

School Organisation Consultation

Proposal to Establish a Special Educational
Needs Unit at Thames Ditton Infant School

September 2024



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

School Organisation Informal Consultation

Local authority details:

Local Authority	Surrey County Council
Address	Quadrant Court 35 Guildford Road Woking GU22 7QQ

School details:

Name of School	Thames Ditton Infant School
Category of School	Infant
Type of School	Foundation School
URN	124968
Address	Speer Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey
Postcode	KT7 0PW

Introduction

This paper outlines a proposal to establish a unit for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) at Thames Ditton Infant School. There will be 21 places for pupils with autism and/or communication and interaction needs from Reception to Year 2. All pupils will have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

This document explains the proposed process and timescales to make this significant change to the school.

Proposal

Thames Ditton Infant School is currently a three-form entry (3FE) infant school in the borough of Elmbridge in Surrey. The school was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in April 2022. From September 2025, the school will formally reduce their published admission number (PAN) to 60, becoming a two-form entry (2FE) infant school. In agreement with the school's Headteacher and Governing Body, Surrey County Council is proposing to establish a SEN unit at Thames Ditton Infant School with 21 places for pupils with autism and/or communication and interaction needs. Each pupil will have an EHCP specifying the specialist provision within the school as an appropriate placement to meet their individual needs.

Table 1 shows the proposed timeline for the changes to take place from September 2025. Dates and phases in the timeline may change based on the outcome of this consultation.

Table 1: Proposed timeline

Phase	Date
Consultation	12/09/2024 – 25/10/2024
Review of consultation responses	W/c 28/10/2024
Outcome of consultation published on www.surreysays.co.uk	By 01/11/2024
Statutory notices	04/11/2024 – 16/11/2024
Lead Cabinet Member Decision	26/11/2024
Implementation	September 2025

It is proposed that:

1. A new SEN unit will be established to provide a total number of 21 places for autistic pupils and pupils with communication and interaction needs aged 4 to 7 years.
2. Thames Ditton Infant School consulted to reduce from a PAN of 90 to 60 from September 2025. There will be no change to the mainstream published admission number (PAN) of 60 from September 2025.
3. In September 2024, the school will be opening a nurture class (The Nest) for children with a diagnosis of autism and with social communication needs. This consultation forms part of the statutory process to transfer this class to a formal SEN unit for pupils with autism and communication and interaction needs from September 2025.
4. The 21 pupils within the new SEN unit will be admitted above the mainstream published admission number (PAN).
5. All pupils placed at the unit by Surrey County Council would have an EHCP specifying the school as an appropriate placement to meet their individual needs. Further details on the admissions process for SEND specialist provision in Surrey can be found on the [Surrey Local Offer website](#). The document '[SEND admissions processes for referrals for specialist placement for school age children](#)' describes how this process works and is available on the Surrey County Council website.

Making representations, objections and comments

1. This is an informal consultation which starts on Thursday 12 September 2024 and concludes on Friday 25 October 2024.
2. A number of organisations are available locally to support families of children who have special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) and young people who have SEND to share their views. Please see [Information, Advice and Support – SEND Advice Surrey](#).
3. Any person can make comments, agree, or object to the proposal by sending representations to the local authority through the following channels:

Website	www.surreysays.co.uk
Email	schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk
Post	Katie Kelly-Weller Education Place Planning Surrey County Council Quadrant Court 35 Guildford Road Woking GU22 7QQ

Background

Thames Ditton Infant School is currently a three-form entry (3FE) infant school in the borough of Elmbridge in Surrey and will have a published admission number (PAN) of 60 from September 2025 (thus becoming two-form entry at this time). The school has capacity of 270 and there is sufficient capacity within the school to accommodate a SEN unit following the reduction of the school's PAN from September 2025. The school was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in April 2022. Table 2 shows the number of pupils on roll in each year group across the school.

Table 2: Number of pupils on roll at Thames Ditton Infant School by National Curriculum Year (NCY) group

	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Number of pupils currently at Thames Ditton Infant School	68	54	90	212

Source data: Synergy July 2024

School vision and curriculum

Thames Ditton Infant School is passionate about providing access to learning for all children.

In September 2024, the school will be opening a nurture class (The Nest) for children with a diagnosis of autism and with social communication needs. This consultation forms part of the statutory process to transfer this class to a formal SEN unit for pupils with autism and communication and interaction needs from September 2025.

Teaching team and curriculum

The Nest is specifically for children who have autism and social communication needs. Admissions to The Nest are entirely separate from places in the main school and are made through Surrey's Special Educational Needs Admissions team.

The Nest is a small nurture class which will run and be overseen by a lead teacher/SEND Manager. The class will be supported by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs).

The Nest is designed to provide a structured environment that is small, welcoming and inclusive. The staff strive to give pupils the maximum level of independence that they can achieve. All pupils have access to the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum with core subjects (Maths, English and Science) and the Foundation subjects (all other subjects). The school will use a topic-based approach to learning, which engages children and helps them to build skills in learning and thinking within a Continuous Provision.

The method of teaching within The Nest is based on the “Attention Autism” approach, developed by Gina Davies, Speech and Language Therapist. This method ensures learning is engaging and motivating. The children are taught from the Early Years Foundation Stage and Primary National Curriculum, using a differentiated approach, adapted to individual needs.

In The Nest, the school will strive to enhance pupil’s social and emotional development, through specific Personal, Social, Health, and Economical (PSHE) education and life skills sessions. They will incorporate programmes such as Social Thinking and the Zones of Regulation into daily practice. The pupils will attend weekly forest school type activities, and drama and creative art lessons as part of an enriching curriculum.

Other professionals

The Nest will have visiting speech and language therapists (SALT), who work onsite with the pupils. The children will have speech and language targets set twice per year, and a written report as part of their annual review. The therapists and staff liaise closely regarding the pupils’ targets to ensure these are incorporated within daily teaching.

The Nest will have visiting occupational therapists (OT), who work with children in a range of ways, which include both direct and indirect input. This enables OT programmes to be completed throughout the school day to support children’s access to their education. This ranges from scheduled movement breaks with specific exercises (e.g. sensory activities that range from low to high intensity depending on the child’s presenting needs), fine motor activities and resources to support writing skills. If a child has OT provision on their EHCP, they will receive programmes and targets according to the amount outlined in Section F of their EHCP, as well as a written report as part of the child’s annual review.

The Nest works closely with Surrey’s Educational Psychology team with an allocated educational psychologist. Children will be seen in Year 1 as part of the junior school phase transition. A referral may also be made if there is a change to a child’s needs or the provision that they require.

Access to mainstream lessons

The school is also committed to adopting an inclusive approach in all aspects of its work and believe that where it is suitable for an individual learner in The Nest, access to mainstream classes can help to promote independence and social awareness. This can take several forms: shared playtimes, supported activity access, lunchtimes, assemblies, and trips as well as participation in selected mainstream lessons. All mainstream opportunities are planned for on an individual basis to ensure these experiences are both meaningful and beneficial for the child. The Nest is a specifically designed classroom that supports the sensory, social and emotional needs of children with autism within the main school building, with its own access to outdoor learning. The school will seek to ensure that their practice reflects the inclusive geography of the class and acts as a bridge between specialist support and mainstream learning.

Assessment

The Nest learners will be assessed using the greater precision offered by a system called Connecting Steps, from BSquared. It is better configured to record the smaller steps of progress that learners make, to build a bigger and more accurate picture of each pupil's learning and progress.

The school use the SCERTS model framework to assess social and emotional learning. This is used to create a profile of a child's social and emotional competencies and highlights priorities for further development. As part of this, parents will be asked to complete a form about their child's social communication and emotional regulation at home. For each child, a SEN support plan is in place. This SEN support plan draws on the outcomes outlined in pupil's EHCPs, the SCERTS profile and BSquared assessment. The targets are devised and reviewed in consultation with parents, on a termly basis.

Communication with parents

The school believes collaboration with parents and carers is key to ensuring the best possible outcomes for pupils. They start the year with a 'meet the teacher' session to introduce parents to their child's teacher, as well as to gain an understanding of the expectations of the upcoming year. In addition to the statutory EHCP annual review meeting, two parent meetings are held to discuss each child's progress. There is also an opportunity to discuss a child's end of year report. Home/school communication books provide an opportunity for parents and staff to communicate on a regular basis. The school will welcome parents and carers to telephone or email the school.

More information about the school's vision and curriculum can be found on the school website: [Thames Ditton Infant School](#).

Reasons for the establishment of a new SEN unit for pupils with autism and/or communication and interaction needs at Thames Ditton Infant School

Table 3 shows the latest projections for infant pupils with EHCPs in Surrey who have autism and/or have communication and interaction needs identified as their primary need in Elmbridge. The projections show a gradual decrease in this cohort year on year to 2032/33 however the demand still outweighs the level of provision within local schools.

Table 3 Forecasts for children with autism and communication and interaction needs in Elmbridge

Residential Area	School Location	Forecast									
		2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33
Elmbridge	Surrey	94	80	77	77	77	77	75	74	74	74
	Out of county	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
	Total SEN Need	96	82	79	79	79	79	77	77	77	77
Total SEN Places Available		24	24	34	44	54	54	54	54	54	54
Shortage or Surplus of Places (No.)		-72	-58	-45	-35	-25	-25	-23	-23	-23	-23
Shortage or Surplus of Places (%)		-299%	-240%	-133%	-80%	-46%	-46%	-43%	-42%	-42%	-42%

The proposed SEN unit at Thames Ditton Infant School will have 21 specialist school places. Should these pupils be required to attend an education provision in the independent sector, costs would equate to around £1.113m per year every year, based on an average unit cost of £53k per pupil per annum for independent sector provision. This is compared to the average cost for state-maintained specialist places at £23k per pupil per annum and equivalent costs for 21 places of £483k. Provision of the additional state-maintained specialist school places would generate an approximate saving of £30k per pupil place per year.

This data clearly shows that sustained use of the independent sector in the future would constitute an inefficient use of limited resources and severely impact Surrey’s ability to deliver services and support for children, young people, and families, whilst remaining financially sustainable.

Surrey’s ambition for children and young people who have additional needs and disabilities is to develop high quality fit for purpose local state maintained specialist school provision that enables better long term outcomes. This in turn ensures that Surrey resident pupils are educated closer to home, more connected to local communities and local support services, and have increased opportunities to enter employment in the future.

Table 4 shows the current SEN unit provision within mainstream schools in Elmbridge.

Table 4 Current SEN unit provision within primary schools in Elmbridge

School	Designation	Age
Bell Farm Primary School	Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)	4-11 (Years R to 6)
Chandlers Field Primary School	Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)	4-11 (Years R to 6)
Thames Ditton Junior School	Moderate learning difficulties (MLD)	7-11 (Years 3 to 6)

Key outcomes and benefits

Expanding outstanding sufficient and sustainable special school provision for Surrey resident primary age pupils in Elmbridge will provide the following benefits as stated in the [Developing local Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) Provision](#) report to Cabinet on 25 January 2022:

1. Benefits realisation ensures Surrey’s maintained specialist education provision is fit for purpose and creates additional employment/supported internship opportunities for residents around areas of expansion.
2. Children, young people, and families can access 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.
3. Expanding Surrey’s specialist provision aligns with the Preparation for Adulthood 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.

4. Capacity created locally will also make certain that SEND home to school transport distance and costs are reduced so that pupils attend their closest most appropriate school with shorter journey times. Opportunities for developing independent travel skills can be maximised as a result of children and young people being educated closer to home. This will also address local congestion around school sites as well as traffic flow around the county, which will be of benefit to Surrey’s Green Agenda.
5. The distribution and occupancy of current Special Schools and SEN Units in mainstream schools clearly illustrates that there is insufficient provision of autism and Communication & Social Interaction Needs, Moderate Learning Difficulties, Severe Learning Difficulties and Social Emotional Mental Health Needs Special places.
6. The approved remodification and expansion programme will ensure that additional places are matched appropriately to need type, phases of education and geographic locations.

An Equality Impact Assessment is being completed throughout the consultation process and will be published as part of the Lead Cabinet Member Decision meeting.

Implementation plan

Finance and resourcing

The school will receive funding per pupil per year for each agreed planned place commissioned. The school will also receive a “top up” sum for each pupil on roll at the SEN unit, appropriate to the needs of individual children.

Year	No. Places	Place Funding (per pupil)	Top-Up (per pupil)	AY Total
1 (AY 24/25)	12	£10,000	£7,517.92	£210,215.04
2 (AY 25/26)	19	£6,000 for previous year's 12 £10,000 for 7 new placements	£7,517.92	£284,840.48

A Surrey maintained special school with experience of setting up new provision will be supporting the school with the start-up of the new SEN unit. This will support the training and ongoing development of the provision over the first academic year.

Staffing

Thames Ditton Infant School has already consulted to reduce the PAN from 90 to 60 from September 2025. The staff are already in place to manage the SEN unit.

The new provision will be run and overseen by a lead teacher/SEND Manager. The class will be supported by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs).

Capital planning and buildings

Thames Ditton Infant School will have latent classroom capacity as a result of the reduction in PAN from 90 to 60 from September 2025. These classrooms will be utilised for the proposed SEN unit.

Growth model

Thames Ditton Infant School has opened a nurture class called The Nest for September 2024 for autistic pupils and those with communication and interaction needs. This consultation is to formalise this arrangement and open a new SEN unit from September 2025. The growth model is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Growth model for nurture group and SEN unit at Thames Ditton Infant School

	Sep-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27
Reception	12	7	2	7
Year 1		12	7	7
Year 2			12	7

	Nurture class
	SEN unit

A nurture class will open with 12 spaces from September 2024, with this class transferring to a SEN unit from September 2025. A new Reception intake will also join the school from September 2025 with 7 spaces. By September 2026, the SEN unit will have 21 spaces throughout Reception to Year 2. Dependant on need, the spaces may not be split evenly across the year groups.

Consultations, approvals and overall timescales

1. It is proposed that the changes commence from September 2025. The proposed changes require a period of consultation, the publication of Statutory Notices and the agreement of Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and Learning if the proposal is to proceed.
2. The first stage of consultation will be informal and will open from Thursday 12 September 2024 and concludes Friday 25 October 2024. During this period, Surrey County Council will share its proposals with the wider professional network, schools including headteachers and chairs of governors, with unions, parent representatives, partner agencies and with the staff and parents of the school subject to the proposals.
3. Following the informal consultation period, it is proposed to publish a Statutory Notice for a four-week period. The publication of Notices is when the local authority formally states that it intends to implement the proposed changes. This will be the final opportunity for consultees to make their views known before a final decision is taken.

Following the consultation periods officers will summarise the feedback and will report to the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning.

Have your say

Surrey County Council and Thames Ditton Infant School would like to know what people in the area feel about the proposal. The consultation will open on Thursday 12 September 2024.

You can respond by:

a) Accessing the consultation online on the ‘Surrey Says’ website: www.surreysays.co.uk and searching for the school’s consultation (school name or post code), or by scrolling through the list of open consultations.

b) Completing the consultation response form that is available alongside this document. You can email the form or print it, complete it and send it back to the address below:

Thames Ditton Infant School – SEN unit
Education Place Planning
Quadrant Court
35 Guildford Road
Woking
GU22 7QQ

Email: schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk with the subject: FAO Thames Ditton Infant – SEN unit

All responses must be received by 5pm on Friday 25 October 2024.

What happens next?

We will hold an online public meeting for parents and any other interested parties to discuss the proposals and to hear your views.

The online event will be held on **Tuesday 1 October at 5:30pm via Microsoft Teams**. There will be a short presentation followed by questions and answers. Please email schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk to register your interest and you will be sent a link to the online event.

Please join to share your views and ask questions. You do not have to have a child at the school to join the meeting.

At the end of the consultation period, we will review all the responses received and share these with the school and publish them on the Surrey Says website.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, we intend to publish a Statutory Notice at the school, in a local newspaper and on the Surrey Says website stating our intention to open a SEN unit for pupils with autism or communication and interaction needs at Thames Ditton Infant School. There will be a four-week statutory consultation period for further representations to be received by the council.

All representations will be reviewed before a final decision is taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning.