



**North Yorkshire County Council**

**Selby and Ainsty Area Constituency Committee**

**8<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

**Proposed special free school – Selby area**

**1.0 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information for committee members in respect of the proposed special free school to be established in the Selby area.

**2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility under the Children and Families Act 2014 to keep its special educational provision under review, to ensure sufficiency in placements to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), working with parents/carers, young people and providers.
- 2.2 In order to meet this responsibility, the Local Authority has developed the Strategic Plan for SEND Education provision 0-25 (the Strategic Plan) to address the needs of children and young people with SEND in North Yorkshire. This plan can be found [here](#).
- 2.3 During engagement and consultation on the SEND Strategic Plan there was strong support for the establishment of a special school in the Selby area. The lack of such a school was identified as a gap which needed to be addressed. During the formal consultation on the Strategic Plan 94% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with proposals for the establishment of a special school in the Selby area
- 2.4 Due to the lack of a special school in the Selby area, children and young people who need a special school have to travel to other special schools in North Yorkshire or in neighbouring Local Authorities, or to independent/non maintained special schools. In October 2019 119 children and young people from Selby attended such schools. These placements are often costlier than placements in North Yorkshire special schools.
- 2.5 The average current daily travel distance for children and young people who reside in Selby and attend a North Yorkshire special school is 27 miles. This is higher than any other district in the county where children and young people travel between 12 and 16 miles on average to a special school. The need for children and young people to travel longer distances to school not only impacts on their well-being, readiness to learn and time away from their families and community, but also increases pressure on SEN transport costs.

### **3.0 The bid for a special free school in the Selby area**

- 3.1 Given the identified gap in special school provision in the Selby area, the submission of a bid to establish a special free school is a key action in the Strategic Plan. It supports our vision for all children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in North Yorkshire to:
- have the best educational opportunities so they achieve the best outcomes
  - be able to attend a school or provision as close to their home as possible
  - make progress with learning, have good social and emotional health and be prepared for a fulfilling adult life
- 3.2 During the bidding process the government was particularly looking for bids from Local Authorities that:
- Had a clear strategy for high needs provision
  - Set out how the new school would help the Local Authority achieve better outcomes for children and young people with SEND
  - Supported inclusion
  - Offered good value for money. This included a focus on helping to manage high needs costs and where a value for money site could be secured in a timely manner and where there was a commitment to use a local authority or government owned site on a peppercorn lease. In addition, sites would have to have an acceptable level of risk and not be costly to develop.
  - Showed that a new school will be financially sustainable
  - Benefited a wider geographical area
  - Extended the free schools programme to areas that have not previously benefitted.
- 3.3 The North Yorkshire bid was submitted in October 2018. It was supported by parents/carers and professionals in the Selby area, and by Selby District Council. The Local Authority was notified in March 2019 that the Secretary of State had approved the bid to move to the next stage.
- 3.4 In terms of outcomes for children and young people from the Selby area who need to attend special school, and their families, the following positive impacts are expected:
- The achievement of aspirational progress and attainment outcomes
  - Good progress in all areas of preparing for adulthood with local links
  - Reduced travel time and associated anxiety for children and young people, resulting in improved readiness to learn
  - Meaningful relationships with the school for parents/carers
  - Children and young people can have their health needs met locally
  - Children and young people will be more involved in their local community
  - Children and young people will be better able to develop independence.
- 3.5 In addition it is estimated that being able to educate pupils in Selby would:
- Result in a long-term saving to the High Needs Budget which could be in the region of £250,000 to £500,000 per annum
  - In the longer term, result in savings of £300,000 to £500,000 per annum in the Local Authority transport budget.

#### **4.0 The proposed special free school**

- 4.1 The proposed school will be for up to 100 pupils aged 3 to 19 with needs in the areas of communication and interaction and/or cognition and learning needs. Communication and interaction needs will include speech language and communication needs and Autism. Cognition and learning needs will include moderate and severe learning difficulties. Some children and young people may have related social, emotional and mental health needs but this will not be their primary need. Children and young people placed at the school will have an Education, Health and Care Plan and will have been assessed as requiring this type of school.
- 4.2 The school will be a free school. Free schools are state funded academies which are outside Local Authority control and are operated by academy trusts. They have more control over how they operate, for example they do not have to follow the national curriculum. They are held accountable through OFSTED inspections and exam results.
- 4.3 There is no opening date set for the school at present. The Department for Education (DfE) has indicated that they do not anticipate that any of the special free schools in the current wave will open before September 2021.

#### **5.0 The proposed site and building the school**

- 5.1 As noted in paragraph 3.2 when bids were submitted the DfE was particularly looking for those which included a value for money site which could be secured in a timely manner and where there was a commitment to use a local authority or government owned site on a peppercorn lease. In addition, sites would have to have an acceptable level of risk and not be costly to develop because of:
- Ground contamination
  - Flood risks
  - Significant topographical issues
  - Other costly issues.
- 5.2 During the preparation of the bid for the special free school, two sites on the western side of Selby at Cross Hills were considered, as well as a site at Osgodby. The Cross Hills sites were discounted on the basis of flood risk assessment, in the context of the DfE's stated requirement. A search was undertaken of other Council and Government sites around Selby but none were deemed as suitable.
- 5.3 The site at Osgodby was therefore selected to be included in the bid on the basis of the following:
- It is already in the County Council's ownership and so there would be no time and cost in acquiring it.
  - It is large enough for potential expansion of the school, should this need to be considered in future.
  - It is accessible easily.
  - It has a lower flood risk assessment than the other sites and so better meets the criteria set by the DfE.

- 5.4 The school will be designed and procured by the DfE and their consultants though they will work with the County Council and the trust appointed to open and operate the school. Work with the DfE in respect of the site and the building is developing but is in the early stages. Among the considerations that the design will need to address are the impact on the landscape and neighbouring properties, highway access and traffic, and the public right of way which crosses the site. The DfE has to complete assessments before confirming the use of the site.
- 5.5 The planning authority for the school will be Selby District Council. A planning application for the school will be submitted by the DfE’s consultant. This is unlikely to be before next year.

## 6.0 The trust competition stage

- 6.1 Currently the Local Authority is engaged in a process with the DfE to identify an academy trust to open and operate the school. Two engagement events were held for proposer groups (trusts) interested in potentially making an application to open and operate the school. Comprehensive information was published on the North Yorkshire County Council website including presentations and frequently asked questions from those meetings and the specification for the school.
- 6.2 The window for applications from groups to open and operate the school closed at midday on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019.
- 6.3 The County Council and the DfE are now undertaking a process to consider applications received. This will involve assessment against published criteria and interviewing proposer groups. The County Council assessment is involving a range of stakeholders, including parent/carer, mainstream and special schools voice. The groups who apply have to demonstrate that they can effectively provide high quality education for the children and young people who will attend the school. Whilst the County Council is involved in the process the final decision on the successful proposer group rests with the Secretary of State.
- 6.4 Timescales for this decision making process are as follows:

September to December 2019	The Local Authority and the DfE assess applications and hold interviews.
Winter 2019	Secretary of State’s decision on successful proposer groups
Early 2020	Announcement of successful proposer groups.

- 6.5 Once a successful appointment is made for a trust to open the school, there will be a pre-opening phase which is managed by the DfE. During that phase the trust will develop plans and meet legal requirements to turn their application into a school ready for opening. The time period for this can vary and any potential opening dates are subject to confirmation from DfE during the pre-opening period.

## **7.0 Communications**

- 7.1 The County Council website has information about the proposed special free school at <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/proposed-special-free-school-selby> .
- 7.2 Parents and carers of children with SEND in Selby are being kept up to date through links with the groups Bee-Able and Parent Power and through the SEND support group which meets at Selby Children’s Centre. In addition, the website link referred to in paragraph 7.1 has a section about the proposed school specifically for parents/carers.
- 7.3 A meeting was held in July 2019 with residents of Osgodby in respect of the proposed school, with some subsequent communication with individual residents.
- 7.4 A meeting was held with education providers in the Selby area on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019 to provide information about the proposed school.
- 7.5 A short article was provided for the September 2019 edition of Citizenlink.
- 7.6 A more detailed communications plan is being developed during the autumn of 2019 as more information becomes available from the DfE.

## **8.0 Recommendation**

- 8.1 It is recommended that members note the report on the proposed special free school in the Selby area.

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