



Consultation Document

Proposal to establish a new special school provision for Autistic children aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School, Harrogate from 1 September 2024

June 2023

New Special School Provision for Autistic children aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School, Harrogate

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This consultation paper outlines a proposal to establish a new special school provision for Autistic children (with or without diagnosis) aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School at Woodfield Road, Harrogate, HG1 4HZ.

Background

Woodfield Community Primary School closed on 31 December 2022 following completion of the required statutory process. There is a desire to continue to use the site for education purposes.

The vacated buildings have been secured and are not currently in use for any purpose. There are ongoing costs associated with maintaining an empty building.

The North Yorkshire Council Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital programme was approved on 18 April 2023. This programme contained proposals to deploy £20.5 million of resource, to enable the Council to address shortfalls in the sufficiency of its specialist provision and ensure that provision matches more effectively with the needs of young people in North Yorkshire requiring access to specialist provision. As part of the programme, officers identified a need for secondary autism provision in a central area of the county and resources have been earmarked for this purpose.

The Council has the potential to deploy the former Woodfield CP School as a site that could support this development.

Need for mainstream places

Before considering alternative educational uses it is important to understand the likelihood of the Council needing to re-establish primary phase mainstream provision at the Woodfield site in the future. This is because the Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in a local area.

The sufficiency of places in alternative schools after the closure of Woodfield School was a factor that was considered throughout the statutory closure process. An analysis of the sufficiency of places in the local Harrogate area using pupil forecasts to 2032 formed part of the consultation documents and was also included within the subsequent statutory proposals. It was discussed in reports that there was/is capacity within other schools in the local area, although not in every year group in every school.

Analysis looking at Woodfield and its four nearest neighboring schools (Bilton Grange, Grove Road, Richard Taylor, and St Robert's) shows that total rolls have fallen by 107 pupils (1286 -1179), so 8.3%, between 15/16 and 22/23. A further fall in 23/24 is projected and continuing down to a total of 1033 pupils in 32/33 reflecting a declining birth rate. Widening the analysis to include a further six schools in the area also shows a significant fall in rolls between 15/16 and 22/23 from 1549 to 1492 pupils. The future downward trend is also notable for this larger group.

Taking the overall result for all 11 schools shows that numbers have fallen from 2835 pupils in 15/16 to 2671 pupils in the current year. Casting forward for the remaining 10 schools shows

a prediction that the total number will fall further to 2317 pupils (excluding housing impacts) in 10 years' time.

Potential additional pupils arising from housing have also been factored in. Using officers' expectations of development trajectories there has been a total allowance for 174 additional pupils by 28/29, this being from a total of 695 dwellings that have planning approval. The additional pupils expected in this specific part of Harrogate will not compensate for the underlying downward demographic trend and so, overall, there is still a predicted fall in pupil rolls for the short and medium term.

Demand for Reception places:

On national offer day in April 2023 the allocation of places to start in the Reception year in September was completed. This was locally significant as it was the first allocation year following the closure of Woodfield School. Results have shown that despite the reduction in available places there has been no real incidence of local oversubscription with only two schools full to their admission number. Therefore, most local schools are expected to have surplus places available at the start of the coming academic year.

In summary, there is no short-term need for additional mainstream places but the need for additional special school places is high and immediate as described below.

Potential SEND use - Autism provision

The Council's current range of provision needs to be extended to cater more effectively for young people with a primary need of autism who require specialist support to maximise their potential. Those who require a more formal secondary curriculum and associated academic accreditation routes would benefit most from the proposed development.

In recent years, since 2016, the number of children and young people with identified SEND and an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has increased by over 110% in North Yorkshire. The latest position is that there are over 4500 children with EHCPs. The increase in numbers of autistic children and children with other communication and interaction needs is the single largest area of growth and the Local Authority has a duty to have a range of provision to meet those needs, including mainstream schools, resource bases and special schools.

Currently there are 432 children with the primary need of autism accessing existing North Yorkshire special schools. Significantly however, there are 77 children with the same primary need in high cost independent and non-maintained special schools as well as 51 children attending state maintained special schools in other Local Authority areas. This is as result of existing specialist provision in North Yorkshire having limited capacity and the educational offer predominantly catering for autistic children that require a semi-formal curriculum.

Within North Yorkshire there are a significant number of children who require a formal curriculum, delivered by autism specialists in a small, low stress environment. By reducing the social and environmental demands, children who are autistic can achieve success, both academically and emotionally. The site at Woodfield provides the opportunity to create this provision, giving children access to suitable academic challenge and supporting them to reach their aspirations.

The special school would provide children and families with a more local specialist education provision than is currently available. This would reduce significant travel time, and/or the requirement for high-cost provision from the independent and non-maintained special sector.

The additional capacity will help to meet the council's obligations of providing sufficient specialist places that deliver good value for money and high quality for autistic children.

The planning assumption is that the new provision would ultimately operate with a capacity of around 80 pupils and would serve an age range of 11 to 19.

Woodfield School site and alternatives

In terms of a geographic location, the Council has identified a need for a location in a central area between the A1 corridor and the Ripon, Knaresborough, Harrogate area because this maximises the school's reach across the county and locates the provision close to an area where a significant proportion of the pupil population resides.

Currently there do not appear to be any realistic alternative options available for the secondary autism provision in the preferred geographic location without seeking to access sites on the open market.

The former Woodfield School site in Harrogate could form an effective base for this new provision using a combination of the existing school buildings and some additional new accommodation. However, the precise build requirements and timeline for developing any additional new buildings would be subject to a detailed feasibility study.

Why use the Woodfield School Site?

The Woodfield School site has some significant benefits in terms of its suitability as a site for a new specialist provision in terms of:

- Large site, with significant outdoor learning environment area
- Site previously operated as a school site, although requirements for a special school would be different to a mainstream provision
- The existing school buildings have a layout that could potentially be used as the basis for opening the school in a phased way
- The site layout lends itself to adding additional accommodation to enable the provision to expand to its proposed full capacity of around 80 places
- The deployment of the site as a school would satisfy the desire to continue educational use and ensure it does not stand empty for an extended period

It should be noted that the consultation does not propose any change to the activities that are accommodated in the block to the front of the Woodfield site including the Community Library and the Children and Family Hub.

The financial position

There are capital costs associated with providing additional accommodation on site to complement the existing buildings and allow the proposed new special school to achieve its full capacity. Resources have been allocated in the SEND Capital Programme although Council officers are cognisant that pressures currently being experienced within the construction sector could impact upon the precise design and capacity that the Council is able to take forward.

There would be short term pre and post opening revenue costs associated with establishing new provision. However, the introduction of local additional specialist places in the maintained sector would provide an overall saving over time to the High Needs Block through reductions on higher cost placements for children accessing education in the independent sector.

The Proposal

The Woodfield site offers a real opportunity to enhance the provision for autism in the central area of the county and it is proposed to establish a new special school for Autistic children (with or without diagnosis) aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School from 1 September 2024.

Additional Information

This consultation document should be read in conjunction with the following documents which can be found here <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/consultations>:

- Mainstream pupil forecasts to 32/33 including potential impacts of housing

What Happens Next?

Your views about this proposal are welcomed. You can either complete and return the attached response sheet, or submit an online response

Paper responses should be returned to North Yorkshire Council at the address below:

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
Woodfield Special School Provision
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON
DL7 8AE

Online responses may be submitted by following this link:

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Responses to the consultation will be published on the Council's website. Your personal details, and those of others you may refer to, will not be published.

The closing date for responses is 5pm on Monday 24 July 2023

All responses to the consultation are expected to be considered by the Council's Executive on 22 August 2023. Should the Executive approve moving forward to establish a new special school then this would be done by following the requirements set out by the DfE in their January 2023 statutory guidance 'The free school presumption – guidance for local authorities and new school proposers'. The overall process should enable the Council to identify a suitable Academy Trust to be the delivery partner who would have the appropriate experience and skill set to operate a successful provision for this specialism in this part of the county. The target opening date is September 2024 and this date will be kept under review as the proposal moves forward.

Anticipated Key Dates

All dates are subject to approvals at each stage.

Activity	Key timetable dates
Approval to consult	30 May 2023
Consultation period	12 June – 24 July 2023
Consultation review and approval to publish statutory proposals	22 August 2023
	Stage 1 – Invitation for Proposals
Launch of process: National and local announcements by DfE and NYC	11 September 2023
Deadline for receipt of proposals	30 October 2023
	Stage 2 – Assessment
Assessment of proposals and selection of preferred proposers	w/c 6 November 2023
Assessment Panel Interviews	w/c 20 November 2023
Recommendation and confirmation of preferred sponsor.	12 December 2023
Proposals are sent by NYC to the Regional Director (RD)	20 December 2023
The RD will consider the LA assessments and recommendations and decide on the successful proposer There is no specified timescale for this part of the process.	Stage 3 - Decision by RD (for the Secretary of State)
	Pre-opening period
All implementation activity, staff recruitment etc	From notification of RD decision to 31 August 2024
	Opening
Target opening date	1 September 2024

Consultation on a proposal to establish a new school provision for Autistic children (with or without diagnosis) aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School, Harrogate.

This is a consultation on proposals to establish a new school provision for Autistic children (with or without diagnosis) aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School, Harrogate from September 2024.

We are collecting this information for the purposes of gathering views on the proposal. Your personal data will not be published or passed to any other organisation unless a legal obligation compels us to do so.

Reading our Privacy Notice will help you understand how and why we process your personal data. www.northyorks.gov.uk/privacy-notices

Do you support the proposal to establish a new special school provision for Autistic children aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School?

Yes / No / Don't know

Do you have any comments on the proposal?

(Please do not disclose any personal information in your answer)

What is your interest/status? Parent / Governor / Teacher / Community / Other	
Other (please state)	

Name of school: (if applicable)	
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To confirm your proximity to school and to prevent duplicate responses we are asking you to provide your name and address. This information will be removed from any analysis or reports.	
Name:	
Address:	
Postcode:	

To help us assess whether we have provided clear information, please let us know whether you found this consultation easy to understand? Yes / No
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Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
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<p>Please send this response sheet to the following "FREEPOST" address. You <u>do not</u> need to use a postage stamp.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS Woodfield Special School Provision Strategic Planning North Yorkshire Council County Hall NORTHALLERTON DL7 8AE </p> <p>Or to submit your response online go to: ##### SNAP SURVEY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">To be received by no later than 24 July 2023</p>
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