

**Report to the Cabinet**

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 1 December 2022

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

**Part I**

Electoral Divisions affected:  
Ormskirk; Skelmersdale  
Central; Skelmersdale East;  
Skelmersdale West; West  
Lancashire East; West  
Lancashire North; West  
Lancashire West;

**Corporate Priorities:**

Delivering better services;  
Caring for the vulnerable;

**Creation of Additional Special School Places at West Lancashire Community High School, Skelmersdale**

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

Sally Richardson, Tel: 07920086432, Head of Inclusion,  
sally.richardson@lancashire.gov.uk

**Brief Summary**

This report provides a proposal to create additional special school places at West Lancashire Community High School, through the development of satellite provision in the Children's Centre on the site of St John's Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale. Cabinet approval is sought to initiate a feasibility study and to complete the necessary statutory processes that are required to make this change to the school.

**Recommendation**

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the initiation of a feasibility study and informal consultation to increase the number of pupil places at West Lancashire Community High School, Skelmersdale through satellite provision on the site of St John's Catholic Primary School.



- (ii) Subject to the agreement of (i) above, authorise the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to proceed to formal consultation on the proposals.

## Detail

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities 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. A copy of the Strategy is set out at Appendix 'A'.

A further review of provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities was carried out during the summer term 2021. As a result of this review, Cabinet approval was given in September 2021 to explore options to create more special school places, through the development of satellite provision in key locations across the county. This proposal to develop satellite provision linked to West Lancashire Community High School is consistent with a need to develop more special school places in the south area of the county for secondary aged pupils with learning difficulties, as identified in the September 2021 Cabinet report.

There has been an 8% increase in demand for education, health and care plans each year for the last four years, which has resulted in an associated increase in demand for special school places. On average, there has been a requirement to provide an additional 164 special school places per year, since the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities reforms in the same year.

Despite significant investment in Special Educational Needs units attached to mainstream schools, and the creation of 294 more special school places that either have, or it is anticipated will become, available in September 2023, it has not been possible to keep pace with demand. This proposal has been put forward in an attempt to ensure there are sufficient special school places for pupils in September 2023.

West Lancashire Community High School was one of the schools that had expressed an interest in developing satellite provision when the proposal was initially put forward. However, at that time, it had not been possible to identify a suitable site for the development of this provision. West Lancashire Community High School is a special school for pupils aged between 11 and 19 years with generic learning difficulties and/or autism. It currently has a total of 83 pupils aged between 11 and 16 years and 39 pupils in the post-16 provision. All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan.

The site that is being proposed for the development of the satellite provision is a vacant building that was previously used as a Children's Centre. The building is co-located with St John's Catholic Primary School in Skelmersdale and is 2.5 miles away from the main West Lancashire Community High School site. Each building



has its own separate entrance and outdoor area. The Children's Centre building has the potential to provide between 40 and 50 additional special school places.

All policies and procedures required for the proposal would be aligned with existing policies at West Lancashire Community High School. All pastoral and safeguarding responsibilities for the children and young people attending the satellite provision would remain with West Lancashire Community High School, should the proposal be approved.

The creation of satellite provision, and increasing the number of places a special school is designed to accommodate by more than 10%, are both considered to be significant changes to a school. It will therefore be necessary to proceed with the statutory process required to implement such a change, which includes informal and formal consultations. Should Cabinet approval be given to proceed with the proposal within this report, it is anticipated that many, if not all, of these additional places will be available from September 2023. Cabinet is also asked to authorise the Executive Director for Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to consider the results of the informal consultation and, if appropriate, to proceed to a period of formal consultation. The results of any formal consultation that is undertaken, and final approval to make any significant change to the school along with financial implications and funding proposals, will be sought from Cabinet during the spring term 2023.

## **Consultations**

No consultations have yet been undertaken.

## **Implications**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

## **Risk management**

The risks associated with not following the proposals contained within this report are that there will be insufficient special school places for children and young people within the south area of Lancashire in September 2023 within the maintained sector.

## **Financial**

By increasing the county council's own Internal Special School Provision, the county council will be able to progress towards keeping up with the demands on the service, and become less reliant on the use of Independent School placements, which are not cost effective and are currently a growing pressure on the budget.

The current average cost of an independent placement is £44,000, compared to an average Internal Special School place of £22,000.

Demand/expenditure is currently increasing by approximately 8% per year, compared to indicative funding allocations for the High Needs Block of 3% per year. This is making the gap between expenditure and funding much wider 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 places created within the satellite hub will help support the growing financial pressures on the High Needs Budget.

### **Human Resources**

Staff at West Lancashire Community High School and St John's Catholic Primary School will be given opportunities to consider the implications of the changes being proposed. All staff will be encouraged to participate in any consultations that are completed as part of the feasibility study, should the decision be made to go ahead with this proposal. The outcomes of the consultations will be made fully available to inform and decision by the Executive Director for Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to proceed to formal consultation.

### **Property Asset Management**

A feasibility study will be carried out to identify the practical considerations and potential works necessary to accommodate the satellite provision.

Utilisation of the vacant accommodation at St John's Catholic Primary School for this purpose will support the primary school's property holding costs.

### **Procurement**

All Lancashire County Council procurement standing orders will be complied with.

### **Legal**

The county council has a legal duty to ensure adequate provision is made for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, including post-16 learners. This has been more challenging in some areas than others, and securing additional places as recommended will provide flexibility and scope in the South Lancashire area to allow this to happen.

### **Equality and Cohesion**

This proposal impacts on both the age (young people) and disability protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 and potentially also on staff at the school whose protected characteristics are not known at present. To meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty fuller consideration will be given to these aspects as part of any feasibility study or further development of this proposal so that any potential adverse impacts can be fully considered as part of the process.



## List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
-------	------	-------------

None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

