

Worcestershire Free Special School engagement event - Tuesday 6th June 17:00, MS Teams meeting

Transcript of recorded meeting

Kiernan, Rachel

We're here today to introduce to you the Worcestershire new Free special School that is due to open in Worcestershire, hopefully by September 2026. We're going to walk through

- the current and projected need.
- the existing provision in Worcestershire.
- the rationale for the new school
- what the new school will look like in terms of location, funding, context and vision.
- the indicative time scales,
- the Create: Schools support offer
- and then we'll have an opportunity for questions and responses at the end.

So, what do we know about children and young people with autism in Worcestershire? We know that the numbers of children and young people with autism Worcestershire are on the rise and we predict that that will continue, mainly within the school age and post 16 age brackets.

In 2021/22, there were 9% of school-aged children with SEN had a primary need of autism in Worcestershire, and we would expect that by 2027 that would have increased to about 12% in our Post 16 cohort. In 2021/22, there were 16% of those young people with SEN with a diagnosis of autism and therefore we would expect that to increase to about 18% by 2027. Much lower proportions in our earliest years because that diagnosis is unlikely to happen in those early years, but there is a small increase that we would expect to see across Worcestershire by 2026/27.

So the local offer and the existing of the existing provision: currently Worcestershire has no specific special school that caters predominantly for pupils with autism. We do have 9 special schools and 14 mainstream schools with resource bases or mainstream autism bases that do cater for children with autism, as do all of our mainstream schools, but the new Special Free School for pupils with autism will absolutely fill a gap in provision in Worcestershire, so all special schools in Worcestershire do have a cohort of children with autism and associated difficulties, but they have limited capacity to provide the support for that increased number of children with autism and moderate learning difficulties going forward.

In January 2022, there were 472 children young people in our special schools with a diagnosis of autism. There were also 149 pupils in our mainstream autism bases. But again, there's very little capacity within our current specialist provisions to provide those

additional spaces for the children that we have identified need that provision in Worcestershire.

There were 83 Worcestershire resident children and young people with EHCPs and a primary need of autism who receive their education at high cost, independent or non-maintained special schools and that might be in Worcestershire, but it's also out of county and that was all based on the bid that we submitted at the time to the Department for Education from the January 22 Census information.

Mel is just going to talk us through a bit of the rationale for the new school.

Barnett, Melanie

Thank you very much. So firstly, and I suppose the obvious thing is that the reason we put the bid in is to meet our statutory responsibilities in terms of sufficiency. So Rachel's spoken about that the numbers of children that we have with education, health and care plans, it will be no surprise to you that those numbers continue to go up. We've currently got 5070 children with EHCPs within Worcestershire and we are seeing our numbers increase in terms of children with autism that have a an EHCP, but it's also important to identify that although some of those children have a diagnosis of autism, that's not their primary need. So obviously we need we need to consider that as well.

Providing choice of provision within the local area was definitely a driver. Again, Rachel has spoken about the out of borough provision, and well the costs I suppose of placements including those out of borough independent settings. So the choice of provision within the local area is very important to keep children within their local area as much as possible. We know that isn't possible in all cases, but again, that was definitely one of the drivers.

The new national autism strategy again, which I'm sure you're all aware of and that's the work stream that I'll come on and talk about in a moment. But we are definitely looking to improve autistic children and young people's access into education. A really important aspect for us and an area of focus within Worcestershire is the positive transitions into adulthood. So there's a lot of work that we're doing around that area as well. And as I've mentioned, building the right support within the community and within our Worcestershire.

Local area, partnerships and strategy, that's due to go to Cabinet for sign off in September this year and we've got a 7 priorities and you've got two of those priorities in in front of you, clearly around sufficiency and effective SEND provision. We also have a specific priority around children and young people with autism and making sure that they achieve positive outcomes and also received the support that they need.

So I'm not sure how much you know about Delivering Better Value in SEND (and I won't go into too much detail because that's a whole different presentation) but it is related to the deficit that some authorities have in terms of their high needs block. So we are actively involved in that. We're part of tranche two and we are just coming to the end of our diagnostic and plans for implementation and clearly some of the information that's come out of that is the opportunities that we have and related to all children with SEND, not just those with autism, but particularly around the early intervention and also supporting young

people to be within their own environments. So we are using a lot of the information and the data that we've got from Delivering Better Value to inform what we need to do going forward. Again, it won't be any surprise to you that the numbers that Rachel shared at the beginning were when we did the bid - Those numbers have gone up since then, so we now have the accurate information through Delivering Better Value in SEND programme.

All age autism strategy: So I mentioned very briefly the national strategy and I'm leading on work stream 2 for Worcestershire Children First, which is improving the autistic children, children & young people's access into education and support positive transition. So again that's a theme that weaves through our All Age Disability SEND strategy and also was clearly a driver in terms of what we wanted to put forward as the rationale for the new school.

And finally, again, the education and skills strategy, ensuring a good education for every child in Worcestershire, and I hope what you can see through this is that the this bid was put in based on the all of the strategies that we've got and using accurate data and forecasting and that's why I think one of the reasons why we were successful because we were able to illustrate the need that we have within Worcestershire for children and young people with autism.

Over back over to you, I think Rachel.

Kiernan, Rachel

Thank you.

So what else do we know in Worcestershire? So we know that there is evidence of a growing number of children and people being diagnosed with autism. As I've said previously, we also know that many of these children experience finding school environments overwhelming.

We are keen to continue to take steps to ensure that we adapt our mainstream schools to ensure that they have an inclusive environment, but we also recognise that the right provision for the right child at the right time is really critical and, as I said previously, we identified a cohort of children who whose only option at the time of our bid was to access independent or non-maintained specialist provision either in Worcestershire or outside of Worcestershire.

The plan for the school is that places will be filled from the Worcestershire population who may currently be in out-of-county specialist schools and that will enable the local authority to reduce the use of out-of-county placements over time and high-cost placements.

It will also enable some of our children that are currently in special schools or mainstream or enhanced mainstream autism bases to access this school provision longer term, so there will be some movement throughout our existing provision and our out of county independent places. So that should relieve some pressure as the school opens.

So through our needs analysis of the children and young people with autism in our independent and non-maintained special schools, we identified that the new special free

school needs to provide an education for children and young people that may experience high anxiety or demand avoidance as a result of autistic presentation support children who are enabled to access mainstream education provision. With support these children and young people have the cognitive ability to access a mainstream curriculum and they will need smaller class sizes. So we are planning to build the school with class sizes of 6 to 8 to support these children and young people's needs and we are assured that the whole school and the staff need to have a dedicated holistic autistic approach to the provision being provided.

So about the actual new school. So the free school will be located in Malvern. For those of you that know Malvern, it will be sited on the existing Poolbrook Centre, which was a former primary school, and the site is owned by Worcestershire County Council.

It will be a special free school all through school opening with 120 places, but I'll show you how that's proposed to be staggered for 5- to 19-year-olds. So Reception through to year 14.

We are proposing that there will be different number of places by key stage, so reception through to key stage two there would be 6 places per year group Key Stage 3 two through to key Stage 4 they'll be 12 places per year group and they'll be 18 places as a whole for post 16.

We chose the site only because it was a former school and it's owned by Worcestershire County Council, but also it has the opportunity to expand in the in the future if needed to approximately 162 places if that was required. The plan is to open in a phased approach, filling up over five years, and I'll show you the detail of that that was submitted as part of our bid.

So this is just a site map and you've got the postcode there. So that's the site plan. The green hatched area is the existing buildings on the Poolbrook side and the land with the red line around it is the former playing field. So it's the full site that is available for the build. It is in a residential area and there is new housing here in the pale pink, so it is fairly surrounded by residential properties.

This is our phased approach to opening so you can see year of opening and then plus 1 + 2. So over five-year period in the first year we would expect to have about 96 places and then building up year on year to the full 120 by year five. And as I say, it could be expanded further later on.

Mel, opportunities for engagement.

Barnett, Melanie

Thank you. So opportunities for engagement. One of the things that we are definitely actively promoting and want to make sure that we achieve is capturing the views of parent carers and young people. So we're really keen that that is reflected within the evaluation

process of the new school. The other thing just to highlight on that slide is the role of Worcestershire Children First, I'm not going to read all of that out to you because you can see the slides in front of you, but clearly there is a role for us to play in in terms of this, this bid and the application and the evaluation process, so facilitating stakeholder engagement again is going to be critical to this to ensure that there are local partnerships formed as the school prepares for opening. I'm now going to pass over to Lotte who will introduce herself and tell you a bit more about Create: Schools.

Charlotte Reece

Thanks, Mel. Yes, I'm Lotte. I'm the lead adviser for Create: Schools.

Create: Schools was established last year by Premier Advisory Group, who are experts in education consultancy. We are entirely funded by the Department of Education, so any support you access through Create: Schools is entirely free of charge. Our team of advisers offer tailored guidance and support to make sure that applications satisfy the DfE's requirements.

You also have access to resources and we can support you up until the pre-opening phase and through us you will also have access to partners in capital, finance, legal, HR, project management and we are hosting a series of webinars with them next week. So if you'd like to get involved then please contact me for more information.

In order to apply you'll need to pre-register first. It's really quick and easy. It should only take about 5 to 10 minutes and this will consist of entering your contact details. Information about you know, the organisation that's applying and which local authority you're interested in. This will need to be completed by next Friday the 16th of June at 5:00 PM. But of course the sooner you do this the better, because once you've submitted your pre-registration you'll then get the application form via e-mail, which means you have more time to write it. It is vital to note that if you don't pre-register then you won't be able to apply, so then you'll have until the 31st of August at midday to submit an application. And obviously between now and then we'll be on hand to review your bid, talk through any concerns you may have, and then come the autumn term, applications will be assessed and invites to interview will be sent out and we will offer further mock, interview support and successful applications will be announced early 2024.

Our team will be on hand to support you throughout the whole of the free school process, but I think the most pertinent service we offer at the moment are the bid reviews. So as you're writing your application, you can send it over to us. We will review against the relevant criteria and ensure that you're adequately adhering to the specification. Also, if you have written a free school bid in the past, you can send that over to us now and we will review again against the Allies. New criteria to show you what needs tweaking and editing so you kind of don't have to start from scratch later down the line. We will also be offering mock interview support. So when you get your invite to interview, we will review what's being asked and replicate that in about a two-hour session to help repair you. And one of

our KPIs with the DfE is to get as many people through to the interview stage as possible. So we process it as the real thing.

So the first two sections of the application are so straight forward, section A is just information about who's applying, and Section B will be a confirmation of the school's characteristics. But both of these will be filled out on the spreadsheet part of the application.

Thank you. It's section C is all about your vision, so you should be linking back to this through your entire application. This will include reference to your growth plan with specifics around time scales, number of schools, angiography, and then you'll also include how you plan to share best practise and your vision for meeting the LA send strategy. This will all be supported by an evidence-based rationale and consistent with the rest of your application, such as with your curriculum and your finances. Most of your vision section is the opportunity to show your passion and how this school.

Provide outcomes for the predicted cohort. That's slightly OK.

So section D1 is where you will show your education plan is ambitious, affordable, and deliverable. This will need to be consistent with your vision, people, intake and financial plan. You'll need to provide clarity on your broadband balanced curriculum and your approach for teaching and learning, safeguarding attendance and behaviour. So if you currently run schools in the same phase, untyped, then you'll need to show how the predicted people intake will differ and explain any variants that you'll have from your current curriculum.

Section D2 was where you'll express the need for the predicted cohort and how you'll measure baseline attainment levels, and so this will include like your strategies to support pupils again with reference to behaviour and attendance and how you report back to parents and the local authority. And again, you should be linking back to your visions throughout this.

Section D3. What includes your staffing structure? And you can also use diagrams and charts as support your answer as it is only 1000 words. Again just showing that it's deliverable, balanced and affordable and with reference to recruitment, retention and staff wellbeing and section D4 again is only a size and words but should summarise how the school will build opportunities for pupils to interact and build positive relationships in the Community with reference to your PSHE SMSC prevent duty.

Preparation for independent life and also adult living.

Thank you.

So each one will show your track record, although it's not mandatory if you already run a state funded school, I think it's a really useful opportunity to show if you have either good or outstanding Ofsted judgements and to show that there are no significant compliance issues.

E2 is where you'll discuss if you have appropriate educational, financial, and other expertise to ensure that the school opened successfully so it includes members of your core applicant

group, including reference to project management, marketing, human resources, health and safety, and things like that, and reference to your Members of your group who make strong trustees and the new school in the new school and identifying any skills gaps and how you may feel them. B3 will show your scheme of delegation lines of accountability.

Explanation of the roles and just how the new school will fit into your existing MT structure.

We absolutely advise filling out the financial template while you're writing your application, although it's not mandatory, and if you do get to interview stage then you'll need to have that anyway, so it's a good idea to do it at the same time as you're doing the rest of your application and but basically you're just need to show that you have a strategic financial plan and transparent processes when delivering educational outcomes and just everything is within order.

Thank you. So in this phase, the Academy Trust will need to develop detailed plans and turn them into a school ready for opening. Obviously, you'll be working very closely with the Department of Education on this. Create: Schools supports proposers up until the pre-opening phase, but if you'd like to talk to us about pre-opening support now, we do have a lot of experience through our parent company and through our partners. But further information can be found in the Pre-opening handbook that is available on our website, but you can contact us if you have any queries.

Next steps are to familiarise yourself with the DfE guidance and just to complete the registration by next Friday. Of course, applications are due on the 31st of August, but in the meantime, if you have any questions, you can either contact myself or hello@createschools.co.uk. Of course if you already working with an adviser then please contact them directly.

Thank you.

Kiernan, Rachel

Thank you, Lotte. So now's your opportunity if you would like to ask any questions. We have also put our Worcestershire Children First e-mail address for you to contact us directly. So if it is about the actually submitting a bid, please do contact Lotte at Create: Schools. But if it's more specifically about the justification for the school and our strategy, etcetera, then you can contact us also.

I'll just stop sharing and so that we can see if anyone hands are up. As I said, if you would like to ask questions now, that's absolutely fine. If you'd like to contact us separately, that's also fine.

C Lawrence. I'm sorry I don't know your first name, so apologies. Would you like to ask a question?

C Lawrence.

Sorry, it's Clive. I've got a couple of questions, if that's OK.

Kiernan, Rachel

Yes.

C Lawrence

I'm from a trust that's currently not within your area at the moment and it's just internal, just a little bit of background of regarding obviously called Worcestershire Children First. So I didn't know if there's just a little bit of clarity around that would just be helpful just for the local knowledge or where we can access that information that would be really helpful.

The other one is in terms of is there any some I've been to a couple of these events now with some of the local authorities it does, is Worcestershire looking at any stage at all to do an early open in a temporary building elsewhere if the need is there because some local authorities are looking within the application to demonstrate ability to and capacity to open early if you need that.

You mentioned the SEND strategy now obviously you've got you on the on the presentation. You put 2 of the seven areas, but I'm assuming in terms of a part of the application will need to evidence all of the seven areas. So just is the seven strategy currently accessible in the public domain?

And then the final one was just around the cognitive capabilities of the pupils because that does have a significant impact on the on the section around the curriculum offer. Now you mentioned the pupils will be able to access the mainstream curriculum. So is that that age-related or is that significantly below age-related but still accessing mainstream curriculum would just be helpful to get clarification on that because that will determine the curriculum design and offer in that section.

They were my questions.

Kiernan, Rachel

OK, that's lovely. Thank you. I'll answer the first 2, so I'll answer about who WCF are and early opening. So Worcestershire Children First are a wholly-owned company of Worcestershire County Council. So we're the children's services area of Worcestershire County Council, so we are one. We are the local authority, but we do have a slightly different name. So hopefully that answers that question.

Early opening. It's not something we've considered as yet, but we are at the very early stages of having the conversations with the DfE about timeline. So as I said at the very beginning, the indicative timeline for opening is September 2026. Now that is dependent on full feasibility of the site by the department and you know any issues that arise from that if there were going to be significant delays to that timeline, it is absolutely something we would look at. We're not sure it would that is an option that could exist on the site that

we've chosen. So it may be that we have to look at alternative sites but as I say that is not something that we have entered into conversation about yet.

If I can then ask Mel to answer the question about SEND strategy and cognitive capabilities of expected pupils.

Barnett, Melanie

The SEND strategy is on the local offer and I was quickly trying to get the link to put it in the chat but wasn't quick enough so I will do that in the minute. So yes that that's on there. So we've got the draft version of the strategy that that's out in the public domain. So you'll be able to see all of the priorities in there.

And in relation to your question about children accessing the mainstream curriculum, I can't remember the exact words that you used, but it would be an age appropriate curriculum. So for us this is about the children that because of the environment, they're not able to reach their potential. And so having those smaller class sizes will enable them to reach their potential. So it's definitely age-appropriate curriculum.

C Lawrence

Okay. So where you've got obviously yours staggered because you've done a places by year group. So if you say you're saying the seven places available for each year group, the young people in year one will be accessing an age-related year one curriculum. But therefore so that the specialist nature in essence is obviously from the small group classes and specialist staff as opposed to a significant adaptation to the curriculum.

Barnett, Melanie

Yes, yes.

C Lawrence

That's helpful. Thank you ever so much.

Kiernan, Rachel

Thank you for those questions.

Would anybody else like to ask any questions here and now?

Okay. Well, that leaves me to say thank you. Thank you for your time. Thank you for coming and listening to us and asking questions. We hope to hear from all of you again at some point we will get the slide sent out to you most likely tomorrow now to the e-mail addresses that you used when you signed up to come this evening. Please. They are for your purposes

only. If other people want to attend the session on Thursday, then please do signpost them to us.