

**From:** Matt Dunkley, CBE, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

**To:** Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

**Subject:** **Proposal to increase the age range and the designated number at Oakley School, Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent**

**Classification:** **Unrestricted**

**Past Pathway of Paper:** None

**Future Pathway of Paper:** Cabinet Member Decision

**Electoral Division:** Tunbridge Wells South - Catherine Rankin  
Tonbridge – Richard Long TD and Michael Payne

**Summary:**

This report sets out proposals to increase the age range and the Designated Number at Oakley School, Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education is asked to:

- (i) Increase the age range of Oakley School from 2-18 years to 2-19 years and;
- (ii) Increase the Designated Number from 242 to 252 places.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 Oakley School is the Profound Severe and Complex Need (PSCN) school for Tunbridge Wells. Its designated age range is 2-18 years. All other PSCN schools in Kent are designated up to age 19 years (ie include Year 14 - young people who turn 19 during the academic year). Oakley School has established a separate company which is an Independent Specialist College (Oakley College) for young adults aged 19-25 years. This takes young people who are aged 19 (i.e. Year 15). The anomaly of Oakley being the sole PSCN school without provision for Year 14 and the fact pupils have a one-year gap before they can enter Oakley College needs to be addressed.

**2. Proposal**

2.1 It is proposed to increase the age range at Oakley School from 2-18 years to 2-19 years and the Designated Number from 242-252 places. This would

provide continuity of provision for Oakley students prior to entering the Oakley college and ensure equality of opportunity for the pupils attending Oakley School.

- 2.2 Legislation requires that statutory proposals are undertaken where:  
The proposal is to increase the age range of a special school by 1 year or more, and where the increase of the designated number is by 10% or 20 pupils (whichever is lesser).
- 2.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the consultation. To date no comments have been received and no changes are required to the Equality Impact Assessment.

### **3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1 **Capital** – There is no capital expenditure for this proposal. There is no requirement for additional accommodation to house the proposed increase in the school's Designated Number, and therefore no capital expenditure relating to this proposal. The school operates across two sites with pupils aged 2-16 years accommodated on the Tunbridge Wells site, and young people of 16-18 years on the Tonbridge Site, which is currently shared with Oakley College. Teaching space to accommodate additional students as a result of the increased Designated Number will become available at the Tonbridge site as Oakley College is relocating to new premises as part of its planned development strategy.
- 3.2 **Revenue** – Oakley School will receive the funding for the pupils in line with the funding allocated to special schools through Kent County Council's (KCC) funding formula
- 3.3 **Human** - The schools will appoint additional staff as and when appropriate.

### **4. Raising Standards**

- 4.1 Oakley was judged Good by Ofsted during a full inspection in March 2015 and the school maintained its Good rating following a short inspection in March 2019. Inspectors noted that 'The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection'. Inspectors felt that 'classroom visits showed the school to be a place where pupils enjoy learning and make good progress. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. The school ethos of 'work hard, be kind, have fun and stay safe' is embraced by the school community.'

### **5. Policy Framework**

- 5.1 These proposals will help to secure our ambition "to ensure that Kent's young people have access to the education, work and skills opportunities necessary to support Kent business to grow and be increasingly competitive in the national and international economy" as set out in 'Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement (2015-2020)'

- 5.2 These proposals reflect KCC's aspirations to provide sufficient school places across the County, as set out in the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2019-23.

## **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 A public consultation was carried out by KCC, with support from the Governing Bodies, from 25 April 2019 to 24 May 2019 (midday). A consultation document was produced together with an Equality Impact Assessment which can be obtained from KCC's website.
- 6.2 The consultation document was distributed via the school to parents/carers, members of staff and governors. The consultation was available on the school and KCC websites and was emailed to all key stakeholders. An opportunity to send in written responses using the response form in paper format and online was provided
- 6.3 A 'drop-in' information session was held at Oakley School, Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 4NE on Wednesday 8th May 2019, 4.00pm to 6.00pm. This provided an opportunity for interested parties to ask questions and complete a response form. The session was attended by one parent who was in favour of the proposed changes.
- 6.4 There were 4 responses to the consultation: 3 from parents/carers (2 of whom were also governors) and from 1 a member of staff. All respondents welcomed the additional places and commonly felt that the proposed changes would help Oakley's young people develop the independent life skills they needed when moving on from school.

## **7. Views**

### **7.1 The View of the Local Members**

The KCC Member for Tunbridge Wells South, Catherine Rankin has been consulted on these proposals and registered her support.

The Members for Tonbridge, Richard Long TD and Michael Payne have been consulted on these proposals.

### **7.2 The View of the Governing Body**

The Governing Body are fully supportive of the proposed changes.

### **7.3 The View of the Executive Headteacher**

The Executive Headteacher, Gordon Tillman has unanimous support from all staff, parents and carers, for the proposed changes to Oakley.

"The School is successful and oversubscribed, and the proposal will increase capacity. This joins together with the Schools vision of putting children and young people at the heart of all that we do and our ethos of creating "Skills for life and independence" for each of our young people.

The proposal will bring Oakley School into line with all other Kent special schools with post-16 provision, and it creates a continuum of provision to

meet the needs of young people with SEND in the district (and beyond), thus avoiding them becoming NEET or worse.”

#### 7.4 The View of the Area Education Officer

The Area Education Officer fully supports these proposals and feels that they will be beneficial to the West Kent SEN Provision. These changes will ensure equality of opportunity across the county and help Oakley school to provide the best possible learning opportunities for its pupils.

### 8. **Conclusions**

- 8.1 This report identifies that the Oakley School designated age range currently stops at 18 years, rather than 19 years for other PSCN Specials schools. This anomaly creates a one-year gap before students can enter Oakley College. The proposed changes to Oakley school will close the one-year gap and ensure equality of places available for local West Kent SEN pupils. The proposals entail no capital expenditure and have the support of the school, parents and the Local Authority.

### 9. **Recommendation(s)**

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education is asked to:

- (i) Increase the age range of Oakley School from 2-18 years to 2-19 years and;
- (ii) Increase the Designated Number from 242-252 places.

### 10. **Background Documents**

- 10.1 Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement 2015-2020 <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/increasing-opportunities-improving-outcomes>
- 10.2 Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2019-2023 <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s88604/KCP%202019%20-%202023%20 Cabinet%20Committee%20-%20FINAL%20PW.pdf>

### 11. **Report Author**

- Nick Abrahams, Area Education Officer – West Kent
- Telephone: 03000 410058
- Email: [nicholas.abrahams@kent.gov.uk](mailto:nicholas.abrahams@kent.gov.uk)

### 12 **Relevant Director**

- Keith Abbott, Director of Education Planning and Access
- Telephone: 03000 417008
- Email [keith.abbott@kent.gov.uk](mailto:keith.abbott@kent.gov.uk)