

Applications for Two New SEMH Designated Special Free Schools

**Questions and responses resulting from**

**LA Consultation & Public**

**Engagement Activity**

**02/09/2022-07/10/2022**

## Initial LA Consultation – Frequently Asked Questions

### 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). The new 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. This document provides responses the most frequently asked questions raised during the consultation and public engagement events.

### Why have these locations been chosen for the new schools when there is a need for additional places in other areas as well? Should the schools not also cater for primary aged pupils?

Surrey County Council (SCC) commission pupil number forecasts from Edge Analytics that show projected demand for specialist school places over the next ten years, based on trends from the previous four years. These forecasts are broken down by need type, school type, phase of Education and by geographical location. Edge Analytics also provide an analysis of current trends in terms of where pupils with EHCPs live and how far they have to travel to attend their nearest most appropriate school. This data enables us to specifically identify areas where there is already high demand for places or where significant growth is projected to be. It has helped us identify that there is a specific need for new special school places for children and young people with significant social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in the North and South East of the County. Alongside planned growth to the current specialist estate delivered through Surrey’s Capital Programme, these needs can only be met in the long term by opening two new special schools.

### Why will the new school be a Free School and not run by the local authority?

Since 2012 (following the Education Act 2011), where a local authority identifies the need for a new school in its area, it must seek proposals to open a new Free School. Free Schools are academies, which means that they are run by an academy trust and Surrey County Council manages the admissions arrangements for pupils with EHCPs. Many of the existing special schools in Surrey are Academies or Free Schools and provide good or outstanding provision as part of Surrey’s wider Specialist Education Estate. The opportunity to bid for these new schools is part of a programme by the Department for Education to open 60 new special free schools. If our applications are successful they would fund and deliver the construction of the schools.

### What support services will be delivered including mental health and therapeutic support?

The character and ethos of the new schools will be aligned with [Surrey’s Children and Young People’s Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health Strategy](https://www.surreyheartlandsccg.nhs.uk/documents/documents/get-involved/engagement-consultation-programmes/ewmh-for-children-and-young-people/260-190507-ewmh-surrey-cyp-strategy-cyp-version-v6-0-gwccg/file) to improve the lives of people with social, emotional, and mental health needs living in the county. This needs to include opportunities for Surrey's pupils that require a special school placement to achieve their full potential, be independent, live healthy and fulfilling lives, where their contributions to their local communities are welcomed, supported, and valued, and no-one is left behind.

The provision at the new schools will deliver a person-centred development strategy that underpins the educational vision and nurtures the abilities of all pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs to promote identity, emotional understanding, and overall well-being. This is to ensure that all pupils at the special school are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged within a positive school climate

The whole school approach, including trauma-informed, nurture and attachment philosophy that will be adopted by the school sponsors and all staff will support the integrative therapeutic support offer and include:

* Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (as appropriate to individual pupils)
* Counselling
* Play, Drama, Music and Art Therapy (as appropriate to the cohorts of pupils)
* Educational and Clinical Psychology (to offer higher-level expertise and oversee therapeutic support delivered by school staff)
* Speech and Language Therapy as specified in pupils EHCPs (either direct support where the need is identified or to oversee therapeutic support delivered by school staff)
* Occupational Therapy as specified in pupils EHCPs (either direct support where the need is identified or to oversee therapeutic support delivered by school staff)

The schools will also be required to work with Surrey’s Mental Health Schools Team (Mindworks) to support the emotional well-being and mental health of their pupils.

### Why can’t the schools be smaller?

There is a balance between providing all of the additional places needed and creating schools that are too big. Moreover, the schools will need to have enough pupils to attract sufficient funding in order to be financially viable in the first year of opening, as well as in the longer-term. The proposed pupil numbers are not especially large for schools of this type and within those schools pupils would be taught in groups of around eight.

### Why can’t you expand existing provision instead?

SCC has already expanded Wishmore Cross Academy by 28 places (primary and secondary) and Bramley Oak Academy (primary) will be expanded by 49 places by September 2024. The scope for expansions is finite and limited by site constraints, planning constraints and the need to ensure existing schools don’t become too big to manage effectively. Our pupil number forecasts indicate that expansions alone will not be sufficient to meet the level of demand projected over the next 10 years. To that end, 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.

Furthermore, the lack of provision in the North and South East of the county means pupils are travelling long distances out of their local area to attend a school place that can successfully meet their needs. Details of this are provided in our needs analysis, which can be found here: <https://www.surreysays.co.uk/csf/applications-for-2-new-semh-special-free-schools>

### Wouldn’t it be better to integrate these children and young people in a mainstream setting?

SCC, Surrey schools and partners are committed to providing high quality teaching, prompt access to targeted support and timely access to specialist services and support for pupils to enable them to thrive within a mainstream environment wherever possible. However, it is important to recognise that children and young people who are placed by the local authority at special schools have a combination of significant and complex special educational needs and disabilities, which means they require significantly more highly specialist teaching and support than is ordinarily available in a mainstream school or SEN Unit in order to make good progress and achieve academic qualifications. It is for these cohorts of pupils that these proposals are targeted.

### How much funding will the new schools attract for each pupil?

Top-up rates are pupil-specific, guided by assessment against the descriptors in Surrey’s high needs banding matrix, but the assumption is that the majority of the new school’s pupils would have needs within the scope of band S4. Total funding based on current rates is as follows:

**As of September 2022:**

