

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**

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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):

Date	Action
Spring 2024	Consultation on school specification.
Sept 2024	Launch of competition for a Trust to run the proposed school.
Oct 2024	Proposer groups will submit their applications.
Nov/Dec 2024	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.
March 2025 (tbc)	Indicative date by when DfE decision on academy sponsor may be announced
2025/26	Sponsor, LA and DfE work together on pre-opening planning, resulting in a signed Supplementary Funding Agreement.
Sep 2026	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 .

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

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 500th 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.

Type of school	Primary, including nursery
Planned opening date	September 2026 (to be confirmed subject to delivery of development)
Age range	Age 2-11
Gender	Co-educational
Size of school	Rising to 3-form entry as the local population grows
Total number of primary places (Reception – Year 6)	Eventual capacity 630 primary places
Number of nursery places proposed full time equivalent nursery places (once school is at full capacity)	Rising to 120 places as the local population grows
SEND provision	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.

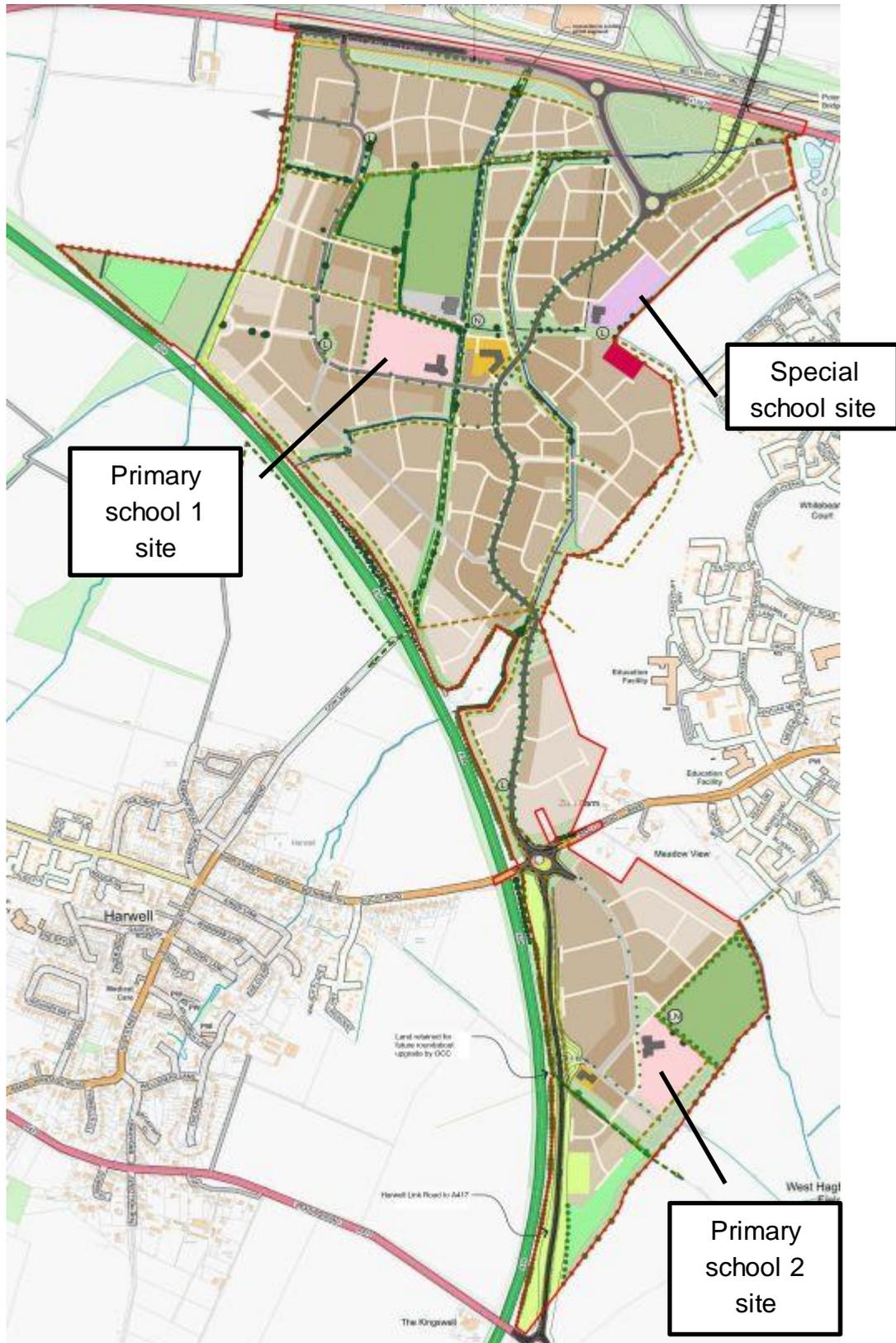
The illustrative masterplan below was submitted as part of the planning application, and shows the location of the two primary schools and the special school planned for this site.

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, 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.