



Consultation on New Special Free School

Proposed New Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) Designated Special Free Schools. Applications to DfE Special Free Schools Programme



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Introduction

Context:

Surrey County Council has a legal duty to manage its specialist education estate efficiently to avoid detriment to schools' educational offers, creating disadvantage to children and young people who have distinct types of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in different geographical areas, or the local authority's financial position.

The [Community vision for Surrey in 2030](#) and [Surrey Children and Young People's Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health Strategy](#) define the Council's strategic priorities to ensure all children have the opportunity to attend a 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.

Children and young people nationally are experiencing increased and significant social, emotional, and mental health challenges. Surrey County Council (SCC) saw significant growth of 46% (from 290 places in 2018/19 to 420 places in 2020/2021) 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. By 2026/27 this growth is expected to increase by around 120% (to 630 places) when compared to 2018/19 figures.

A long-term sufficiency gap for additional specialist school places for this cohort has been identified in the north and the south east of the county. The impact of this means that approximately 300 children and young people aged 11-19 years in Surrey with significant SEMH needs are currently educated in the independent sector and around 55% are educated out of county. These children have to travel long distances outside of their resident district and quadrant each day to attend a special school that can successfully meet their needs, which severely impacts on their readiness to learn when they get to school and their future outcomes.

In June the Department for Education (DfE), launched its next wave of [DfE Special Free School Applications 2022](#), which is one of the routes local authorities can follow to apply to set up a new school in their area. The application process is open to all local authorities across the country. Under existing Government legislation, all new schools must be 'Free Schools'. Free schools are legally academies, which are state-funded schools operated by academy trusts. The process for opening the new special free schools will see the DfE fund and manage the construction of the buildings, and local authorities have been asked to provide suitable sites.

Subject to the outcome of this consultation, SCC proposes to submit two applications (the maximum allowed) by the deadline of midday on Friday 21 October 2022. Three potential sites have already been identified by SCC Land & Property teams for this purpose: two in the north of the county and one in the south east of the county. If our applications are successful, the new schools will be delivered by the DfE in 2026/27 and the expectation is that the schools will reach capacity over a 4–5-year period.

Should SCC be successful, the developments will create two new coeducational SEMH Designated Special Free Schools, delivered by the DfE which will provide around 320 urgently needed additional specialist school places from 2026/27.

The location of the new special schools will provide local residents in the north and south east quadrants who have children with significant social, emotional, and mental health needs closer access to high quality specialist education and dramatically reduced home to school journey times.

Rationale (evidence of need)

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 without additional specialist strategies and interventions to help manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
- 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.
- Cooccurring 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.
- 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.

SEMH needs are not necessarily a lifelong condition. With appropriate therapeutic support and highly specialist teaching, children and young people can develop the right strategies to move forward and live successful independent lives.

In Surrey there are currently 25 state-funded special schools for children and young people with significant special educational needs and disabilities. Across Surrey only four of these schools are specifically for pupils with SEMH needs:

Current SEMH Designated Special Schools in Surrey

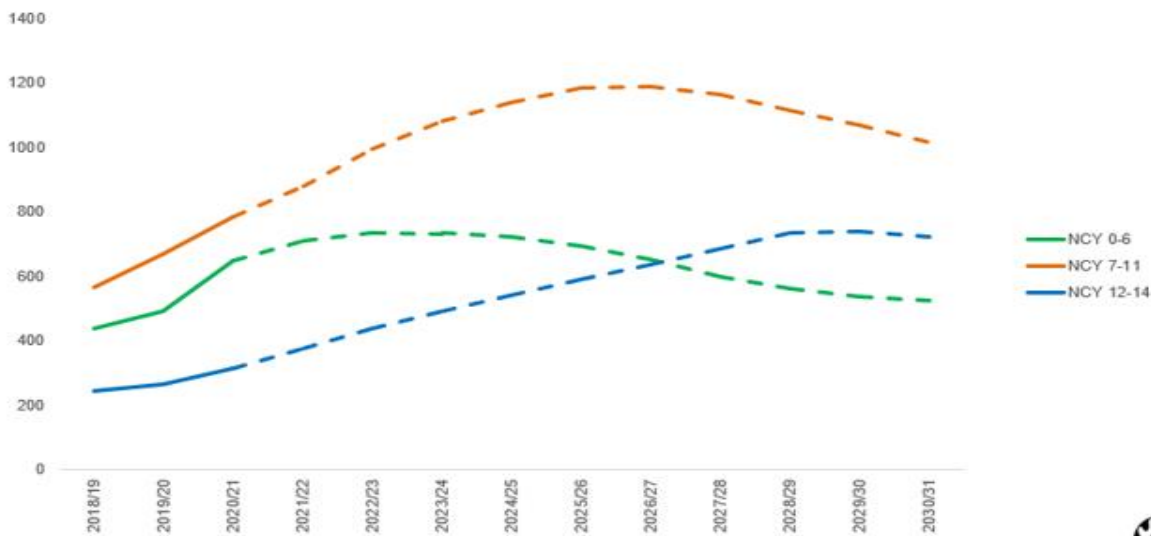
Setting	Trust	District/ Borough	Age Range	Gender	School Capacity	Occupancy Sep 2021	Planned expansion
Wishmore Cross Academy	AET	Surrey Heath (NW)	7-16 years	Co-education	93	82 (88%)	28 places (Sep 2021)
Bramley Oak Academy	LSEAT	Guildford (SW)	7-11 years	Boys	61	56 (92%)	49 places (Sep 2024)
Grafham Grange	OHCAT	Guildford (SW)	11-16 years	Boys	95	94 (99%)	0
Unified Academy	OHCAT	Mole Valley (SE)	9-16 years	Boys	105	76 (72%)	0

Wishmore Cross Academy was expanded by 28 places under Surrey’s SEND Capital Programme in 2021 and Bramley Oak Academy will be expanded by 49 places from September 2024. However, these expansions do not create enough specialist school places for girls and boys aged 11-19 years over the coming years.

Graph 1 shows the latest sufficiency projections for Surrey pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs identified as their primary need:

- Primary age SEMH projections (5-11 years) show declining demand from 2024/25 towards the end of the planning period. This evidences the fact that the recent and planned expansions under Surrey’s SEND Capital Programme are providing enough primary age places
- Secondary age SEMH projections (11-16 years) in particular show an exponential increase year on year to 2027, followed by a gradual stabilisation and decline towards the end of the planning period. This evidences the fact that a significant expansion of the maintained specialist education estate is required to achieve SCC strategic commitments and priorities.
- Post 16 SEMH projections (16-19 years) show a gradual increase to 2028/29 before plateauing towards the end of the planning period. The majority of post-16 pupils with SEMH needs progress on to further education with appropriate high-needs support and interventions from mainstream providers. However, a proportion of these young people require additional time to achieve basic academic qualifications, and a small expansion of the maintained specialist education estate would achieve this in order to reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown.

Graph 1: Projections for Surrey EHCP pupils aged 4-19 years with primary needs identified as Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs



Increasing Demand for Specialist School Places (Key statistics)

This section provides headlines and an overview of the evidence of the need for additional SEMH designated special school places. A full needs analysis can be found [here](#).

Since 2015, the number of children with an EHCP who live in Surrey and require a specialist school place has increased by 73%. This can potentially be attributed, in part, to the increase in the birth rate, the changes brought about by the Children and Families Act and the SEND Regulations in 2014, the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice in 2015 and the improvements to earlier identification and diagnosis of need.

The demand for maintained specialist school places in Surrey for children and young people with SEND has grown significantly over the past four years from around 2,860 planned places to over 3,700 in 2021-2022: of those places, 97% are occupied. As the county's specialist estate has not expanded at the same rate as the demand, this in turn has increased reliance on the independent sector to ensure all pupils are able to access suitable full-time education.

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. In 2018/19 there were around 260 pupils in Surrey aged 11-16 years with SEMH needs requiring a special school place; that is expected to peak at 545 in 2026/27, a growth of 110%. At post-16, the number in 2018/19 was 29 and this is expected to have grown by 200% to 87 in 2026/27. The lower raw numbers here may reflect a lack of post-16 provision in Surrey special schools rather than a lack of demand.

North Surrey projections:

Growth in demand for SEMH special school places for pupils aged 11-16 years in the north of the county is projected to grow from a figure of 119 in 2018/19 to a peak of 272 in 2026/27: an increase of 129%.

Demand for post-16 SEMH provision for pupils aged 16-19 years in this area is also expected to grow by 330% from 10 to a peak of 43 over the same period.

Currently, there are 80 maintained places in special schools in the north of the county but none of those are for pupils aged 16-19 years.

As well as helping to meet growing demand for places, the proposed new school would offer an opportunity to address certain issues within the current pattern of provision and travel patterns associated with it. Currently, 98% of pupils with SEMH needs living in the north of the county are educated outside of the district they live in; nearly 90% are educated outside of their home quadrant and 86% have to travel more than 7 miles each way from home to school each day.

South East Surrey projections

Growth in demand for SEMH special school places for pupils aged 11-16 years in the south east of the county is forecast to increase from 76 in 2018/19 to a peak of 166 in 2026/27. This represents growth of 118%.

Demand for post-16 SEMH provision for pupils aged 11-16 years is not expected to increase significantly from 2018/19 was 15 and this is only expected to grow to 22 in 2026/27. SCC is not proposing to open a sixth form at this school.

Currently, there are 90 maintained places in special schools the south east of the county and none of those are for pupils aged 16-19 years.

As well as helping to meet growing demand for places, this school would offer an opportunity to address certain issues within the current pattern of provision and travel patterns associated with it. Currently, 75% of pupils with SEMH needs living in the south east of the county are educated outside of the district they live in; just under half are educated outside of their home quadrant and around 80 % must travel more than 7 miles each way from home to school each day.

The proposal

SCC is proposing to apply to open two new special free schools:

- One co-educational school serving the north of the county for up to 170 children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs age 11-19 years (around 150 pre-16 places and 20 post-16 places).
- One co-educational school serving the south East of the county for up to 150 children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs age 11-16 years.

The reason for the different age ranges is due to the diverse demographics and patterns of pupil demand and projected growth between the geographical areas. Admissions for pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) will be managed by Surrey County Council's existing arrangements [Choosing a Specialist School Place for Children and Young People with SEND](#) and in line with the [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years 2015](#)

Whilst the DfE has not published timelines for opening the new schools, it is expected that 2026/27 will be the first year of opening and places will be phased in over a period of 4-5 years.

The identified sites for the proposed two new special free schools will be confirmed in the applications submitted by SCC to the DfE in October. Should we be successful, public consultation will be carried out for each approved project going forward in line with statutory Planning Consultations and Judicial Review periods for Land & Property developments.

Further public consultation and engagement will also be undertaken by the approved sponsors in line with DfE statutory processes in order to demonstrate that fair and open local consultation has been undertaken with all those who could be affected by the proposed changes.

Benefits of the proposed action to Surrey Residents:

The provision of additional specialist places will support the county-wide inclusion plan as well as increasing the availability of places for children and young people with SEND to access in the county.

Benefits realisation ensures specialist education provision is fit for purpose and creates additional employment/ supported internship opportunities for residents around areas of expansion.

Children and young people with SEND can access the help and support they need to thrive and achieve within their local communities. They can go to education provision that meets their needs, access services and play an active role in the community close to where they live.

Children, young people, and families have access to the same level of high-quality support wherever they live in Surrey. We have a good, shared understanding of our children and young people who have SEND in Surrey and our support offer matches their identified needs.

Expanding Surrey's specialist provision aligns with the Next Steps programme and strategy for Post-16 to create local further education and employment pathways such as apprenticeships and supported internships. This enables young people who have SEND to make a successful transition to adulthood and secure employment.

Capacity created locally will also ensure SEND home to school transport times are reduced in line with Department for Education recommendations, improving congestion and traffic flow around the county.

The local impacts will include improved provision of specialist places and more children with additional needs attending schools closer to their home, better connected to local communities and support services.

The proposed new special free schools support SCC corporate priorities including Embracing Surrey's Diversity, Tackling Inequality, and Supporting Independence. They also directly support the county-wide priority to improve outcomes for children with additional needs in Surrey.

Consultations, approvals, and overall timescales

The proposal to open two new co-educational special free schools for children and young people with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties is dependent on SCC being successful in the application process, managed by the DfE's Central Free Schools Programme.

SCC needs to demonstrate that the proposed new schools:

- are in areas where a new school fits with the local authority's wider SEND and high needs strategy.
- make a strong strategic case for why a new special free school is needed and will better meet the needs and achieve better outcomes for children and young people in the area.
- will help local authorities reduce their dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficit.
- will be financially sustainable and that local authorities will commit to commissioning, funding, and supporting places.
- will contribute to the wider aims of the [SEND review: right support, right place, right time 2022](#)
- include details of a viable site which is likely to secure value for money, in a timely manner, and with an acceptable level of risk.

There are a number of stages to go through before the proposed new schools can open. This is the initial consultation that is run by the local authority. It will run from **2 September 2022** until **30 September 2022**.

Other key timescales include:

Date	Activity
July 2022	Pre-Registration of applications with the DfE
September 2022	Initial Local Authority Consultation
October 2022	Submission of full applications to the DfE
December 2022 – January 2023	Successful applicants announced by the DfE, and School Specifications published
February 2023	Academy trusts (prospective sponsors) submit their applications; SCC and DfE begins to assess them
May 2023	Short-list interviews with successful academy trusts
May 2023 – June 2023	Local Authority submits recommendations to the Secretary of State for Education
Summer 2023	DfE announce successful Academy Trusts and pre-opening activity starts
2026/2027	New Special Free Schools open

Have your say

As part of our ongoing improvements in our Special Education Needs and Disabilities provision and support, we are applying to the Department for Education to open two new schools for children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs in Surrey.

Do you have a child with SEMH needs? We want to hear your views on our proposals to open two new schools for young people with SEMH needs in Surrey.

Do you work with young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs in Surrey? We want to hear your views on our proposals to open two new schools for young people with SEMH needs in Surrey.

If you would like to find out more, please register to join our online engagement events planned for:

- **Wednesday 14 September from 6pm-7pm** (Local residents, parents/carers, other interested parties) or
- **Thursday 15 September from 5pm-6pm** (Academies, Trusts, Colleges and other LAs).

You can do this by emailing schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk with the subject 'SEMH Designated Special Free Schools'. You will be sent a link to the online event where there will be a short presentation followed by questions and answers. We will publish the questions and answers after the engagement events have taken place.

The consultation opens on **Friday 2 September 2022**.

You can respond by:

- a) **Using the online survey.** You can access the consultation online on the '[Surrey Says](#)' [website](#) by searching for "New Special Free School" or by scrolling through the list of open consultations or by using this direct link:
<https://www.surreysays.co.uk/csf/applications-for-2-new-semh-special-free-schools>
- b) **Completing the consultation response form** that is available alongside this document and emailing it to schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk with the subject "FAO DfE Special Free Schools Applications"
- c) **Printing and completing the consultation response form** that is available alongside this document and sending it back to the address below:

Education Place Planning - FAO Peter Speers
Quadrant Court
35 Guildford Road
Woking
Surrey GU22 7QQ

All responses must be received by **midnight on Friday 30 September 2022**, please.

What happens next?

At the end of the consultation period, SCC will collate and review all of the responses received and publish them on the Surrey Says website. The responses will be analysed, and this information will be included in the full applications we plan to submit to the DfE before the deadline of midday on 21 October 2022. We expect to hear the outcome of our applications by late December 2022-early January 2023 and we'll publish the results.

Consultation response form

Proposal to open two new SEMH Designated Special Free Schools in Surrey

Please give us your views. Please tick the box that best shows what you think about the proposed expansion and also give us any comments you have. You can write on the other side of this sheet if you want more space to write comments.

1. 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?
Agree <input type="checkbox"/> _____ Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> _____ Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
2. 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?
Agree <input type="checkbox"/> _____ Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> _____ Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
3. What do you think is the most important thing to consider when creating a new SEMH special free school (e.g., location, facilities, community involvement)?
4. What district of Surrey do you live in? (Please circle)
Elmbridge Reigate and Banstead Tandridge Epsom and Ewell Runnymede Waverley Guildford Spelthorne Woking Mole Valley Surrey Heath
5. What is your interest in this proposal (e.g., parent, school governor, local resident)?

6. Are you responding on behalf of an Organisation? If so, please give details.

7. Please provide any other comments.

Please return to:

Email: schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk

Or by post to:

Education Place Planning - FAO Peter Speers
Quadrant Court
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