

Applications for Two New SEMH Designated Special Free Schools

**LA Consultation Analysis**

**October 2022**

## Initial LA Consultation – Feedback Analysis

### Background

SCC is applying to the Department for Education (DfE) Special Free School Programme to open two new special free schools (one in the north of the county and one in the south east) to accommodate boys and girls with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). Both schools would cater for pupils aged 11 to 16 years and the school in the north would also have sixth form provision. Admissions will be in line with [Surrey County Council's SEND Admissions Process](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/admissions/child-with-a-ehcp). It is envisaged that the new schools would provide up to 320 places at full capacity between them.

The local authority ran consultation and public engagement activity with local residents, schools, prospective sponsors from 2 September to 7 October 2022 in advance of submitting formal bids to the DfE. The consultation process involved publishing a set of documents online with an opportunity to complete a consultation form. There were also two online events that interested parties could attend to gather more information, ask questions and offer opinions. Furthermore, an engagement session was held with “ATLAS”, Surrey’s user voice group for children and young people with Additional Needs and Disabilities, which provided very positive feedback. This was in order to gauge opinion and support for the proposals and this document provides analysis the 171 responses received.

### Respondents

The majority of the responses came from parents as shown in the table and chart below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Response Number** | **Response %** |
| Parents/Carers | 97 | 51% |
| Local Residents | 38 | 20% |
| Education Professionals | 32 | 17% |
| Other Family Members | 9 | 5% |
| Neighbouring LA | 2 | 1% |
| Other | 12 | 6% |

### Breakdown of Residence of Respondents

The consultation proposed the establishment of two new special free schools in the north of the county and the south east but there were responses from people living across the county and beyond. A breakdown by district and quadrant is shown in Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1: Resident District & Borough of responders to LA Consultation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **District** | **Responses** | **Response %** |
| Elmbridge | 15 | 8% |
| Epsom and Ewell | 27 | 14% |
| Guildford | 20 | 11% |
| Mole Valley | 17 | 9% |
| Reigate and Banstead | 21 | 11% |
| Runnymede | 18 | 9% |
| Spelthorne | 14 | 7% |
| Surrey Heath | 12 | 6% |
| Tandridge | 10 | 5% |
| Waverley | 20 | 11% |
| Woking | 6 | 3% |
| Other | 10 | 5% |

Table 2: Resident Quadrant of responders to LA Consultation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Quadrant** | **Responses** | **Response %** |
| North East | 56 | 29% |
| North West | 36 | 19% |
| South East | 48 | 25% |
| South West | 40 | 21% |
| Other | 10 | 5% |

### General Themes

As part of the consultation, respondents were given the opportunity to put forward their view in a free text format. An analysis of these responses has picked up the following general themes:

1. Geography

* It is important the schools are located to serve as wide an area as possible.
* There needs to be good transport links and arrangements to be able to access the schools.
* At the young people engagement event, a number of participants highlighted the need to reduce journey times to school.
* The link to the local community is important.

2. Facilities

* There should be a good environment for the pupils including outside space.
* The accommodation and facilities should be fit for purpose to meet the needs of the children.
* The size of the school is important – big enough to meet demand but not too big that the children find it unsettling.

3. Needs

* There should be mental health and therapeutic provision included in the offer.
* There is a need to recognise the co-occurring needs often present including autism and communication and interaction needs.
* More provision for girls with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and co-occurring needs is required.

4. Staffing

* It is important to get experienced and qualified staff who have the expertise to support children and young people with these types of needs.
* Staff should have access to relevant, specialist training.
* Staff should have high aspirations for the pupils at the schools.

### Overall Themes

Two questions were asked to gauge each respondent’s general view of the proposal. The responses were overwhelmingly positive as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Responses to general yes/no questions

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Yes** | **Not Sure** | **No** |
| Do you agree with the proposal to open two new co-educational special free schools with places for up to 320 pupils with SEMH needs in Surrey from 2026 onwards? | 178 | 3 | 9 |
| Do you agree that there is a need for additional special school provision in Surrey to serve children and young people with significant SEMH needs? | 184 | 1 | 5 |

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### Positive Responses and Feedback

The vast majority of responses were positive with 97% 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.

Most of those in favour stressed what they saw as a pressing need for additional specialist school places for children and young people with SEMH. Some argued the need to provide even more places or move faster to provide them. The benefits of these projects listed by respondents in favour include reduced travel times and have a setting that was right for the needs of their children.

### Negative Responses and Issues Raised

In terms of negative responses, the size of the school was mentioned with a couple of respondents preferring very small provision for pupils with these needs. However, other respondents urged us to provide as many places as possible.

There were questions as to whether the provision ought to be expanded to cover the south west of the county and the primary sector but the data around pupil number forecasts does not support a bid around those areas.

One respondent raised concerns that opening new provision would see already stretched resources further spread more thinly amongst more schools. However, these proposals would in fact reduce the reliance on more expensive independent and out of county placements and contain costs, which would allow Surrey to continue to deliver services and support for children, young people, and families, whilst remaining financially sustainable.

A number of respondents mentioned the importance of pupils being able to integrate with mainstream peers. These proposals would add to SCC’s existing capital programme to provide additional SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) places; that programme will deliver the expansion of a wide variety of specialist provision enabling local children and young people to access the support they need in the right state-maintained school at the right time so that no one is left behind. In this case we are looking to create two new schools for pupils whose significant and complex special educational needs and disabilities mean they require a special school placement either in the short or longer term to make good personal as well as academic progress and achieve their potential.

Finally, a very small number of respondents advocated SCC focusing on improving and expanding existing schools in Surrey rather than building new ones. The Capital Programme is already expanding two local SEMH designated special schools and the long term demand for additional places far exceeds the expansion potential of existing provision in the county. To that end, our 10 year sufficiency forecasts indicate that we will need both new schools on top of existing provision to ensure that Surrey resident girls as well as boys with significant social, emotional and mental health needs have opportunities to attend a school local to them so that they can learn, grow and develop in their local community.