

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 7 September 2023

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 School Places and Special Educational Needs Units at Mainstream Schools
(Appendices 'A' to 'E' refer)

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Brief Summary

This report provides an update and review on the implementation 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.

Final approval is also being sought on the proposal to create additional special school places on the Applebee Wood Specialist School site in Lostock Hall. This proposal forms part of the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Sufficiency Strategy 2019–2024, agreed by Cabinet in October 2020.

In addition, final approval is being sought on the proposal to remove the boarding provision at Bleasdale School, Silverdale.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the initiation of feasibility studies for the 11 special schools detailed within the report that have expressed an interest in increasing the capacity



and number of special school places within their schools.

- (ii) Approve the initiation of the informal consultation process to expand and increase the numbers of special school places at The Loyne Specialist School in Lancaster, Kirkham Pear Tree School, Acorns Primary School in Preston, Mayfield Specialist School in Chorley, The Coppice School in Preston and Kingsbury Primary School in Skelmersdale to create additional places from January 2024, and in the longer-term.
- (iii) Subject to (ii) above, 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 consultations for the January 2024 and longer-term expansions in relation to the six schools identified in (ii) above.
- (iv) Subject to (i) above, provide agreement in principle for the provisional costings for any refurbishment or other building works required to create additional capacity in the six schools identified in (ii) above.
- (v) Subject to (iv) above, authorise the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to make decisions about any revised costings for the six schools identified in (ii) above.
- (vi) Approve the initiation of feasibility studies and informal consultation process to create Special Educational Needs units at Poulton St Chad's Church of England Primary School, and Flakefleet Primary School in Fleetwood.
- (vii) Subject to (vi) above, 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 consultations for the development of Special Educational Needs units at the two schools identified in (vi) above.
- (viii) Consider the results of the formal consultation and give final approval to increase the number of special school places at Applebee Wood Specialist School, Lostock Hall, Preston by 20 places to 167, which will be created through additional teaching spaces on the school site.
- (ix) Consider the results of the formal consultation and give final approval to remove the boarding provision at Bleasdale School, Silverdale.

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. 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.

In line with the principles and priorities identified within the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, 306 more special school places have been created since September 2021. In addition, 96 of the 244 Special Educational Needs unit places identified in the strategy are currently available, 88 should become available before the start of the 2024/25 academic year and another 40 are under consideration.

Lancashire has seen an 8% growth in the increase in the number of Education, Health and Care plans over the last few years, which is slightly lower than the national annual growth of 10%. There has been a 4% increase in the number of special school places in Lancashire on average each year since 2018/19.

It should be noted that 9% more children are educated in special schools in Lancashire, in comparison with the average across local authorities in England. There is evidence that greater inclusion in mainstream settings can improve the academic achievement for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as their sense of belonging¹.

To manage the increasing demand for more specialist provision across the county further, special and mainstream schools were invited to submit expressions of interest in July in relation to the following:

- The expansion of special school provision, either through the expansion of the existing school site or through the development of satellite provision.
- The creation of Special Educational Needs units attached to mainstream primary and secondary schools.

Special schools for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or autism

Any growth in the number of special school places in recent years has been created within schools for children with learning difficulties and/or autism, rather than for those with social, emotional and mental health needs. All special schools for children with learning difficulties and/or autism and those for children with social, emotional and mental health needs are at capacity. It is therefore not possible to create additional places without building works or expansion onto other sites. The only possible exception to this is Broadfield Specialist School in Burnley, where there may be some scope to create additional places within the existing building.

In 2022/23, there were a total of 3,450 pupils attending special schools in Lancashire. It is anticipated that with a 4% increase in growth, 138 more special school places will be required for September 2024 and 144 by September 2025.

¹ Gray, P., Norwich, B., Webster, R. (2021) A review of the evidence on the impact of inclusion on pupils with SEND and their mainstream peers; Kart, A., & Kart, M. (2021). Academic and social effects of inclusion on students without disabilities: A review of the literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(1), 16



The proposed number of special school places required to be created in each location is as set out in the table below for January 2024 (to accommodate children entering education), September 2024 and September 2025.

Location	0 to 17 population 2021	Percentage of 0 to 17 population	Number special school places January 2024	Number special school places by September 2024	Number special school places by September 2025
East	88378	35.2%	N/A	49	51
Lancaster/ Morecambe	27369	10.9%	8	15	16
Fylde/Wyre	34066	13.6%	9	19	20
Preston	79083	31.5%	10	43	45
West Lancashire	22146	8.8%	12	12	13

The demand for special school places is evident across all age ranges and areas for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or autism. The ratio of primary school places to secondary school places for children with learning difficulties and/or autism is two to three, although the rate of growth is double that in secondary compared with primary. This is not entirely unexpected, given the increase in the secondary age population in Lancashire, and that approximately 100 more children move from mainstream primary schools into more specialist provision, when they enter the secondary phase of their education each year. It is therefore proposed that, at the current time, two secondary special school places will be created for every primary secondary school place. This will need to be reviewed as more data becomes available to support post-pandemic modelling in the future.

15 expressions of interest were received from 22 eligible special schools, and one specialist post-19 college which is part of the same trust as Tor View School. A summary of these is provided in the table below.

Phase	Designation	School	Area
Primary	Learning difficulties and/or autism	Acorns Primary School	Preston
		Kingsbury Primary School	West Lancashire
		Oswaldtwistle White Ash School	East
Secondary	Learning difficulties and/or autism	Pendle Community High School	East
		Ridgewood Community High School	East
Primary/ secondary	Learning difficulties and/or autism	The Loyne Specialist School	Lancaster/Morecambe
		Great Arley School	Fylde and Wyre
		Kirkham Pear Tree School	Fylde and Wyre



		Mayfield Specialist School The Coppice Chorley Astley Park School Tor View Community Special School	Preston Preston Preston/West Lancashire East
Post-16	Learning difficulties and/or autism	Applebee Wood Community Specialist School	Preston

It can be seen from the information presented above that expressions of interest have been received from key areas across the county. Preliminary studies indicate that it may be possible to create sufficient special school places up to September 2025, although further work is required to be confident in the feasibility of some of these proposals. However, it is unlikely that the expansion of existing schools, based on the current proposals, will be sufficient to create the capacity needed from September 2025 onwards.

The lead-in time for bigger projects is such that proposals will need to be developed within the next few months to ensure the county council is able to fulfil its statutory duties, in terms of meeting demand for special school places in two years' time. This will be particularly relevant if, for example, it is identified there is a need to create new schools via the free school presumption route.

There is a more immediate need to create special school places for children entering school for the first time in September 2023. On average, since 2018/19, 121 children have joined the reception class of a special school in Lancashire. In the 2023/24 academic year, it is anticipated that there will be a requirement for up to 209 places, which includes those children currently under assessment. This is a shortfall of 39 special school places for children of reception age, based on existing availability. The options for creating this additional capacity are presented in the table below.

Cabinet is asked to approve the provisional costings for the immediate special school placement increases. This proposal mitigates the risk of the county council failing in its duty to provide sufficient school places.

Location	Number of places	Existing special school
Lancaster/ Morecambe	8	The Loyne Specialist School
Fylde and Wyre	9	Kirkham Pear Tree School
Preston	10	Acorns Primary School
		The Coppice School
Chorley		Mayfield Specialist School



West Lancashire	12	Kingsbury Primary School
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It is not expected there will be a need to expand all of the schools in the Preston and Chorley areas for January 2024, and that at least one of these schools will be considered as part of the longer-term proposals, alongside the other 11 schools offering this type of provision.

Social emotional and mental health needs

Two expressions of interest were received from six eligible special schools for children with social, emotional and mental health needs. These are presented in the table below.

Phase	Designation	School	Area
Secondary	Social, emotional and mental health	Hope High School Moorbrook School	West Lancashire Preston
Post 16	Social, emotional and mental health	Hope High School	West Lancashire

Hope High School have expressed an interest in developing secondary and post-16 provision. Currently, there is no dedicated post-16 provision with social, emotional and mental health needs across Lancashire, and it is often difficult to secure appropriate post-16 placements in local colleges for young people presenting with this type of need.

In addition, it can be seen there is no scope for developing provision in either the north or the east of the county, based on the expressions of interest submitted. Brookfield School provides 76 places for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in the Fylde and Wyre area, but there is no secondary provision for pupils with this type of need in Lancaster/Morecambe, and only 66 places currently available for pupils in the East area.

Currently, the shortfall in special school places for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs is addressed through the placement of pupils within the independent, non-maintained sector provision. The numbers of these pupils and the cost associated in each area is as follows:

Locality	Number of CYP placed	Fees
East	49	£2,275,400.92
North	136	£5,758,716.11
South	99	£5,577,814.99



Post-19 provision

Three expressions of interest were received in relation to the development of post-19 provision linked to existing special schools, as can be seen from the information presented below.

Phase	Designation	School	Area
Post-19	Learning difficulties and/or autism	Bleasdale School Sir Tom Finney Community High School Valley College (linked to Tor View Community Special School)	North Preston East

Currently, the only state funded specialist post-19 provision provided in Lancashire is at Valley College, which is part of the Sea View Trust and linked to Tor View Community Special School. There is, therefore, a lack of parity across the county, which currently is filled by the independent, non-maintained sector. Currently, there are 81 young people attending specialist post-19 institutions across Lancashire at a total cost of £1,505,062.38.

Approval is now being sought to initiate feasibility studies and an informal consultation process in respect of the expressions of interest received from 17 of the 29 state funded special schools across the county, to increase the number of pupil places available, either through expansion on the existing school site and/or the creation of special school satellite provisions.

Approval is also being sought 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 make a decision about whether to proceed with the formal consultation.

The results of the formal consultation and feasibility study will be presented to Cabinet for final approval later this year.

Special Educational Needs Units

Approval is being sought to initiate feasibility studies and the informal consultation process in respect of the two following schools:

- Poulton St Chad's Church of England Primary School, Hardhorn Road, Poulton-le-Fylde
- Flakefleet Primary School, Northfleet Avenue, Fleetwood

Both schools are judged to be good schools by Ofsted. Preliminary investigations indicate these schools may already have the space required to accommodate the development of a Special Educational Needs unit; Flakefleet Primary School has some modular buildings that are not being used, although they may need some



refurbishment. Poulton St Chad's Church of England Primary School has falling roll numbers in the younger part of the school, which could result in surplus teaching space. There is a shortfall of Special Educational Needs units at both primary and secondary level in this area.

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. The informal consultation is not a requirement of the statutory process although it is recommended.

Approval is therefore being sought 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 make a decision about whether to proceed with the formal consultation to establish a Special Educational Needs unit at Poulton St Chad's Church of England Primary School and Flakefleet Primary School.

The results of any formal consultations and feasibility studies will be presented to Cabinet for final approval later this year.

Applebee Wood Specialist School

Applebee Wood Community Specialist School is a special school in Lostock Hall, for children with generic learning difficulties between the ages of four and 16 years.

In March 2023, Cabinet approved the initiation of a feasibility study and informal consultation to increase the number of places at Applebee Wood Community Specialist School from 147 to 167.

The school will create additional teaching space by installing modular buildings on the main school site. The school is funding the cost of this expansion in its entirety and therefore requires no commitment from the capital programme.

The informal consultation was open from 17 March to 29 April 2023, and included an on-line survey, in addition to a public meeting held in the school on 18 April 2023, at which a representative from Lancashire Council attended. Thirty-five responses were received to the informal consultation and, of these, 32 respondents agreed with the proposal to expand the school. The remaining three respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the proposal.

In May 2023, the results of the informal consultation were considered by the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, and approval was given for the publication of the statutory notice and initiation of the formal consultation.

The formal consultation began on 19 June 2023 and ended on 17 July 2023; this period of consultation included the publication of the statutory notice, an on-line survey and a public meeting held in the school on 12 July 2023. The meeting was led by a representative from Lancashire Council along with the headteacher.



There were 15 responses received to the on-line survey. A summary of these responses is set out at Appendix 'A'. 47% of respondents were parent carers of pupils who either attended or who might attend Applebee Wood Community Specialist School in the future. 77% of respondents had a child or young person with special educational needs in their household. A breakdown of the responses provided is as follows:

- 87% of respondents agreed with the proposal.
- The remaining respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the proposal or strongly disagreed.

Comments from respondents who agreed with the proposal referenced how good the school and staff were, and that more special school places were needed. The limited number of respondents who either did not agree or disagree or who strongly disagreed with the proposal made comments about the need for sixth form provision and the quality of the existing provision.

Bleasdale School

Bleasdale School is a residential school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties between the ages of 2 and 19 years. It is situated in Silverdale, which is a village in the north of the county, very close to the Cumbrian border. The day school provision and boarding provision are on two sites, on either side of a road. While the two sites are distinct entities, pupils from the day school do access facilities contained within the boarding provision, including the hydrotherapy pool and rebound centre.

The cost to the high needs block in respect of the residential element of Bleasdale School is £926,000 per annum. Pupils were last admitted to the residential provision at this school four years ago, and it is not anticipated there will be any further requirement for this provision now or in the future, based on current demand. Families are either tending to opt for their children to remain at home and taking up the short breaks offer or utilising the 52-week residential provision. It is anticipated that there would be no change to the day school provision at Bleasdale School as a result of the removal of the boarding provision.

In January 2023, Cabinet approved the initiation of a feasibility study and informal consultation to remove the boarding provision at Bleasdale School.

The informal consultation began on 5 May 2023 and ended on 11 June 2023 and included a public meeting on 15 May 2023. This meeting was attended by a representative of Lancashire County Council.

There were 37 responses to the informal consultation; a summary of these responses is set out at Appendix 'C' and the outcome was as follows:

- 38% of respondents did not register any information or opinion or neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal.
- 40% of respondents agreed with the proposal.



- 22% of respondents disagreed with the proposal.

Those respondents agreeing with the proposal made comments about the efficient use of public funds, but also expressed concerns about continued access to the hydrotherapy pool and rebound centre in the future for pupils attending the school. Those disagreeing with the proposal were also concerned about access to facilities and how difficult it might be to recreate the boarding provision, should this be needed in the future.

In June 2023, the results of the informal consultation were considered by the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, and approval was given for the publication of the statutory notice and initiation of the formal consultation.

The formal consultation began on 23 June 2023 and ended on 21 July 2023; this period of consultation included the publication of the statutory notice, an on-line survey and a public meeting in the school on 4 July 2023. A representative from Lancashire County Council attended this event. Paper copies of the consultation booklet were also made available in Silverdale Library.

There were 30 responses to the on-line survey and one response was received via the paper copy forms made available in the public library in Silverdale. 54% of respondents worked at Bleasdale School and 74% did not have a child or young person with special educational needs in their household. A breakdown of the responses provided is as follows:

- Four respondents did not register any information or an opinion or neither agreed or disagreed with the proposal.
- 32% agreed with the proposal.
- 60% disagreed with the proposal.

The main concerns about the proposal related to difficulties with accessing respite care and future access to the facilities, such as the hydrotherapy pool, the rebound centre and the outdoor play area that are located within the residential part of the building. This was seen as problematic in terms of the day school offer for existing pupils, and to a lesser extent, as part of the community offer to pupils and their families.

Concerns were also raised about the future use of the building and that, although it was not needed now for boarding provision, it may be needed at some point in the future. A limited number of respondents suggested the residential building could be developed for post-19 provision.

It is important to be clear that the current consultation relates to the proposal to remove only the boarding provision at Bleasdale School. This was requested by the school due to the numbers decreasing to the point where there were no pupils requiring residential provision. Whilst there may be a need for more respite care, this has never been provided by Bleasdale School nor could it be. Boarding provision and respite care are very different types of provision; each is subject to its own regulations and governance, and they cannot be used interchangeably.



Consideration has also been given as to whether the residential building that is part of Bleasdale School could be used for this type of respite care. However, this was discounted as overnight provision of this nature was usually limited to a single night or a few nights each week. The location of Bleasdale means that many children with the most complex needs would have to travel significant distances, and the view at the time was that there were likely to be better locations for this type of provision. Work continues to explore the options for the use of the residential building that is currently part of Bleasdale School, should a decision be made to remove the boarding element of this school.

The proposals for an increase in special school places at Applebee Wood Community Specialist School and for the removal of the boarding provision at Bleasdale School have been shared with external partner agencies and other local authority services. Developments in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Sufficiency Strategy have also been shared through the SEND Partnership Board.

Appendices

Appendices 'A' – 'E' are attached to this report. For clarification, they are summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Applebee Wood Specialist School formal consultation results summary
Appendix 'B'	Equality Impact Assessment Applebee Wood Specialist School
Appendix 'C'	Bleasdale School formal consultation results summary
Appendix 'D'	Equality Impact Assessment Bleasdale School
Appendix 'E'	Cost breakdown for SEND sufficiency priority projects for placements required from September 2023, completion January 2024

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 mitigates the risk of this and the county council failing in its duty to provide sufficient school places.



Property Asset Management

All works are being funded from within Applebee Wood Community Specialist School's own resources and managed by the school.

Any works necessary in respect of the development of mainstream Special Educational Needs Units and increasing the availability of special school provision would be identified through the feasibility studies.

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, through the expansion of special school places and through the development of mainstream school SEN Units will be funded via the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation. This is grant funding 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 reducing reliance on the use of independent school placements which present a growing pressure on high needs block funding.

The demand for special educational needs provision increased by 10.7% in 2022, in comparison with 2021. Prior to this, the average increase in demand has been 8% per year. The indicative funding allocations for the High Needs Block are 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 High Needs Budget.

The expansion at Applebee Wood Community Specialist School requires no capital commitment from the capital programme.

There would be a cost saving of up to £926,000 per annum to the high needs block in respect of the residential element of Bleasdale School.

Financial implications are set out at Appendix 'E' and are deemed to be Part II and exempt from publication as the appendix contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). There are sufficient funds currently uncommitted to meet the costs of this project.

Equality and Cohesion

The Equality Impact Assessments for Applebee Wood Community Specialist School and Bleasdale School are set out at Appendices 'B' and 'D' respectively.



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		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

Appendix 'E' is not for publication - Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The appendix contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). It is considered that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

