

From: **Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education**

Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

To: **Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee 16 May 2024**

Subject: 24/00040 Proposal to add an eight classroom block at Whitfield Aspen Primary School (Richmond Way site)

Key decision – It involves expenditure or savings exceeding £1m

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member – Education and Skills

Electoral Division: Dover North

Summary:

This report informs Members of the proposal to add eight classrooms at Whitfield Aspen Primary School (Richmond Way site) and the reasons for this.

Recommendation(s):

The Children's, Young People and Education Committee is asked to CONSIDER and ENDORSE, or MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on the proposal to:

- (i). Approve the allocation of up to £2,800,000 of capital funding from the CYPE capital budget to add an eight classroom block at Whitfield Aspen Primary School (Richmond Way site);
- (ii). Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Director of Education to enter into any necessary contracts or other legal agreements as required to implement this decision; and
- (iii). Authorise the Director of Infrastructure to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

1. Background

1.1 Whitfield Aspen Primary School is a 3FE primary school with a large specialist resourced provision (SRP) for pupils with profound, severe and complex needs.

1.2 In 2018 the school was expanded by 1FE (to 3FE) via a second site (Richmond Way) to support the need for additional primary school places within the Whitfield Urban Expansion (WUE).

[Decisions for issue 16/00032 - Proposal to expand Whitfield Aspen School by 1FE across a split site \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)

- 1.3 Expansion of the school has been phased. Phase one delivered the core infrastructure required by a 2FE school (library, offices, meeting rooms, food technology etc). Sufficient classroom accommodation was provided to enable the school to grow year on year to 3FE in the mainstream and to offer 112 places in the SRP, the maximum number of specialist places that was required. Phase two was planned to be the addition of a two-storey block of eight additional mainstream classrooms. This was to be added when 4FE of mainstream provision was required.
- 1.4 The rise in EHCPs and the need for specialist primary provision in Dover over a number of years has led to more pupils requiring a place in the SRP than was initially planned. As of January 2024, there were 175 pupils on roll in the SRP across both sites. As noted, the current accommodation (across both school sites) was built to provide for 112 SRP pupils. Having to accommodate c63 additional pupils in the SRP has reduced the number of mainstream classrooms available. At an average of 12 pupils per SRP class base it means 5 of the additional mainstream classrooms are being utilised by the SRP. As things stand, four of these classrooms will be required from September 2025 to enable the school to continue to admit 3FE of mainstream pupils as they are required to do.

2. The Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed to build the planned two-storey block containing eight mainstream classrooms, but only fit out the ground floor at this stage, with the second floor remaining as a shell to be fitted out when required. The block to be built for September 2025 to enable the school to expand to 3FE as per the previous statutory decision. The block has planning permission.
- 2.2 The Quantity Surveyor has considered this option and forecasts the 'most likely' cost to be c£2,436,000, with the upper cost of c£2,800,000. The economies of scale provide greater value for money than designing a four classroom solution and seeking planning permission for this (see options considered below).
- 2.4 Although the eight classrooms are not required currently, this would seem to be the best option in order to secure additional classrooms for September 2025 as required. Any change to the current permitted plans will require a new planning application adding up to 12 weeks to the delivery timeline. This will lead to the school being short of accommodation for September 2025 and temporary accommodation being required.

3. Timing of future expansion to 4FE.

- 3.1 Current forecasts would suggest a small deficit of Year R places (less than 3) across the Whitfield and Dover North planning group from 2026-27. This can be managed if the additional classrooms are added at Whitfield Aspen as proposed.
- 3.2 The expansion to 4FE would not be expected until the end of the decade or into the next. This would be driven by the rate of housing delivery across the Whitfield Urban Expansion.

4. Alternative options considered and rejected.

- 4.1 A number of alternative options have been considered at a high level. Cost have been provided for each of the options within a range of 'most likely' and 'upper limit.'
- 4.2 Option 2: Build and fully fit out eight classrooms as originally planned. The 'most likely' cost is c£3,150,000 with the 'upper limit' of c£3,600,000. This is in line with the current planning permission, and the economies of scale would provide greater value for money. However, currently, expansion to 4FE is not required. The upper limit cost is c£800,000 more than the proposal. This would divert further basic need and high needs capital away from other needed schemes within the capital programme. Additionally, the school would need to maintain from its revenue budget four classrooms which are not currently required.
- 4.3 Option 3: Build a two-storey block containing four classrooms. The Quantity Surveyor has considered this option and forecasts the 'most likely' cost to be £1,900,000, with the upper cost of c£2,250,000. It will minimise the footprint and therefore the costs. The design will need to be such as to enable further classrooms to be added. Further design work will be required before this proposal can be finalised and planning permission will need to be secured as this will be a significant change to the existing planning permission. These processes would add up to 12 weeks to the delivery timeline with the additional classrooms not being ready for September 2025. The capital cost saving at this point would be £550k, but revenue costs of temporary accommodation of c£370k would be incurred. The total capital and revenue cost being up to c£2,620,000.
- 4.4 Option 4: Build four single storey classrooms at a 'most likely' cost of c£1,735,000, with an 'upper limit' of c£2,000,000. Whilst this will reduce costs at this point, there is a significant risk that the larger footprint could inhibit further classrooms being added to take the school to 4FE. This option was therefore discounted.
- 4.5 Option 5: Reduce the numbers in the SRP by not offering places in Year R or additional places in other year groups for the next two academic years. This was considered for two reasons. First, the opening of the satellite of The Beacon School in Walmer is increasing the number of special school places in the district. However, the current provision operating at Walmer (the Compass Centre) already provides for Year R and KS1. The main building comes online in September 2025. This will provide the planned accommodation for KS2-4. Second, the significant amount of work being undertaken to build capacity in mainstream schools to support children and young people with SEN should reduce the dependence on specialist provision. However, this will take time to embed and build parental confidence. Therefore, it is not feasible to restrict the numbers of pupils in the SRP at Whitfield Aspen at this time.
- 4.6 Option 6: Do nothing. This would mean that the school could not accommodate 3FE of mainstream pupils in line with their published admissions number and the public notice regarding the expansion of the school of May 2016. An application for an in-year variation to the admissions arrangements would be required.

5. How the proposed decision supports Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026:

- 5.1 The proposal will support Priorities 1 and 2 of Framing Kent's Future 2022-26 – "The commitment to maintain KCC's strategic role in supporting schools in Kent to deliver accessible, high quality education provision for all families."

6. How the proposed decision supports Securing Kent's Future 2022-2026:

- 6.1 The proposed decision will support **Objective 1: Bringing the 2023/24 budget back into balance**. Not delivering the proposal would require option 5 above to be implemented, with the revenue costs required to purchase places in the Non-Maintained Independent Sector, and the associated cost to the SEND transport budget.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Capital:

The proposal has been reviewed by a Quantity Surveyor. The capital cost is estimated to be an 'upper cost' of c£2,800,000. The standalone four class option has been costed at £2,250,000 (upper cost) therefore it is considered reasonable for this value to be funded by the High Needs Capital Budget, with the remaining £550,000 coming from the Basic Need Budget to fund the shell of the four first floor classrooms. The future fit out costs for the four classrooms (£800,000 at the upper cost) would be subject to a separate proposal when required.

The Schools' Capital Budget agreed by the Council in February 2024, included a provisional allocation of up to £6m basic need funding to support the expansion of the school from 3 to 4FE. The basic need and high needs capital programme budgets will be updated to reflect the changes outlined in this paper. The Department of Education have recently confirmed additional high needs capital allocations for 2024-25. This funding will be used to fund the £2.2m additional high needs commitment. The resulting savings from the Basic Need element of the programme will be reallocated or held as a contingency.

In addition, a standard payment of £2,500 is provided to a school for each new classroom for ICT equipment. This will be funded from the allocated capital budget.

- 7.2 Revenue: There are no expected revenue costs to be funded from the Council's general fund (such as temporary mobiles). The Dedicated Schools Grant Growth fund, ring-fenced grant from the Department of Education, will be used for the £6,000 classroom set up contribution for each of the four fitted out classrooms.

Should the scheme not proceed through to completion, any costs incurred at the time of cessation would become abortive costs and are likely to be recharged to Revenue. This would be reported through the regular financial monitoring reports to Cabinet.

8. Legal Implication

- 8.1 Planning permission exists for an eight classroom block. If there is a change to the current plans, a planning application will be required.
- 8.2 Kent County, as the Local Authority, is responsible for ensuring sufficient school places. In May 2016, the County Council published its statutory proposal to expand Whitfield Aspen School to 3FE across two sites. It has a duty to provide the accommodation necessary to implement that proposal. The increase in the number of pupils in the SRP and consequential loss of mainstream classrooms means further accommodation must be provided to fully implement the proposal.

9. Views of Local Member

- 9.1 Cllr David Beaney, Dover West

10. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and no negative impact on protected groups has been identified.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 The SRP at Whitfield Aspen Primary School currently has c63 more pupils than was planned for. This has led to classrooms intended for expansion of the mainstream school being used for specialist provision. Four mainstream classrooms are required from September 2025 to enable the school to continue to admit 3FE of mainstream pupils and provide places for 175 SRP pupils.
- 11.2 The proposal to build the planned 8 classroom block, with four classrooms fitted out represents the best value for money and ensures delivery by September 2025. Funding has been allocated from the high needs and basic needs capital budgets to deliver this proposal, if approved.

12. Recommendation(s)

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13. Background Documents (plus links to document)

- 13.1 The report to The Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee 11 May 2016: Proposal to expand Whitfield Aspen School initially by 1 FE across a split site

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk:9071/documents/s65115/B1%20-%20RGKA%20APP%20Whitfield.pdf>

- 13.2 Report to CYPECC 13 September 2022: Additional funding required in relation to the expansion of Whitfield Aspen Primary School (Dover) onto a satellite site

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk:9071/documents/s113566/Report.pdf>

14. Contact details

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