

From: Roger Gough – Leader of the Council

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

**To: Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee
16 January 2023**

Subject: Decision 23/00124- Commissioning of a 30 place specialist resourced provision for secondary aged pupils with autistic spectrum condition at Folkestone Academy

Classification: Unrestricted

Key Decision

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Executive Decision

Electoral Division: Folkestone and Hythe divisions

Summary:

This report sets out the proposed decision to commission a 30 place specialist resourced provision (SRP) for secondary aged pupils with autistic spectrum condition at Folkestone Academy.

Recommendation(s):

The Children’s, Young People and Education Committee is asked to CONSIDER and ENDORSE, or MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS to the Leader of the Council on their proposed decision to:

- (i). Release £200,000 of capital funding from the Children’s, Young People and Education Capital Budget to enable works to be completed to open the SRP;
- (ii). Authorise the Director of Education on behalf of the County Council to enter into capital and revenue funding agreements with the Turner Schools Trust; and
- (iii). Authorise the Director of Education to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

1. Background

1.1 The number of children and young people resident in Kent with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) was 18,930 as at January 2023. This was a 6.8% increase on the previous year. 4.2% of 0-25 year olds resident in Kent have an EHCP, compared to 3.1% nationally. This demand continues to place pressure on the specialist provision available within the County. 39.7% of EHCP learners in Kent (2023) are educated in special schools, compared to 34.8% nationally. The position is unsustainable.

- 1.2 To address the above, Kent is now part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Safety Valve programme. This programme supports local authorities to reform their high needs systems and SEND services for children and young people while ensuring services are sustainable. A significant element of this is to reduce demand for special school places by improving the ability of mainstream schools to support children and young people with SEND, and building parental confidence in this. A further element of this work is to ensure we have the right provision in the right places, with pathways which enable learners with an EHCP to move from the primary to secondary sector in their localities.
- 1.3 To that end, KCC has developed its first SEND Sufficiency Plan. This forecasts a further increase in the number of children and young people with EHCPs linked to their ASC. One gap in our provision is in Folkestone where there is a primary phase specialist resourced provision for children with autistic spectrum condition (ASC), but no pathway in to secondary school. This leads to a demand for special school places, rather than maintaining support in a mainstream setting. Accordingly, the Plan recommends commissioning a 30 place secondary SRP at Folkestone Academy from September 2024.
- 1.4 The decision on this proposal would normally be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. However, as the proposal could have a specific impact on Cllr Love's division (Cheriton Sandgate and Hythe East) the Leader will make the decision.

2. Current SRP provision for ASC in Folkestone and Hythe

- 2.1 The district has three ASC designated SRPs.
 - Martello Primary Academy SRP (Folkestone): for 14 pupils.
 - St Nicholas CE Primary Academy (New Romney): for 14 pupils.
 - The Marsh Academy (New Romney): secondary aged for 24 pupils.
- 2.2 Pupils with ASC in the south of the district are able to continue their education journey from a primary to secondary SRP. The same opportunity is not available for those in living in the Folkestone end of the district, without a significant journey to either New Romney, Ashford or Canterbury.
- 2.3 SRPs aim to offer inclusive mainstream education with high quality support from specialist teaching staff and class support. The degree of integration may vary pupil to pupil and change over time to meet their personal needs. The curriculum is adapted to support integration. This approach benefits both the pupils supported by the SRP and their peers, and extends knowledge and understand across the school staff and community.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal is to commission a 30 place SRP for secondary aged pupils with ASC at Folkestone Academy. This can be operational from September 2024. 6 places will be offered in the first year, incrementally rising to 30 across the five statutory age groups.
- 3.2 Folkestone Academy is part of The Turner Schools multi-academy trust based in Folkestone and Dover. Currently, there are 6 schools in the trust, including 3 secondary schools, 3 primary schools and a trust Sixth Form. Within these schools they host 3 successful SRPs: one for PSCN at Dover Christ Church

Academy (called Aspen 2); another for pupils with ASC at Martello Primary Academy; and the third for VI pupils at Morehall Primary Academy. In 2023, the Trust supported KCC by opening a class for a cohort of pupils with cognition and learning needs, thereby reducing the demand for special school places.

- 3.3 The Trust will convert an existing building at Folkestone Academy to provide for the SRP. This will allow for five classrooms, care facilities, a toilet, a meeting/intervention room and an office. The maximum expected cost is c£200,000 or £6,600 per place. This would represent good value for money given that between August 2021 and January 2023, KCC delivered 6 new SRPs at an average cost of £42,618 per place and the DfE's benchmark figures for an expansion per pupil for a SEND capital project currently stand at an average cost per pupil £63,000.
- 3.4 The school, which is non-selective, was judged as "Good" with "Outstanding Leadership" by Ofsted in April 2022 and was assessed as an Inclusion Quality Mark Centre of Excellence in July 2023. It offers 180 places per year group, and the 6 SRP places will be counted within this number.

4. Alternative Options considered and rejected

- 4.1 There are two non-selective secondary schools in Folkestone, both in the Turner Schools Trust. The Trust has proposed to base the SRP in Folkestone Academy. This has accommodation that can be adapted. The sister school, Turner Free, has no surplus accommodation, thus the costs of providing an SRP here would be more significant. The local primary SRP for ASC is also within the Trust. This will further help create a smooth transition pathway and allow for strong partnership with parents as their children progress to secondary school.
- 4.3 The option of not opening a further SRP for ASD in the district has been rejected. The absence of an onward pathway at secondary transfer age for those pupils educated in the local primary SRP leads to them moving in to special schools, both maintained and independent, with longer journeys to school. This limits their ability to form local friendships, participate in after school activities, and the risk of isolation.

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

- 5.1 The proposal will support Priority 1 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; and
 - to make significant improvements in educational attainment, particularly for deprived communities in coastal areas so that they improve faster than the rest of Kent to reduce the gaps.

6. How the proposed decision supports Securing Kent's Future.

- 6.1 The proposal will support Securing Kent's Future Objective 2:

- The proposal is included within the SEND Sufficiency Strategy which is ensuring the right mix of placements are available.
- Having SEND provision closer to where it is needed will reduce the distances families are required to travel and reduce transport costs.
- The revenue cost at £19,000 per place per annum (c£15.5k excluding the basic rate of funding for every school place) compares favourably to the cost of commissioning additional places within a maintained special school or an ASD day placement in an independent SEND school which currently stand at £21,277 and £45,599 per place per annum respectively. It is anticipated the creation of these places will lead to a cost avoidance of between £0.25m and £1.0m per annum once filled. This saving would contribute towards the High Needs Safety Valve Plan.
- It would also be anticipated to have a positive impact on reducing the cost of transport provision where children are then able to be educated more locally.
- The capital costs of the project are far lower than expanding existing specialist provision.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Capital funding of up to £200,000 will be required. The funds have been allocated within the High Needs Capital Budget, the current budget for 2023-24 to 2025-26 is £40.5m. The Trust wishes to self manage the capital works, therefore a capital funding agreement will be entered in to if the proposal is agreed.
- 6.2 Revenue funding for SRPs is determined as part of the funding arrangements for schools. The number of places commissioned are funded at a pre-set rate, in this case 6 places in year 1, at c£19,000 per place for ASD. The funding comes from the High Needs funding block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, a ring-fenced grant from the Department of Education. The LA puts in place service level agreements with maintained schools and contracts with academies, which covers the funding and expectations. Accordingly, if approved, a three-year contract will be entered in to with the Trust.
- 6.3 It is expected that the proposal will have a positive impact on reducing the pressure on the SEND Transport Budget. In the year 6/7 transfer placement meetings with special schools and mainstream heads, and number of pupils were identified as benefitting from a secondary ASD SRP should one be opened in Folkestone Academy. Based on these pupils attending there, rather than needing places at The North School (Ashford) or The Marsh School (New Romney) the cost difference on transport would be approximately £8,835 per annum per place. It is recognised the final decisions on placement which are made in February 2024, as well as parental responses may alter which pupils join the SRP in September 2024, however, the case remains that having this provision is an important step in ensuring appropriate local pathways exist for all pupils, and such arrangements avoid unnecessary expenditure on transport.

7. Consultation process and timeline to open the SRP

- 7.1 The Turner Schools Trust consulted on the proposal. The Trust received 28 responses via email to the consultation document, of which 27 were in support.

7.2 The consultation on the SRP was sent to:

- parents/carers
- local schools
- local KCC Members
- Folkestone and Hythe District Council
- Folkestone Town Council
- Member of Parliament
- KENT PACT
- Autism charities, societies and support groups.

7.3 The Trust will need to submit a business case to the Department for Education (DfE) to have its funding agreement amended to include the SRP. This will include the consultation outcomes, and will require confirmation from KCC that it will commission the SRP if approved by the DfE. No contracts can be entered in to until the DfE have approved the proposal.

7.4 The DfE should reach their decision on the SRP by March 2024. Once approved, the Trust will appoint staff and to complete the refurbishment works for a September 2024 start opening to Year 7 pupils.

8. View of the Local Members

8.1 The provision is expected to draw from a wider area than the current school cohort, and therefore could impact a number of Divisions. As such the view of the following members have been sought:

- Cllr Dylan Jeffery, Folkestone West
- Cllr Jackie Meade, Folkestone East
- Cllr Rory Love, Cheriton Sandgate and Hythe East
- Cllr Susan Carey, Elham Valley
- Cllr Jenni Hawkins, Hythe West

8.2 Views of Cllr Dylan Jeffery, Folkestone West

I fully support and welcome the proposal for an SRP at Folkestone Academy. The Turner Schools continue to demonstrate and make great strides towards inclusiveness and opportunities across the whole community they serve and I believe this facility will offer huge benefits to the pupils who are able to access a place.

Having worked in schools elsewhere in the county where specialist provision is provided, I fully appreciate and support the benefits that can be achieved in the social understanding, awareness and cohesion across the whole school community (including residents, families, parents, carers and children) by having such provision in the same location and at the same identifiable school. This is a much needed resource and very welcome in Folkestone.

8.3 Views of Cllr Jackie Meade, Folkestone East

Although not in my division the proposed new provision would greatly benefit some of my residents' families.

From the pupil perspective:

- 1) Currently pupils are having to travel some distance in order to get to their school. A shorter journey can only be less stressful and encourage a calm approach to the educational day.
- 2) To be sited more within the pupils' community for friends and family contact for extra curriculum activities must be a strong point to be taken into consideration.
- 3) The Academy already has excellent facilities including gardening / science activities and a mixed base of ages so I believe this provision would be a good fit.

From a financial perspective:

- 1) As an existing building is to be repurposed, it is cutting costs to set up this provision dramatically, and also sits well within Carbon Neutrality as new builds tend to be quite carbon intensive.
- 2) By siting the provision closer to their homes, I would hope that many of the pupils would be able to travel by foot or possibly public transport thereby helping to increase their confidence and wellbeing as well as cutting the costs for private taxi fares charged to KCC. I believe an indicative saving is being created by the team to show the possible savings.

8.4 Views of Cllr Rory Love, Cheriton Sandgate and Hythe East

In my role as a local Divisional Member, I write to confirm my full support for the proposal to open an SRP for pupils with ASD at Folkestone Academy. This will be an important further step towards inclusive education, enabling more children to be educated amongst their friends and peers, and (on average) to reduce their travel time between home and school. It will also be consistent with KCC's Safety Valve commitments by reducing dependence on expensive, independent provision, thereby setting our budgets on a more sustainable pathway. The additional local school places also reduce the pressure on the home to school transport budget funded by council taxpayers, which makes a further contribution to financial sustainability.

I am advised that I shall not be the decision-maker on this matter as the proposal could be seen as having a greater beneficial impact on pupils in my Division than on those from other parts of Kent.

8.5 Views of Cllr Susan Carey, Elham Valley

I am in support of the proposal.

8.6 Views of Cllr Jenni Hawkins, Hythe West

No view received prior to this paper being published.

9. Views of the Assistant Director Education (South Kent)

9.1 The proposal delivers a commissioning intention set out in the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024-28 and in the SEND Sufficiency Plan. It provides an important pathway for a group of young people which enables them to continue their education in a mainstream environment, and importantly, in their own locality. The Trust has demonstrated its commitment to providing inclusive education for all. I support the proposal.

10. Equalities Impact Assessment

10.1 An EIA has been completed and no negative impact on protected groups has been identified.

11. Conclusion

11.1 The Kent Sufficiency Plan for children and young people with SEND has identified the need for a secondary aged SRP in Folkestone to support pupils with ASC. Folkestone Academy has the physical capacity to accommodate the SRP and the expertise and skills to support pupils with ASC. The SRP can be opened in September 2024 offering much needed additional specialist places to support young people in the district.

12. Recommendation(s)

The Children's, Young People and Education Committee is asked to CONSIDER and ENDORSE, or MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS to the Leader of the Council on the proposed decision to:

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- c) Authorise the Director of Education to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

13. Background Documents (plus links to document)

- SEND Sufficiency plan – item on CYPE Cabinet Committee Agenda January 2024

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s121909/Draft%20SEND%20Sufficiency%20Plan%20October%202023.pdf>

- Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024-28 – Item on the CYPE Cabinet Committee Agenda January 2024

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s121946/Commissioning%20Plan%20for%20Education%20Provision%20in%20Kent%202024-28.pdf>

14. Contact details

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