

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 8 February 2024

Report of the (Acting) Director of Education, Culture and Skills

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

SEND Sufficiency Strategy Implementation – Provision of Special Educational Needs Units at Mainstream Schools

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Brief Summary

This report provides an update of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy and outlines proposals to increase the availability of special needs provision throughout the county, through the expansion of special school places and through the further development of Special Educational needs Units at mainstream schools.

Approval is being sought for a feasibility study to be undertaken to create a Special Educational Needs unit at Brunshaw Primary School in Burnley.

Approval is being sought to confirm the budget spend to undertake a full feasibility study needed to determine the cost of buildings works required to the co-located White Ash Special School/Hargreaves House site in Oswaldtwistle, to increase the number of special school places.

Approval is being sought for a full feasibility study to be undertaken, and to confirm the budget spend for the feasibility study needed to determine the cost of building works required to enable the former Hendon Brook School site in Nelson to be repurposed, to increase the number of special school places.

Finally, approval is being sought for a full feasibility study to be undertaken, and to confirm the budget spend for the feasibility study needed to determine the cost of building works required to enable the former Hope High School site in Skelmersdale to be repurposed. Again, it is anticipated that this site could be used to increase the number of special school places in that area.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the requirements of Standing Order C19 have been complied with.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the initiation of feasibility studies and informal consultation process to create a Special Educational Needs unit at Brunshaw Primary School in Burnley.
- (ii) Subject to (i) above, authorise the Executive Director for Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to review the outcomes of the informal consultations, and to decide whether to proceed with the formal consultation for the development of an Special Educational Needs unit at Brunshaw Primary School.
- (iii) Approve the budget for the full feasibility study on the co-located White Ash Special/Hargreaves House site in Oswaldtwistle.
- (iv) Approve the initiation of a feasibility study to repurpose the former Hendon Brook School site in Nelson, and approve the budget to undertake a full feasibility study of the former Hendon Brook site.
- (v) Approve the initiation of a feasibility study to repurpose the former Hope High School site in Skelmersdale, and approve the budget to undertake a full feasibility study of the former Hope High School site.

Detail

This report proposes the development of more specialist provision across Lancashire for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, in view of the continuing increase in demand for this type of provision.

Brunshaw Primary School, Burnley

Approval is being sought to initiate a feasibility study and the informal consultation process in respect of Brunshaw Primary School. Brunshaw Primary School was last assessed by Ofsted in October 2022 and was classified as 'Good' in all areas.

The proposal is to create a Special Educational Needs Unit for up to 16 children with social communication and interactions needs.

The addition of a Special Educational Needs unit to a mainstream school is considered to be a prescribed alteration, and therefore the local authority is required to complete the necessary statutory processes, in order to implement this type of permanent change. Informal consultation is not a requirement of the statutory process although it is recommended.



Cabinet is asked to authorise the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to review the outcomes of the informal consultations, and to decide whether to proceed with the formal consultation process to establish a Special Educational Needs unit at Brunshaw Primary School.

The results of the formal consultation and feasibility study will be presented to Cabinet for final approval for the permanent addition of the Special Educational Needs unit later this year.

Feasibility Studies

White Ash Special School/Hargreaves House site, Oswaldtwistle

In September 2023, Cabinet approved the initiation of feasibility studies for special schools which had expressed an interest in increasing the capacity and number of places within their schools. White Ash Special School was one of those schools where approval had been given for a feasibility study to be undertaken.

White Ash Special School is co-located on the site of the former Hargreaves House respite centre on Thwaites Road in Oswaldtwistle. Hargreaves House has been closed since 2013.

Cabinet is asked to approve the budget to undertake a full feasibility study of the White Ash Special School/Hargreaves House site, in order to assess the site's viability towards mitigating some of the risk associated with Lancashire being unable to fulfil its statutory duty, in terms of providing sufficient special school places. The cost of undertaking the full feasibility study is £15,000.

Former Hendon Brook School site, Nelson

In December 2023, Cabinet approved that feasibility studies could be undertaken to identify additional physical space within schools, colleges or alternative Lancashire County Council buildings, to change the use of these to become satellite provision for the associated special schools in the area.

Hendon Brook School was the primary pupil referral unit in the East of the county. It was closed in August 2020, following 2 Ofsted inspections in 2017 and 2019, in which it was graded as 'Inadequate'.

Cabinet is asked to approve the initiation of a full feasibility study to repurpose the former Hendon Brook School site, and to approve the budget to undertake the feasibility study to assess the site's viability. The cost of undertaking the full feasibility study is £15,000.

Former Hope High School site, Skelmersdale

Hope High School on the Tanhouse Road, Skelmersdale site closed in 2015, when the school moved into a purpose-built school at Carfield in Skelmersdale.



Cabinet is asked to approve the initiation of a full feasibility study to repurpose the former Hope High School site, and to approve the budget to undertake the feasibility study to assess the site's viability. The cost of undertaking the full feasibility study is £15,000.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

The county council and partners across education, health and care are required to work together to plan for and meet the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities, in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice 2014.

If the decision was not to proceed with the proposals contained within the report, the risk would be insufficient places and potential for increased costs out of area. This proposal only mitigates some of the risk of this and the county council failing in its duty to provide sufficient school places and risk to reputational damage of the county council.

There would also be a continued risk to a considerable overspend on the revenue-high needs block funding as places would have to be sought in the Independent sector at considerable cost to the local authority.

Property Asset Management

The council remains liable for premises holding costs where buildings are not in operational use. Due to the complexity of the shared arrangements and other education delivery at both the White Ash/Hargreaves House site and the former Hendon Brook school (which is co-located with Nelson Walton Lane Nursery) the premises have not been disposed of.

Financial

Any building works that are agreed by the authority outlined in the proposals to increase the availability of special needs provision throughout the county will be funded via the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation and capital receipts arising from the disposal of assets previously held for education where appropriate. The High Needs allocation is grant funding from the Department for Education and the amounts of funding available may limit the schemes that are deliverable.

By increasing the county council's internal Special School Provision, this will enable progress to be made towards keeping up with the demand for special school places and limit the increase in the use of independent school placements which present a growing pressure on revenue- high needs block funding.



The demand for special school places continues to increase. The percentage increase in the number of special school places required exceeds the indicative funding allocation for the High Needs Block which is expected to increase by 3% per year. This is likely to increase the gap between expenditure and funding over the next few years. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities sufficiency work is being carried out to address these issues, and to prevent Lancashire County Council going into a High Needs Deficit Position. The additional internal places created will therefore help to support the growing financial pressures on the revenue - High Needs Budget.

The cost of each of the three full feasibility studies in respect of the White Ash Special School/Hargreaves House site, the former Hendon Brook School site and the former Hope High School site is £15,000, giving a total cost of £45,000. This will be funded using the grant allocation and will not impact borrowing and any related revenue financing charges.

Legal

The local authority has a statutory duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet present and future demand for special school places, and for this to be kept under review.

Equality and Cohesion

This proposal impacts on both the age (young people) and disability protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 and is designed to contribute positively to the Public Sector Equality Duty's general aim of advancing equality of opportunity and its related aim of increasing participation in public life for these children and young people, their families and carers.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

