



Department
for Education

Surrey Special Free School

**Contextual information for applicant
groups applying to open a new
Special Free School**

Surrey County Council

May 2023

OVERVIEW

The Department for Education is inviting applications from proposer groups to open a new special free school in Surrey.

Applicant groups can access the key school specification information, along with the full 'How to Apply' guidance, on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). You should read these documents carefully before completing mandatory pre-registration.

The school specification document sets out the key factual details about the proposed school, including the proposed size, SEND designation, age range, suggested top-up funding, and proposed site.

This document provides applicant groups with additional contextual information provided by Surrey County Council, which includes:

- The rationale, context and need for the school;
- Details on the commissioning of places, including the involvement of any other LAs commissioning places;
- A brief description of the existing provision in the area;
- Future expected growth in pupil numbers; and
- How the LA expects places within the school to be filled.

RATIONALE, CONTEXT AND NEED FOR THE SCHOOL, INCLUDING PROPOSED COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

Wider context:

Surrey County Council is the county council administering certain services in the non-metropolitan county of Surrey in England. The council is composed of 81 elected councillors. The leader of the council is Tim Oliver. The county comprises of four quadrants (North East, North West, South East, South West of the county) and eleven district and boroughs (Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking).

As of September 2022, Surrey County Council (SCC) currently maintains around 12,430 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people aged 0-25 years. Over 11,000 of these are for children and young people aged 4-19 years. Latest sufficiency modelling projections from September 2022 indicates growth in the total number of Surrey resident pupils aged 4-19 years with EHCPs over the forecast period 2018- 2032, reaching its peak in 2026/27 and 2027/28, reducing slightly thereafter. This represents 22% growth overall from 2021/22. By 2031/32, the total number of Surrey EHCP pupils in Reception (4-5 years old) to Year 14 (18-19 years old), is projected to be almost 1,700 higher than the 2021- 22 total.

SCC's existing state-maintained specialist education estate consists of around 830 places in 52 mainstream SEN Units/ Resourced Provision in primary and secondary schools and more than 3,160 places in 25 special schools. The current demand for specialist school places for children and young people with SEND has increased by 73% since 2015, and this in turn has increased Surrey's sustained reliance on the independent sector to ensure all pupils are able to access a suitable full-time education. (See 2021/22 Children and with EHCPs education in NMSS or independent schools versus the national average).

Surrey's SEND Strategy:

SCC's [Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy \(2023 to 2026\)](#), the [Community vision for Surrey in 2030](#) and [Surrey Children and Young People's Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health Strategy](#) define the Council and wider 'SEND' Partnership's strategic priorities to ensure all children have the opportunity to attend a good school local to them so that they can learn, grow and develop in their community. This includes the adopted county-wide commitment to root children in their local communities and ensure no one is left behind.

The new Inclusion and Additional Needs strategy sets out the ambition that all Surrey's children and young people with additional needs and disabilities are enabled to lead their best possible life. To ensure the strategy was co-produced, practitioners and those with lived experience took part in collaborative workshops throughout 2022.

Surrey's aspiration is to enable Surrey children and young people aged 0 to 25 with additional needs and/ or disabilities to lead the best possible life. Our Inclusion and Additional Needs strategy sets out our ambition that all Surrey children and young people with additional needs and/ or disabilities and their families:

1. are heard and are involved in the decisions that affect them
2. achieve positive outcomes, including the opportunity to lead healthy lives
3. develop positive relationships
4. learn and achieve their educational potential, and
5. become increasingly independent where possible and flourish within their community

To achieve this, we will work in partnership with families and colleagues across education, health, social care and the third sector to:

- improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people and their families and ensure that no-one is left behind
- be a champion for children and young people with additional needs and/or disabilities
- ensure children and young people are rooted in Surrey and educated locally, wherever possible
- learn from our feedback and continue our improvement journey

Desired Outcomes:

- Pupils with additional needs and disabilities can attend a good local school with the right package of support that can meet their needs at the right time, reducing the number of EHCPs, one-to-one tuition, elective home education and managed moves.
- Improving the sufficiency of the right sort of maintained specialist educational provision that meets the needs of communities in Surrey enables in the long term reduces home to school travel distances (and associated home to school transport budget costs) and the requirement for independent and residential placements by virtue of Surrey children with additional needs and disabilities being educated closer to home.
- All pupils have the right opportunities to develop the skills necessary to be full prepared for adulthood and they are supported by high-quality providers, so that a greater number of learners with additional needs and disabilities enter further education and go on secure successful employment as adults.

- Surrey, as a community, is welcoming and inclusive, where support and advice can be accessed easily when it is needed and where all schools support children and young people with additional needs and disabilities to be part of their wider communities. High quality evidence-based outreach support offers to mainstream schools supports stepdown from specialist provision where pupils needs may be better met in mainstream, thereby reducing the requirement for the sustained use of alternative provision.
- The state maintained specialist education estate is fit for purpose in the long term and addresses sufficiency demand by need type, phase of education and geographical location. It delivers the required places, facilities and space to provide suitable learning environments for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities and reduces delays in placing pupils who have EHCPs.
- Surrey's ability to deliver services and support for children, young people, and families, whilst remaining financially sustainable increases to eliminate the Council's Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block deficit and embed sustainable practices to work within the level of overall funding.

Surrey's Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy runs to the end of 2026. The outcomes and Key Performance Indicators are monitored by Surrey's Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership Board. The new strategy will run from 2023 to 2026 and covers:

- Leadership, governance and partnership accountability, which includes the planned reduction of the use of independent provision, persistent absence, exclusions and managed moves
- Coproduction and increased choices locally
- Early identification, information and support, which focuses on high quality teaching, prompt access to targeted support and timely access to specialist services and support
- Inclusion in education and community, which emphasises the planned reduction in home to school travel distances
- Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years and achieving positive education and destination outcomes
- Joint commissioning, sufficiency of specialist school places and evaluation,
- Systems and practice, which brings together education, health and care partners with local government and local inclusion planning setting out how each area will meet the national standards.

Capital Investment in Specialist Educational Provision:

SCC is expanding the specialist education estate at pace in order to ensure children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and require a specialist school placement can have their education needs met close to home and within state-maintained provision wherever possible.

Between 2019 and 2023 Cabinet approved the strategies and capital investment of c£214m for four phases of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Programme. With this investment the programme is aiming to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019-2026 to create capacity for 5,760 state-maintained specialist places by 2030/31.

As of September 2022, accommodation for around 800 new specialist school places has already been delivered across Surrey through 34 Capital projects at a cost of £37m. As a result of this, Surrey's state maintained specialist education estate has been increased by more than 700 places, from around 3,320 in 2019 when the Capital programme started to around 4,000 places now. These specialist school places are almost full, noting that new places are still being phased in and some of the existing accommodation needs to be re-provided as it is not fit for purpose.

The Council's Capital Programme forms one important aspect of Surrey's Additional Needs Strategy and Transformation Programme which aims to improve outcomes for children with additional needs and disabilities and embed financially sustainable practices to work within the level of funding available.

The Council's Safety Valve Agreement with the DfE (March 2022), which aims to eliminate the council's Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block deficit, includes a condition to deliver an ambitious Capital programme that will improve the long-term sufficiency of state-maintained specialist educational provision that meets the needs of communities across Surrey.

Prior to entering into the safety valve agreement, the Council's High Needs Block was projected to reach a deficit of £118m at the end of 21/22. Increasing capacity in the specialist education estate is essential to delivering a sustainable High Needs Block.

Planning:

SCC is proposing to open a 170-place co-educational special free school in the north of the county for pupils aged 11-19 years to meet the locality demand for **up to 258 places by 2026/27**. This would be a day school because by virtue of pupils being educated closer to home and rooted in their local communities, residential provision would not be required.

Existing SEMH designated Specialist Schools in Surrey:

Of the 25 state-maintained special schools in Surrey, only four are designated to meet the needs of pupils with significant and complex social, emotional, and mental health needs. These include:

- **Wishmore Cross Academy** in Woking NE Surrey, which is a coeducational school for pupils aged 7-16 years has a capacity of 93 places, of which 87% are currently occupied. Academies Enterprise Trust manage the school, which was expanded by 28 places by SCC following Regional Schools Commissioner approval in 2021. The school has a current Ofsted judgement of Requires Improvement and was last inspected in 2022.

There is no further expansion potential in the North of the County as the school has been expanded to maximum capacity on the current site. Therefore, the existing provision in the North of the County will not meet the demand for up to 219 additional specialist school places and a new special free school is required to meet long term demand from 2026/27.

- **Bramley Oak Academy** in Guildford SW Surrey, which is a school for boys aged 7-11 years has a capacity of 61 places of which 100% are currently occupied. London South East Academies Trust manage the school, which is due to expand by 49 places to a capacity of 104 and become co-educational by September 2024. The school was previously Wey House School, and converted in 2019, following an Ofsted judgement of Inadequate in 2018. Inspection is due imminently and the school is on track for an at least Good Ofsted Judgement.

Primary age specialist school place projections overall all do not support any further expansion and there are existing site limitations.

- **Grafham Grange School** in Guildford SW Surrey, which is a coeducational school for pupils aged 11-16 years has a capacity of 70 and a PAN of 56 places, of which 98% are currently occupied. Orchard Hill College Academies Trust manage the school and there are no plans to expand the school to capacity at this point due to school improvement issues that still need to be addressed. The school has a current Ofsted judgement of Requires Improvement and was last inspected in 2020. A monitoring visit in July 2022 highlighted ongoing concerns by Ofsted in relation to the quality of special educational provision, behaviour management, persistent absence and lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.

SCC in partnership with the Trust need to ensure that existing academy doesn't become too big to manage while necessary school improvement activity is ongoing.

- **Unified Academy** in Dorking SE Surrey, which is a school for boys aged 11-16 years has a capacity of 105 and a PAN of 75 places, of which 71% are currently occupied. Orchard Hill College Academies Trust manage the school and there are no plans to expand the school to capacity at this point.

The school has a current Ofsted judgement of Requires Improvement and was last inspected in 2022. Staff have made significant and rapid improvements to all areas of the school since they took up their posts following the last inspection and the previous Ofsted judgement of Inadequate. Areas that still need to improve include pupil attendance and embedding recent curriculum developments to address gaps in pupils' learning.

Once improvements are fully embedded the potential for an additional 30 places will support sufficiency demand in the SE. However, our pupil number forecasts indicate that expansion alone will not be sufficient to meet the level of demand projected demand in the SE of the county over the next 10 years. Therefore, the existing provision in the South East of the County will not meet the locality demand for up to 150 additional specialist school places and a new special free school is required to meet long term demand from 2026/27.

The impact of the current lack of good quality SEMH specialist provision and particularly the availability of special school places for girls in the north of the county means that:

- Approximately 80 children (40%) from this area of the county with significant SEMH needs who require a specialist school placement are currently educated in the independent sector at a cost of c£4.24m per year. 100 equivalent state-maintained places would cost in the region of c£1.84m per year.
- Continued use of the independent sector at the current rate is unsustainable and severely impacts Surrey's ability to deliver services and support for children, young people, and families, whilst remaining financially sustainable.
- Around 61% of this cohort are educated out of county.
- 87% of this cohort also travel more than 7 miles between home and school each day. For pupils with complex and significant SEMH needs, this severely impacts on their readiness to learn and emotional well-being when they get to school.
- 86% of Electively Home Educated pupils are girls with SEMH needs and this rate has increased by 23% within the past 12 months.
- As of 2021/22 Surrey has c1,850 pupils who attend Alternative Provision with pupils resident in the north and south east of the county being the greatest users.

- Approximately 94% of this cohort are pupils with EHCPs and a high proportion have SEMH identified as either primary or co-occurring needs. These pupils spend extensive periods in AP because of numerous unsuccessful managed moves and placements elsewhere. This in turn puts pressure on short stay place availability which has the potential to meet needs and achieve successful reintegration for pupils with less severe needs.
- Permanent exclusions of pupils with SEMH needs have increased by 160% since 2020/21. The data below details the position as of academic year 2021/22:
 - 26 Permanent exclusions: Boys 14 (54%), Girls 12 (46%)
 - 558 Fixed Period Exclusions: Boys 357 (64%), Girls 201 (36%)

EXISTING PROVISION, EXPECTED FUTURE GROWTH IN PUPIL NUMBERS, AND HOW PLACES IN THE NEW SCHOOL WILL BE FILLED

There is significant evidence of need for additional SEMH specialist school provision.

Surrey's [School Organisation Plan 2022-2032](#) sets out our aims for providing education close to home by local providers, and the forecasting methodology for both mainstream and specialist education across the county (also, see data from School Census, SEN2, National Statistics SEND in England Jan 2022).

SEMH needs in Surrey

As of 2021/22 Surrey County Council maintains a total of approximately 2,000 statutory EHCPs for the county's children and young people who have SEND aged up to 25 years who SEMH needs. Around 1,200 of these are for pupils aged 11- 19 years.

- Approximately 40% (c450) of these pupils attend specialist provision.
- Almost 50% (more than 200) of those pupils are educated at non-maintained and independent schools (NMI) or specialist independent provision (SPI).
- 11% of that cohort attend specialist school places outside of Surrey's borders.
- Around 30% (c140) of that cohort attend special schools which are either ASD or MLD designated.

Children and young people nationally are experiencing increased and significant social, emotional, and mental health challenges. Surrey County Council (SCC) saw significant growth of 52% (from 290 places in 2018/19 to 440 places in 2021/2022) in the number of children and young people with SEND who have social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs aged 11-19 years and require a maintained specialist school placement. These pupils require highly specialist teaching and learning opportunities as well as pastoral support to manage their anxiety, cooccurring mental health and SEN (such as autism and moderate learning difficulties) in order to make good progress and achieve academic qualifications.

By 2026/27 this growth is expected to increase by around 111% (to c610 places) when compared to 2018/19 figures. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs are the second most prevalent specific SEND need-type amongst children and young people in Surrey with EHCPs. This is explored in greater detail in Surrey's SEMH Special Free Schools Needs Analysis, which is available [here](#).

Children and young people with significant SEMH needs often feel anxious, scared, and misunderstood. This means that they may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include:

- Language and communication needs, leading to becoming withdrawn or socially isolated.
- Severe difficulty in building and maintaining healthy relationships with peers and adults, which increases social vulnerability, safeguarding risks and impacts on successful community participation.
- Sustained difficulty engaging with learning and coping in classroom environments due to difficulty managing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours without additional highly specialist strategies and interventions to help manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. This can lead to breakdown in relationships, disengagement from learning and long periods of absence from education.
- Displaying worrying behaviour that may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harm, substance misuse, eating disorders, habit disorders, oppositional disorders, or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. These can impact severely on children and young people's development of independence, ability to cope with the normal stresses of life, engagement with productive and fruitful activity, and capacity to contribute to his or her community.
- Trauma, post-traumatic stress, or depressive conditions associated with adverse childhood experiences, including neglect or abuse. These experiences can have long-term impacts on children and young people's emotional well-being, mental health, and future life chances.

- Co-occurring special educational needs including autism spectrum conditions, mild to moderate learning difficulties and speech and language difficulties. This can mean that individuals may be at increased risk of placement breakdown if their primary and secondary needs are not well understood.
- Persistent absence problems associated with emotional school-based anxiety. This can mean that progress can be very challenging in some or all areas of the school curriculum because difficulties such as phobias, anxiety, depression, aggression, oppositional problems, and hyperactivity all create significant barriers to learning.

The proposed new school is part of a wider capital programme being delivered across Surrey to provide up to 6,000 state-maintained specialist school places across Surrey by 2030/31. This directly supports achievement of cost containment targets aligned with SCC's Safety Valve Agreement with the DfE and the current DSG Management Plan (March 2022) that results in an in-year balance in the DSG HNB by 2029/30 to allow Surrey to continue to deliver services and support for children, young people, and families, whilst remaining financially sustainable.

This is also aligned with [Surrey's Joint Commissioning Strategy 2017-2022](#) which emphasis key priorities that include delivering an integrated SEND offer with and for Surrey's children and families and supporting our children, young people and families to lead healthy lifestyles and have good emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Evidence of engagement

Stakeholders in Surrey are very supportive of the proposal. SCC undertook public consultation and engagement activity on the proposed new SEMH school with local parents of children with SEND, young people, residents, mainstream and special schools, colleges, health providers, school phase councils, parent and carer forums, commissioning bodies and neighbouring local authorities from 2 September to 7 October 2022. This was in order to gauge opinion and support for the proposals and a total of 190 responses were received. Full details including the consultation and engagement documentation, Q&As, needs analysis and consultation analysis are available [here](#).

97% of responses were positive, stating that they agreed there was a need for additional SEMH designated specialist school provision and 94% agreeing with our proposals to meet that need.