



# OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## **FULL STATUTORY PROPOSAL**

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

### **Expansion of St Edburg's Church of England (VA) School**

#### **1. School and LA details**

**School:** St Edburg's Church of England (VA) School

**Address:** Pioneer Way, Bicester, OX26 1BF

**Local Authority:** Oxfordshire County Council

#### **2. Outline of proposed alteration**

In accordance with The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 ('the Prescribed Alterations Regulations'), Oxfordshire County Council is publishing this proposal to:

- Expand St Edburg's CoE (VA) School from 420 primary places to 630 primary places.
- Expand St Edburg's CoE (VA) School onto an additional "satellite" site.
- Extend the age range of St Edburg's CoE (VA) School from 3-11 to 2-11.

The alterations would be implemented as of 1 September 2023.

#### **3. Objectives**

This proposal aims to:

- Ensure sufficient primary and nursery education places for the population of the Kingsmere development in SW Bicester.
- Increase the percentage of families living in SW Bicester who are able to secure a place at their preferred primary school.
- Be supportive of high educational standards.
- Support the long-term financial viability of Bicester's primary schools.

#### **4. Background**

St Edburg's CoE (VA) School is currently a 2-form entry primary school, admitting up to 60 pupils per year group, with a total capacity for the Reception – Year 6 age range of 420 places. It also includes a one-room nursery for 3/4-year-olds.

The school is located within the Kingsmere housing development, in south-west Bicester. It was relocated to its current site, and expanded, in 2016 to meet the need for primary school places from the initial phases of the housing development.

Masterplan of the Kingsmere development, showing the school sites:



Bicester is one of the biggest growth areas within Oxfordshire. The Cherwell Local Plan includes over 10,000 new homes due to be built in the town by 2031. This scale of growth requires significant investment in additional school capacity. This will include new primary schools within the Kingsmere, Graven Hill, SE Bicester and NW Bicester developments, and new secondary schools within the Kingsmere and NW Bicester.

The first phases of this additional capacity are already complete or underway. Firstly, St Edburg's CE School relocated to Kingsmere and expanded in 2016, and Longfields Primary School expanded in 2017. The first new school – Gagle Brook Primary School in NW Bicester - opened in 2018, and a new secondary school opened in Kingsmere in 2020. A new primary school is due to open in Graven Hill in 2022. In addition, new or expanded capacity at schools surrounding Bicester provide more options for families in the area. The next step in ensuring sufficient school places in Bicester is to complete the planned school provision for the Kingsmere development in SW Bicester.

## **5. Description of proposed alterations**

Oxfordshire County Council, working with the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education and the Governing Body of St Edburg's CE School, now proposes to further expand the school by one form of entry, so that it would admit up to 90 pupils per primary year group, with a total

capacity of 630 places for the Reception – Year 6 age range. The school's nursery would also expand from one room to three rooms, and the age range of the school would be extended downwards to include a small number of 2-year-olds. The actual number and age balance of nursery pupils would vary across the year.

To accommodate this expansion, the school would be reorganised onto two sites. The current site would be the base for older pupils, in Years 3-6; the Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 (Years 1-2) base would move to purpose-built accommodation on a new site within Phase 2 of the Kingsmere development. The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education would commission the design of the new building, which would be funded from developer funding ("Section 106") contributions secured by Oxfordshire County Council from the surrounding housing developments.

## **6. Evidence of demand**

St Edburg's CoE (VA) School is the only primary school within the Kingsmere development, which comprises over 2,400 new homes, approximately 1,000 of which are not yet completed. The school's designated area is the Kingsmere development. Pupil numbers at the school are rising rapidly, and the school's Reception places have been over-subscribed from within its designated area for the last two years. Pupil numbers within Kingsmere are expected to rise further as the remaining houses are occupied.

For the 2020 admission intake, 20 pupils living within the designated area of St Edburg's were refused places at the school, meaning they had to travel to other schools. Seven of these families were not allocated places at any of their preferred schools. Only 64.1% of first preference applicants were offered a place at the school, compared to a county average of 90.6%. Families living in SW Bicester are therefore less likely than families elsewhere to secure a place at the school of their choice. Admissions data for 2020 show that the Bicester South and Ambrosden Ward (where Kingsmere is located) has the lowest level of successful first preference applications (87.6%) within the Cherwell District, and the highest level of families being offered a school which was not one of their preferences (4.9%, compared to 1.9% of families in Oxfordshire as a whole).

In order to meet the growing population living in SW Bicester, and increase the percentage of families living in this area who are able to secure a place at the school of their choice, additional primary school capacity within the SW Bicester development is needed. A site for this additional primary school provision has been secured through a Section 106 agreement, and is located within Phase 2 of the Kingsmere development.

Population forecasts for the Bicester South MSOA show that the 0-4 population is forecast to rise by 251 children between 2019 and 2025. There is, therefore, forecast to be strong growth in this age range of population, which is unsurprising given the concentration of housing development.

A sufficiency forecast for funded early education places in Bicester South has been calculated, based on current take up and availability of places projected up to summer 2022. (Projections past that date are increasingly difficult due to other market factors and policy or funding decisions, but the population data suggests demand will continue to grow beyond

that.) This shows that there is already projected to be a small shortfall of places for 2-year-olds by 2022 and a significant shortfall for 3/4-year-old places.

Bicester South	Predicted Demand	Available Places	Projected Sufficiency (surplus/shortfall)
2 Year Olds	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-3</b>
3/4 Year Olds	<b>332</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>-146</b>

To address this shortfall, as part of expanding St Edburg's CE School, additional nursery capacity would be provided, and the age range of the school lowered to include 2-year-olds. (In addition, there will be increased demand for early education and childcare which does not qualify for funding, and this need would have to be met by the private, voluntary and independent sector.)

## **7. Consultation prior to publication of this proposal**

To inform this proposal, an open consultation was carried out by the county council between 15 June and 13 July 2020. The consultation invited comments on two options: a separate new 1 form entry primary school, or the expansion of St Edburg's CE School from 2 form entry to 3 form entry, through the mechanism of splitting it across two sites.

The consultation received 71 responses:

- 34% identified as parents of children at St Edburg's CE School
- 13% identified as parents of children at other primary schools
- 39% identified as parents of children not yet at primary school
- 56% identified as local residents.

Of these responses:

- 39% expressed support for expanding St Edburg's CE School and 49% expressed opposition;
- 59% expressed support for a separate new primary school and 13% expressed opposition.

Both options therefore received both support and opposition, with the balance of support being greater for the option of a separate new school rather than an expansion of St Edburg's.

The key issues raised by the consultation, and how they have shaped this proposal, are discussed below.

## **8. Rationale for proposal**

Department for Education statutory guidance on *Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools* sets out the following factors which should be considered in proposing, and deciding on, the types of changes proposed.

## Funding

The capital (building) costs of expanding St Edburg's CE School are expected to be similar to those of building a new school, and therefore capital costs are not a factor in deciding whether to expand the existing school or establish a new school.

However, there are significant implications for revenue (running) costs for both the new or expanded school, and other local schools.

Department for Education guidance on establishing new schools discourages opening new schools which are smaller than 2 forms of entry, due to the greater risks to financial (and therefore educational) viability related to smaller schools. A new school would need to be approved by the Department for Education, which could refuse to sign a funding agreement if they considered a 1 form entry school would be unviable.

While Oxfordshire has many excellent schools which are smaller than 2 forms of entry, experience has shown that it is significantly more challenging for a new 1 form entry school to open and grow quickly enough to be viable.

Current data do not support the opening of more than 1 form of entry of additional primary school capacity within Kingsmere. Although primary pupil numbers are still growing in SW Bicester, growth in pupil numbers has slowed down, and there is now a risk that two separate schools in such close proximity competing for pupils would result in one or both schools having too few pupils to be financially viable in the longer term.

As a single, larger primary school, an expanded St Edburg's would benefit from economies of scale, for example only having one head teacher rather than the two headteachers needed for two separate schools. As the school budget is primarily based on pupil numbers any money saved on running costs means more money is spent on the children.

During the consultation, existing education providers in Bicester expressed concern that a separate new school in SW Bicester could be destabilising to other schools, as it would need to compete for pupils to enable it to grow rapidly enough to become financially viable. All of the local primary education providers who responded to the consultation supported expansion of St Edburg's CE School in preference to the establishment of a new school.

## Education standards and diversity of provision

St Edburg's CE School is a popular and successful school, which is over-subscribed and has a "Good" Ofsted rating. At the time of publication of this proposal, all primary schools in Bicester have a "Good" Ofsted rating (with the exception of Gagle Brook Primary School, which has not yet been inspected). Access to good schools for families in Bicester is therefore already very high.

During the consultation, 14% of respondents indicated that expanding St Edburg's would be beneficial to educational quality because of the proven standards at St Edburg's, and/or expressed concern that two separate schools in close proximity would be divisive. 6% of respondents were concerned that a split site would be detrimental to the effectiveness of ethos of St Edburg's CE School, for example by reducing interaction between older and younger pupils.

As set out above, the establishment of a separate new 1 form entry primary school could risk educational standards. Either the new school may grow too slowly to be viable, or it may attract pupils away from other schools, destabilising their budgets.

Expanding an existing school does not create the same challenges to financial viability as opening a brand-new school. St Edburg's is already established and operates with a substantial budget; it would receive additional funding to cover the costs of growth. As one large school, St Edburg's would have more flexibility with its budget to react to fluctuations in pupil numbers. Greater economies of scale would free up resources to benefit education, and staff would benefit from greater development opportunities.

During the consultation, 31% of respondents made clear they had a preference for a separate new school in order to increase choice and diversity of school provision, in particular for a non-church school option (21%). This is a significant argument in favour of establishing a separate new school.

However, two separate schools may not provide the degree of choice that might be imagined, as if one school is over-subscribed, families living further away would not get a place at their preferred school and therefore feel disadvantaged. A separate new school would not be able to open all year groups at once, and therefore it would be several years before parents moving into the development would be able to secure a place at the new school for older children. St Edburg's CE School would be able to set up additional classes for older pupils sooner than a new school could afford to do.

Although St Edburg's is a voluntary aided Church of England school, it is open to children of faith or of no faith - there is nothing in the school's admission policy about attendance at church. The school focuses on children's spiritual, not religious, development.

Clearly, the county council's proposal to expand St Edburg's CE School, if approved, would mean that parents specifically seeking a school unattached to the Church of England would need to send their children to a school outside of the Kingsmere development. Within Bicester town, with the exception of St Mary's (VA) Catholic School, all other schools are non-church schools.

### Travel and accessibility

During the consultation, 28% of respondents expressed concern that a split site expansion of St Edburg's would create travel and accessibility difficulties, especially for families with children at both sites. In particular, there is potential for an adverse effect on transport and the environment as parents dropping off and collecting children on two sites are more likely to do so by vehicle than by sustainable options such as walking or cycling. However, it was also noted that this could still happen if the two schools were separate, as some families may be unable to get all children into one school especially before a new school is operating in all year groups.

In response to these concerns, and to minimise any negative impact, it is proposed that St Edburg's manages a "Walking Bus" between the two sites. This would allow siblings to be dropped off together at one site. It is estimated that approximately 10% of Key Stage 2 pupils would use the Walking Bus. It is proposed that the Walking Bus would start from the new site

at 8.40 am and Key Stage 2 children would be supervised by school staff to walk to the current Pioneer Way site. At the end of the day, at 3.15 pm, Key Stage 2 children would be supervised to walk back to the new site for their parents to collect them. To allow time for movement between sites, the school would have flexible starts and finishes from 8.45-9.00 am and 3.15-3.30 pm. Wrap Around Care will be offered at both sites with earlier start times (7.15am) and later collection times (5.45pm) to ensure that parents can collect children from both sites without losing work time.

The two sites are approximately half a mile apart, for most of which there is a wide dedicated pedestrian/cycle path. The proposed Walking Bus will help establish sustainable travel to school behaviour by giving children experience of walking to school under supervision.

### Community cohesion

During the consultation a few respondents commented that one school serving the whole of the Kingsmere development would support community cohesion, and that St Edburg's had built a strong reputation for community engagement. However, this is unlikely to be a significant factor in determining this proposal.

### Equal opportunities issues

The decision-maker must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which requires them to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics to be considered are: age (including children and young people), disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

It is not anticipated that the proposal to expand St Edburg's CE School will affect people negatively in a disproportionate manner because of their protected characteristics;. The expansion will increase the availability of school places and therefore be beneficial to children and families, although by choosing to expand St Edburg's in preference to a separate new school, there is a greater benefit to parents choosing a church school rather than those who choose a non-church school.

*There are additional factors to be considered relating to the establishment of a satellite site.*

### The rationale for a satellite site

The current site area of St Edburg's CE School is 2.22ha, which is the size required by the county council for a 2-form entry school. Expanding the school on its current site would result in it becoming over-crowded. The proposed satellite site area has been secured by the county council to support primary education provision within the Kingsmere development.

The proposal for a split site would allow an innovative approach to tailoring educational provision to the specific needs of the age groups. Younger children would not feel overwhelmed by being at a large school as they would be in an environment designed at their scale, rather than one suited to children much older. The use of the Key Stage 2 site could be adapted to better prepare children for secondary school through the creation of specialist spaces for subjects such as Music, Languages and IT.

#### Admission and curriculum arrangements

The new site would be for the younger children and the current site would be for the older children, but the school would be one primary school, and not separate Infant and Junior schools. This means that once admitted into the school, children would progress through the year groups as now, and families would not need to reapply after Key Stage 1. The school would continue to plan the whole curriculum as a whole to ensure that children have a broad and balanced experience to build their skills and knowledge. There would be a single set of subject leaders, as there are now, to provide cohesion and continuity across the whole age range. Although children would spend most of their time on one of the sites, sometimes they would use the other site – for example, sometimes the whole school would come together for events and celebrations.

#### Governance and administration

There would be one governance, leadership and management structure across both sites, and staff would be employed to work on both sites, although on a day-to-day basis most staff would be based at one site. The Head and deputy(ies) would have offices on both sites and would work equally on both sites, and both sites would have caretakers managed by the School's Business Manager.

#### Physical characteristics of the school

Each site would have its own facilities such as playgrounds, halls and dining areas. These would be tailored to the needs of the different age ranges. The two sites would be approximately half a mile, or a 10-15 minute walk, apart, and both are easily accessible to residents within the Kingsmere development.

### **9. The effect on other schools, academies and educational institutions within the area**

The proposed expansion is in line with expected population growth in the local area, and is therefore not expected to have a significant adverse effect on other educational institutions.

### **10. Project costs and funding**

An options appraisal is underway to identify the cost of expansion, which is expected to be in the region of £8m. The project would be funded from developer contributions secured by the county council from local housing developments.



## **11. Implementation and any proposed stages for implementation**

It is expected that building work will be completed by September 2023, enabling the school to increase its admission number from this date. In the first instance, the school would increase the intake into the Reception class, but if there is sufficient demand then it would also seek to open additional classes for older pupils. It would also be able to take additional nursery pupils from this date.

## **12. Objections and comments**

Comments or objections must be received by the local authority by midnight on **23 October 2020**.

Respond by:

- using the online questionnaire at <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stedburgs>
- emailing [school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk) (*please quote 'St Edburg's Expansion' in the subject line*)

## **13. Decision-making**

The decision-maker for this proposed expansion is Oxfordshire County Council. The decision will be made by the Cabinet Member for Education and Cultural Services at a meeting which is open to the public, and publicised on the county council's website. The decision must be made within a period of two months of the end of this representation period, and is currently expected on 11 November 2020.