

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 5 May 2022

Report of the Head of Service - Inclusion

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Delivering better services;

Expansion of Morecambe Road School, Lancaster and Development of Special Educational Needs Units

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Brief Summary

This report provides the outcomes of the informal consultation that has been carried out in relation to a proposal to expand Morecambe Road School, Lancaster. It is being proposed that this school expansion will be achieved through the creation of 34 additional places. 22 of these places would be based within the existing school site. The additional teaching space required would be achieved through building work commissioned and financed by the school, and 12 places would be based in a satellite provision at Lancaster and Morecambe College, which is located 0.3 miles away from Morecambe Road School. The separate 'satellite' provision would be operated as part of Morecambe Road School.

Morecambe Road School is a mixed special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. It is also being proposed to redesignate Morecambe Road School as a school which meets the needs of children and young people with generic learning difficulties.

This report also includes a proposal to seek expressions of interests, and initiate feasibility studies and the informal consultation process that would further support the development of SEN units in schools in different locations across the County.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Consider the results of informal consultation to increase the number of special school places at Morecambe Road School by 22 places to 177 that will be created through the building of additional teaching space on the main

school site, and approve the publication of a statutory notice and the initiation of the formal consultation process required to make this prescribed alteration/significant change to Morecambe Road School.

- (ii) Consider the results of informal consultation to create another 12 special school places at Morecambe Road School to increase the overall number so places at the school to 189, subject to approval to (i) above. These 12 places will be created through the development of satellite provision on the site of Lancaster and Morecambe College and so approval is being sought for the publication of a statutory notice and the initiation of the formal consultation process required to make this prescribed alteration/significant change to Morecambe Road School.
- (iii) Consider the results of the informal consultation to change the designation of Morecambe Road School from one for pupils with moderate learning difficulties to one for pupils with generic learning difficulties, and approve the publication of a statutory notice and the initiation of the formal consultation process required to make this prescribed alteration/significant change to Morecambe Road School.
- (iv) Approve the initiation of a process to seek expressions of interest to further support the development of SEN units in schools in different locations across the County where this continues to be required.
- (v) Subject to approval of (iv) above, approve the initiation of the informal consultation process.

Detail

The SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2019-2024 was developed in response to the increase in demand for specialist provision for children and young people in particular areas across Lancashire, and within the context of increased pressure on the high needs block funding. The implementation of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy enables the county council to fulfil its statutory duties in relation to the provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The proposals in the report are consistent with the principles and priorities identified within the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, and a further review of SEND provision carried out in June 2021. This later review identified a particular demand for special school places for children and young people with learning difficulties in the Lancaster/Morecambe area. The proposals build on the Strategy because of the increased demand for education, health and care plans and special school places that has been evident in the last two years.

In September 2021, Cabinet gave approval to seek expressions of interest for the initiation of feasibility studies and an informal consultation process, to expand and increase the numbers of school places in satellite provision, at both primary and secondary level for children and young people with learning difficulties in the north area of Lancashire.

Morecambe Road School is a school for children and young people between the ages of three and 16 years with moderate learning difficulties. It has been identified as a good school by Ofsted since 2003. The school is over-subscribed.

Morecambe Road School has put forward three proposals for the development of the school. All three proposals would be classed as significant changes to the school and are therefore subject to a statutory process, to enable such changes to take place. The changes being proposed are listed below.

- 1) Increase the number of special school places by 22, which would be achieved through building work to increase the amount of teaching space available on the existing school site.
- 2) A further increase in the number of special school places by 12 which would be achieved through the development of satellite provision on the site of Lancaster and Morecambe College.

The above two proposals would result in an overall increase in pupil numbers of 34, to create a school population of 189.

- 3) Change the designation of the school from one for pupils with moderate learning difficulties to a school for pupils with generic learning difficulties.

There are steps that must be taken as part of the statutory process to instigate these changes, including a period of informal consultation followed by a formal period of representation/consultation and the publication of a statutory notice. This paper provides the outcomes of the informal consultation and seeks approval to move to the next stage of formal consultation.

School expansion

There is ongoing building work within the school site for expansion of the school to create an additional 22 places. This building work is being funded from within the resources available to the school and no additional capital funding is being sought for these works.

Development of satellite provision

The creation of a further 12 places would be through the development of a key stage 4 satellite provision at Lancaster and Morecambe College. It is anticipated the development of this satellite provision would build on and formalise existing arrangements between the school and college, and would better equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and experiences they need to prepare themselves for adulthood.

The satellite provision on the site of Lancaster and Morecambe College would be used to increase the number of special school places within Morecambe Road School. Pupils attending this provision would be able to use facilities and accommodation that is available on the college site. Any pupil placed in the satellite provision would be on the roll of Morecambe Road School and the school would be

responsible for the education of all children attending the satellite provision, and this would include for example the curriculum, staffing and all resources.

The Governing bodies of both settings are happy and supportive of the proposals. The Headteacher of Morecambe Road School, the Director for Personal Development and Welfare and the Principal at Lancaster and Morecambe College have met and discussed and agreed the proposal of the satellite provision. All policies and procedures are aligned with existing policies at Morecambe Road School. All pastoral and safeguarding responsibilities for the young people attending the satellite provision remain with Morecambe Road School.

Change in school designation

Morecambe Road School is currently designated as a school for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties. The type and level of severity of special needs for which Morecambe Road School makes provision, is no longer reflected in the current designation. It is therefore proposed that Morecambe Road School is redesignated as a school for children and young people with generic learning difficulties.

Informal consultation

The informal consultation with interested parties, including families, staff and the governing bodies of Morecambe Road School and Lancaster and Morecambe College continued until 1 April 2022. This period of consultation included meetings for families of the school on 11 and 31 March 2022 and the proposed changes were raised at a meeting with special school heads in the local area on 25 March 2022. The views of pupils have been collected separately within the school.

A total of 30 responses from the communities of both Morecambe Road School and Lancaster and Morecambe College were received in relation to the proposal to expand Morecambe Road School. 93% of respondents agreed with the proposal to expand Morecambe Road School. Concerns raised by families related primarily to the practical arrangements of operating the satellite provision and how this would affect individual pupils.

Other concerns raised by families of pupils already attending the school related to whether the expansion of the school would lead to an increase in class size. It should be noted that the purpose of the building work is to increase the number of classes and maintain pupil numbers within each at their existing levels.

It was reported by Morecambe Road School that pupils were excited by the additional opportunities that would be afforded them by the development of satellite provision at Lancaster and Morecambe College.

Concerns were raised about the change of designation of the school from moderate learning difficulties to generic learning difficulties, and the potential impact this might have on neighbouring special schools. Specifically, the concerns seemed to relate to whether this would result in neighbouring special schools being required to take pupils with more complex needs, potentially leading to a reduction in their class

sizes. It was suggested the reduction in the number of pupils within individual classes would result if children and young people with more complex needs required additional bulky equipment or more space in which to move. This might then affect the funding available to individual schools.

Information provided anecdotally by special school headteachers indicates the needs of pupils are becoming more complex across Lancashire, including those pupils in schools catering for moderate learning difficulties. The change of designation would therefore appear to be more consistent with the nature of pupils' special educational needs. It should be noted that in other parts of the county, special school designations have already moved towards that of generic learning difficulty. Decisions about where pupils are placed are made by the local authority and steps are being taken to improve the methodology for these decisions, to include a more centralised approach to ensure greater parity across areas and schools.

SEN units where feasibility studies/informal consultations have not started

Cabinet is being asked for approval to seek further expressions of interest, the initiation of feasibility studies and informal consultation where appropriate, so that it is possible to consider the development of SEN units, where appropriate, in the areas identified through the SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

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 special school places and increased costs for out of area provision. This proposal mitigates the risk of this and the county council failing in its duty to provide sufficient school places.

Financial

The expansion of Morecambe Road School requires no capital commitment from the capital programme.

High needs funding within the dedicated schools grant supports provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This funding enables local authorities and education providers to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014.

The provisional allocation of high needs provision capital allowance from the Department for Education has been announced at £12.1m for 2022/23 together with the £400k capital funding provided by Cabinet in February 2022. This gives a funding programme of £12.5m from which a programme can be developed, following

consultations for suitable projects. The approval of the projects within the programme will be the subject of future reports to Cabinet.

Equality and Cohesion

The proposals impact the age (young person) and disability protected characteristics. Whilst it is anticipated that the proposals should be positive in terms of advancing equality of opportunity for these groups, an Equality Impact Assessment will be prepared following formal consultation, to reflect issues raised during the full consultation process.

Human Resources

If the expansion is approved and the satellite opened on the site of Lancaster and Morecambe College, staff may be required to move between the school site and the satellite. The distance between the two sites is 0.3 miles. It is not envisaged that this would be problematic for staff affected. Staff will be/have been consulted on the proposal so that any concerns raised can be addressed.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A