



OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

FULL STATUTORY PROPOSAL

The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England)
Regulations 2013

Expansion of John Watson (special) School (secondary phase)

1. School and LA details

School: John Watson School (secondary phase)

Address: Steve Drywood Building, Wheatley Park Campus, Holton, Oxford OX33
1QH

Local Authority: Oxfordshire County Council

2. Description of alteration

John Watson School provides up to 91 places for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) aged 2-19. The school is co-educational.

Oxfordshire County Council, working with the Governing Body of the school, proposes to expand the secondary phase of John Watson School by 16 places from September 2022 onward. This would increase the overall capacity of the school from 91 to 107 places and would secure long-term provision for sixth form pupils.

To accommodate this expansion, the county council would replace an aged relocatable classroom unit with permanent accommodation. Comments about the design of the additional accommodation should be submitted through the planning permission consultation.

3. Evidence of demand

On 18 December 2018, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet approved a new *Special Educational Needs & Disability Sufficiency of Places Strategy* to ensure sufficient school places are provided for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as Oxfordshire's population grows. This strategy sets out how an emerging shortage of special school provision is resulting in an increased use of high-cost independent & non-maintained special school placements, resulting in a growing High Needs block revenue pressure and overspend. The shortage of special school places is also affecting the county's ability to complete an Education and Health Care Plan for pupils with SEND within the required 20-week period. The Strategy states that an additional 200 special school places would be required in Oxfordshire by 2022

to reverse the recent dependence on the independent non-maintained special school sector and ensure needs can be met through the local authority's provision.

The proposed expansion of John Watson School by 2022 is noted in the Strategy. The school currently offers 91 places, and Pupil Census Data from October 2019 shows that, at this time, there were 82 pupils on roll, including 37 in the secondary phase. Planned, permitted and completed housing development in some of the areas served by the school, including Barton, Benson, Thame, Chinnor and Watlington, is expected to increase demand for places at the school. If the school does not expand, pupils with SEN living in these areas may have to travel further to attend a special school in future, reducing community cohesion and increasing transport costs.

The proposed expansion would be part funded from the Special Provision Fund government grant. To meet the conditions of this funding, the county council worked with a High Needs Review Steering Group to review provision for children and young people with SEND. This Steering Group included representatives from the county's special and mainstream schools, and was one key mechanism through which education providers were consulted on this proposal.

This proposal has been informed by the open consultation carried out by the county council between 25 January and 22 February 2018. The purpose of this consultation was to allow all those with an interest in provision for children and young people with SEND to feed back their views on the proposed plan, including the proposed expansion of John Watson School. The consultation was conducted via the county council's consultation website, and advertised on the Local Offer Page of the council's website, in School News, by direct email to SEND provision serving Oxfordshire, via social media, SENCO newsletter and direct mailing to parent support groups in Oxfordshire. This consultation received 31 responses, 20 of which agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to expand John Watson School (65%). Of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed, the main concerns related to:

- The need for additional SEN places in other areas of the county, such as South and West Oxfordshire.
 - The proposal to expand John Watson School has resulted from ongoing work with Oxfordshire's special schools to identify needs and opportunities for investment. A review of special school provision was undertaken as part of the SEND Strategy to identify any opportunities for expansion.
 - A new special school is planned in Didcot for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Other special schools have increased their capacity within the last few years, and opportunities for further expansion of existing special schools will be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on feasibility and funding from developer contributions.
- The need for special school provision for pupils with SEMH needs.
 - New special schools are planned in Bloxham and Didcot to cater for children with SEMH needs. Northfield School in Oxford, which caters for boys with SEMH needs aged 11-18, will also be rebuilt and expanded.

The proposal to expand John Watson has also been publicised through Cabinet reports and other communications related to the Special Provision Fund and the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, as well as the 2018 and 2019 Pupil Place Plans.

4. Objectives

The proposed expansion would:

- Be supportive of high educational standards for SEN education provision. John Watson School is rated Good by Ofsted (last inspected May 2016);
- Provide more special school places for Oxfordshire's growing pupil population;
- Make it easier and quicker to place pupils with SEND in appropriate education;
- Reduce the county council's expenditure on high cost places at independent schools.

5. The effect on other schools, academies and educational institutions within the area

Due to the existing and growing shortage of special school places in the county, the expansion of John Watson School is not expected to have a detrimental effect on existing maintained schools. It is expected that this expansion would reduce the number of places the county council needs to purchase at independent & non-maintained special schools.

6. Project costs and funding

The estimated cost of the project is around £3m. As noted in the Council's SEND Sufficiency of Places Strategy, the project is expected to be funded from the Special Provision Fund and S106 developer contributions.

7. Implementation and any proposed stages for implementation

It is expected that building work will be completed by September 2022, enabling the school to increase its secondary intake from this date.

8. Objections and comments

Comments or objections must be received by the local authority by **17 July 2020**.

Respond by:

- using the online questionnaire at <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/johnwatsonexpansion>
- emailing school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk (please quote 'John Watson Expansion' in the subject line)

9. Decision-making

The decision-maker for this proposed expansion is Oxfordshire County Council. The decision will be made by the Cabinet Member for Education and Cultural Services at a meeting which is open to the public, and publicised on the county council's website. The decision must be made within a period of two months of the end of this representation period, and is currently expected on 9 September 2020.