



## ***Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Young People's Services***

***Wednesday, 10 July 2024 at 2.00 pm***

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

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

### ***Items for Decision***

The items for decision under individual Cabinet Members' delegated powers are listed overleaf, with indicative timings, and the related reports are attached. Decisions taken will become effective at the end of the working day on 17 July 2024 unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

Copies of the reports are circulated (by e-mail) to all members of the County Council.

**These proceedings are open to the public**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Reeves".

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

July 2024

*Committee Officer:*

*Note: Date of next meeting: 11 September 2024*

**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, but please give as much notice as possible before the meeting.**

## Items for Decision

### 1. Declarations of Interest

See guidance below.

### 2. Questions from County Councillors

Any county councillor may, by giving notice to the Proper Officer by 9 am two working days before the meeting, ask a question on any matter in respect of the Cabinet Member's delegated powers.

The number of questions which may be asked by any councillor at any one meeting is limited to two (or one question with notice and a supplementary question at the meeting) and the time for questions will be limited to 30 minutes in total. As with questions at Council, any questions which remain unanswered at the end of this item will receive a written response.

Questions submitted prior to the agenda being despatched are shown below and will be the subject of a response from the appropriate Cabinet Member or such other councillor or officer as is determined by the Cabinet Member, and shall not be the subject of further debate at this meeting. Questions received after the despatch of the agenda, but before the deadline, will be shown on the Schedule of Addenda circulated at the meeting, together with any written response which is available at that time.

### 3. 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.

Requests to speak must be submitted by no later than 9am four working days before the meeting. Requests to speak should be sent to [committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk) .

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9 am 2 working days before the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

### 4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 1 - 2)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2024 to be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 5. SHAP - Supported Housing Accommodation Programme (Pages 3 - 12)

*Cabinet Member:* Children, Education and Young People's Services

*Forward Plan Ref:* 2024/147

*Contact:* Caroline Kelly, Lead Commissioner, Start Well

([Caroline.Kelly@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Caroline.Kelly@oxfordshire.gov.uk))

Report by Director of Children's Services (**CMDCEYPS5**)

**The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:**

- a) **Agree the commissioning and procurement of the Supported Accommodation Service for Young People aged 18-25 at Risk of Homelessness service and to Award a Contract using a grant awarded by the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC).**
- b) **Delegate authority to the Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Head of Procurement and Contract Management, to award a Contract with a value of up to £400,000 per annum for the support element of a Supported Accommodation Service for Young People aged 18-25 at Risk of Homelessness service for a term of 3 years following a successful procurement process.**

## **6. Didcot Special School - Education Specification and Approval to Start LA Presumption Process (Pages 13 - 38)**

*Cabinet Member:* Children, Education and Young People's Services

*Forward Plan Ref:* 2024/089

*Contact:* Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager

([Barbara.Chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Barbara.Chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk))

Report by Director of Children's Services (**CMDCEYPS6**).

**The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:**

- a) **Approve the specification for the new special school serving the Didcot area, and for a competitive process to be launched to identify an academy sponsor to run the school.**

## **7. New Primary School for Valley Park - Education Specification and Approval to Start LA Presumption Process (Pages 39 - 70)**

*Cabinet Member:* Children, Education and Young People's Services

*Forward Plan Ref:* 2024/159

*Contact:* Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager

([Barbara.Chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Barbara.Chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk))

Report by Corporate Director for Childrens Services (**CMDCEYPS7**).

**The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:**

- a) **Approve the specification for the new primary school to serve the Valley Park development to the west of Didcot, and for a competitive process to be launched to identify an academy sponsor to run the school.**

## **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.

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# Agenda Item 4

## **DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Wednesday, 15 May 2024 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 2.05 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Liz Leffman – in the Chair

**Officers:** Jack Ahier (Democratic Services Officer), Barbara Chillman (Pupil Place Planning Manager).

*The Cabinet Member considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.*

### **1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** (Agenda No. 1)

There were none.

### **2 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS** (Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

### **3 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS** (Agenda No. 3)

There were none.

### **4 ASTON ROWANT CE PRIMARY SCHOOL - CHANGE OF CATEGORY** (Agenda No. 4)

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leffman, welcomed everybody to the meeting and explained that she was substituting for the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Young People's Services, Cllr John Howson, as he was unavailable, as per the Constitutional provision in Part 4.4, Section 2 (b).

Officers noted that the request to change category came from the school itself. The Chair noted the report stated that the school would have to provide some funding and officers confirmed that they were confident that the school would be able to achieve this.

After a question regarding consultation responses from the Chair, officers stated that the majority of respondents were in support of the changes.

The Chair thanked officers for their work and agreed to the recommendation in the report.

**RESOLVED to:**

- a) Approve the proposal from the Governing Board of Aston Rowant CE Primary School to change its category from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided, with effect from 1 June 2024.**

..... in the Chair

Date of signing ..... 10/07/2024



**Divisions Affected – N/A**

**DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN,  
EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**10 July 2024**

**SUPPORTED ACCOMODATION SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
AGED 18-25 AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**

**Report by Director of Children's Services**

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

**a) Agree the commissioning and procurement of the Supported Accommodation Service for Young People aged 18-25 at Risk of Homelessness service and to Award a Contract using a grant awarded by the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC).**

**b) Delegate authority to the Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Head of Procurement and Contract Management, to award a Contract with a value of up to £400,000 per annum for the support element of a Supported Accommodation Service for Young People aged 18-25 at Risk of Homelessness service for a term of 3 years following a successful procurement process.**

**Executive Summary**

1. In 2023 the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) invited Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council to submit a joint bid for a supported accommodation service for young people aged 18-25 who have experienced multiple disadvantage and are at risk of homelessness. This is under their [Supported Housing Accommodation Programme](#) 18-25 year olds (SHAP). Oxfordshire County Council were the lead bidder and worked with a Registered Housing Provider who identified a suitable property to run the service from.
2. Oxfordshire County Council were awarded granted funding of approx. £1.2 m over 3 years to provide support for a 12 bedded service. However this funding was not drawn down as the housing provider was unable to obtain the necessary Planning Permission to convert the property to supported accommodation.

3. Oxfordshire County Council have now identified a different housing provider who has located a suitable 9 bedded property and a new proposal will be submitted to DLUHC for an alternative service to support a slightly smaller cohort of young people.
4. Should this proposal be accepted, Oxfordshire County Council will need to procure the support element of the service. The value of this is likely be approx. £1.2m for the duration of a 3 year contract starting from April 2025.
5. All housing management functions will be carried out by the housing provider who will apply for Enhanced Housing Benefit to cover the rent and supported housing management costs.
6. We are advised by colleagues in the City Council that Planning Permission for change of use from C4 to C2 is likely to be granted.

### **Context and Background:**

7. The need for the service was jointly identified by Oxford City Housing Department and the Oxfordshire County Council Leaving Care Homeless Prevention team.
8. Current services do not meet the needs of young people with multiple needs which include a combination of:
  - (a) mental health needs (diagnosed or undiagnosed);
  - (b) neurodiversity
  - (c) learning disability
  - (d) refusal or eviction by current supported accommodation providers
  - (e) exploitation by criminal gangs
  - (f) drug and alcohol misuse
  - (g) aggression/challenging behaviour
  - (h) offending issues
  - (i) experience of abusive relationships
  - (j) experience of multiple care placements
  - (k) experience of multiple system failure.
9. Oxfordshire County Council worked with a Registered Housing Provider who identified a suitable property which could be reconfigured to provide 12 units of ensuite accommodation with additional office space, shared kitchens and lounges and 1:1 therapy rooms.
10. Funding of approximately £1.2m was granted by DLUHC to provide the revenue support element of the service for up to 3 years.
11. The Housing Provider was unable to gain the necessary Planning Permission to use the property for supported accommodation. Therefore Oxfordshire County Council is now working with another Registered Housing Provider who have sourced an alternative property to run the service from. The property has

9 ensuite bedrooms. Early indications from DLUHC are that this would be a suitable alternative to the 12 bedded property identified above.

12. The property will need a small level of refurbishment to update the décor and create an office and therapy room in the garden of the property. The Housing Provider is investigating a grant from Homes England to fund the refurbishment. It is not expected that any capital funding will be required from Oxfordshire County Council.
13. Oxfordshire County Council will submit a new proposal for support delivery for the 9 units of accommodation and will work in consultation with DLUHC and the Housing Provider.

### **The Service Model:**

14. A nine bedded supported accommodation service for young people aged 18-25 located within Oxford City.
15. Residents will include care leavers (expected to be the majority) and young people presenting to Oxford City Housing Teams.
16. The expected length of stay in the service for each individual is flexible but anticipated to be up to two years.
17. There will be 14 hours of support per person per week and in addition dedicated mental health support and overnight support, the support costs that are funded by the SHAP grant will be provided by the Service Provider selected via the mini-competition process under the Start Well Supported Living Framework. Rental charges will be paid by housing benefit (subject to eligibility) to the Housing Provider under separate occupancy agreements between the occupant and the Housing Provider.
18. The expected outcomes for individuals in the service are:
  - new or renewed access and engagement with mental health services
  - an improvement in mental health and ability to manage own condition
  - empowerment to manage alcohol and substance misuse.
  - reduction in aggression/challenging behaviour
  - increased resilience to external risks such as exploitation or abuse
  - increased involvement with social and community networks
  - Increased independent living skills – cooking, budgeting, shopping for food, cleaning, tenancy management etc
  - Engagement in or progress towards Education, Employment or Training
  - The development of healthy relationships
  - Ability to move on to accommodation with lower levels of support

## Procurement of Service

19. The support element of the service will be tendered as a mini-competition from the newly established Start Well Supported Living Framework.
20. The provision of property lies outside Contract Procurement regulations.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

21. The above proposal supports the Council's Corporate Plan and in particular points 2,3, and 7.
  - *Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire* – young people to be supported in the above service are amongst the most disadvantaged in the county.
  - *Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents* – resource will be dedicated to addressing health issues of residents of the service, particularly mental health and alcohol and substance misuse.
  - *Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.* Stable housing is fundamental to enabling young people achieve good life outcomes and this service will provide the support needed to help young people who have suffered multiple service failure address their needs and plan for their future.
22. In addition this service aligns with the CEF Commissioning Strategy (2023 update) Key Strategic Priorities
  - Needs led provision for care leavers over 18
  - Market Development Support – Focus on the predicted needs of care leavers post 18 and commission provision accordingly.

## Financial Implications

23. For the first 3 years, this service will be fully funded by grants, and therefore the new commitments will not require any council funding in during this period.
24. The Housing Provider will apply to Homes England for a grant to make the property fit for purpose. There will be no call on the Council for capital expenditure.
25. The Housing Provider will be responsible for providing housing management services and for collecting the rent. Both of these will be covered by Enhanced Housing Benefit payable to each young person.
26. As there is no specifically commissioned current provision for the young people with the complex needs outlined above, many have been placed into expensive out of county spot placements, which can cost up to £7,000 per person per week.

27. Should there be no long-term funding beyond the initial 3 years from DLUCH the service would be placed on the Start Well Supported Living Service and be used by Children's Services to house and support care leavers on a pay per use basis. This is expected to be at a lower cost than the current spot purchasing method currently used.

Comments checked by: Thomas James, Head of Finance Business Partnering  
[Thomas.James@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Thomas.James@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Legal Implications**

28. The Council's powers and duties to engage in this activity are set out in
  - (a) The Housing Act 1996 and amended by The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which requires councils to prevent and relieve homelessness.
  - (b) The Children Act 1989 amended by The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the purpose of which is to help young people who been looked after by a local authority move from care into living independently in as stable a fashion as possible.
29. The Start Well Supported Living Framework was competitively tendered as a light touch regime framework agreement under the Public Contract Regulations 2015. To ensure continued compliance with the Regulations any proposed block call-off contract for the support element of the services must be awarded under the mini-competition award process as set out under the Start Well Supported Living Framework and will be subject to its terms and conditions.

Comments checked by Jonathan Pool, Solicitor (Contracts),  
[Jonathan.Pool@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Pool@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

30. The support service will be commissioned from a provider who is expected to provide all necessary staffing as part of the contract.
31. The Housing Provider will be responsible for all training and supervision of housing provider staff providing housing management functions under the occupancy agreements.
32. The work to resubmit the revenue funding bid and if successful commission the service and contract monitor it will carry no additional staffing implications.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

33. The support service was planned according to a detailed gap analysis of services for young people who have complex needs and who have experienced multiple service exclusions.
34. This new service will cater to their individual needs through tailored support plans which will take into account each young person's risk factors such as
  - Mental health
  - Neurodiversity
  - Learning Difficulty
  - Refusal or eviction by current supported accommodation providers
  - Exploitation
  - Drug and alcohol misuse.
  - Aggression/challenging behaviour
  - Antisocial behaviour
  - Offending issues
  - Experience of abusive relationships
  - Experience of multiple care placements
  - Experience of multiple system failure
35. The service will
  - cater to each individual's cultural and religious beliefs
  - support each young person to access training, learning, voluntary and employment opportunities as appropriate as a step towards becoming economically active
  - be procured in an open and transparent manner through our Start Well Supported Living Framework which requires all providers to have an Equalities Policy in keeping with the Equalities Act 2010 and to certify that they have no industrial or tribunal cases brought against them regarding unlawful discrimination within the last 3 years.
  - Be regularly monitored on equality items by the Council's Quality and Improvement Team.

## **Sustainability Implications**

36. The Start Well Supported Living Framework requires providers to self-certify that their organisation had no prior convictions of breaching environmental legislation, or had any notice served upon it within the last 3 years by any environmental regulator or authority.
37. Support work for the service will mostly be carried out at one site and recruitment is likely to attract local workforce so will limit the amount of required travel.
38. The property used will have a high energy performance rating and residents will be supported to develop efficient energy use habits.

## Risk Management

39. Care leavers are highly over represented in mental health and drug and alcohol services as well as the homeless and prison populations. Those with the most complex needs are most at risk. This service seeks to mitigate the risk factors which these young people face and to support them to overcome their challenges.
40. Assuming Planning Permission is granted and that the updated revenue bid is accepted by DLUHC, please see a table of risk and mitigations relating to the specific service below

Risk	Impact	Probability	Mitigation	Risk Owner
No suitable provider takes part in the mini competition to provide the service.	High	Low	Extensive market engagement took place during the service design stage and a soft market testing exercise was carried out by Procurement in April 2024 which yielded 19 companies interested in providing the support.  This list includes the housing provider.	Commissioning Team
Successful support provider is unable to recruit full compliment of staff	Med	Low	Recruitment experience and procedures will be tested during procurement process  The service will accept young people in a phased manner	Commissioning Team  Quality and Improvement Team

			which can be adjusted according to staffing levels	
Voids in service due to lack of referrals	Low	Low	The need for the service is based on a gap analysis conducted jointly the City Council and the County Leaving Care Team. This indicated a need for 15 units of accommodation but a suitable building was not available to provide this number.	Commissioning Team Housing Provider Support Provider
Conflicting needs of young people make matching of residents difficult in a shared property raising a risk of voids	Med	Low	Accommodation of 9 ensuite rooms allows young people space to be alone when necessary. High levels of staff specifically trained in supporting young people with complex needs plus dedicated onsite mental health support will mean young people are supported to use the shared areas.	Support Provider Commissioning and Quality and Improvement Teams
Lack of move on opportunities mean that service	Med	Med	Intensive support will enable young people to move into other commissioned	Support Provider Commissioning Team





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**Division(s): DIDCOT EAST & HAGBOURNE; DIDCOT LADYGROVE; DIDCOT WEST; HENDREDS & HARWELL; SUTTON COURTENAY & MARCHAM, WALLINGFORD; BENSON & CHOLSEY; BERINSFIELD & GARSINGTON**

## **DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**10 JULY 2024**

### **NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL SERVING THE DIDCOT AREA: REPORT ON CONSULTATION AND APPROVAL FOR SCHOOL SPECIFICATION**

**Report by Director for Children's Services**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Approve the specification for the new special school serving the Didcot area, and for a competitive process to be launched to identify an academy sponsor to run the school.**

#### **Executive Summary**

1. Oxfordshire's Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Sufficiency Delivery Strategy identifies the need for two new special schools in the south-east of Oxfordshire, one for children with Social, Emotional & Mental Health and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder (SEMH/ASD) needs, and one for children with Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) or Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), and other associated needs.
2. One site for a new special school has been identified since 2014 (and secured through a Section 106 legal agreement relating to the large-scale Valley Park housing development) to the west of Didcot, but that development made slow progress through planning, and there is still no confirmed timescale for being able to acquire that site. That delay is expected to prevent a new school being built until at least 2028. This school would specialise in PMLD and SLD needs.

3. A search for a second site, which could be made available sooner, identified the potential for partnership working with GLF Schools, the academy trust responsible for Aureus (secondary) School to the west of Didcot, to reduce the planned capacity of Aureus School, to enable subdividing the site for the purposes of building a new special school. This site would be used for the school specialising in SEMH/ASD needs.
4. Oxfordshire County Council will not run the new schools. The 2011 Education Act requires that all new schools are expected to be academies/free schools. This law means that they are not run by the county council except in exceptional circumstances. Instead, academies are run by independent academy trusts.
5. This report forms part of the approved process in Oxfordshire to identify a sponsor for a new SEMH/ASD special school, as detailed below. It seeks approval both for the final education specification, and for the council to embark on a process to identify an academy sponsor to operate the new school. (The opening date for the school focused on other categories of need is not yet confirmed, and a new school process will follow in due course.)
6. The physical design and construction of the school will be subject to the usual planning permission and capital governance processes, and is not covered in this report.

## **Background**

7. Didcot currently has no special schools. The nearest maintained community special schools (primarily educating children with PMLD/SLD needs) are in Abingdon and Wantage. The nearest maintained special schools focused on SEMH/ASD needs are in Oxford, with a new school planned for Faringdon. This means children and young people with SEND face long journeys to access suitable education provision. These travel distances are detrimental to the wellbeing of children living in the Didcot area, and result in increased transport costs for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).
9. Didcot is one of the fastest growing towns in Oxfordshire, and a major focus for housing development, split across the district council border between South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse, with growth of over 10,000 homes planned/permitted between 2011 and 2035. It also lies at the centre of further major strategic housing growth areas in South Oxfordshire (around Culham, Berinsfield, etc) and Vale of White Horse (at Wantage and Grove). The need for special education provision is therefore expected to grow in this area.

8. Work to identify a potential site for a new special school to serve Didcot and the surrounding area resulted in OCC working in partnership with GLF Schools, the academy trust responsible for Aureus (secondary) School to the west of Didcot, to develop a proposal to reduce the planned capacity of Aureus School, and use the resulting surplus land area to enable subdividing the site for the purposes of building a new special school. The availability of this site is subject to DfE approval, as well as the usual planning permissions.
9. Although in the short-term this would reduce the nominal secondary school capacity in Didcot, there are currently surplus places, so there will continue to be sufficient secondary school provision in the town. In the longer term, the pupil generation from local housing development will require additional secondary school provision, and this will be delivered through a new secondary school to be built on a site secured within the North East Didcot strategic development area.
10. Oxfordshire County Council's role is to plan for and secure sufficient school places, and find a potential sponsor for the new schools. The Department for Education (DfE) has set out guidance on the Free School Presumption process for establishing new schools, and based on this guidance, Oxfordshire's School Organisation Stakeholder Group has approved the following process:
  - i. The county council undertakes a public consultation to decide the academy model to be implemented and finalise the education specification for the new academy, based on the DfE's model specification template, which is then to be approved by the Cabinet Member responsible for Education. The DfE is notified that applications will be sought.
  - ii. The county council invites applications from academy trusts interested in running the school through the county council website, as well as through direct notification of known interested parties and through such mechanisms as facilitated by the DfE.
  - iii. The county council assesses applications against the specification and the criteria in current DfE guidance. This assessment includes a presentation from each bidder to the assessment panel.
  - iv. The county council submits a recommendation and assessments, including scoring of the proposals, to the DfE Regional Director (RD), as representative of the Secretary of State, who then decides on the successful trust.
11. The first stage of this process is to write an educational specification for the new schools to invite bids from potential academy trusts wanting to run it. The public consultation on the draft specification for the special school in Didcot has now taken place, and details of this consultation are provided below. From this, the specification for the school has been finalised. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the consultation outcome, and seek Cabinet Member

approval to move onto the next stage of the process: inviting interested parties to submit applications to run the school, based on the proposed specification at Annex 1.

## **Proposed specification for the new school**

12. The school will be:
  - A 120-place special school, specialising in SEMH and ASD needs
  - Age range: 7-19
13. The detailed specification is provided in Annex 1.

## **Next Steps**

14. The Cabinet Member is requested to approve the draft specification attached as Annex 1 as the basis for stage (ii) of the academy provider process outlined in paragraph 11 above, the invitation of applications from potential providers. Such applications would be sought once the DfE has approved the reduction in site area at Aureus School, which it is hoped would be by the end of 2024. Once the applications are assessed, the Cabinet Member will be asked to approve a preferred provider for recommendation to the DfE Regional Director for approval by spring 2025.
15. Running in parallel to this process, feasibility work is underway to inform the design for the new school; the current expectation is that the school will open in 2027.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

16. The planned new school is necessary to ensure the county council can meet its statutory duty to secure sufficient school places for the growing population of Didcot. It will support the council's vision to provide services that enhance the quality of life and to give every child a good start in life. It supports the Oxfordshire Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2022-2027 and the SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy 2022/23-2026/27.

## **Financial Implications**

17. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the process of seeking expressions of interest, which is planned for and met within the normal CEF

budget provision. There are no significant financial implications or risks at this stage.

18. The capital cost of the school is included in the current OCC approved Capital Programme, and is expected to be fully funded from High Needs Capital grants and Section 106 developer funding contributions secured for this purpose.

Comments checked by:

Thomas James, Head of Finance Business Partnering  
[thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Legal Implications

19. Local authorities must plan for and secure sufficient school places for their area in line with their duties under section 14 of the Education Act 1996.
20. The process followed by the council to establish a new school is in line with the non-statutory guidance published by the government which sets out the department's advice and guidance about how the free school presumption process should operate in practice. This guidance applies to all new schools established following the process in section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006<sup>1</sup>, which is known as the 'free school presumption' route. Section 6A requires that, where a local authority identifies a need for a new school in its area, it must seek proposals to establish an academy (free school). The legislation that relates to this guidance includes:
  - the Education Act 2011 (EA 2011)
  - the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006)
  - the Academies Act 2010.

Comments checked by:

Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Law & Governance (Legal Services)  
[paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Staff Implications

21. There are no additional staff implications resulting from this report.

## Equality & Inclusion Implications

22. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions:
  - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.
23. Increasing SEND provision through the building of a new special school to serve Didcot and the surrounding area will have positive equalities impacts for children and young people with special educational needs & disabilities, and their families and carers. Children with SEND are disproportionately male, eligible for free school meals, looked after by a local authority, and from the ethnicity groups Traveller of Irish heritage, Black Caribbean or Other Black backgrounds, and these groups will particularly benefit from this service change.

## **Sustainability Implications**

24. The school will be constructed to Net Carbon Zero standards. Locating a special school in Didcot will reduce travel distances for children with SEND.

## **Risk Management**

25. The location of the school on part of the current Aureus School site is subject to approval by the DfE for Aureus School to reduce in size, and by the GLF Trust Board to release the site. Officers are working with GLF and the DfE to identify and resolve any concerns.
26. If the specification proves unattractive to potential sponsors, we may not be able to identify sufficient providers interested in running the school. In cases where an academy provider cannot be identified, the Department for Education expects to be able to assist.

## **Consultations**

27. The public consultation to inform the development of the education specification for the new primary school was conducted by the School Organisation & Planning team between 19 February – 28 March 2024. The purpose of the consultation was:
- To invite comment on the draft education specification to be used as the basis of identifying an academy sponsor for the new school;
  - To act as pre-notification to potential sponsors of the future bidding process.
28. The consultation was publicised through the county council consultations website and invitations to join the consultation were targeted at local councillors, schools, and other stakeholders.
29. There were 32 responses, of which 29 expressed clear support for the proposal; the remaining three expressed views that a school was more needed in



Witney/Carterton, or that it should not be located so close to Aureus School, or that the school should be for Moderate Learning Difficulties rather than SEMH.

30. The location and type of school was identified based on data analysis showing where there is the greatest need for additional special school provision, and the specific site selected facilitates the swiftest delivery of a new special school. The proposed school is only one element of the county council's ongoing work to increase SEND provision across the county. The county council does not support special schools designated for Moderate Learning Difficulties, as the expectation is that pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties are educated within mainstream schools, with additional support as required.
31. Other comments included:
- A Didcot special school is long overdue, and should open as quickly as possible.
  - Extremely needed to help families and their children to receive local education they need that supports and meets their individual needs.
  - The current lack of special school places is placing huge pressure on mainstream schools; staff and children.
  - Building on an existing school site is an excellent idea and hopefully minimises the risk of delay.
  - More places will be required.
  - Places needed for children younger than 7 as well.
  - More post-16 places will be needed.
  - Revenue funding levels for special schools need to be increased.
  - More money should also be invested in ensuring children with EHCPs can thrive in mainstream schools.
32. Since the consultation, the revenue funding details have been updated, and the revenue funding is in line with other special schools in Oxfordshire. The age range, and indicative number of places per year group, can be kept under review once the school is operational, and adjustments made if necessary. The new school is part of a wider programme of works which will also deliver a second special school in Didcot and more support for SEND provision within mainstream schools.

Lisa Lyons  
Director for Children's Services

Annex 1: Proposed specification for a new special school serving Didcot

Contact Officer: Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager, 07554103418, [barbara.chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:barbara.chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

July 2024

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# **Oxfordshire County Council New Special School**

**Seeking proposals to establish a  
new Special School to serve  
south-east Oxfordshire**

**September 2024**



## SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

Oxfordshire's Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Sufficiency Delivery Strategy identifies the need for two new special schools in the south-east of Oxfordshire, one for children with Social, Emotional & Mental Health and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder (SEMH/ASD) needs, and one for children with Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) or Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), and other associated needs.

The new schools are required to:

- reduce travel distances and time for children in the Didcot and south-east Oxfordshire area who currently have no nearby special school suitable for their needs;
- as a result, improve education and welfare outcomes for local children;
- meet local population growth both in the immediate areas and surrounding communities, by releasing capacity at existing special schools; and
- better manage the county's expenditure on Independent and Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) provision and special school transport.

This specification covers the new SEMH/ASD special school, which is planned to open in 2027, subject to progress with construction. The opening date for the school focused on other categories of need is not yet confirmed, and a new school process will follow in due course.

Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the 'free school presumption') where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy.

**The authority is therefore seeking proposals from appropriate providers to sponsor this new school. This new school would be deemed a free school.**

To inform the selection of a sponsor, Oxfordshire County Council conducted a public consultation on this educational specification for the new school from February to March 2024. The consultation resulted in 32 responses. The consultation has informed this specification, which was approved by the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Member responsible for Education in July 2024.

This specification guides applicants in the information that should be included in proposals from interested academy sponsors, and should be read in conjunction with the relevant application forms.

**Key Dates (subject to change):**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Spring 2024</b>	Consultation on school specification.
<b>Autumn 2024</b>	Launch of competition for a Trust to run the proposed school.
<b>Winter 2024</b>	Proposer groups will submit their applications.
<b>Spring 2025</b>	Assessment of applications received, with reference to how well they meet the specification for the school. Interviews and presentations by shortlisted bidders.  Local authority will make recommendations to DfE, who will make a final decision on which application to approve.
<b>Summer 2025</b>	Indicative date by when DfE decision on academy sponsor may be announced.
<b>2025/26</b>	Sponsor, LA and DfE work together on pre-opening planning, resulting in a signed Supplementary Funding Agreement.
<b>2027</b>	Target date for opening of school – exact date tbc

Please note, these dates will be updated and published on the OCC website; they are subject to change and may be updated as the process progresses.

The Regional Director (RD) for South East, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will consider the local authority assessments and recommendations before deciding which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school. The Regional Director will inform the local authority and the successful proposer of its decision, and the local authority will inform any unsuccessful proposers.

It is essential that by the time of presentation, proposers have achieved DfE approved sponsor status. Without this, their application cannot be considered.

Information about this process is available from [www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-sponsorship](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-sponsorship) .

The New School Proposal Form and this Specification Document are available to download from <https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/new-schools-oxfordshire>

**Contact details and further information**

Further information is available from, and applications should be sent to:

[school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## SECTION B: OXFORDSHIRE'S CONTEXT

### B1: Special Educational Needs in Oxfordshire

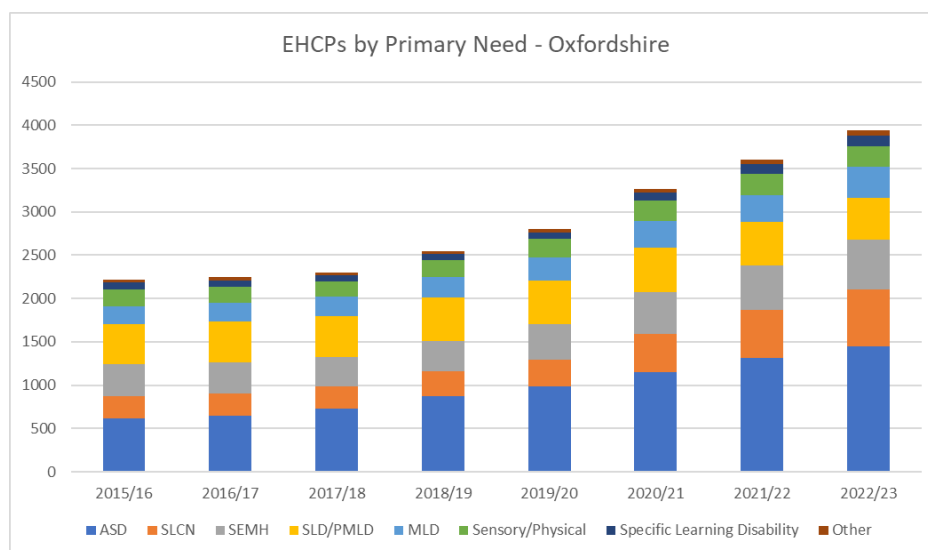
Oxfordshire's ambition is for all children and young people with SEND to have the right support and opportunities at the right time, so that they go on to live rich and fulfilling lives at the heart of their communities. In 2022, an updated Oxfordshire Local Area SEND Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0 to 25 with SEND was published at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sendstrategy](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sendstrategy). The strategy was co-produced by the SEND Strategy Development Group, with representatives from Oxfordshire County Council (education and social care), NHS Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, education settings and Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum and provides the following strategic objectives:

1. Improving outcomes for children with SEND
2. Developing a continuum of local provision to meet the requirements of children and young people with SEND
3. Good physical and mental health and wellbeing
4. Improving post-16 education, learning, employment and training
5. Positive move into adulthood for young people with SEND

The associated sufficiency strategy, published at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sendsufficiency](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sendsufficiency) particularly seeks to deliver the second objective of good, local provision. This planned new school is a major element in delivering the necessary provision.

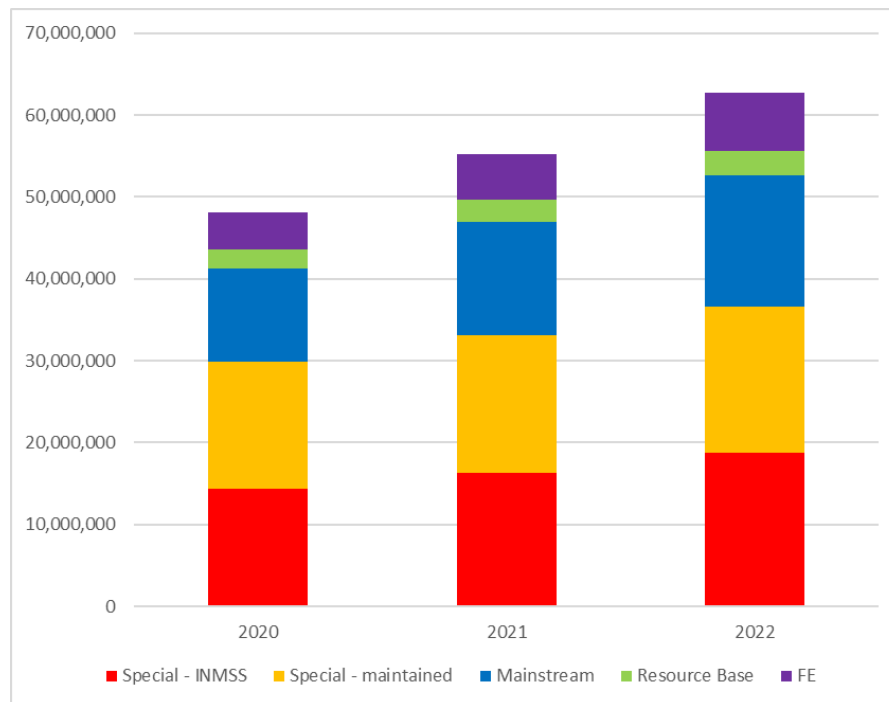
Numbers of Oxfordshire EHCPs have risen rapidly since 2016 (as published through SEN2 returns).

Figure 1: Numbers of EHCPs by primary need



The proportion of Oxfordshire children with an EHCP attending specialist provision in Independent and Non-maintained Special School (INMSS) placements is 16% of all those in specialist placements compared to national figures of 11%. This is creating an unsustainable pressure on SEND funding in the county.

**Figure 2: Total expenditure on SEND provision, 2020-2022**



## B2: Current SEND Provision in Oxfordshire

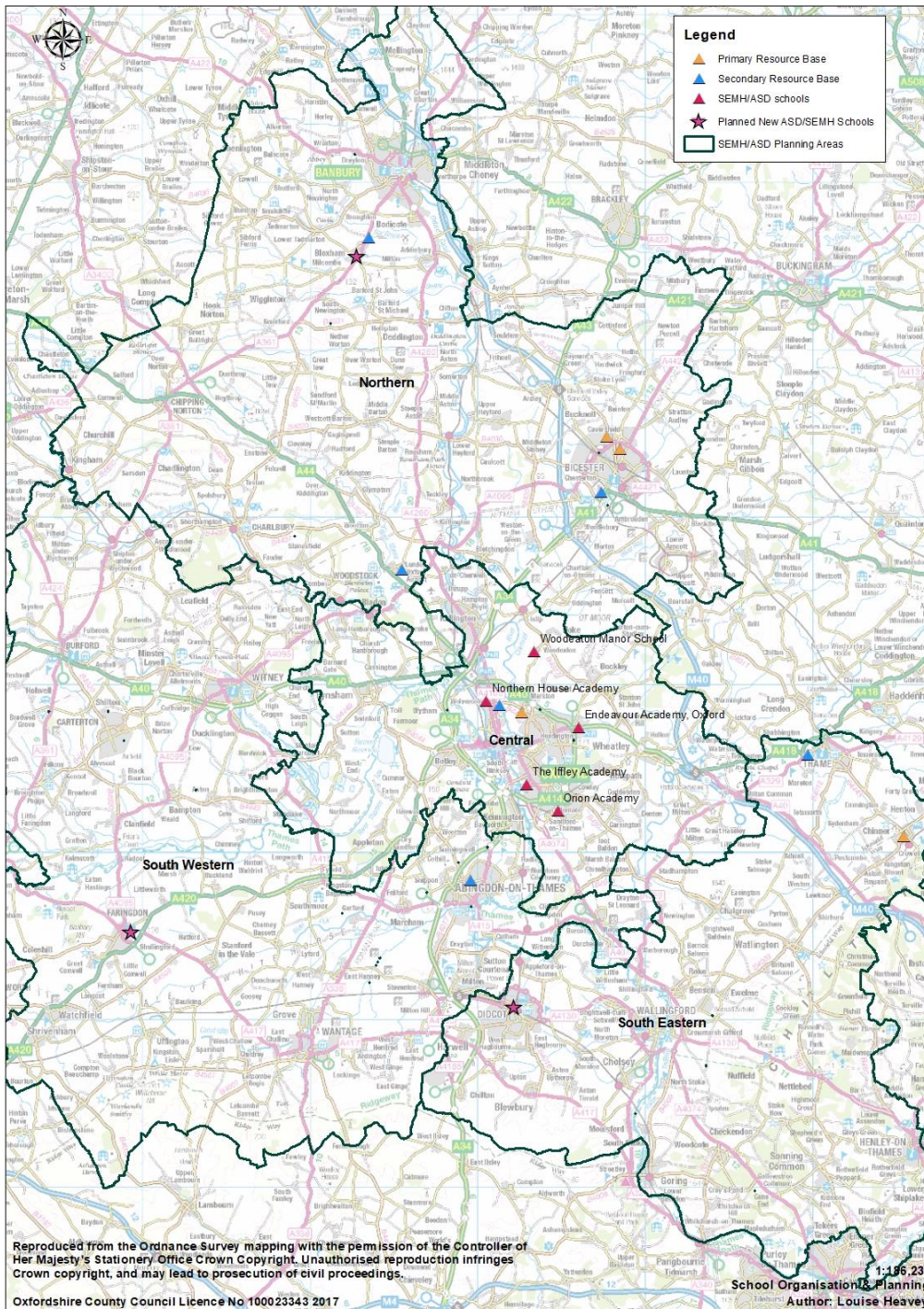
Oxfordshire currently has 14 maintained special schools, 10 of which are academies. Six of these are primarily for pupils with SEMH / ASD needs, and eight are primarily for children with SLD/PMLD and associated needs. There is also one Hospital School, and an Alternative Provision school. Of the schools with current inspection ratings, 3 are Outstanding and 6 are Good. One school was rated Inadequate in January 2024; three other schools have been converted to academies since receiving Inadequate Ofsted ratings, and have not yet been inspected as academies. One new school for pupils with SEMH / ASD needs opened in January 2024 and has not yet been inspected. Another school (in Faringdon) for pupils with SEMH / ASD needs is working through the planning permission process, and is due to open for 2026/27.

This specification is for a new special school serving the south-east Oxfordshire area, meeting the needs of children and young people in the 7-19 age range with severe SEMH and associated needs.

Oxfordshire’s current SEND provisions are located as shown on the maps below.

Map 1: current and planned maintained specialist provision for SEMH / ASD

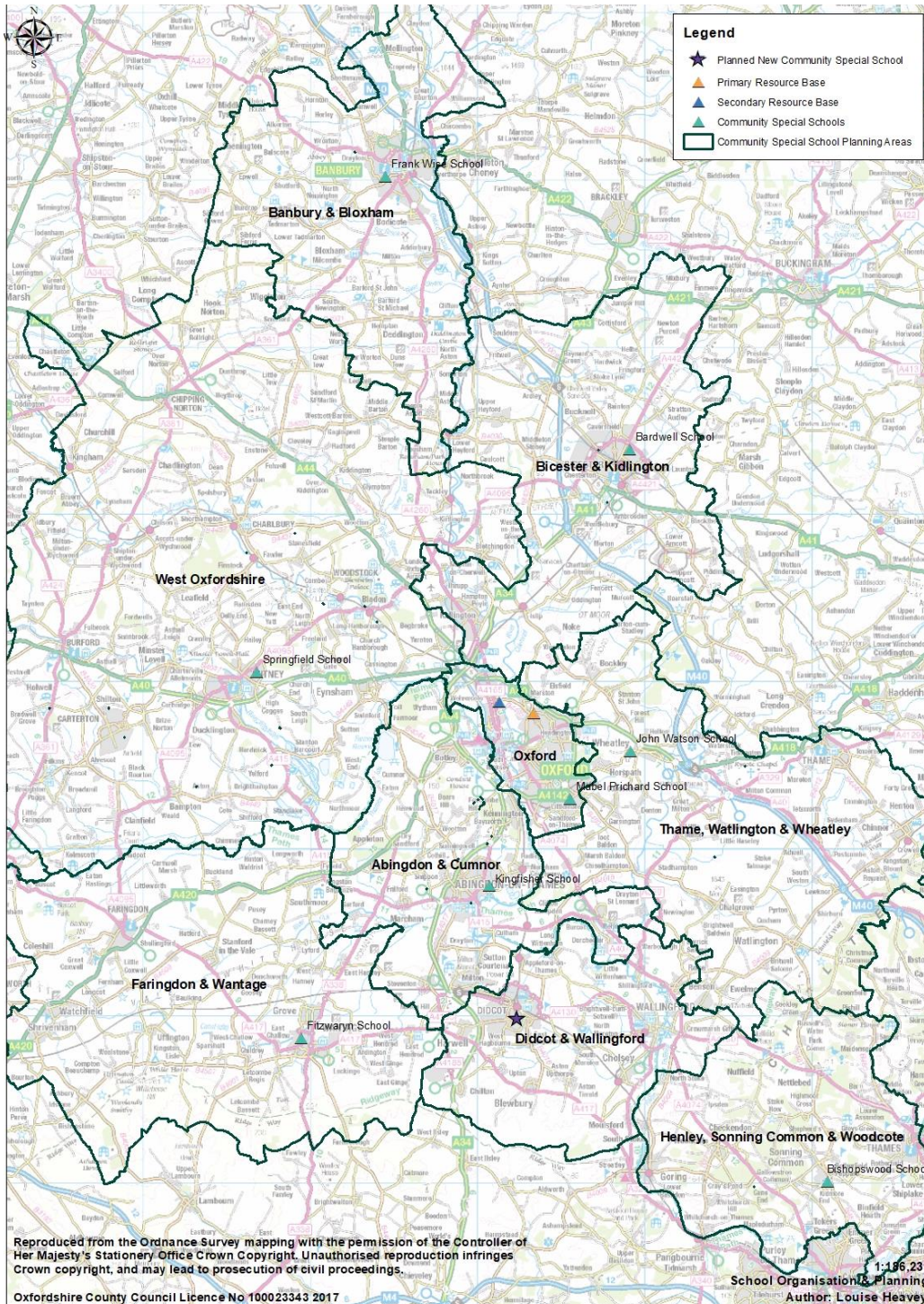
The map below divides the county into four areas for the purpose of strategic planning of specialist provision for SEMH / ASD. These areas are envelopes of the smaller planning areas used for planning mainstream school capacity, reflecting the much larger areas served by special schools. Oxfordshire's SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy 2022/23-2026/27 sets an aspiration for a specialist ASD/SEMH special school in each of the areas.





**Map 2: current maintained specialist provision for needs other than SEMH / ASD**

The map below divides the county into nine areas for the purpose of strategic planning of specialist provision primarily for needs other than SEMH / ASD. These areas are envelopes of the smaller planning areas used for planning mainstream school capacity, and broadly reflect the areas from which each of the county's existing maintained community special schools draws its pupils. The exception is the Didcot/Wallingford area, which currently has no community special school.



Oxfordshire County Council provides places for children with SEMH/ASD/C&I needs in:

- Eleven resourced provisions in mainstream schools (5 primary, 6 secondary)
- Six county-wide schools focused chiefly on providing for children with SEMH needs and/or ASD. These schools, although offering places to children who live throughout the county, are all located in or near to Oxford City, with the exception of the school opened in 2024 in Bloxham.
- The new school opening in the south-west of the county will also be for children with SEMH/ASD needs.

OCC, working in partnership with academy trusts and the DfE, has provided significant additional specialist places in recent years:

- A rolling programme of special school expansions over the last ten years has added over 270 places, including through the rebuilding of two Oxford schools. Further projects are in the feasibility stage.
- A new ASD school (aged 9 – 19) for the most complex needs, providing 32 places, was opened in 2014.
- Two further new schools have been secured through the DfE Free School programme, one of which opened in January 2024 and the other due to open in 2026/27:
  - Bloxham Grove Bloxham, SEMH/ASD, 118 places, January 2024
  - A new special school in Faringdon, SEMH/ASD, 118 places, 2026/27.

Despite this, the demand for special school placements is still growing faster than the supply in maintained schools, and the use of the INMSS sector continues to rise. The two new schools open/underway will significantly improve the distribution of provision for children and young people with severe SEMH/ASD needs, which until now has been concentrated in and around Oxford, but there remains a gap in the south-east of the county. Oxfordshire County Council is therefore running this competition to identify an academy sponsor for a new SEMH/ASD special school as a key component in meeting the needs of the local population.

Pupils living in the south-east of Oxfordshire who attend maintained special schools specialising in SEMH/ASD needs currently need to travel into or beyond Oxford, resulting in lengthy journeys, prone to traffic congestion.

The proposed new school will significantly improve access to special education provision for the growing population in south-east Oxfordshire. This will speed up the processing of placing children with severe SEMH/ASD needs in a suitable special school and reduce travel times and distances. There will also be an indirect benefit of releasing pressure on existing schools and freeing up capacity to meet other areas of population growth.

In addition to the school covered by this specification, Oxfordshire intends to open a community special school in Didcot, for children and young people with needs primarily other than SEMH/ASD. A site for this school has been secured through a Section 106 agreement with a large housing development, and the timescale for opening that school depends on the progress of the associated development. It is currently hoped that this will open in 2028.

## SECTION C: THE SCHOOL

This specification is to establish a school in the south-east of the county. This would improve the geographic coverage of SEMH/ASD schools to ensure provision within a reasonable distance of all communities. The tables below list key details of the school proposed. Proposer group applications must be for a school that has these key characteristics.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special																																				
<b>Area of SEN</b>	SEMH & ASD																																				
<b>Per-pupil revenue funding the local authority would expect to pay</b>	<p>Funding will be as determined by the special schools funding formula, agreed annually by Schools' Forum. For 2024/25 the formula is set out below:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Item</th> <th>Rate</th> <th>Basis</th> <th>Set By</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Place Funding</td> <td>£10,000.00</td> <td>Per place</td> <td>DfE/ESFA</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Teacher Pay &amp; Pension Funding</td> <td>£660.00</td> <td>Per place</td> <td>DfE/ESFA</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Core Top Up</td> <td>£8,224.87</td> <td>Per OCC pupil</td> <td>LA – +0.5% from 2023/24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bonus Top Up</td> <td>£1,321.00</td> <td>Per OCC pupil</td> <td>LA – no change from 2023/24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Additional Uplift Top Up</td> <td>£1,293.06</td> <td>Per OCC pupil</td> <td>LA – no change from 2023/24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other Top Up Factors</td> <td>Variable</td> <td>School specific</td> <td>LA – no change from 2023/24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MFG</td> <td>4.3%</td> <td>Protection/Uplift</td> <td>LA – DfE/ESFA guidance</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Additional Funding</td> <td>Variable</td> <td>Per place</td> <td>DfE/ESFA</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>During the 2024/25 financial year Oxfordshire County Council intends to review the top-up methodology and formulas used across all SEND services to understand the options available to allocate the resource to deliver the outcomes desired, which may result in a new special school formula.</p>	Item	Rate	Basis	Set By	Place Funding	£10,000.00	Per place	DfE/ESFA	Teacher Pay & Pension Funding	£660.00	Per place	DfE/ESFA	Core Top Up	£8,224.87	Per OCC pupil	LA – +0.5% from 2023/24	Bonus Top Up	£1,321.00	Per OCC pupil	LA – no change from 2023/24	Additional Uplift Top Up	£1,293.06	Per OCC pupil	LA – no change from 2023/24	Other Top Up Factors	Variable	School specific	LA – no change from 2023/24	MFG	4.3%	Protection/Uplift	LA – DfE/ESFA guidance	Additional Funding	Variable	Per place	DfE/ESFA
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Additional Funding	Variable	Per place	DfE/ESFA																																		
<b>Age range</b>	Age 7-19																																				
<b>Gender</b>	Co-educational																																				
<b>Capacity</b>	The eventual full capacity of the school is expected to be 120 pupils, including sixth form. It is recognised that class sizes may vary from year to year depending on the needs of each cohort.																																				
<b>Type of placements</b>	Full time																																				
<b>Number of nursery places</b>	n/a																																				
<b>Number of 16-19 places</b>	12. This will be subject to review once the school is established and operating in all year groups.																																				
<b>Any planned outreach, training and/or reintegration support</b>	Oxfordshire's approach to outreach is under development, and the new school would be expected to take an active part in the relevant initiatives.																																				

## **C1: Location and site**

Proposed location: Candytuft Way, Harwell, Didcot, OX11 6FF

The county council is in discussions about a potential site for the new school on the western edge of Didcot, on land which is currently part of the Aureus (secondary) School site, between the secondary school and the UTC.

The school will be accommodated in a new, purpose-built building, the design of which will be based on DfE Building Bulletin 104 Guidelines. It will include 12 Key Stage 2-4 classrooms, and 2 sixth form classrooms. Further details will be available as the design work progresses.

## **C2: Indicative opening schedule**

In order to minimise travel distances, pupils living in the area who are already at special school will be offered the opportunity to transfer to the new school, where this is compatible with the effective operation of the school.

Because of the shortage of appropriate special school provision for SEMH needs in this area, many children are placed in high-cost Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools, which places unsustainable pressure on SEND funding in Oxfordshire. The council will work with parents to manage moves to the new school at appropriate transition points, where this is in the best interests of the pupil.

In addition, some children with severe SEMH needs are remaining in their mainstream school awaiting a more suitable special school place becoming available. This would be a further immediate intake to the new school.

To reflect these circumstances, the council will work with the successful sponsor to plan the most appropriate schedule of growth for the new school, based on data held once a provisional opening date for the school is confirmed, and agree an annual number of commissioned places.

The table below details an indicative number of places that the local authority proposes for each year group at the point of opening until the school is full, subject to review in the pre-opening period. The numbers per year group will need to be flexible based on the needs of each cohort, and will be kept under annual review.

	Year of opening 2027 tbc	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
Nursery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reception	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Key stage 1 (Y1-2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Key stage 2 (Y3-6)	16	18	18	18	18	18	18
Key stage 3 (Y7-9)	24	34	44	54	54	54	54
Key stage 4 (Y10-11)	0	8	18	18	27	36	36
Key Stage 5 (age 16-19)	0	0	0	4	8	10	12
Totals	40	60	80	94	107	118	120

## **SECTION D: REQUIRED OUTCOMES OF THE NEW SCHOOL**

*Applicants will be required to fully explain and evidence in Section D of the proposal form how the school will achieve its educational vision under the following headings. Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance, available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption), which provides more detail on the evidence which should be provided.*

### **D1 – Curriculum & Education**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate an ambitious and deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake.*

The school should:

- Provide sustainably good or outstanding education with an exciting and inspiring, broad and balanced curriculum across the age range which is flexible enough to meet the individual needs of all pupils, and deliverable with the resources which will be available.
- Have a clear rationale for the proposed curriculum, demonstrating understanding of the needs of the expected intake, and an ambitious approach to meeting those needs.
- Have strategies in place to support pupils to be successful when they enter and leave the school, with a strong focus on preparation for adulthood, including life and social skills.
- Work collaboratively with FE providers and health and social care agencies to ensure appropriate onward destinations post school at either 16+ or 19+.
- Form partnerships with other educators, employment services, businesses, housing agencies, disability organisations and arts and sports groups.
- Seek out and share best practice within and beyond the school, promoting innovation and creativity in learning and teaching.
- Work effectively with mainstream schools to maximise appropriate integration and development opportunities, sharing skills and expertise.

### **D2 – Measuring Performance**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate their approach to measuring school and pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets.*

The school should:

- Set and meet ambitious but realistic aspirations for all pupils, determined through timely and comprehensive assessment.

- Instil rigorous processes of school self-evaluation and continual improvement, including recognising the importance of pupil and parent input in these processes.
- Identify baseline measures of pupils' attainment and put in place an assessment and data tracking system that will allow pupil progress to be monitored and continuously improved.
- Review success measures and targets regularly to improve the school's performance. This could include benchmarking assessment data with other relevant schools.
- Use appropriate data to inform teaching and drive progression and attainment for all pupils.
- Implement strategies to ensure that attendance of children matches the attendance rates of the highest performing authorities.
- Engage parents/carers in supporting and encouraging their children's learning, including through regular reporting.

### **D3 – Staffing & Management**

*Applicants will need to set out a staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective performance management).*

The school should:

- Have an appropriate balance of roles, experience and expertise.
- Maintain outstanding and dynamic leadership, management and governance.
- Attract, retain and develop the highest quality teachers and support staff to ensure good or better teaching and learning, and effective and motivated workforces.
- Plan the growth of staffing within the funding available, until the school is at full capacity in line with planned pupil numbers, and have credible contingency plans to adapt the staffing structure and still deliver a sufficient curriculum if income were less than expected.

### **D4 – Ensuring inclusivity, safeguarding and strong communities**

*Applicants will need to set out clear and robust policies and procedures for inclusion, safeguarding and community links.*

The school should:

- Work in partnership with pupils and parents to support the development of every child.



- Develop a strong moral and caring ethos, ensuring care and support for the whole child.
- Ensure safeguarding and well-being responsibilities are met.
- Be welcoming to pupils of all faiths/world views and none. Encourage pupils from different communities, faiths and backgrounds to work together, learn about each other's customs, beliefs and ideas and respect each other's views.
- Prepare children for life in modern Britain including through the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education. Consideration must be given to relevant issues, for example how the school will teach PHSE, adhere to the Prevent Duty
- Promote fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- Meet the needs of its pupils and local community through enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs.
- Explore the range of opportunities the community offers to keep well, keep learning and stay involved.
- Work in close partnership with the existing network of special schools in Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire's SEND team.
- Work in partnership with the county council and other educational providers to contribute towards meeting the collective responsibility to secure the best for all Oxfordshire's learners, including participating in school-to-school support, and supporting the strategic responsibilities of the county council to ensure sufficiency of high quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information.
- Work in partnership with wider services such as social care services, health and police to keep children safe, support families and build stronger communities.
- Be outward facing, playing a key role within its immediate community and the wider local economy, for example through opening up facilities to the community, and participating in community activities.
- Develop strategic alliances, partnerships and networks to better meet the needs of children and families.

## **SECTION E: CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY**

*Applicants will be required to demonstrate that they have the capacity and capability to set up and run the new school, and that they have access to appropriate educational, financial and other expertise.*

As a minimum, this must include the following:

- The resources they would draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new school by the opening date.
- Clear evidence that they have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including: managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety
- How the school would be organised and what the governance arrangements would look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures.

### **E1 – Experience and credentials**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate:*

- Appropriate roles, responsibilities and relevant experience to support the pre-opening and post-opening phases of the school's opening.
- A clear understanding of missing skills and experience (if any) of the team and a strategy to fill these gaps.
- Strong, relevant special education expertise, for example strong special school improvement experience, or substantial experience of delivering high quality special education relevant to this specification.

### **E2 – Governance**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate:*

- A governance structure, and roles and responsibilities, that will ensure accountability and effective decision-making, and drive improvement in the new school.
- An understanding of what changes, if any, they would need to make to the existing governance structure.
- An assessment of any conflicts of interest and how they will be managed, including any financial transactions that are likely to take place between any member/trustee and the academy.
- A strategy for securing independent challenge to members and trustees.
- A plan to recruit and train high quality individuals to fill any gaps.

## SECTION F: FUNDING AND COSTS

Funding for the new school has been identified in Oxfordshire County Council's capital programme, with an indicative budget of £14.4m. Funding sources include DfE capital grants (High Needs Provision Capital Allocation 2021/22 – 2023/24) and “Section 106” funding secured by the council that supports SEND provision.

The local authority is required by the Department for Education to provide revenue funding towards pre-opening and post-opening costs of new schools.

In addition to the pupil-led revenue funding, the new school will qualify for the following financial support from the local authority:

- A pre-opening grant of £97,500.
- A loose furniture and equipment budget of £250 per primary pupil and £540 per secondary pupil.
- A post-opening grant of £170,000

The Department for Education will also provide a one-off grant payment of £25,000 to the successful sponsor to cover the legal costs incurred in establishing the new free school.

*Applicants will be required to submit a robust financial plan for the school, covering the period until the school is operating at full capacity. They should detail their contingency planning should pupil intakes grow slower than expected. This plan could be in the form of the DfE's School Financial Template, or similar tool.*

## SECTION G: IMPACT AND EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

A new special school in this location would have positive equality and inclusion implications, by improving access to a suitable school place for children with SEMH and ASD needs. Sufficiency of SEND provision has important equalities impacts. National data shows that pupils with EHCPs are more likely to be:

- Male – 73% of EHCPs nationally are for boys.
- Eligible for free school meals – 40% of pupils with EHCPs are eligible compared to 23% of all pupils in schools.
- Speakers of English as their first language – 84% of pupils with EHCPs compared to 80% of all pupils in schools
- Looked after by a local authority – 29% have an EHCP.

Special Educational Needs are most prevalent in the Traveller of Irish heritage ethnic group – in 2022, 5.7% of pupils with this stated ethnicity had an EHCP. Other significantly higher than average rates of EHCPs are seen for pupils of Black Caribbean and Other Black backgrounds.

Other important equality and inclusion impacts include:

- more local places allow vulnerable children to be educated in their local community;
- more local places reduce travel distance and time for children and enables them arriving at school more willing and able to learn;
- shorter journeys reduce unit costs (cost per pupil) measures in the Home to School Transport budget;
- this new school will complete the map of SEMH/ASD provision for Oxfordshire and create potential to reduce the use of expensive Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools placements, releasing financial resources.

The school is not expected to have a negative impact on other maintained schools, due to the existing shortage of special education provision within Oxfordshire.

Division(s): HENDREDS & HARWELL

## **DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**10 JULY 2024**

### **NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL SERVING THE VALLEY PARK DEVELOPMENT TO THE WEST OF DIDCOT: REPORT ON CONSULTATION AND APPROVAL FOR SCHOOL SPECIFICATION**

**Report by Director for Children's Services**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Approve the specification for the new primary school to serve the Valley Park development to the west of Didcot, and for a competitive process to be launched to identify an academy sponsor to run the school.**

#### **Executive Summary**

1. Oxfordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new primary school to serve a permitted new housing development of over 4,000 homes to the west of Didcot. The Section 106 agreement under which the primary school is being delivered by the developers sets a requirement that it opens by the 500th housing occupation. The developers currently advise that they expect the school to be ready to open for September 2026
2. Oxfordshire County Council will not run the new school. The 2011 Education Act requires that all new schools are expected to be academies/free schools. This law means that they are not run by the county council except in exceptional circumstances. Instead, academies are run by independent academy trusts.
3. This report forms part of the approved process in Oxfordshire to identify a sponsor for the new primary school, as detailed below. It seeks approval both for the final education specification, and for the council to embark on a process to identify an academy sponsor to operate the new school.

4. The physical design and construction of the school will be subject to the usual planning permission and capital governance processes, and is not covered in this report.

## **Background**

5. Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the 'free school presumption') where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy. Oxfordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new primary school in the Valley Park development to the west of Didcot.
6. The new school will chiefly serve a permitted new housing development of over 4,000 homes to the west of Didcot, permitted under application P14/V2873/O. The first phases of development were granted Reserved Matters approval in 2022 and 2023. Population modelling of the development estimated that once fully populated, it would generate approximately 800 additional primary pupils, equivalent to nearly four forms of entry. The actual pupil generation may vary from this based on the speed of delivery of the new houses as well as underlying demographic patterns. To meet the needs of the new residents, the development includes sites for two new primary schools, the first of which is covered by this report. There is no confirmed timescale for the second school at this stage.
7. The Section 106 agreement under which the first primary school is being delivered by the developers sets a requirement that it opens by the 500th housing occupation. The developers currently advise that they expect the school to be ready to open for September 2026.
8. This school forms part of the strategic planning for additional school capacity to meet the expected growth in pupil numbers arising from housing growth in the Didcot area, both permitted and planned in the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire Local Plans. This includes two new special schools and a new secondary school within the NE Didcot development, as well as three primary schools and a secondary school opened in recent years.
9. Oxfordshire County Council's role is to plan for and secure sufficient school places, and find a potential sponsor for the new schools. The Department for Education (DfE) has set out guidance on the Free School Presumption process for establishing new schools, and based on this guidance, Oxfordshire's School Organisation Stakeholder Group has approved the following process:

- i. The county council undertakes a public consultation to decide the academy model to be implemented and finalise the education specification for the new academy, based on the DfE's model specification template, which is then to be approved by the Cabinet Member responsible for Education. The DfE is notified that applications will be sought.
  - ii. The county council invites applications from academy trusts interested in running the school through the county council website, as well as through direct notification of known interested parties and through such mechanisms as facilitated by the DfE.
  - iii. The county council assesses applications against the specification and the criteria in current DfE guidance. This assessment includes a presentation from each bidder to the assessment panel.
  - iv. The county council submits a recommendation and assessments, including scoring of the proposals, to the DfE Regional Director (RD), as representative of the Secretary of State, who then decides on the successful trust.
10. The first stage of this process is to write an educational specification for the new schools to invite bids from potential academy trusts wanting to run it. The public consultation on the draft specification for the new school has now taken place, and details of this consultation are provided below. From this, the specification for the school has been finalised. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the consultation outcome, and seek Cabinet Member approval to move onto the next stage of the process: inviting interested parties to submit applications to run the school, based on the proposed specification at Annex 1.

## **Proposed specification for the new school**

11. The school will be a 3-form entry 2-11 primary, providing 630 primary school places, with a 120-place nursery and a 12-place SEND resource base. The detailed specification is provided in Annex 1.

## **Next Steps**

12. The Cabinet Member is requested to approve the draft specification attached as Annex 1 as the basis for stage (ii) of the academy provider process outlined in paragraph 11 above, the invitation of applications from potential providers. Such applications would be sought from September/October 2024, and assessed, and the Cabinet Member asked to approve a preferred provider for recommendation to the DfE Regional Director for approval by spring 2025.
13. Running in parallel to this process, the developer is working towards submitting a detailed planning application for the school this summer, with approval expected by the autumn. They plan for construction to commence Spring 2025

with practical completion June 2026 and the school opening in September 2026. This timescale is subject to change, should the associated housing development slow down.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

14. The planned new school is necessary to ensure the county council can meet its statutory duty to secure sufficient school places for the growing population of Didcot. It will support the council's vision to provide services that enhance the quality of life and to give every child a good start in life.

## Financial Implications

15. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the process of seeking expressions of interest, which is planned for and met within the normal CEF budget provision. There are no significant financial implications or risks at this stage.
16. The building costs of the new school will be met by the housing developer through the Section 106 agreement linked to the Valley Park development.

Comments checked by:

Thomas James, Head of Finance Business Partnering  
[thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Legal Implications

17. Local authorities must plan for and secure sufficient school places for their area in line with their duties under section 14 of the Education Act 1996
18. The process followed by the council to establish a new school is in line with the non-statutory guidance published by the government which sets out the department's advice and guidance about how the free school presumption process should operate in practice. This guidance applies to all new schools established following the process in section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which is known as the 'free school presumption' route. Section 6A requires that, where a local authority identifies a need for a new school in its area, it must seek proposals to establish an academy (free school). The legislation that relates to this guidance includes:
  - the Education Act 2011 (EA 2011)
  - the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006)
  - the Academies Act 2010.

Comments checked by:

Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Law & Governance (Legal Services), [paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk)



## **Staff Implications**

19. There are no additional staff implications resulting from this report.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

20. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.
21. Increasing education provision through the building of a new school to serve Didcot will have positive equalities impacts for children, and their families and carers, through providing easier access to school places.

## **Sustainability Implications**

22. The school will be constructed to Net Carbon Zero standards.

## **Risk Management**

23. The delivery timescale of the primary school is dependent on the progress of the associated housing development, and it may become necessary to delay the opening of the school. This risk can be managed through the usual project planning processes for new schools.
23. If the specification proves unattractive to potential sponsors, we may not be able to identify sufficient providers interested in running the school. In cases where an academy provider cannot be identified, the Department for Education expects to be able to assist.

## **Consultations**

24. The public consultation to inform the development of the education specification for the new primary school was conducted by the School Organisation & Planning team between 1 April – 23 May 2024. The purpose of the consultation was:
- To invite comment on the draft education specification to be used as the basis of identifying an academy sponsor for the new school;

- To act as pre-notification to potential sponsors of the future bidding process.
25. The consultation was publicised through the county council consultations website and invitations to join the consultation were targeted at local councillors, schools, and other stakeholders.
  26. 21 respondents submitted comments. Of these the majority took the opportunity to comment on the need for more special education provision, either through the planned SEND Resource Base within the school being larger (3 responses); or through a special school being built instead of or as well as a primary school (9 responses). The delivery of new special schools for the Didcot area is covered by a separate report. The size of the planned Resource Base is in line with those at other Oxfordshire schools, but can be reviewed once the school is operational, if more places are required.
  27. Three respondents expressed the view that a new primary school was not needed, one that it might be too large and another that it might be too soon. Although there are currently spare places in some schools in Didcot, the schools surrounding the Valley Park development have very few spare places, and the two primary schools opened to serve the Great Western Park development are significantly over-subscribed. The scale of the Valley Park development (larger than Great Western Park) will require additional primary school capacity, and locating this in the heart of the development will reduce the need to travel and support community cohesion for the new residents. Although the school will be built as a 3-form entry school, it will open up classes gradually to keep pace with local population growth, and minimise the impact on other schools.
  28. Five respondents unambiguously supported the need for a new primary school, and in total fifteen responses suggested support, with some qualifications.
  29. Other comments included:
    - Suggestions about the details of school design.
    - Need for more nursery places in the vicinity.
    - A current shortage of school places to the west of Didcot.

Lisa Lyons  
Director for Children's Services

Annex 1: Proposed specification for a new primary school to serve Valley Park, west of Didcot

Contact Officer: Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager, 07554103418, [barbara.chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:barbara.chillman@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

July 2024

# **Oxfordshire County Council New Primary School**

**Seeking proposals to establish a  
new Primary School to serve  
Valley Park, west of Didcot**

**September 2024**



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**

Section A: Introduction and process

Section B: The local context

Section C: The school

C.1 – Location and site

C.2 – Growth planning and admissions

C.3 - SEND Resource Base

Section D: Required outcomes of the new school

D.1 - Curriculum

D.2 – Measuring performance

D.3 – Staffing and management

D.4 - Ensuring inclusivity, safeguarding and strong communities

Section E: Capacity and capability

Section F: Funding and costs

Section G: Impact and Equalities Assessment



## SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the ‘free school presumption’) where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy. Oxfordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new primary school in the Valley Park development to the west of Didcot, to open in September 2026.

The new school will chiefly serve a permitted new housing development of over 4,000 homes to the west of Didcot, construction of which is underway. This school forms part of the strategic planning for additional school capacity to meet the expected growth in pupil numbers arising from housing growth in the Didcot area, both permitted and planned in the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire Local Plans.

**The authority is therefore seeking proposals from appropriate providers to sponsor to this new school. This new school would be deemed a free school.**

To inform the selection of a sponsor, Oxfordshire County Council conducted a public consultation on this educational specification for the new school from 1 April 2024 to 23 May 2024. The consultation resulted in 21 responses. The consultation has informed this specification, which was approved by the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Member responsible for Education in July 2024.

This specification guides applicants in the information that should be included in proposals from interested academy sponsors, and should be read in conjunction with the relevant application forms.

### **Key Dates (subject to change):**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Spring 2024</b>	Consultation on school specification.
<b>Sept 2024</b>	Launch of competition for a Trust to run the proposed school.
<b>Oct 2024</b>	Proposer groups will submit their applications.
<b>Nov/Dec 2024</b>	Assessment of applications received, with reference to how well they meet the specification for the school.  Interviews and presentations by shortlisted bidders.

	Local authority will make recommendations to DfE, who will make a final decision on which application to approve.
<b>March 2025</b> (tbc)	Indicative date by when DfE decision on academy sponsor may be announced
<b>2025/26</b>	Sponsor, LA and DfE work together on pre-opening planning, resulting in a signed Supplementary Funding Agreement.
<b>Sep 2026</b>	Target date for opening of school

Please note, these dates are subject to change and may be updated as the process progresses.

The Regional Director (RD) for South East, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will consider the local authority assessments and recommendations before deciding which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school. The Regional Director will inform the local authority and the successful proposer of its decision, and the local authority will inform any unsuccessful proposers.

It is essential that by the time of presentation, proposers have achieved DfE approved sponsor status. Without this, their application cannot be considered. Information about this process is available from [www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-sponsorship](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-sponsorship) .

The New School Proposal Form and this Specification Document are available to download from <https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/new-schools-oxfordshire>

### **Contact details and further information**

Further information is available from, and applications should be sent to: [school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Section B: THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Didcot was awarded garden town status in 2015, and the adopted Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire Local Plans aim for the town to accommodate over 15,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs in the area by 2031.

Oxfordshire County Council is planning school capacity strategically across Didcot to meet the needs of the recent and planned housing growth, as well as the existing population growth. This includes a number of new schools:

- Two new primary schools and a secondary school have already opened in the Great Western Park development to the west of Didcot.
- North East Didcot is planned to include two new primary schools and a secondary school.
- Up to three primary schools (including the one covered by this specification) and a special school are included in plans for further development to the west of Didcot.

The host site for this new school is the Valley Park development permitted in 2022 for up to 4,254 homes under application P14/V2873/O. The first phases of development were granted Reserved Matters approval in 2022 and 2023. The site developers are Taylor Wimpey and Persimmon Homes.

The Section 106 agreement under which the first primary school is being delivered by the developers sets a requirement that it opens by the 500<sup>th</sup> housing occupation

There is not yet a confirmed timescale for the special school (school site transfers by 350 housing occupations) and second primary school (due to open by 2,600 housing occupations). It is hoped that the special school will be built by approximately 2028. The second primary school will only be triggered when the local population has grown sufficiently to support it.

## SECTION C: THE SCHOOL

The table below lists key details of the school proposed. Proposer group applications must be for a school that has these key characteristics.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary, including nursery
<b>Planned opening date</b>	September 2026 (to be confirmed subject to delivery of development)
<b>Age range</b>	Age 2-11
<b>Gender</b>	Co-educational
<b>Size of school</b>	Rising to 3-form entry as the local population grows
<b>Total number of primary places (Reception – Year 6)</b>	Eventual capacity 630 primary places
<b>Number of nursery places proposed full time equivalent nursery places (once school is at full capacity)</b>	Rising to 120 places as the local population grows
<b>SEND provision</b>	12-place Resource Base for pupils with Communication & Interaction needs; scale of resource base to be reviewed as the school grows. Opening timescale for resource base to be agreed once the school is operating in sufficient year groups.

### C1: Location and site

The approximate postcode is OX11 6DU.

The illustrative masterplan below was submitted as part of the planning application, and shows the location of the two primary schools and the special school planned for this site.

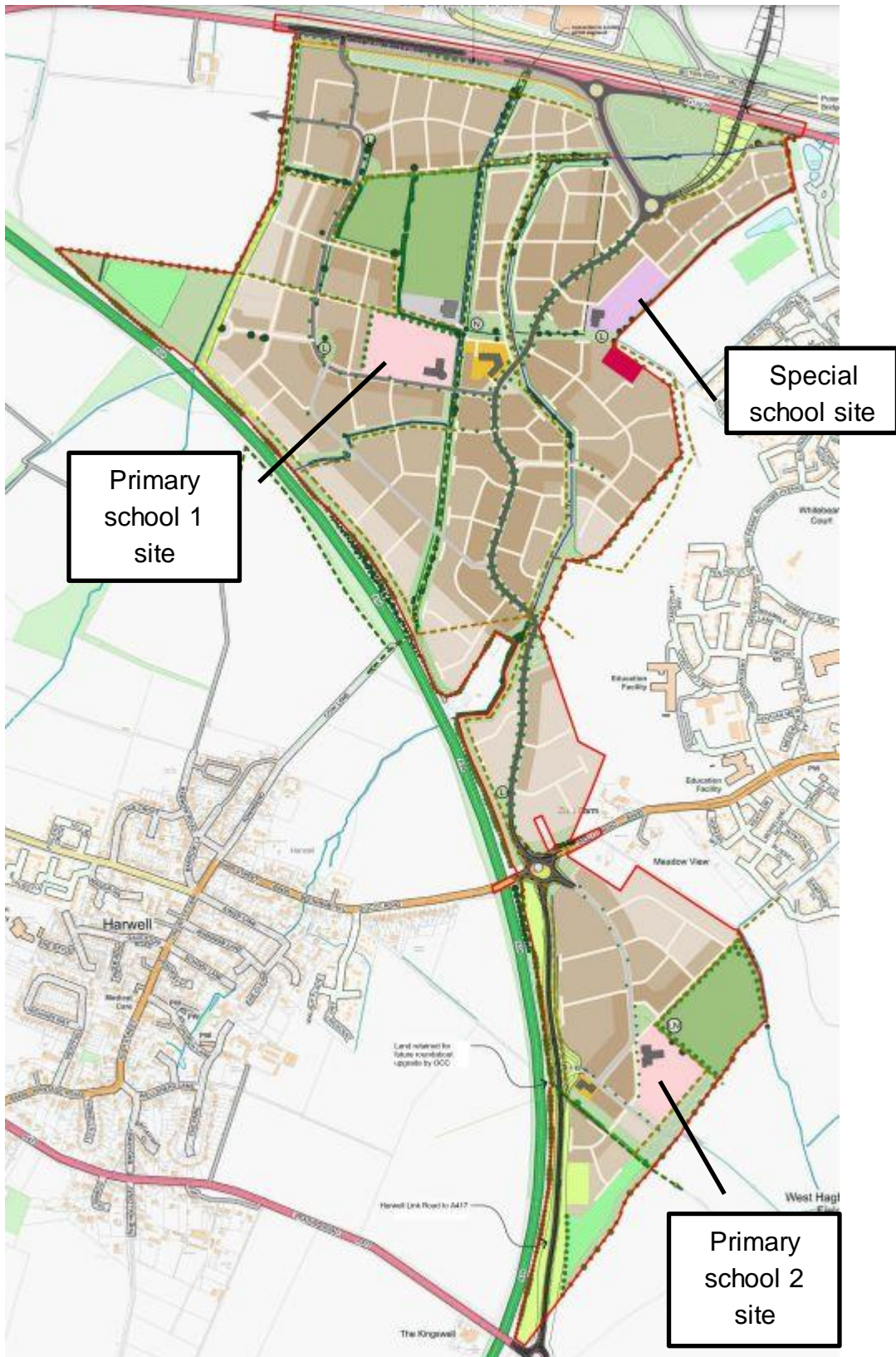
This specification covers the first primary school, to the north of the development.

The school will be built by the developer, to Oxfordshire County Council's specification, based on the government's Building Bulletin 103. At the time of publishing this specification, the developer is consulting on the Development Brief for the school.

The site for the new primary school is 3.01ha.



The school site will be owned by Oxfordshire County Council, and is expected to be made available to the academy on a 125-year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the 2010 Academies Act.



## **C2: Growth planning and admissions**

Didcot is experiencing a high level of housing growth, which brings with it uncertainties and year-to-year variation in the growth of pupil numbers. The growth of this new school will need to be carefully planned to achieve the best possible balance between meeting the needs of the surrounding housing development while not having a detrimental impact on the local community of schools.

The school will need to be flexible in how it organises classes to respond to the growth in local school-age population, including children who move to the development after the normal age of starting school. Proposers will be expected to demonstrate they have fully considered how they will ensure the needs of new residents of the development are met without promoting or encouraging a large-scale relocation of pupils from other schools.

It would be expected that the school initially opens with an admission number of 30 Reception places; a mixed aged Year 1 and Year 2 class may also be appropriate in the first instance, depending on how the local population is growing. The school would then be expected to increase its Reception intake in stages to 90 in line with the local population growth, with the rate of growth being agreed with the local authority. This is likely to include some periods when the school would operate with mixed-age classes (e.g. an admission number of 45), and proposers will need to demonstrate robust plans to manage changing class structures as the school grows, including a positive commitment to mixed-age teaching as appropriate.

The school will also be expected to contribute towards meeting local needs for wraparound care and childcare, including supporting the local authority's response to changing policies and requirements.

The school's catchment is expected to be primarily the Valley Park strategic development area, but may draw from a wider area to meet population pressures as they arise.

The new school will be included within the county council's coordinated admission scheme, but the successful sponsor will be responsible for consulting on, and publishing, its specific admissions policy.

Information about Oxfordshire's school admissions and home-to-school transport is available at <https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/school-admission-rules-and-policies>

### **C3: SEND Resource Base**

To support Oxfordshire's SEND Sufficiency Delivery Strategy, the school includes a 12-place SEND Resource Base, which will provide additional support to pupils with Communication & Interaction needs (including Autism Spectrum Disorder). Pupils supported by the Base will be expected to spend the majority of their time in mainstream classes.

Children admitted to the Base will have Education, Health & Care Plans issued by the local authority naming the Base. The Base would not be expected to open before the school has pupils in at least Year 3, and will open in a phased manner in line with pupil numbers. The scale of the Resource Base will be reviewed as the school grows.

## **SECTION D: REQUIRED OUTCOMES OF THE NEW SCHOOL**

*Applicants will be required to fully explain and evidence in Section D of the proposal form how the school will achieve its educational vision under the following headings. Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance, available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption), which provides more detail on the evidence which should be provided.*

### **D1 – Curriculum**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate an ambitious and deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake.*

The school should:

- Provide sustainably good or outstanding education with an exciting and inspiring, broad and balanced curriculum across the age range which is flexible enough to meet the individual needs of all pupils, and deliverable with the resources which will be available.
- Have a clear rationale for the proposed curriculum, demonstrating understanding of the needs of the expected intake, and an ambitious approach to meeting those needs.
- Rigorously focus on educational standards to ensure that every child achieves their potential, and goals and national expectations are met or exceeded.
- Have strategies in place to support pupils to be successful when they enter and leave the school.
- Seek out and share best practice within and beyond the school, promoting innovation and creativity in learning and teaching.

There should be a particular focus on support for vulnerable learners and children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, including, but not restricted to, those admitted to the SEND Resource Base.

### **D2 – Measuring performance**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate their approach to measuring school and pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets.*

The school should:

- Set and meet ambitious but realistic aspirations for all pupils, determined through timely and comprehensive assessment.
- Instil rigorous processes of school self-evaluation and continual improvement, including recognising the importance of pupil and parent input in these processes.
- Identify baseline measures of pupils' attainment and put in place an assessment and data tracking system that will allow pupil progress to be monitored and continuously improved.
- Review success measures and targets regularly to improve the school's performance. This could include benchmarking assessment data with other relevant schools.
- Use appropriate data to inform teaching and drive progression and attainment for all pupils.
- Implement strategies to ensure that attendance of children matches the attendance rates of the highest performing authorities.
- Engage parents/carers in supporting and encouraging their children's learning, including through regular reporting.

### **D3 – Staffing and management**

*Applicants will need to set out a staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective performance management).*

The school should:

- Have an appropriate balance of roles, experience and expertise e.g. senior leadership team, middle managers, SENCO, subject leaders, teachers, support staff, etc.
- Maintain outstanding and dynamic leadership, management and governance.
- Attract, retain and develop the highest quality teachers and support staff to ensure good or better teaching and learning, and effective and motivated workforces.
- Plan the growth of staffing within the funding available, until the school is at full capacity in line with planned pupil numbers, and have credible contingency plans to adapt the staffing structure and still deliver a sufficient curriculum if income were less than expected.

### **D4 – Ensuring inclusivity, safeguarding and strong communities**

*Applicants will need to set out clear and robust policies and procedures for inclusion, safeguarding and community links.*

The school should:

- Ensure that the needs of all children are fully provided for, and that the school will be fully inclusive. Be welcoming to pupils of all faiths/world views and none. Encourage pupils from different communities, faiths and backgrounds to work together, learn about each other's customs, beliefs and ideas and respect each other's views.
- Work in partnership with pupils and parents to support the development of every child. Develop a strong moral and caring ethos, ensuring care and support for the whole child.
- Ensure safeguarding and well-being responsibilities are met.
- Prepare children for life in modern Britain including through the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education. Consideration must be given to relevant issues, for example how the school will teach PHSE, adhere to the Prevent Duty
- Promote fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- Meet the needs of its pupils and local community through enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs.
- Work in partnership with the county council and other educational providers to contribute towards meeting the collective responsibility to secure the best for all Oxfordshire's learners, including participating in school-to-school support; a strong commitment to cooperating with Fair Access protocols; and supporting the strategic responsibilities of the county council to ensure sufficiency of high quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information.
- Support the county council in delivering effective early intervention services, ensuring school readiness and supporting our most vulnerable learners and families. Work in partnership with wider services such as social care services, health and police to keep children safe, support families and build stronger communities.
- Be outward facing, playing a key role within its immediate community and the wider local economy, for example through opening up facilities to the community, and participating in community activities.
- Develop strategic alliances, partnerships and networks to better meet the needs of children and families in Didcot.

## SECTION E: CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

*Applicants will be required to demonstrate that they have the capacity and capability to set up and run the new school, and that they have access to appropriate educational, financial and other expertise.*

As a minimum, this must include the following:

- The resources they would draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new free school by the opening date
- Clear evidence that they have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including: managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety
- How the school would be organised and what the governance arrangements would look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures

### **E1 – Experience and credentials**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate:*

- Appropriate roles, responsibilities and relevant experience to support the pre-opening and post-opening phases of the school's opening.
- A clear understanding of missing skills and experience (if any) of the team and a strategy to fill these gaps.
- Strong, relevant education expertise, for example strong school improvement experience, or substantial experience of delivering high quality education relevant to this specification.

### **E2 – Governance**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate:*

- A governance structure, and roles and responsibilities, that will ensure accountability and effective decision-making, and drive improvement in the new school.
- An understanding of what changes, if any, they would need to make to the existing governance structure.
- An assessment of any conflicts of interest and how they will be managed, including any financial transactions that are likely to take place between any member/trustee and the academy.
- A strategy for securing independent challenge to members and trustees.
- A plan to recruit and train high quality individuals to fill any gaps.

## SECTION F: FUNDING AND COSTS

Under Section 106 of the Town and County Planning Act, 1990, the county council has secured a 3.01 ha site and school building, to be designed and constructed by the developer, to OCC specifications.

The local authority is required by the Department for Education to provide revenue funding towards pre-opening and post-opening costs of new schools. In addition, the Department for Education provides a one-off grant payment of £25,000 to the successful sponsor to cover the legal costs incurred in establishing the new school.

The new school will qualify for the following financial support from the local authority:

- A pre-opening grant of £97,500.
- A loose furniture and equipment budget of £250 per pupil.
- A post-opening grant of £283,000.
- Guaranteed revenue funding for pupils in the first three years of opening, through the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) in line with the local authority's projection of pupil numbers.
- After the first three years, the authority will continue to adjust APT to avoid lagged funding, but it will not underwrite that funding, and it will therefore be subject to clawback by ESFA if actual numbers are below those in the APT.

The SEND Resource Base will attract additional revenue funding, once the Base is admitting pupils. Funding will be as determined by the High Needs funding formula, agreed annually by Schools' Forum. Schools are currently funded for Resource Base places through:

- Core funding: a combination of per-pupil funding through the local schools funding formula, plus £6,000 per place for those occupied by pupils on roll (as of October census); or £10,000 per place for commissioned places not occupied.
- Top-up funding: paid on a per-pupil basis by the resident (commissioning) local authority. Oxfordshire's current top-up rate for Resource Base places is £10,000 per pupil.

During the 2024/25 financial year Oxfordshire County Council intends to review the top-up methodology and formulas used across all SEND services to understand the options available to allocate the resource to deliver the outcomes desired, which may result in a new High Needs formula.

*Applicants will be required to submit a robust financial plan for the school, covering the period until the school is operating at full capacity. They should detail their contingency planning should pupil intakes grow slower than expected, given the inevitable unpredictability of future housing delivery. This plan could be in the form of the DfE's School Financial Template, or similar tool.*



## SECTION G: IMPACT AND EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The provision of a new school to the west of Didcot is necessary as the scale of local housing and population growth is expected to generate more pupils than could be accommodated at existing nearby schools, and a new school in the heart of significant new housing developments is considered to be an important element of community building.

Taking into account the high level of housing growth in Didcot the impact of the proposed new primary school is not likely to be significant in the medium to long term. In the short-term, there may be some turbulence in pupil numbers at local schools, as patterns of parental preference shift in reaction to the new provision. However, it is not considered that this would be sufficient to threaten the viability of any existing schools.

The county council has sought to minimise any risks to the existing schools by writing into the school specification that the eventual sponsors will manage school growth in such a way as to not adversely affect existing schools, and will work closely with the existing partnership of schools.

The new school is not expected to have an adverse impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The new school is expected to have a positive impact on two specific groups with protected characteristics:

- Children and young people: the new school will help to minimise travel distances to school, and increase choice. If sufficient primary school places are not available within the heart of the community this can affect access to out of school activities, social contact with peers, travel patterns and community cohesion.
- Children with special educational needs: the school's specialist resourced provision for children with communication and interaction needs (autism and speech and language difficulties) will increase provision in the local area.

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