promoted guidance for DSLs, presented at the Autumn OSCB Safeguarding in Education Sub-Group on our work, and produced an Engagement Plan for a "You Said, We Did" project. Furthermore, we consistently attended and presented at key forums to update stakeholders on this workstream.

**b) Promoting practice that supports children's engagement in education**

This has been made possible by the Virtual School participating in the South-East Virtual Schools' Sub-Group for children with a social worker to share, learn and cascade practices that support children's engagement in education. We share best practices through our training and support programme, through our termly newsletter for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and the various local school networks and forums. We continue to work hard to foster a collaborative and aspirational environment within Oxfordshire that enhances educational outcomes for children with social workers.

We track attendance, suspensions/exclusions, elective home education (EHE) and the use of reintegration timetables for children subject to Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) plans. We are exploring ways to extend this tracking to children who have previously had a social worker (Ever6 CWSW).

Restorative enquiry into the lived experiences of children with social workers (CWSW) with 0% attendance shed light on their perspectives, thoughts, feelings and needs. This enquiry highlighted the ripple effects of their experiences and identified necessary actions to improve their engagement. Indeed, it informed guidance for social workers. Regular attendance and input at the Oxfordshire Strategic Attendance Board has established a clear system-wide strategy on attendance and engagement for CWSW in Oxfordshire, emphasising that it is everyone's responsibility.

The 'You Said, We Did' engagement project with school staff, parents/carers and CEF professionals further strengthened our work. Reviewing our consultation referral form, collating termly consultation impact summaries and offering Virtual School consultations for CSC professionals working with children subject to CIN and CP plans has ensured timely targeted support.

The implementation of Phase 1 of the Relational Schools Programme - in partnership with the SEND Transformation Theme Group, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and The Restorative Lab (TRL) - was a significant step forward.

### **The Relational Schools Programme**

The Virtual School initiated the Relational Schools Programme in Oxfordshire because we knew it would disproportionately benefit our cohorts. This programme (which commenced in July 2023) aims to embed trauma-informed, relational and restorative practices in schools, promoting a whole-school culture of accountability, understanding and love. By fostering a sense of belonging, the programme benefits all children, especially those with SEMH needs or other SEND.

The 18-month programme includes leadership training, online modules, reflective sessions and comprehensive implementation support. As a result, we are seeing reduced conflict, suspensions and exclusions, along with increased attendance, attainment and schools that foster social learning and development.

In 2023-24, the Virtual School successfully wrote a business case to create a full-time, permanent post to lead this project from within the SEND Early Intervention Team. The Virtual School are now working strategically in collaboration with SEND Early Intervention colleagues to promote this programme, aiming to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of our children, build confidence among mainstream school staff and enhance parental trust in mainstream education.

This programme encapsulates the recommendations of the Rees Centre following Phase One of its research into best practices for promoting children's engagement in education.

#### **c) To level up children's outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential**

This has been made possible by the Virtual School participating in the South-East Virtual Schools' Sub-Group for children with a social worker to share, learn and cascade practices that support improved outcomes. We share best practices and impactful interventions through our training and support programme, through our termly newsletter for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and the various local school networks and forums. We continue to work hard to foster a collaborative and aspirational environment within Oxfordshire that enhances educational outcomes for children with social workers. We have started to track attainment and progress for this cohort. We are exploring ways to extend this tracking to children who have previously had a social worker (Ever6 CWSW).

We strategically collaborate with the Early Years Advisory and School Improvement Teams, School Improvement Officers from Oxfordshire Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and the Educational Psychology Service. This has been crucial in developing a cohesive strategy to ensure that every child can reach their potential by addressing educational disparities.

## **5.12 Children with a Social Worker – Impact**

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During the last academic year, the Virtual School has achieved the following in relation to our duty to promote the education of children with a social worker:

- The Virtual School attended relevant forums to raise awareness of the disadvantages faced by CWSW.
- We identified Oxfordshire schools with the lowest and highest attendance of children with a social worker, undertook a Deep Dive and produced findings to inform future actions.
- In partnership with colleagues from across the school-system, attendance started to increase for children with a social worker. Overall attendance for children subject to CIN planning increased during 2023-24 from 73.6% to 76.3% and attendance for children subject to CP planning increased from 67.7% to 67.81%.
- The Virtual School offered consultations to social workers, supporting 40 professionals and 48 children, improving attendance for 56% of these learners.
- 210 agencies and 409 professionals accessed the Virtual School's Training and Support Programme. Feedback showed high satisfaction rates and positive impact on knowledge and understanding.
- The Virtual School participated in the South-East Virtual School network, supporting collaboration and best practice sharing.
- The Virtual School ensured teams across Children, Education and Families hold high aspirations for CWSW and co-produced guidance to support colleagues in knowing what to do to support improved educational outcomes for this group.
- In 2023-24, the Virtual School supported 22 settings and 12 professionals in accessing the initial rollout (Cohorts 1 and 2) of the Relational Schools Programme which showed early indicators of success (as outlined in Section 5.3).
- The Virtual School's annual conference was attended by 162 professionals, with 100% agreeing the content met the aims of nurturing identity and belonging in CWSW.
- Seed funding from the Virtual School's Section 31 grant support the EET Team in successfully supporting 85% of NEET 16-18-year-olds with a social worker to re-engage in education, employment or training.
- We continued to promote the Early Years Early Language Pathway which is positively impacting outcomes.
- Shared best practices via our termly newsletter for DSLs, forums, training and consultations.
- Up-to-date webpage and DSL guidance promoted widely, with increased engagement.

See below headlines based on the 2024 attainment data and findings:

### **Strengths**

#### **Child Protection Plan (CPP):**

- Year 1 Phonics: Performing in-line with the national average and 6% above statistical neighbours.
- Year 2 Phonics: Performance above national average and statistical neighbours.
- KS4 Attainment 8 Point Scores: 1.1% above the national average and 2.1% above statistical neighbours.

- KS4 English & Maths 9-5 Attainment: 3% above national average and 7% above statistical neighbours.

#### **Children in Need (CIN):**

- Year 2 Phonics: Performing significantly above national average and statistical neighbours (6% and 8% higher).

#### **Section 47:**

- No specific strengths highlighted in the provided data.

### **Focus for Future Efforts**

#### **Child Protection Plan (CPP):**

- KS2 Attainment: Performance notably lower than national average and statistical neighbours.

#### **Children in Need (CIN):**

- Year 1 Phonics: Significantly below both the national average and statistical neighbours.
- KS2 Attainment: Performance significantly below national average and statistical neighbours.
- KS4 Attainment 8 Point Scores: 5% below national average and statistical neighbours.
- KS4 English & Maths 9-5 Attainment: 5% below national average and statistical neighbours.

#### **Section 47:**

- Year 1 Phonics: Considerably lower than both the national average and statistical neighbours.
- Year 2 Phonics: Performance below national average and statistical neighbours.
- KS2 Attainment: Performance considerably lower than national average and statistical neighbours.
- KS4 Attainment 8 Point Scores: 3% below national average and 4% below statistical neighbours.
- KS4 English & Maths 9-5 Attainment: 4% below national average and 5% below statistical neighbours.

Please refer to the Annexes for more data and graphical presentations.

### **5.13 Children with a social worker – Recommendations:**

In 2024-25, we have been working on the following recommendations to further enhance the support and educational outcomes for children with a social worker:

- Continue to make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience by enhancing partnerships between educational settings, local authority teams and associated partners. Look into innovative training tools that can enhance understanding and empathy among educators and professionals.

- Strengthen practices that support the engagement of children with a social worker in education by sharing best practices through role modelling, training programmes, newsletters and forums. Review the guidance document for social workers and put together a comprehensive training programme for social workers.
- Extend tracking of attendance, suspensions, exclusions and reintegration timetables to include children who have previously had a social worker (Ever6 CWSW).
- Through newly appointed Education Officers, continue to utilise restorative practices to better understand the educational experiences of children with social workers with severe and persistent absence to identify necessary actions that will overcome barriers to engagement in education.
- Maintain regular attendance and input at the Oxfordshire Strategic Attendance Board to ensure a system-wide strategy on attendance and engagement.
- Support the expansion of the Relational Schools Programme to more settings.
- Continue to collaborate with Early Years Advisory and School Improvement Teams, MATs and the Educational Psychology Service to develop cohesive strategies that promote best practice.
- Work with educational settings, representative forums (such as the Schools Forum), and partner agencies to consider innovative approaches to offer opportunities for children with social workers to gain cultural capital throughout the year, enriching their educational experiences and supporting their overall development.
- Maintain robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of interventions and identify areas for further improvement. Explore methods to capture data for children who have been subject to child in need and child protection planning within the last six years.
- Find creative ways to celebrate best practice across Oxfordshire.

## 6. Financial Implications

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This report does not propose any new or additional financial implications. All actions and initiatives discussed are expected to be funded within the funding allocations already agreed. There are no new revenue or capital resources required beyond those currently allocated.

Comments checked by:

Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner  
[Jane.billington@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.billington@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## 7. Legal Implications

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Other than our legal duty to uphold the Virtual School Head duties as outlined in *Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children* and *Children's social care: virtual school head role extension*, we are unaware of any additional legal requirements.

Comments checked by:  
Leanne Schrouder  
Locum SEN and Education Solicitor  
[leanne.schrouder@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:leanne.schrouder@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **8. Staff Implications**

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At this time, there are no new or additional staff implications regarding the submitted report. However, it is important to note that we do not yet have the full details of the government's ask regarding the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which may impact future staffing considerations.

Comments checked by: Michelle Higgs, HRBP Schools and Education  
[michelle.higgs@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.higgs@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **9. Equality & Inclusion Implications**

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In planning, delivering, monitoring and evaluating our work, equality and diversity issues are appropriately considered from the outset. The Virtual School Head has a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of children we care for, previously cared for children and children with a social worker. This includes ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal access to high-quality education and support.

New proposals are screened for relevance against our statutory duties to promote equality, and where relevant, an Equality and Community Impact Assessment (ECIA) is completed to ensure that our actions do not inadvertently disadvantage any group. This ensures that equality and diversity considerations are integral to our work, supporting the educational success of all children under our care.

## **10. Sustainability Implications**

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This report does not propose any new budget, policy, strategy, project or programme that would have a material impact on the council's ability to meet its climate and ecological commitments. Therefore, there are no direct sustainability implications related to climate action arising from this paper.

While the primary focus of the Virtual School Head's duties is on educational outcomes and wellbeing, the role also involves promoting practices that can indirectly support sustainability, such as fostering inclusive and supportive school environments that contribute to the overall resilience and sustainability of the community.

## **11. Risk Management**

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In developing this report, risks and opportunities to the Council have been carefully considered, particularly in relation to the duties of the Virtual School Head. The Virtual School Head has a statutory responsibility to promote the educational achievement of children we care for, previously cared for children and children with a

social worker. This involves ensuring that these children have equal access to high-quality education and support, regardless of their background or circumstances.

#### Summary of Risk Assessment:

- Educational Placement Delays: Mitigated by ensuring timely access to suitable placements and alternative educational provisions when necessary.
- Inadequate Support: Addressed through regular PEP reviews, multi-agency meetings and targeted interventions.
- Lack of Awareness: Mitigated by promoting educational advice widely and providing comprehensive training to professionals.
- Disengagement and Poor Outcomes: Addressed through tracking attendance and progress, promoting best practices and implementing programmes like the Relational Schools Programme.

A more detailed risk assessment for major changes or complex proposals can be provided upon request. This approach ensures that potential risks are identified and managed effectively, supporting Priority 7 in the Council's Strategic Plan 2023 – 2025 – Creating opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

## **12. Consultations**

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In-line with our commitment to thorough and transparent consultations, we will ensure that all substantive points raised by respondents are carefully reported and addressed.

LISA LYONS

Director of Children's Services

Annex: See 'Annual report data annex 2023-24' and '2023-24 Extended Duties data annex'.

Background papers: Various – available on request.

Other Documents: Nil.

Contact Officer: Clare Pike, Acting Head of the Virtual School

February 2025

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# The Oxfordshire Virtual School Annual Report for Corporate Parenting Panel

## Annex I – Data

### Oxfordshire Virtual School Context (September 2024)

| Key Stage          | CWCF       | Male       | Female     | EHCP       | K - SEN Support | Number in County | Number Out of County | CWCF in Ethnic Minority Groups |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| EYFS*              | 41         | 20         | 21         | 1          | 14              | 30               | 11                   | 12                             |
| KS1                | 35         | 16         | 19         | 7          | 17              | 27               | 8                    | 8                              |
| KS2                | 95         | 48         | 47         | 34         | 40              | 58               | 37                   | 27                             |
| KS3                | 145        | 77         | 68         | 72         | 49              | 77               | 68                   | 26                             |
| KS4                | 156        | 87         | 69         | 65         | 49              | 97               | 59                   | 42                             |
| KS5                | 268        | 191        | 77         | 70         | 44              | 175              | 93                   | 145                            |
| <b>Totals</b>      | <b>740</b> | <b>439</b> | <b>301</b> | <b>249</b> | <b>213</b>      | <b>464</b>       | <b>276</b>           | <b>260</b>                     |
| <b>Percentages</b> |            | <b>59%</b> | <b>41%</b> | <b>34%</b> | <b>29%</b>      | <b>63%</b>       | <b>37%</b>           | <b>35%</b>                     |

| Post 16                      | Care Leavers | Male       | Female     | EHCP       | K - SEN Support | Number in County | Number Out of County | CWCF in Ethnic Minority Groups |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Years 14, 15, 16, 17+</b> | 545          | 355        | 190        | 132        | 47              | 391              | 154                  | 256 <sup>+</sup>               |
| <b>Percentages</b>           |              | <b>65%</b> | <b>35%</b> | <b>24%</b> | <b>9%</b>       | <b>72%</b>       | <b>28%</b>           | <b>47%<sup>+</sup></b>         |

\*40 x pre-F3's to be added in September as a result of DfE expectations that we host PEPs for CWCF in settings from 9-months of age

<sup>+</sup> Estimated numbers based on the percentage of care leavers as at 23-09-2024 (Performance Data colleagues explained that this data cannot be pulled retrospectively)

## How are we doing?

### Admissions (**Access**)

|   | <b>2021/22</b>   |             |                | <b>2022/23</b>   |             |                | <b>2023/24</b>   |             |                |
|---|------------------|-------------|----------------|--|-------------|----------------|--|-------------|----------------|
| Total number of In Year school admissions for CWCF    | 100<br>(84 CWCF) |             |                | NIC (Years 1 – 11): 138*<br>NIC Post 16: 98*<br>In term moves 87 (82 CWCF) |             |                | NIC (Years 1 -11): 100*<br>NIC Post 16: 55*<br>In term moves: 99 (97 CWCF) |             |                |
| Total number of school moves completed within 20 days | 90               |             |                | 68   |             |                | 86   |             |                |
| % of school moves completed in 20 days                | 90%              |             |                | 78.2%  |             |                | 86.9%  |             |                |
|   | <b>ALL</b>       | <b>EHCP</b> | <b>No EHCP</b> | <b>ALL</b>   | <b>EHCP</b> | <b>No EHCP</b> | <b>ALL</b>   | <b>EHCP</b> | <b>No EHCP</b> |
| Average number of days for a school move              | 13               | 39          | 6              | 25.8   | 70.8        | 16.6           | 13.6   | 34.35       | 5.4            |

\*Includes any NIC in summer holiday

### Placements/Settings by Ofsted rating

| Percentage of CWCF at schools according to Ofsted rating | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|  |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Outstanding  | 15.0    | 13.4    | 10.9    | 14.3    | 12.0    | 11.8    |
| Good   | 64.0    | 64.9    | 62.4    | 66.9    | 65.4    | 71.8    |
| Requires Improvement                                     | 8.9     | 8.2     | 7.1     | 7.3     | 5.1     | 5.1     |
| Inadequate   | 4.3     | 4.3     | 6.6     | 5.2     | 0.0     | 0.00    |
| No rating  | 7.8     | 9.3     | 13.1    | 6.3     | 17.5    | 11.3    |
| Total  | 100.0   | 100.0   | 100.0   | 100.0   | 100.0   | 100     |
| Good or Outstanding                                      | 79.0    | 78.3    | 73.2    | 81.3    | 77.4    | 83.6    |

### Attendance (Engage)

|   | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|   |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Cohort size (Reported Cohort)                       | 318     | 338     | 363     | 379     | 384     | 411     | 438     |
| % attendance for all statutory age children (Y1-11) | 93.5%   | 91.7%   | 82.9%   | 86.6%   | 90.3%   | 90.33%  | 87.11%  |
| % of children with less than 90% attendance         | 15.4%   | 20.7%   | 26.2%   | 45%     | 26.5%   | 27.93%  | 34.7%   |
| % of children with less than 50% attendance         | 2.2%    | 4.7%    | 6.5%    | 4.2%    | 3.9%    | 3.89%   | 7.76%   |
| Rate of unauthorised Absence                        | 1.76%   | 2.1%    | 2.3%    | 1.7%    | 2.2%    | 2.38%   | 3.85%   |

Data per term is not cumulative

### Exclusions (**Engage**)

|   | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|   |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Cohort size (Full Cohort)                             | 493     | 510     | 505     | 552     | 679     | 562     | 521     |
| Number of Children excluded (Permanent)               | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 1       |
| Total number of suspensions/FTEs issued to CWCF       | 178     | 154     | 85      | 77      | 145     | 230     | 214     |
| Total number of CWCF receiving a suspension/FTE       | 73      | 69      | 36      | 43      | 66      | 83      | 77      |
| % of CWCF receiving a suspension/FTE                  | 14.8%   | 13.5%   | 7.1%    | 7.8%    | 9.7%    | 14.8%   | 14.78%  |
| Number of CWCF receiving more than one suspension/FTE | 42      | 36      | 24      | 17      | 35      | 51      | 46      |
| % of CWCF receiving more than one suspension/FTE      | 8.5%    | 7.1%    | 4.7%    | 3.1%    | 5.1%    | 9.07%   | 8.83%   |

Data per term is cumulative.

## Attainment in Statutory Outcomes (Excel)

### EYFS

|                               | 2019  | 2020   | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024  |
|-------------------------------|-------|--|------|------|------|-------|
| Cohort size (reported cohort) | 18    | NO STATUTORY ASSESSMENTS UNDERTAKEN (COVID-19) |      | 15   | 15   | 11    |
| % achieving GLD               | 44.4% |  |      | 33%  | 27%  | 27.3% |

### Phonics Screening Assessment

|   | 2019  | 2020   | 2021 | 2022  | 2023 | 2024  |
|---|-------|--|------|-------|------|-------|
| Year 1  |       |  |      |       |      |       |
| Cohort size (reported cohort)   | 10    | NO STATUTORY ASSESSMENTS UNDERTAKEN (COVID-19) |      | 4     | 11   | 10    |
| % Reaching the expected standard  | 90%   |  |      | 25%   | 64%  | 50%   |
| Year 2  |       |  |      |       |      |       |
| Cohort Size (reported cohort)   | 11    |  |      | 18    | 10   | 11    |
| % reaching the expected standard at the end of Year 2 i.e. retake pass rate | 63.6% |  |      | 61.1% | 50%  | 81.8% |

### Key Stage I

|                               | Reading |       |      |        | Writing |       |      |        | Maths |       |      |        |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------|------|--------|---------|-------|------|--------|-------|-------|------|--------|
|                               | 2019    | 2022  | 2023 | 2024   | 2019    | 2022  | 2023 | 2024   | 2019  | 2022  | 2023 | 2024   |
| Cohort size (reported cohort) | 18      | 23    | 10   | 11     | 18      | 23    | 10   | 11     | 18    | 23    | 10   | 11     |
| % reaching EXS+               | 33.3%   | 34.8% | 10%  | 63.63% | 33.3%   | 17.4% | 0%   | 45.45% | 33.3% | 26.1% | 20%  | 45.45% |
| % reaching GDS                | 3%      | 4.3%  | 0%   | 18.18% | 6.1%    | 4.3%  | 0%   | 9.09%  | 3%    | 0%    | 10%  | 9.09%  |

|                                  | Reading, Writing and Maths |       |      |        |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|--------|
|                                  | 2019                       | 2022  | 2023 | 2024   |
| Cohort size (reported cohort)    | 18                         | 23    | 10   | 11     |
| % reaching EXS+ in RW&M combined | 27.8%                      | 13.0% | 0%   | 36.36% |
| % reaching GDS in RW&M combined  | 0%                         | 0%    | 0%   | 9.09%  |

\*No assessments in 2020 and 2021

## Key Stage 2

|                               | Reading |       |       |        | Writing |       |       |        | Maths |       |       |        |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|--------|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
|                               | 2019    | 2022  | 2023  | 2024   | 2019    | 2022  | 2023  | 2024   | 2019  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024   |
| Cohort size (reported cohort) | 28      | 29    | 37    | 38     | 28      | 29    | 37    | 38     | 28    | 29    | 37    | 38     |
| % reaching EXS+               | 17.9%   | 27.6% | 54.1% | 52.63% | 17.9%   | 24.1% | 45.9% | 34.21% | 28.6% | 24.1% | 43.2% | 36.84% |
| % reaching GDS                | 0%      | 0%    | 13.5% | 7.89%  | 3.6%    | 0%    | 2.7%  | 0%     | 0%    | 0%    | 8.1%  | 0%     |

|                                  | Reading, Writing and Maths |       |       |        |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|
|                                  | 2019                       | 2022  | 2023  | 2024   |
| Cohort size (reported cohort)    | 28                         | 29    | 37    | 38     |
| % reaching EXS+ in RW&M combined | 14.3%                      | 17.2% | 35.1% | 21.05% |
| % reaching GDS in RW&M combined  | 0%                         | 0%    | 2.7%  | 0%     |

\*No assessment in 2020 and 2021

### KS4 Outcomes – GCSEs

|                                  | 2018 | 2019 | *2020 | *2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|------|
| Cohort Size (reported cohort)    | 48   | 67   | 52    | 59    | 65   | 65   | 82   |
| 5+ GCSEs at Grade 5-9 inc. E&M % | 5.8  | 3.0  | 17.3  | 11.9  | 12.3 | 9.2  | 2.4  |
| 5+ GCSEs at Grade 4-9 inc. E&M % | 11.5 | 14.9 | 32.7  | 27.1  | 20.0 | 15.4 | 4.9  |
| GCSE Eng & Maths at grades 4-9 % | 13.5 | 25.4 | 34.6  | 32.2  | 23.1 | 20   | 4.9  |
| Any qualification %              | 75.0 | 79.1 | 82.7  | 79.7  | 81.5 | 87.7 | 92.7 |

\*2020 & 2021 all GCSEs were teacher assessed due to COVID-19

### Post 16 Outcomes Higher Education

|                        | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total no. in HE (July) |      |      |      | 22   | 22   | 32   | 34   |
| No. graduating         |      |      |      | 8    | 3    | 5    | 4    |
| New Oct HE starters    |      |      |      | 12   | 15   | 10   | 10   |

### Level 3

| Aug                              | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023       | 2024 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------------|------|
| No. completing L3 qualifications | 15*  | 19*  | 17   | 22   | 39   | 27         | 18   |
| Courses completed                |      |      |      |      | 43   | 49         | 29   |
| No. of passes                    | 13   | 14   | 15   | 20   | 41   | 36 (3 TBC) | 27   |
| % pass rate                      | 87%  | 74%  | 88%  | 89%  | 95%  | 76%        | 93%  |

### Level 2

| Aug                            | 2018                                  | 2019                                  | 2020                                  | 2021 | 2022 | 2023                           | 2024                   |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| No. studying L2 qualifications | 37<br>(not incl.<br>GCSE Ma &<br>Eng) | 37<br>(not incl.<br>GCSE Ma &<br>Eng) | 36<br>(not incl.<br>GCSE Ma &<br>Eng) | 66   | 59   | 59                             | 79                     |
| Courses completed              |                                       |                                       |                                       |      | 73   | 97                             | 140                    |
| No. of passes                  |                                       |                                       |                                       |      | 15   | 18 (1<br>contested, 18<br>TBC) | 34 (44 TBC)            |
| % pass rate                    | 57%                                   | 57%                                   | 64%                                   | 40%  | 21%  | 19-37%                         | 24-56%                 |
| Nos. sitting GCSE/FS2 maths    | 37                                    | 36                                    | 48                                    | 42   | 35   | 37 (9 TBC)                     | 42 (results<br>so far) |
| % pass GCSE/FS2 maths          | 8%                                    | 8%                                    | 9%                                    | 42%  | 31%  | 5-30%                          | 17%                    |
| Nos. sitting GCSE/FS2 Eng.     | 23                                    | 30                                    | 40                                    | 36   | 16   | 32 (6 TBC)                     | 32 (results<br>so far) |
| % pass GCSE/FS2 Eng.           | 13%                                   | 6%                                    | 12%                                   | 29%  | 20%  | 9-31%                          | 25%                    |

### Level 1

| Aug  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023       | 2024 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------------|------|
| No. studying L1<br>qualifications incl. ESOL | 34   | 34   | 42   | 51   | 43   | 45         | 31   |
| Courses completed                            |      |      |      |      | 71   | 51         |      |
| No. of passes                                | 25   | 28   | 28   | 26   | 50   | 26 (7 TBC) |      |
| % pass rate                                  |      |      |      |      | 70   | 51-65%     |      |

### Entry Level

| Aug                           | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023        | 2024                             |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| No. studying Entry Level ESOL |      |      | 64*  | 60*  | 93*  | 115         | 105                              |
| Courses completed             |      |      |      |      |      | 141         |                                  |
| No. of passes                 |      |      |      |      |      | 116 (2 TBC) | 86<br>(completed all components) |
| % pass rate                   |      |      |      |      |      | 82-84%      | 82%                              |

\*All Entry Levels (incl. ESOL)

### Destination Data

|  | Year 11 |      |       |      | Year 12 |      |      |      | Year 13 |      |      |      |
|--|---------|------|-------|------|---------|------|------|------|---------|------|------|------|
|  | 2021    | 2022 | 2023  | 2024 | 2021    | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2021    | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
| Total Cohort Size (reported)                     | 59      | 65   | 65    |      | 104     | 134  | 127  |      | 123     | 113  | 141  | 144  |
| % EET (Participating & Not Participating, Sept.) | 91.5%   | 94%  | 95.4% |      | 78%     | 87%  | 92%  |      | 80%     | 86%  | 82%  |      |
| % NEET or unknown (Aug)                          | 8.5%    | 6%   | 4.6%  |      | 22%     | 10%  | 8%   |      | 20%     | 14%  | 18%  |      |

### Progress (Excel)

The proportion of children making good progress (expected/better than expected) in their education, as determined through the PEP monitoring process.

|  | <b>2022</b>  | <b>2023</b>   | <b>2024</b>  |
|--|--|---|--|
| % of primary age children making good progress                                     | Autumn: 70% (200 pupils)<br>Spring: 68% (165 pupils)<br>Summer: 65% (71 pupils)  | Autumn: 89% (145 pupils)<br>Spring: 84% (135 pupils)<br>Summer: 81% (45 pupils)   | Autumn: 85% (133 pupils)<br>Spring: 78% (41 pupils)<br>Summer: 74% (67 pupils)   |
| % of secondary age children making good progress                                   | Autumn: 75% (313 pupils)<br>Spring: 76% (280 pupils)<br>Summer: 80% (166 pupils)   | Autumn: 80% (190 pupils)<br>Spring: 77% (244 pupils)<br>Summer: 65% (59 pupils)   | Autumn: 82% (176 pupils)<br>Spring: 78% (77 pupils)<br>Summer: 73% (133 pupils)  |
| % of Post 16s (yr 12 & 13 in edu) making expected or better than expected progress | Yr 12: 50% PEP1 (67 students) / 28% PEP2 (37 students) / 14% PEP3 (19 students)<br>Yr 13: 42% PEP1 (47 students) / 32% PEP2 (36 students) / 16% PEP3 (18 students) | Yr 12: 77% PEP1 (82 students)<br>Yr 13: 78% PEP1 (87 students)<br>Yr 12: 71% PEP2 (59 students)<br>Yr 13: 76% PEP2 (62 students)<br>Yr 12: 54% PEP3 (35 students)<br>Yr 13: 78% PEP3 (40 students)) | Yr 12: 72% PEP1 (65 students)<br>Yr 13: 83% PEP1 (59 students)<br>Yr 12: 85% PEP2 (61 pupils)<br>Yr 13: 79% PEP2 (42 students)<br>Yr 12: 83% (54 students)<br>Yr 13: 80% (41 students) |

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## **2023-24 Extended Duties data annex**

### **Contents**

#### **Annex A: Attainment Data (pages 2-7)**

**Table A1:** Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Attainment

**Table A2:** Year 1 Phonics

**Table A3:** Year 2 Phonics

**Table A4:** Summary of KS2 Attainment Data

**Table A5:** Summary of KS4 Attainment 8 Point Scores

**Table A6:** Summary of KS4 Attainment E&M 9-5

#### **Annex B: Attendance data for the CWCF Reported Cohort (page 8)**

**Table B1:** Annual Attendance Rates for the CWCF Reported Cohort

**Table B2:** Annual Persistent Absence Rates for the CWCF Reported Cohort

**Table B3:** Annual Unauthorised Absence Rates for the CWCF Reported Cohort

#### **Annex C: Annual Suspension and Exclusions data for the Reported CWCF Cohort (page 9)**

**Table C1:** Exclusions

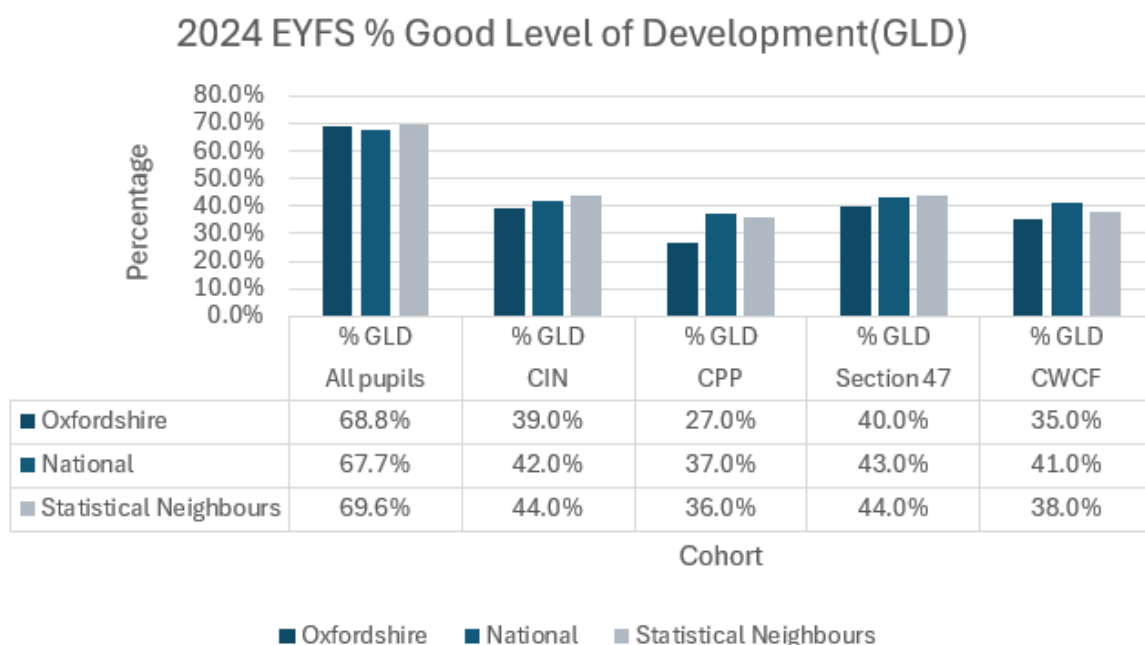
**Table C2:** Suspensions

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**Disclaimer:** The data presented in this report is based on the information recorded at the time of collection. It is important to note that the accuracy of the data is contingent upon the accuracy of the recorded information. Additionally, the cohort being analysed is fluid and subject to change. The Virtual School is actively working to align our data reporting processes across all of our cohorts to ensure consistency and reliability. However, due to the dynamic nature of the cohort, some variations may still occur.

## Annex A: Attainment Data

**Table A1: Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Attainment**

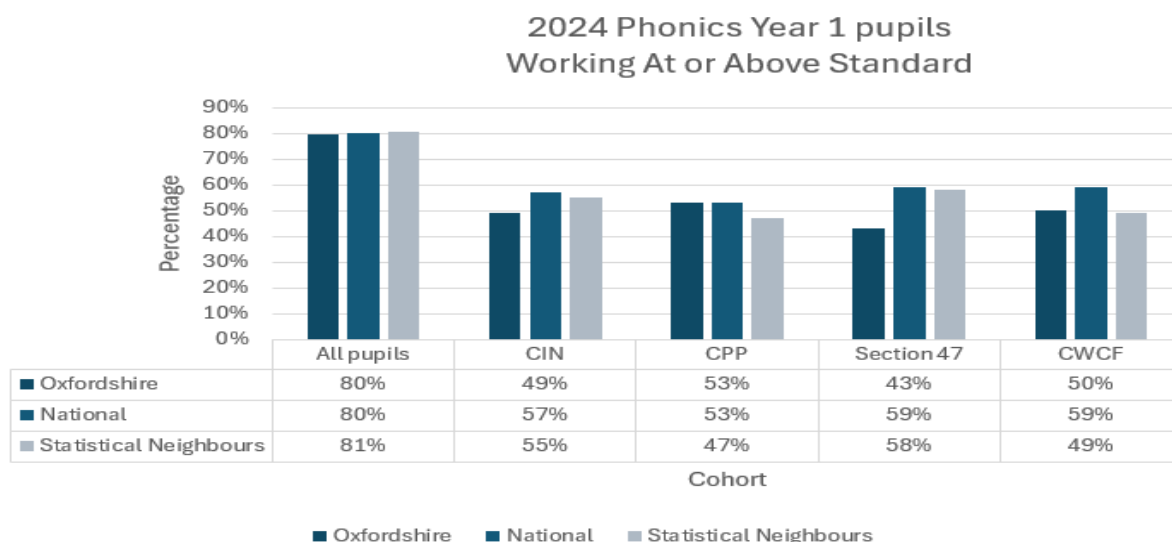


### Summary

In 2024, Oxfordshire's reception year group achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD) that was 1.1% above the national average but 0.8% below their statistical neighbours. However, specific cohorts performed as follows:

- **Children in Need (CIN):** 3% below the national average and 5% below statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) cohort:** 10% below the national average and 9% below statistical neighbours.
- **Section 47 cohort:** 3% below the national average and 4% below statistical neighbours.
- **Children We Care For (CWCF) cohort:** 6% below the national average and 3% below statistical neighbours.

**Table A2: Year 1 Phonics**



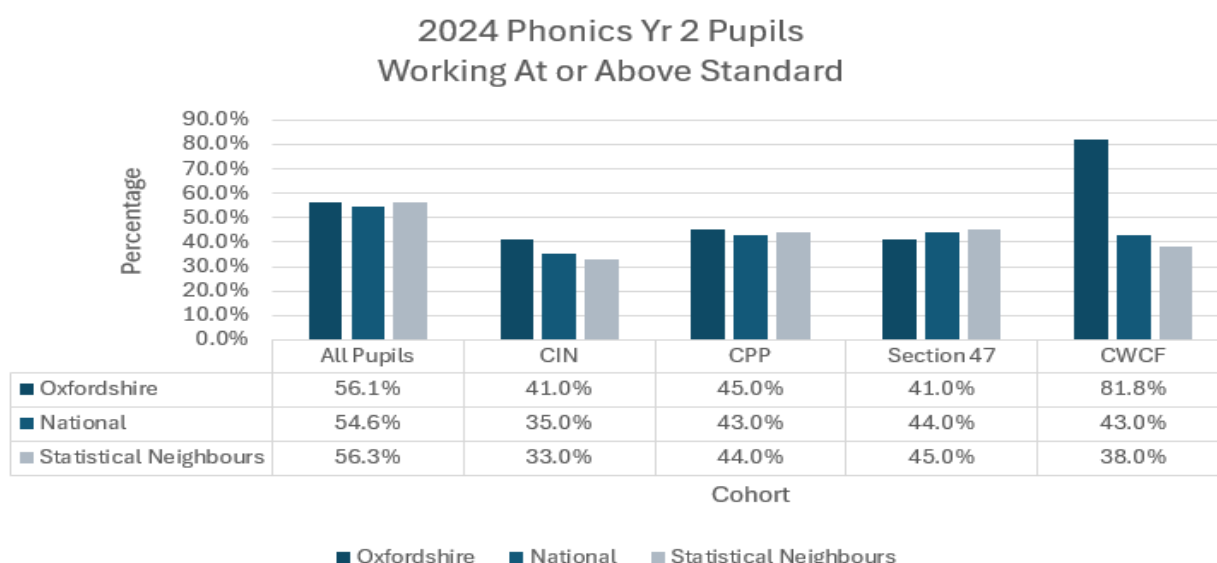
### Summary

In 2024, 80% of Year 1 pupils in Oxfordshire were working at or above the standard, which is in line with the national average and 1% below their statistical neighbours.

Specific cohort performances were as follows:

- **Children in Need (CIN):** 8% below the national average and 6% below statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) cohort:** Achieved 53%, in line with the national average and 6% above statistical neighbours.
- **Section 47 cohort:** 16% below the national average and 15% below statistical neighbours.
- **Children We Care For (CWCF) cohort:** 9% below the national average and 1% above statistical neighbours.

**Table A3: Year 2 Phonics**

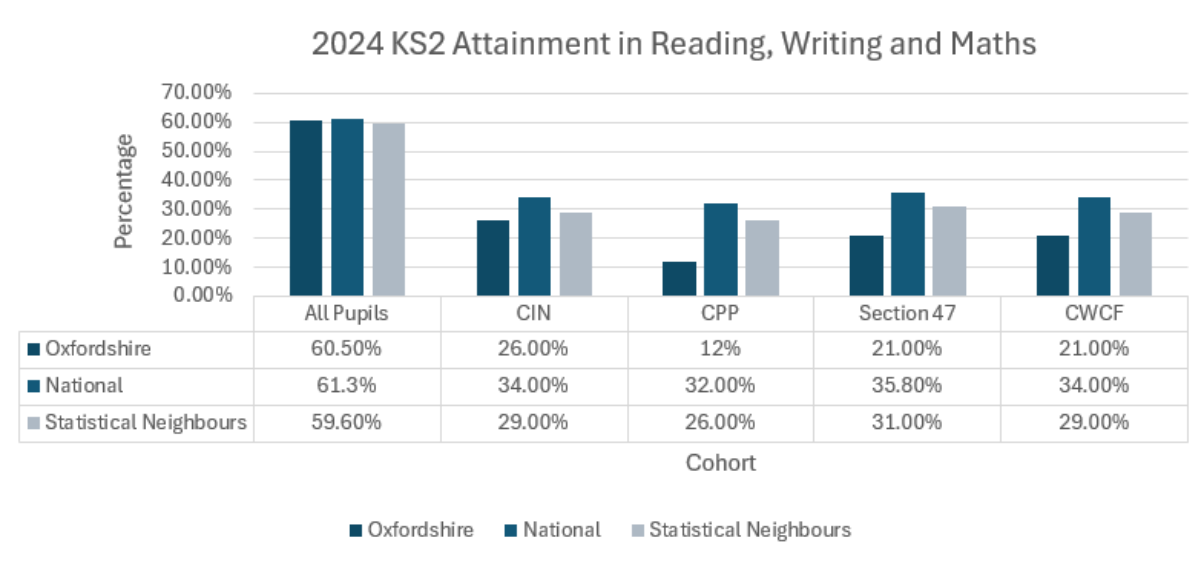


### Summary

In 2024, 56.1% of Year 2 children in Oxfordshire who took the phonics assessment were working at or above the standard, which is 1.5% above the national average and 0.2% below their statistical neighbours. Specific cohort performances were as follows:

- **Children in Need (CIN):** 6% above the national average and 8% above statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) cohort:** Achieved 45%, 2% above the national average and 1% above statistical neighbours.
- **Section 47 cohort:** 3% below the national average and 4% below statistical neighbours.
- **Children We Care For (CWCF) cohort:** 38.8% above the national average and 43.8% above statistical neighbours.

Table A4: Summary of KS2 Attainment Data

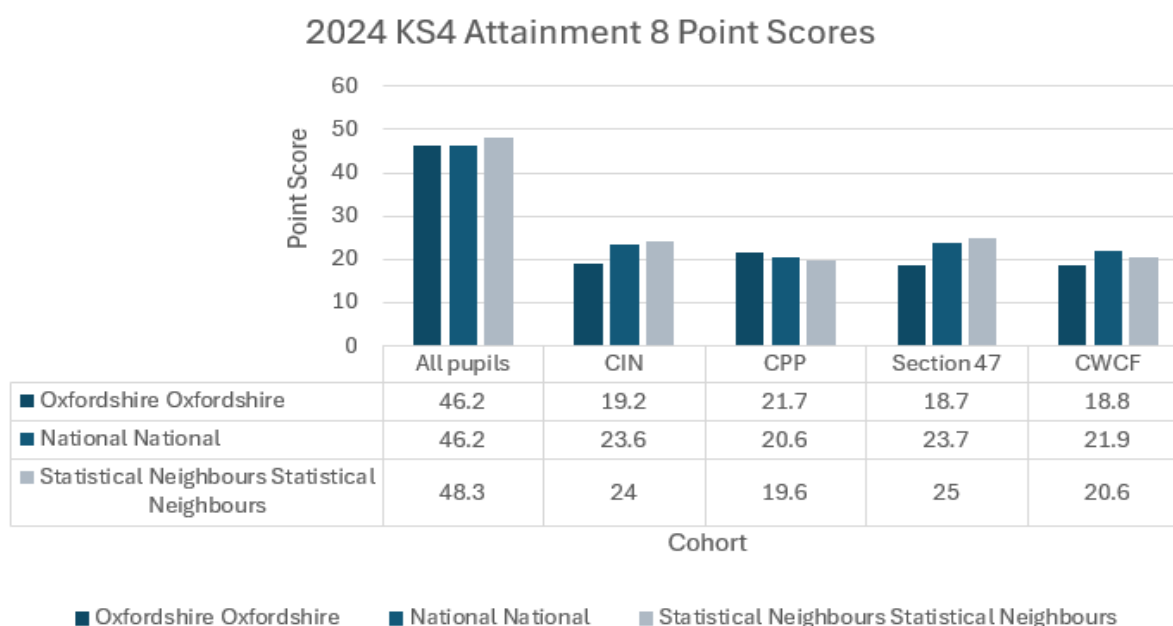


Summary

In 2024, 60.5% of Year 6 pupils in Oxfordshire achieved the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths at the end of Key Stage 2. This was 0.8% below the national average and 0.9% above their statistical neighbours. Specific cohort performances were as follows:

- **Children in Need (CIN):** 8% below the national average and 3% below statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) cohort:** 20% below the national average and 14% below statistical neighbours.
- **Section 47 cohort:** 14.8% below the national average and 10% below statistical neighbours.
- **Children We Care For (CWCF) cohort:** 13% below the national average and 8% below statistical neighbours.

**Table A5: Summary of KS4 Attainment 8 Point Scores**



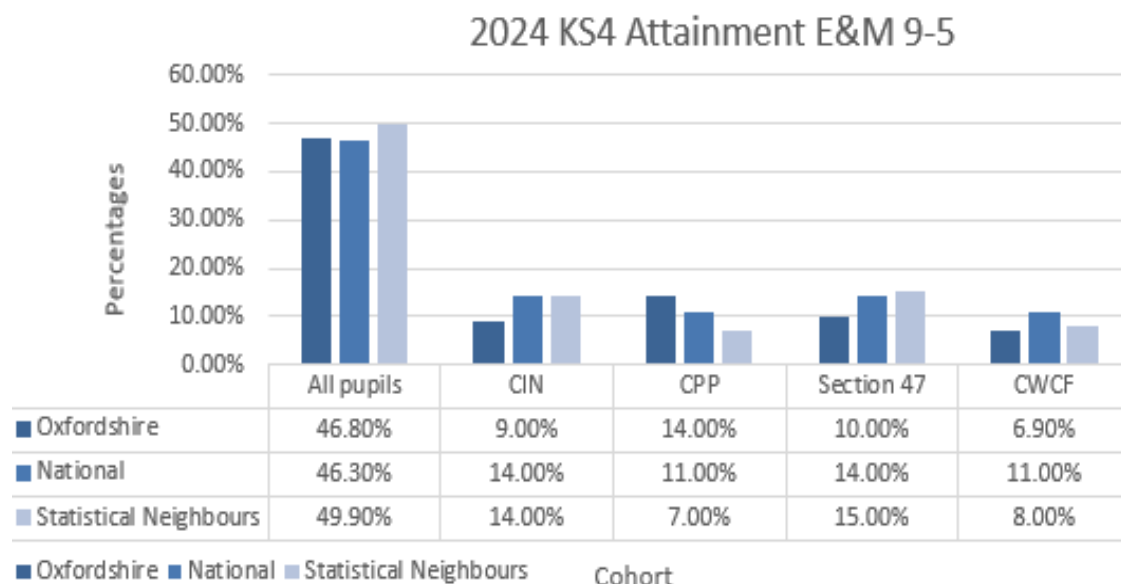
Attainment 8 is a measure used to assess the achievement of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 (usually around age 16) in England. It calculates the average score of a pupil's best eight GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.

### Summary

In 2024, Oxfordshire pupils' Attainment 8 scores were in line with the national average but 2.1% below their statistical neighbours. Specific cohort performances were as follows:

- **Children in Need (CIN):** 4.4% below the national average and 4.8% below statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) cohort:** 1.1% above the national average and 2.1% above statistical neighbours.
- **Section 47 cohort:** 5% below the national average and 6.3% below statistical neighbours.
- **Children We Care For (CWCF) cohort:** 3.1% below the national average and 1.8% below statistical neighbours.

**Table A6: Summary of KS4 Attainment E&M 9-5**



E&M 9-5 refers to the percentage of pupils achieving a grade between 9 and 5 in both English and Maths GCSEs. Grades 9 to 5 are considered strong passes, with grade 9 being the highest. This measure is important as it indicates the proportion of pupils who have achieved a good level of proficiency in these core subjects.

### Summary

Oxfordshire pupils performed slightly above the national average achieving 0.5% above the national average. There was a performance gap of -3.1% when compared with our statistical neighbours.

- **Children in Need (CIN):** Performed 5% below the national average and 5% below our statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP) cohort:** Achieved 3% above the national average and 7% above our statistical neighbours.
- **Section 47 cohort:** Performed 4% below the national average and -5% below our statistical neighbours.
- **Children We Care For (CWCF) cohort:** Performed 4.1% below the national average and 1.1% below our statistical neighbours.

## Annex B: Attendance data for the CWCF Reported Cohort

**Table B1: Annual Attendance Rates for the CWCF Reported Cohort**

| % Attendance |           | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|--------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Oxford CWCF  | Primary   | 97.1    | 95.2    |         | 92.59   | 94.98   | 96.09   | 95.78   |
|              | Secondary | 91.6    | 89.8    |         | 82.6    | 87.71   | 87.34   | 82.97   |
| England CWCF | Primary   | 97.4    | 97.4    |         | 95.2    | 95.7    | 96.1    | N/A     |
|              | Secondary | 94.5    | 94.2    |         | 88.6    | 90.6    | 89.4    |         |
| Oxford All   | Primary   | 96      | 96.2    |         | 96.8    | 93.6    | 94.3    | 94.8    |
|              | Secondary | 94.1    | 94      |         | 94.7    | 90.6    | 90.1    | 90.1    |
| England ALL  | Primary   | 95.8    | 96      |         | 96.4    | 93.7    | 94.0    | 94.5    |
|              | Secondary | 94.5    | 94.5    |         | 94.5    | 91      | 90.7    | 90.9    |

**Table B2: Annual Persistent Absence Rates for the CWCF Reported Cohort**

| % PA         |           | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|--------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Oxford CWCF  | Primary   | 2.8     | 9.7     |         | 26.9    | 12.78   | 9.52    | 7.09    |
|              | Secondary | 21.7    | 26.2    |         | 56.22   | 35.74   | 37.48   | 43.42   |
| England CWCF | Primary   | 4.1     | 4       |         | 17.4    | 8.5     | 7.8     | N/A     |
|              | Secondary | 14.1    | 14.7    |         | 40.4    | 24.3    | 27.0    | N/A     |
| Oxford All   | Primary   | 7.4     | 7.1     |         | 6.9     | 17.1    | 15.6    | 13.1    |
|              | Secondary | 14.6    | 14.7    |         | 13.5    | 27.9    | 28.1    | 27.2    |
| England ALL  | Primary   | 8.7     | 8.2     |         | 8.8     | 17.7    | 17.2    | 15.2    |
|              | Secondary | 13.9    | 13.7    |         | 14.8    | 27.7    | 28.3    | 26.7    |

**Table B3: Annual Unauthorised Absence Rates for the CWCF Reported Cohort**

| % Unauthorised Absence |           | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Oxford CWCF            | Primary   | 0.1     | 0.4     |         | 0.6     | 1.23    | 0.35    | 0.20    |
|                        | Secondary | 2.6     | 3.1     |         | 2.6     | 11.37   | 3.44    | 5.59    |
| England CWCF           | Primary   | 0.4     | 0.4     |         | 0.4     | 0.5     | 0.6     | N/A     |
|                        | Secondary | 2       | 2.2     |         | 2.1     | 3.5     | 4.7     | N/A     |
| Oxford All             | Primary   | 0.9     | 0.9     |         | 0.6     | 1.1     | 1.1     | 1.1     |
|                        | Secondary | 1.5     | 1.6     |         | 1.3     | 2.3     | 3.0     | 3.1     |
| England ALL            | Primary   | 1.1     | 1.1     |         | 0.9     | 1.5     | 1.7     | 1.6     |
|                        | Secondary | 1.6     | 1.8     |         | 1.6     | 2.8     | 3.5     | 3.6     |

*CWCF figures are for Reported Cohort*

*Comparisons are with state funded schools*

*2021/22 figures include pupils who were absent due to covid*

## Annex C: Annual Suspension and Exclusions data for the Reported CWCF Cohort

**Table C1: Exclusions**

| Percentage of pupils permanently excluded | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Oxfordshire CWCF                          | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 1.28%   |
| England CWCF                              | 0.27    | 0.29    | 0.16    | 0.11    | 0.18    | N/A     | N/A     |
| England ALL                               | 0.10    | 0.10    | 0.06    | 0.05    | 0.08    | 0.11    | N/A     |
| Oxfordshire ALL                           | 0.04    | 0.07    | 0.05    | 0.02    | 0.03    | 0.02    | N/A     |

*Please note figures are not available for the previous years and so we are unable to identify a trend for Oxfordshire (CWCF) pupils.*

**Table C2: Suspensions**

| Percentage of pupils with one or more suspension | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Oxfordshire CWCF                                 | 14.8    | 13.5    | 7.1     | 7.8     | 9.7     | 14.8    | 8.83%   |
| England CWCF                                     | 11.58   | 11.70   | 9.55    | 9.99    | 12.72   | N/A     | N/A     |
| England ALL                                      | 2.33    | 2.44    | 1.87    | 2.20    | 3.02    | 3.61    | N/A     |
| Oxfordshire ALL                                  | 2.12    | 2.41    | 2.02    | 2.18    | 2.77    | 3.37    | N/A     |

*CWCF at any point, full cohort*

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## Divisions Affected - All

### EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 28 March 2025

#### SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING AND DELIVERY

**Report by Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services**

#### RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to:
  - i. Acknowledge and support the proposed updates to the Sustainable Schools Strategy as set out in School Place Planning Report 1.
  - ii. Acknowledge the progress made and planned towards the delivery of additional education provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities as set out in School Place Planning Report 2.

#### Executive Summary

2. These reports are presented to update Scrutiny on two key issues relating to school place planning and delivery.

#### REPORT 1: Sustainable Schools Strategy – 2025 update

3. In 2020, Education Scrutiny Committee considered a report on Management of Changing Rolls in Oxfordshire *Schools: A Strategy for Sustainability*, which set the basis for work by the local authority to address issues relating to school sustainability.

##### School Place Planning Report 1:

- i. provides data on how pupil numbers are changing in mainstream primary and secondary schools in Oxfordshire
- ii. outlines the existing Sustainable Schools Strategy, as originally considered by Education Scrutiny in 2020;
- iii. reviews the first five years of operation under the Sustainable Schools Strategy;
- iv. provides data on how pupil numbers are changing in mainstream primary and secondary schools in Oxfordshire;
- v. proposes an updated Sustainable Schools Strategy, setting out clear principles and priorities to be used when considering changes in school capacity.

## REPORT 2: Special Education Sufficiency Planning

4. The Oxfordshire SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy 2022/23-2026/27 sets out Oxfordshire County Council's planning framework for the delivery of additional school-based capacity to meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

School Place Planning Report 2:

- i. outlines the delivery of new specialist provision since the July 2023 Ofsted;
- ii. outlines the forward plan of delivery of additional SEND capacity;
- iii. defines principles for prioritising future SEND provision;
- iv. considers ongoing sufficiency challenges.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

5. The activity covered in the reports supports the Strategic Priorities in the County Council's Corporate Plan, in particular:
  - i. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire through ensuring equitable access to educational provision;
  - ii. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential, specifically through increasing activity that supports pupils with special educational needs and disabilities to have their needs met in mainstream school settings and delivering our special school capacity expansion programme.
6. Report 2 considers work in support of the Council's SEND Sufficiency Strategy, as well as the SEND Transformation Programme (Theme 1: Right Support, Right Time) and Oxfordshire's commitment to supporting early intervention.

## **Financial Implications**

7. The Reports have no new or additional revenue or capital implications for the council, but cover activity intended to ensure that the council's resources are targeted most effectively.

Comments checked by:

Thomas James  
*Head of Financial Services*  
[thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Legal Implications**

8. The Reports have no new or additional legal implications for the council.

Comments checked by:

Leanne Schrouder  
*Locum SEN and Education Solicitor*  
[leanne.Schrouder@Oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:leanne.Schrouder@Oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

9. The Reports have no new or additional staffing implications for the council.

Comments checked by:  
Michelle Higgs  
*HR Business Partner, Schools and Education*  
[michelle.higgs@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.higgs@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

10. The activity covered in Report 1 has a positive equalities impact by supporting the viability of our small rural schools.
11. The activity covered in Report 2 has a positive equalities impact by improving the access for children with SEND to the right support at the right time through delivery of additional SEND provision.

## **Sustainability Implications**

12. If children and young people are enabled to attend suitable local education provision school, then both transportation costs and the impact on the local climate or school transport are reduced.

## **Risk Management**

13. The Reports have no new or additional risk management implications for the council.

LISA LYONS  
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Other Documents: Report 1: the current Sustainable Schools Strategy is available at [https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s49729/ESC\\_FEB0520R03%20-%20Changing%20Rolls.pdf](https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s49729/ESC_FEB0520R03%20-%20Changing%20Rolls.pdf)  
Report 2: The Oxfordshire SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy is available at

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/special-educational-needs/SENDsufficiencystategy.pdf>

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07554 103418  
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March 2025

# SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT 2:

## Delivery of Special Education Provision

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## 1. Background

The Oxfordshire SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy 2022/23-2026/27 sets out Oxfordshire County Council's planning framework for the delivery of additional school-based capacity to meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It complements the Oxfordshire Local Area SEND Strategy and is aligned with the DfE Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme. The Strategy is published on the council's website at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/special-educational-needs/SENDSufficiencyStrategy.pdf>

The Strategy sets out how the number of children subject to an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) is rising much more rapidly than can be explained by population growth alone, and the subsequent increase in demand for special school provision has been greater than the increase in the supply of maintained special school places. The growing deficit has been met through increased dependence on higher-cost Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS), resulting in unsustainable pressure on funding for SEND provision. A shortage of places also means it takes longer to place a child in suitable provision, and may mean that children have further to travel to school.

The detailed analysis in this Strategy of the growth in the numbers of children with EHCPs, existing specialist provision of all types, and forecasts for future demand for places, complements the Oxfordshire Local Area SEND Strategy, and is aligned with the DfE Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme. It is informed by widespread consultation held during 2022 into the Local Area SEND Strategy 2022-27 and System Reform for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, as well as through the DBV Programme.

The Strategy sets out a spatial framework to achieve a better distribution of special school provision, and to provide a structure for the phased expansion of the network of Resource Base provision. Under the Strategy, capital investment to provide additional SEND provision in Oxfordshire will focus on the following four priorities:

- Priority 1: Local access to appropriate high-quality provision
- Priority 2: Reducing overall cost pressures
- Priority 3: Meeting emerging needs
- Priority 4: Efficient use of resources to maximise reach and scope of support

This report sets out recent, current and planned work to increase educational provision for children with SEND.

## **2. Delivery of additional SEND provision since 2023**

### **a. Resource Bases**

*In the two academic years since July 2023 (the date of the SEND Ofsted) the number of SEND Resource Base places has increased by 3%, compared to an increase in total Oxfordshire pupil numbers of 1%.*

This increase in places was delivered through a new Resource Base at:

- Cherry Fields Primary School, Banbury (2023/24) - Communication & Interaction needs.

This followed on from the three Resource Bases opened in the previous two years, which were still working up to full operational capacity by 2023:

- Whitelands (secondary) School, Bicester (2021/22) - Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs
- Southwold Primary School, Bicester (2021/22) - Communication & Interaction Needs, and Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs
- Gagle Brook Primary School, Bicester (2022/23) - Communication & Interaction Needs, and Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs

Taking all four new Bases into account, the number of Resource Base places in Oxfordshire schools has increased by 10% between 2021/22 and 2024/25, compared to an increase in overall pupil numbers in Oxfordshire of 3%.

### **b. Special schools**

*In the two academic years since July 2023 (the date of the SEND Ofsted) the number of state-maintained sector special school places in Oxfordshire has increased by 8%, compared to an increase in total Oxfordshire pupil numbers of 1%.*

This increase in places has been delivered through:

- John Watson Special School, Wheatley – 8 additional places added over that period
- Bardwell Special School, Bicester – 15 additional places added over that period
- Bloxham Grove Academy – new school, supplying 70 places by 2024/25, growing to 120 places when fully operational.

Bloxham Grove Special School opened in January 2024, providing 118 additional special school places for pupils aged 7 – 18 with Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### **3. Forward plan of additional capacity**

#### **a. Resource bases**

*Taking into account the recently opened and currently confirmed new Resource Bases, the number of Resource Base places in Oxfordshire schools is planned to increase by 45% compared to the July 2023 Ofsted date – over 80 additional places.*

Accommodation for new Resource Bases has already been incorporated in three new mainstream schools recently opened, and the Bases will start admitting pupils in due course:

- Barton Park Primary School, Oxford - Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs
- St John's CE Academy, Grove (primary and secondary) – Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs and Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Windrush CE Primary School, Witney – Communication & Interaction Needs, and Autism Spectrum Disorder

In order to provide more local specialist provision for children with SEND, work is underway to expand the coverage of Resource Bases and open Bases more quickly than can be delivered through new schools, through working with existing schools which have accommodation which can be repurposed as a Base.

The next of these due to open is at St Frideswide CE Primary School in Oxford, which will open a 16-place Base in 2025/26 for pupils with Communication & Interaction Needs, and Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs.

In addition, there has been considerable interest from other primary schools in opening Resource Bases, and proposals are being considered against the principles set out in section 3d below.

#### **b. Special schools**

*Taking into account the recently opened and currently confirmed new and expanded special schools, the number of state-maintained special school places in Oxfordshire is planned to increase by 47% compared to the July 2023 Ofsted date – over 600 additional places.*

The current expansion projects planned for existing special schools are:

- Mabel Prichard School: accommodation due to complete for the 2025/26 school year, to increase capacity from 110 to 136 places.
- Springfield School: working with schools and Trusts to identify how special school could expand into accommodation now surplus to requirements at mainstream school (co-located)
- Bishopswood School: working with schools and Trusts to identify how special school could expand into accommodation now surplus to requirements at mainstream schools (co-located)

Further opportunities to expand existing schools are also at an earlier stage of exploration.

Three further new special schools are at different stages of the planning process.

**New SEMH special school in Faringdon (Key Stage 2 – Key Stage 5)** at a site previously used by an Infant School, which has now relocated into new accommodation. Funding for this school is primarily via the DfE Free School programme. This school is planned to provide up to 118 additional places, and expected to open in 2026/27.

**New SEMH special school in Didcot (Key Stage 2 – Key Stage 5).** Subject to DfE approval, this will be built on land currently used by Aureus (secondary) School which is surplus to that school's requirements. This school is planned to provide 120 additional places, with a current opening date of 2027/28.

**New community special school in Didcot (Nursery – Key Stage 5).** A site for this school has been secured through a Section 106 agreement with the housing development to the west of Didcot, known as Valley Park. This school is planned to provide 120 additional places. The opening date of this school is dependent on the progress of the host development, but is currently estimated as 2028.

### **c. Capital Budget for planned schemes**

Schemes planned for delivery from 2025 onwards are funded from a combination of High Needs Capital Grant (provided annually from DfE), Section 106 funds from housing developers where contributions have been sought to support specialist provision, and corporate funds approved to support the expansion of Resource Bases. A total of £37m funding has so far been committed against planned schemes. Costs to deliver the current programme are expected to be £47m.

There is an expectation that we will continue to receive High Needs Capital, which over 2021/22-2024/25 has averaged in the region of £7m per annum. Funding has so far been announced up to the 2024/25 budget year; an announcement is expected by the end of March about funding for the 2025/26 budget year. The government has previously stated that the spend guidance will be updated to reflect the government's priority to improve mainstream inclusion.

"Section 106" funding is sought from housing developers for expansion of special education provision proportionate to the need arising from the development.

Although Basic Need Funding is primarily for creation of new places in mainstream schools, it can also be used to support specialist schemes.

All capital funding streams are kept under regular review to ensure they are allocated to projects that best match priorities.

#### **4. Principles for assessing proposals for capital spend on SEND provision**

The council continues to invite interest from both mainstream and special schools in further projects to expand SEND provision. The consideration of any proposals will be informed by the following principles:

##### Inclusion

Building on the principles in the Oxfordshire Local Area SEND strategy 2022-2027, inclusion will be at the heart of any prioritisation. The three priority groups are:

- Children with SEND
- Children we care for (CWCF) and Children we previously cared for (CWPCF)
- Children in receipt of pupil premium funding (PP/disadvantaged)

##### Quality First Teaching

Removing barriers to learning, adapting the environment to the child to enable children to fully participate in school life. Investment should be focused on schools where:

- There is strong leadership of SEND, and capacity to manage the proposed investment and new provision
- Good existing quality of education for SEND, which will be further strengthened through the proposed investment, or
- Existing quality of education for SEND is compromised by the available accommodation, which could be resolved through the proposed investment.

##### Right Support Right Time in Inclusive Settings

Oxfordshire's SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy 2022/23-2026/27 sets out the following overarching priorities for delivery of SEND provision:

- Local access to appropriate, high-quality provision - addressing existing gaps in spatial planning frameworks (set out in the Strategy).
- Reducing overall cost pressures, through reduced use of higher cost INMSS provision, and/or reducing travel distances/costs. Projects which enable children to remain within mainstream schools.
- Meeting emerging needs - focused on growing types of SEND and/or geographic areas of population growth and housing development.
- Efficient use of resources to maximise reach and scope of support, e.g adapting or expanding existing accommodation to better meet need, or where the capital investment required otherwise represents good value for money.

These principles translate into assessment criteria as shown in Figure 1 below.

| <b>Inclusion</b>                                      |  |
|---|--|
| The proposal would increase the number of:            | Children with SEND who will attend their local school  |
|   | Children we care for (CWCF) and Children we previously cared for (CWPCF) who will attend their local school  |
|   | Children in receipt of pupil premium funding (PP/disadvantaged) who will attend their local school   |
| <b>Quality First Teaching</b>                         |  |
| The school demonstrates:                              | Strong leadership of SEND, and capacity to manage the proposed investment and new provision, for example as assessed by Ofsted                                       |
|   | High quality of education for SEND, for example as assessed by Ofsted  |
|   | How quality of education for SEND will be strengthened through the proposed investment   |
|   | High aspirations for learners  |
|   | Inclusive school ethos - low rate of permanent exclusions, suspensions, etc.   |
|   | Clear plan to measure impact   |
| <b>Right Support Right Time in Inclusive Settings</b> |  |
| Proposal would:                                       | Meet the needs of children with complex needs  |
|   | Fill a local current or emerging geographic gap in provision   |
|   | Target the type of SEND for which there is a local shortage of provision   |
|   | Be affordable and sustainable within the relevant revenue funding mechanisms   |
|   | Deliver added value in supporting SEND provision beyond the school, e.g. through a local partnership approach  |
| <b>Property expectations and governance</b>           |  |
| Proposal would:                                       | Represent good value for money   |
|   | Make more effective use of OCC's education estate and assets   |
|   | Comply with standard OCC governance processes and priorities, including sustainability and DfE guidance as outlined in BB104 Area guidelines for SEND as appropriate |

*Figure 1: assessment criteria for new SEND provision proposals.*

## 5. Sufficiency Challenges

It is recognised that delivery of sufficient additional SEND capacity has previously not kept pace with the rapid rise in the need for specialist provision, resulting in increased use of Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools, and delays in identifying suitable provision for children with SEND.

The main challenges, and responses, have been:

### The pace of growth and change in EHCPs

- Not only has the number of EHCPs risen much faster than previously forecast, but the type and complexity of need is constantly changing. Over the last five years, the number of EHCPs issued per year in Oxfordshire has trebled, from 232 (2019) to 706 (2024) (+204%).
- This rapidly escalating need and demand on specialist services and requests for specialist placements highlights the need to further develop the mainstream offer and this forms part of the Council's SEND Sufficiency Strategy, as well as the SEND Transformation Programme (Theme 1: Right Support, Right Time) and Oxfordshire's commitment to supporting early intervention.
- Schools and the local authority will continue to need to be increasingly innovative in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. This includes the council's Enhanced Pathways initiative, developed within schools, which provides a teacher-led space to support some of the most vulnerable SEND students across local schools, offering a bespoke and specialised curriculum that meet their social, emotional, communication, sensory and academic needs whilst remaining within their local mainstream school community.

### Site availability

- Existing special school sites are fully utilised – for further expansion, additional site area is required, and is being sought through a combination of reprioritising the mainstream educational estate and acquiring new sites. In some cases, expansion of special schools would require their relocation, or for them to operate across split sites.
- New school sites within housing developments are dependent on progress of the development to delivery the site with the necessary services and infrastructure. This has been a cause of delay in delivering a new special school in Didcot.
- In some cases, accommodation previously used for mainstream education has become surplus to requirements, but adapting this accommodation to be suitable for special education is not always straightforward.
- Land agents have been employed to search for potential new sites, but there is limited availability of affordable and available sites within Oxfordshire which are suitable for a special school.

### Trust and school operational requirements

- Surplus accommodation within mainstream schools will only become available gradually, as pupil numbers fall and classrooms become available for repurposing. Close partnership working with schools and academy trusts is necessary to plan how

accommodation can be repurposed without compromise to their operational requirements.

- Special Schools also need to adjust their operational practices to adapt to the scale and nature of additional accommodation which is available, for example operating across split sites.
- Revenue funding models are also needing to be revised to recognise the greater flexibility of SEND provision and deliver equitable funding across different types of provision.

### Statutory approval processes

- There are statutory processes to be followed to establish new schools or make significant changes – including expansion or adding a SEND Resource Base – to existing schools and academies. These inevitably add to the timescale of creating additional provision.
- Under current legislation, most new schools are established as academies, and the local authority is responsible for running a competitive process to identify a suitable academy sponsor to recommend to the DfE Regional Director. Once the academy sponsor has been approved in principle, it will then be for the successful trust to work towards establishing the new school, with support from the local authority and the DfE. The Secretary of State will then consider signing a funding agreement with the successful trust once content that the school is ready to open successfully. The process of establishing a new school, putting aside any construction timescale, typically takes at least two years.
- For significant changes to schools, current legislation requires full consultation to take place, particularly with parents, staff and governors. For non-academy schools, a statutory consultation and decision-making process must be followed, with the decision taken by the local authority. Academies need to submit an application to the Department for Education, for approval by the DfE Regional Director.

### Planning permission and construction

- Significant changes to accommodation, in particular new schools, will require planning permission, which can always be a potential constraint on construction, and cause of delay.
- Construction processes can be accelerated through the use of modular / off-site construction techniques, where these are suitable.

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# SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT 1:

## Sustainable Schools Strategy – 2025 update

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## 1. Background and introduction

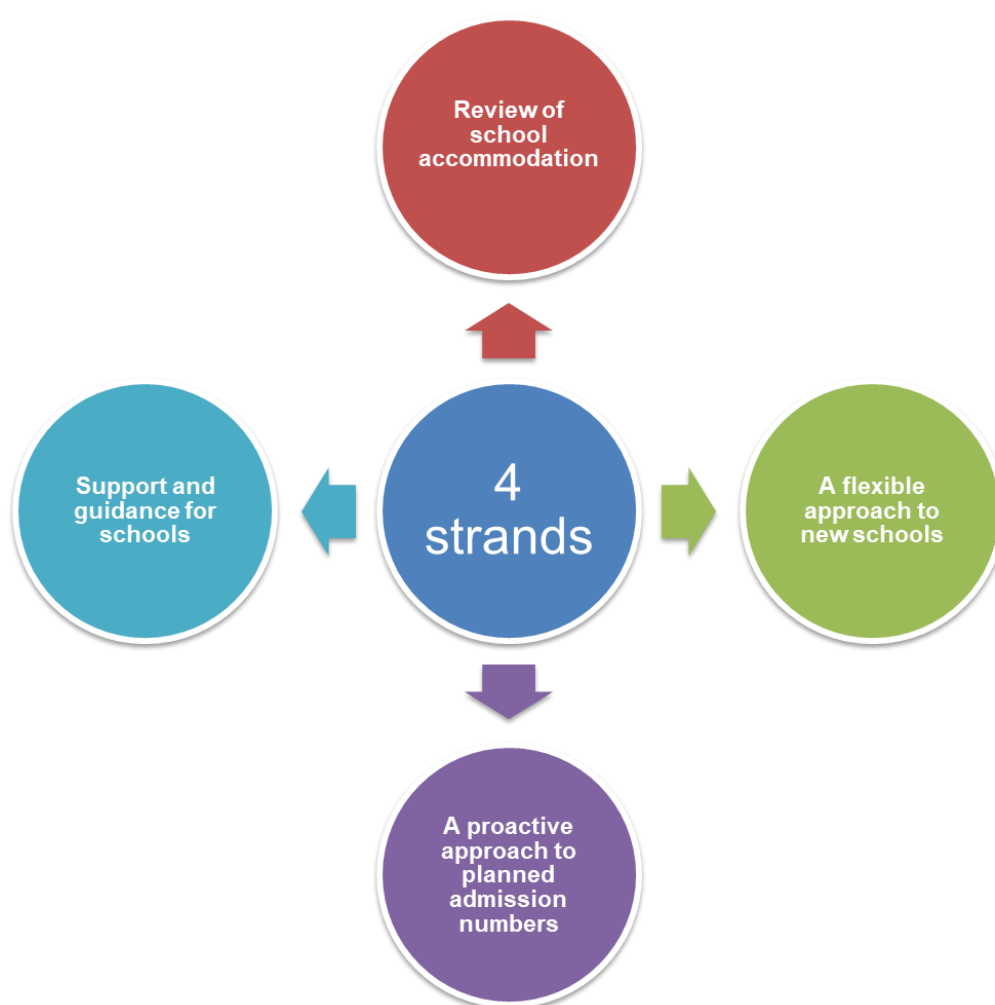
On 5 February 2020, Education Scrutiny Committee considered a report on *Management of Changing Rolls in Oxfordshire Schools: A Strategy for Sustainability*, and requested that an annual report on progress be made to the School Organisation Stakeholders Group. The strategy was focused on primary schools, but the general approaches also apply to secondary schools.

The original report is available at:

[https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s49729/ESC\\_FEB0520R03%20-%20Changing%20Rolls.pdf](https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s49729/ESC_FEB0520R03%20-%20Changing%20Rolls.pdf)

Section 10 of the report sets out four strands of Oxfordshire's Sustainable Schools Strategy:

*Figure 1: Sustainable Schools Strategy*



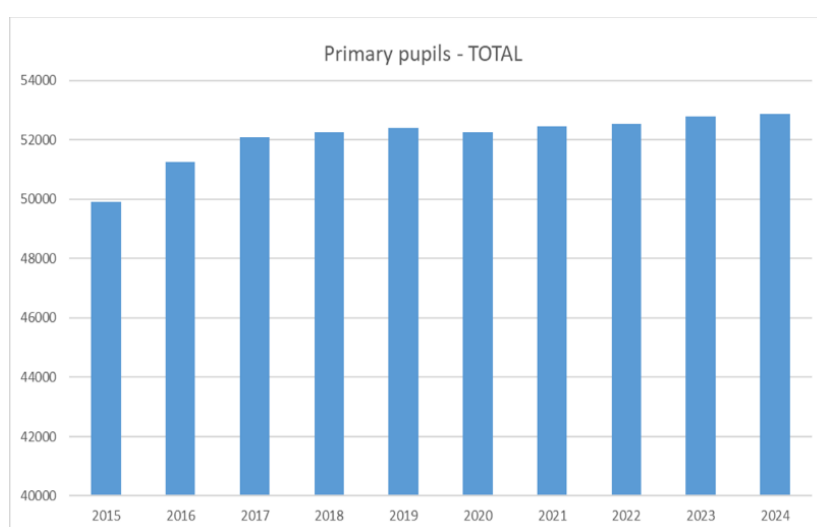
This report reviews the first five years of operation under the Sustainable Schools Strategy, and sets out plans to further strengthen this area of work. The current statutory framework for making changes to schools and academies is summarised in Section 5 for reference.

## 2. Changing pupil numbers

### Primary schools

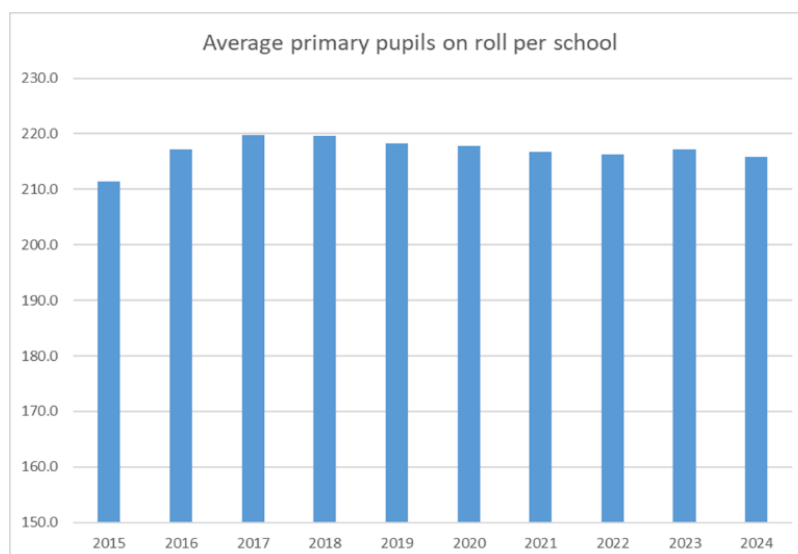
Patterns of pupil numbers, change and spare capacity across Oxfordshire are complex and can be volatile, and cannot be simply summarised. There are rural areas with falling numbers, but also urban areas. There are village schools with surplus capacity but also many which are full. Large housing developments are generating rapid rises in pupil numbers in some areas, but in other areas have been slow to have an impact. Schools and areas which have surplus places one year can be suddenly full the next year, and vice versa.

Overall, the number of primary pupils in Oxfordshire schools is still rising, despite the fall in underlying birth rates, as a result of large scale housing growth in some areas, but growth is much slower than was seen a decade ago.



*Figure 2: Oxfordshire total primary pupil numbers – last 10 years*

Because there have been new schools opened to meet the needs of the large housing developments, the average number of pupils per school has fallen slightly over the last seven years



*Figure 3: Oxfordshire average primary pupil numbers per school – last 10 years*

However, at the local level there are significant differences. Over the last five years, some areas have seen a 10% fall in pupil numbers, while others have seen more than a 10% increase in numbers. Demographic changes are, therefore, being felt very differently in different areas.

Excluding new schools which are still growing, this county has 39 schools with fewer than 90 pupils on roll (October 2024 pupil census), of which there are 7 schools with fewer than 60 pupils on roll. The question is often asked, “how small is too small?” This is not easily quantifiable – a school is too small if it can no longer deliver high quality educational experience in a financially sustainable manner, and some small schools are very successful at doing this. The smallest primary school in 2024/25 is Finstock Primary School, with 25 pupils (October 2024 pupil census) which in January 2024 received an “Outstanding” Ofsted rating.

## Secondary schools

Secondary pupil numbers in Oxfordshire have been growing strongly, both in total and also the average number of pupils per school.

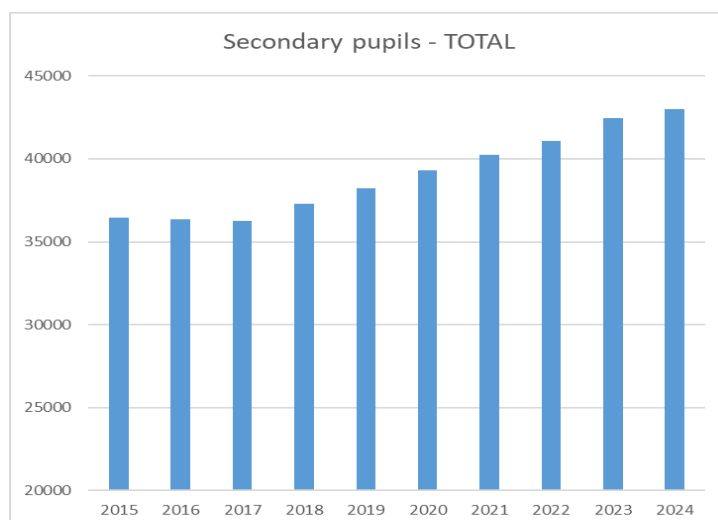


Figure 4: Oxfordshire secondary pupil numbers – last 10 years

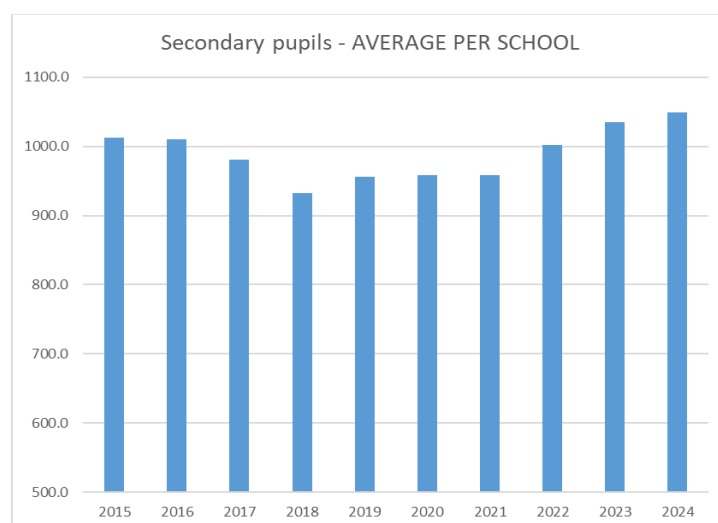


Figure 5: Oxfordshire average secondary pupil numbers per school – last 10 years

In the context of opening new schools, the DfE would define “too small” as less than 4 forms of entry, i.e. 600 pupils (with no sixth form). However, some specialist schools – University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools, providing a more vocational focus – have been designed to be 600-places or smaller, only taking pupils from Year 10 upwards. Of Oxfordshire’s 11-16 or 11-18 secondary schools, only two have significantly fewer than 600 pupils: Aureus School in Didcot, which opened in 2017 to serve housing development in Didcot and will grow as the housing populates, and Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge in Sonning Common.

### Forecast pupil numbers

Pupil forecasts are submitted to the DfE each summer for the purposes of informing Basic Need funding allocations. Forecasts are updated annually, and are based on School Census data, population forecasts (which include planned housing development) and recent patterns of parental choice.

The latest set of pupil forecasts approved by the DfE were calculated in the summer of 2024.

*Figure 6: Primary pupil forecasts 2024/25 – 2028/29*

| Forecast Year | R    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | Total  |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|
| 2024/25       | 7424 | 7752 | 7801 | 7861 | 7950 | 7904 | 7796 | 54,488 |
| 2025/26       | 7293 | 7707 | 7975 | 7992 | 8020 | 8112 | 8056 | 55,155 |
| 2026/27       | 7487 | 7566 | 7917 | 8135 | 8124 | 8163 | 8242 | 55,634 |
| 2027/28       | 7244 | 7731 | 7759 | 8061 | 8242 | 8244 | 8276 | 55,557 |
| 2028/29       | 7141 | 7474 | 7891 | 7892 | 8144 | 8329 | 8335 | 55,206 |

*Figure 7: Secondary pupil forecasts 2024/25 – 2028/29*

| Forecast Year | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   | 13   | Total  |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|
| 2024/25       | 7806 | 7791 | 7916 | 7575 | 7256 | 3463 | 2989 | 44,796 |
| 2025/26       | 7741 | 7916 | 7861 | 7940 | 7548 | 3361 | 3182 | 45,549 |
| 2026/27       | 7954 | 7841 | 7969 | 7884 | 7896 | 3458 | 3090 | 46,092 |
| 2027/28       | 8125 | 8042 | 7883 | 7990 | 7838 | 3621 | 3169 | 46,668 |
| 2028/29       | 8123 | 8198 | 8061 | 7890 | 7929 | 3609 | 3319 | 47,129 |

### **3. Delivery of Oxfordshire's Sustainable School Strategy 2020-2024**

#### **Strand 1: A flexible approach to new schools**

*Where a new school is required, consideration will be given to the potential to relocate an existing school before committing to a new school.*

It is important to note that capital investment for new schools is mainly secured from housing developers through "Section 106" funding, the uses of which are legally restricted. For Education, the effect of this is that developers can only be required to pay for additional school capacity where the existing school capacity will not be sufficient for the expected number of pupils generated by the new housing, and the funding can only be used for additional capacity directly related to the housing development.

In some circumstances, local authorities are able to work within these constraints and also achieve added value through investment in existing schools rather than establishing separate new schools, for example, where an existing school is on a site which would not support expansion, but an additional school in the area would be destabilising.

- Shrivenham Primary School relocated to a new site in 2024, enabling it to grow.
- St Nicholas Infant School in Wallingford will also move to a new site and building in 2026, enabling it and Fir Tree Junior School to convert to primary schools. This follows similar action in Faringdon, where the infant school moved to a new site and building, and both it and the junior school extended their age ranges to become primary schools in 2022.
- Another option actively explored is the expansion of a school onto a split site, as happened in Bicester with St Edburg's CE Primary School expanding onto a second site in 2024.

#### **Strand 2: A proactive approach to planned admission numbers**

*Where a school appears to be operating with a lower Published Admission Number (PAN) than their accommodation supports, and it is in an area where additional school places are required, officers will discuss with the school a timetable for increasing PAN if places are forecast to be needed. To ensure a proactive approach to forward planning of admission numbers, schools which may benefit from a reduced PAN, with reference to the latest pupil forecasts and forward plan of new school openings, are contacted annually in time to consult on PAN changes.*

Each year, OCC has worked with schools and academy trusts to revise published admission numbers (PANs) in response to changing patterns of pupil numbers. This includes both permanent and temporary increases and decreases in PANs with the aim of better matching school provision to local population.

#### **Strand 3: Review of school accommodation**

*Where reductions in PAN result in surplus accommodation, options will be explored for the use of that accommodation for other priorities, which include SEND or AP provision, or Early Years provision.*

Recent examples include:

- New Marston Primary School (Oxford) is using surplus accommodation for Alternative Provision.
- St Frideswide CE Primary School (Oxford) is using surplus accommodation to establish a SEND Resource Base.
- Orchard Meadow Primary School's reduced PAN frees up accommodation to allow the expansion of Mabel Prichard (special) School (Oxford).
- Several schools have submitted applications to convert surplus accommodation into Early Years provision.

#### **Strand 4: Support and guidance for schools**

*Advice and support will be provided to schools on how to manage their budgets on "Affordable Schools", including structural solutions such as federation (sharing headteachers and governors).*

This is provided by the School Improvement team to maintained schools at a school-level, in response to emerging financial deficits. In addition, discussions are held at an area-level where there are more general concerns.

#### **Permanent closure of a school or academy**

Where the strands of the Sustainability Strategy as set out above do not succeed in maintaining school standards and viability, it may become necessary to consider whether closure of a school would support better educational outcomes for pupils.

Closure may be considered where a school has low numbers of pupils on roll, there is no reasonable prospect of attracting additional pupils because there are surplus places in schools elsewhere in the local area, and no predicted increase in the medium to long-term need for places. It may also be considered where a school has been underperforming for some time and is under capacity, and shows no realistic prospect of meeting the required standard.

There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools and of maintained nursery schools. This does not mean that a rural school or maintained nursery school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.

Where two (or more) schools are to be amalgamated, the legal process for this is to either close the schools and open a new one, or to close one (or more) of the schools and expand another to accommodate the displaced pupils. School amalgamations therefore require a statutory school closure process.

In the last five years, two primary schools in Oxfordshire have been completely closed, both in small villages where the population could no longer sustain the school. The most recent, in August 2023, was Wootton-by-Woodstock Primary School (an academy) which permanently closed by mutual agreement of the LA, DfE and academy trust (ODST) due to unviable pupil numbers, with the majority of pupils transferring to Tackley Primary School (in the same academy trust).

## **4. Sustainable Schools Strategy 2025**

Based on the experience of the first five years of the Sustainable Schools Strategy, areas for increased focus have been identified.

### **Priorities and principles**

Decisions about expansion and reduction of school capacity will be informed by these principles.

Inclusion will be at the heart of any decision. The impact of any proposal will be considered in the context of how it would support high quality provision for:

- children with SEND;
- children we care for (CWCF) and Children we previously cared for (CWPCF);
- children in receipt of pupil premium funding (PP/disadvantaged).

Quality of education:

- expansion of successful, high attaining schools supports the council's commitment to improving educational outcomes, and is in line with DfE expectations;
- this will be balanced against the potential detrimental impact to quality of education at other schools, if they experience falling rolls and hence funding as a result of another school expanding or a new school opening;
- where possible, capacity changes which move schools towards being able to teach in single age classes are preferred.

Local access to appropriate, high quality provision:

- to encourage children walking or cycling to school, changes in school provision will seek to ensure that children are able to attend a school no more than 2 miles (for infant children) or 3 miles (for older children) from home.

Efficient use of resources and assets:

- changes in school capacity will be supported where they enable the education estate to be repurposed to meet higher priority needs;
- cost-effectiveness and value for money of any changes, both with regards to capital investment and ongoing revenue funding (including school transport costs); will be important considerations.

Parental preference, choice and diversity:

- the county council seeks to ensure a high percentage of parents can secure a place at their first preference school;
- this will be balanced against the potential detrimental impact to parental preference if expansion of one school, or a new school opening, risks the viability of other schools;
- church schools and academies are considered equally with local authority maintained schools for expansion; closure proposals for a school that has been designated with a religious character should consider the effect that this will have on the balance of denominational provision in the area.

### Community cohesion

- schools are a focal point for family and community activity, providing extended services for a range of users, and their closure may have wider social consequences.

### Sustainability

- where possible, appropriate school provision should be available within walking or cycling distance;
- capital investment decisions will seek to improve the environmental performance of the school estate.

These principles will inform any action or decision taken relating to the Sustainable Schools Strategy.

## **Strand 1: A flexible approach to new schools**

### *Current policy:*

Where a new school is required, consideration will be given to the potential to relocate an existing school before committing to a new school.

### *Proposed change:*

Where additional school capacity (primary, secondary or special) is required, the order of priority will be:

1. Expansion of existing schools – where this is in line with the principles above.
2. Relocation of an existing school to enable its expansion – where this is in line with the principles above, and subject to the necessary academy trust and/or DfE approvals, and financial viability.
3. Expansion of an existing school onto a satellite site – where this is in line with the principles above, and subject to the necessary academy trust and/or DfE approvals, and financial viability.
4. A new school.

## **Strand 2: A proactive approach to planned admission numbers**

### *Current policy:*

Where a school appears to be operating with a lower Published Admission Number (PAN) than their accommodation supports, and it is in an area where additional school places are required, officers will discuss with the school a timetable for increasing PAN if places are forecast to be needed. To ensure a proactive approach to forward planning of admission numbers, schools which may benefit from a reduced PAN, with reference to the latest pupil forecasts and forward plan of new school openings, are contacted annually in time to consult on PAN changes.

### *Proposed change:*

The council will work with schools and academy trusts to plan ahead for where PANs need to be either increased or decreased to better meet local demand. This will include coordinating discussion across schools and trusts to identify appropriate solutions, informed by the principles above. No presumption is made of a minimum admission number, as this

will depend on the context of each school. However, the local authority will actively suggest changes where the current PANs are considered to be detrimental to school financial viability or quality of education.

### **Strand 3: Review of school accommodation**

#### *Current policy:*

Where reductions in PAN result in surplus accommodation, options will be explored for the use of that accommodation for other priorities, which include SEND or AP provision, or Early Years provision.

#### *Proposed change:*

Where reductions in PAN result in surplus accommodation, options will be explored for the use of that accommodation for other priorities, which include SEND or AP provision, or Early Years provision, informed by the principles above.

### **Strand 4: Support and guidance for schools**

#### *Current policy:*

Advice and support will be provided to schools on how to manage their budgets on “Affordable Schools”, including structural solutions such as federation (sharing headteachers and governors).

#### *Proposed change:*

Advice and support will be provided to schools on maintaining high quality education within an affordable budget, including structural solutions such as federation (sharing headteachers and governors). Where schools have a sustained record of not providing high-quality education, the council will review what intervention is required, working with academy trusts and the DfE as required.

### **Strand 5: School closure**

#### *Current policy: not stated*

#### *Proposed change:*

Where the strands of the Sustainability Strategy as set out above do not succeed in maintaining school standards and viability, the council will work with schools, academy trusts, the DfE and other stakeholders to consider whether closure of a school would support better educational outcomes for pupils, informed by the principles above, and within the relevant statutory processes relating to school closure.

## **5. Statutory framework**

### **a. Making changes to maintained (non-academy) schools**

The *School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013* set out the way in which decisions are made about proposals to significant changes to local authority maintained (i.e. non-academy) schools.

In October 2024, the DfE released updated Guidance: *Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools*. The purpose of this guidance is stated as:

- to ensure that good quality school places can be provided quickly where they are needed;
- that local authorities and governing bodies do not take decisions that will have a negative impact on other schools in the area;
- and that changes can be implemented effectively where there is a strong case for doing so.

For significant changes – including expansion, relocation or change of age range – the legislation requires full consultation to take place, particularly with parents, staff and governors. A statutory consultation and decision-making process must be followed, with the decision taken by the local authority.

Changes of Published Admission Numbers (PANs) that do not require a physical enlargement to the premises of the school do not require this statutory process, but reduction in PANs do need to be consulted on in line with the requirements of the School Admissions Code.

Changes that are not counted as a “prescribed alteration” can be made by the local authority or school governing body without following a statutory process; they are nevertheless required to adhere to the usual principles of public law. They must: act rationally; take into account all relevant and no irrelevant considerations; and follow a fair procedure. Local authorities and governing bodies are expected to work together on such changes, taking into account the wider place planning context, and ensure open.

### **b. Making changes to academies**

The local authority only has direct influence over the maintained schools, and of course a large number of Oxfordshire schools are now academies. However, the latest DfE guidance on “*Making significant changes to an academy*”, published October 2024, sets out clear expectations, and clarifies the responsibilities of local authorities and academy trusts in working collaboratively and constructively in delivering the local authority’s statutory responsibility to ensure there are enough school places available in their area for every child of compulsory school age (the ‘sufficiency duty’ as set out under section 14 of the 1996 Education Act).

Academy trusts are expected to:

- work collaboratively and constructively with local authorities, other academy trusts, schools, dioceses/religious bodies (as relevant) and the department on place planning matters;

- inform the local authority and DfE promptly of any changes affecting capacity (e.g. events that take school buildings out of use);
- act reasonably when responding to requests to raise or lower PAN and expand/contract where necessary;
- be transparent with local authorities and the DfE about issues affecting their ability to deliver places and about any significant changes they are planning;
- undertake a fair and open local consultation on any significant changes they are proposing.

### **c. Permanent closure of a non-academy school**

The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 set out the way in which decisions are made about proposals to close local authority maintained schools. In October 2024, the DfE released updated guidance on *Opening and Closing Maintained Schools*.

Under section 15 of EIA 2006, a local authority can propose the closure of a community, foundation, voluntary, community special, foundation special or maintained nursery school and the governing body of a voluntary, foundation or foundation special school may publish proposals to close its own school, in each case following the statutory process. Alternatively, the governing body of a foundation or voluntary school can close the school by giving at least 2 years' notice of its intention to close the school to the Secretary of State and the local authority.

The statutory process is set out in the Establishment and Discontinuance Regulations. An initial informal consultation would precede the publication of a statutory proposal to close the school, after which there would be a formal consultation period, with the final decision being taken by the local authority.

### **d. Permanent closure of an academy**

The process for permanent closure of an academy is set out in the government guidance *Closure of an academy by mutual agreement*. This sets out that an academy trust may ask the Secretary of State to consider the closure of an academy "by mutual agreement", on the basis that there is no reasonable prospect of attracting additional pupils, and no predicted increase in the medium and long-term need for places, and/or that the academy has been underperforming for some time and is under capacity and shows no realistic prospect of meeting the required standard. If the academy is in an area with a need for additional school places, as an alternative to proceeding to closure, the Secretary of State may agree to allow trustees to transfer the funding agreement to an alternative sponsor or multi academy trust with the skills and capacity to improve standards.

The process to permanently close an academy starts with confidential discussions between the academy trust, DfE and local authority to assess the appropriateness and potential impact of closure. If the DfE agrees in principle to closure, further work is undertaken to develop a detailed closure proposal, and the trust seeks a substantive decision from the Secretary of State to close. Following a substantive decision from the Secretary of State to proceed to closure, the academy trust should share news of the closure with pupils, parents, staff, unions, relevant local authorities and schools elsewhere in the local area at the earliest opportunity and conduct a listening period, which will inform the closure plan.