



Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Education Sufficiency Strategy Consultation Outcome Report

Education Directorate, Children's Services

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Introduction

A key priority within our SEND and inclusion Strategy 2021-23 is to ensure there are enough educational placements for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Work towards the development of a draft SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy has been ongoing, and in June 2021 a consultation was held to seek the views of key stakeholders across Buckinghamshire on 6 proposals. These proposals were developed following a needs and demand analysis in relation to pupils with SEND and the types of educational placements that would be required over the next 5 years. The draft strategy was completely new as Buckinghamshire has not had a SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy in previous years.

Background

Buckinghamshire has a population of 161,400 (0-25 years, ONS mid-year estimates 2019), of which 3.5% of children and young people have an Education, Health and Care Plan (Mar 2021). 87,112 children and young people attend Buckinghamshire state-funded schools (Jan 2021), with 10.1% registered by their schools as receiving SEN support. The draft Education Sufficiency Strategy that was consulted upon:

- detailed the current educational places available in Buckinghamshire for the 5 – 25 age group
- outlined the range of needs children and young people in Buckinghamshire have, and the areas where demand is increasing
- forecasted future demand, both in terms of the number of school places likely to be required over the next 5 years, and the nature of these placements
- identified some proposals for how this demand could be met.

Purpose of report

This report will:

- detail the SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy consultation process and outputs
- outline response numbers, types and key themes
- identify next steps to complete the Strategy.

Consultation process

In carrying out this consultation, the Council's corporate consultation process was followed. The project had four distinct stages:

- I. Planning and research to inform the engagement
- II. Pre-engagement work
- III. Public consultation

IV. Consultation close and report.

Methodology

Planning and research to inform the engagement

Data analysis and forecasting informed the development of the draft strategy that was shared during the consultation period. A number of strategies from other local authorities were also reviewed.

Research was also conducted by Educational Psychologists relating to the evidence base for the effectiveness of mainstream settings with Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) and SEN Units on pupil outcomes.

Pre engagement

Pre-engagement included:

- Dialogue with FACT Bucks, the parent/carer forum to understand the experience of children and families in Bucks. This was informed by the ongoing dialogue with parents through meetings and support group social media conversations; feedback from SENDIAS service users; as well as specific surveys conducted by FACT Bucks in partnership with SENDIAS.
- Pre-engagement activity with schools. This included an analysis Buckinghamshire Special Schools which identified the types of special educational needs catered for and where there were gaps. The range of specialist provision has now been published on the Local Offer [Education options and admissions for children with SEND | Family Information Service \(buckinghamshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/education-options-and-admissions-for-children-with-send)
- Discussions with school networks (Primary Executive Board [PEB], Bucks Association of Secondary Heads [BASH] and Special School Heads). These centred on the needs of children and young people currently placed in our settings, and what this told us for now and the future.
- Discussion at the SEND Integrated Services Board (January 2021), the body that provides multi agency governance of SEND and includes representatives from across Health, Education and Social Care as well as the Voluntary and Community Sector and Parent /Carers. This identified some critical considerations including the broader context beyond educational placements, for example health services and housing.
- Discussion in the Sufficiency workstream of the SEND improvement programme, which informed the discussion with senior leaders.

Public consultation

Public consultation was conducted through the Council's consultation hub. An online survey was produced. The survey design collected demographic data, to allow analysis of the results

by different groups of stakeholders. The survey was designed to allow stakeholders to be able to fully explain their responses and give in-depth feedback on the consultation. Some respondents who were unable to access the online survey received a printed questionnaire or submitted an email response.

Opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the proposals directly with the Head of Integrated SEND, Head of Improvement and Transformation, and the Chair of FACT Bucks were provided. 2 online sessions were held for parents/carers, and 1 session for schools/settings. The feedback from these meetings is being considered alongside the formal consultation responses.

The Council set a 30-day period to hold the consultation, starting on 7 June and closing on 18 July 2021.

Communications

The Council wanted to hear from as many stakeholders as possible and the following methods were used to promote the consultation:

- Dedicated consultation hub webpage
- Link to webpage shared via FACT Bucks and SENDIAS mailing lists
- Link to webpage shared via Primary Executive Board (PEB), Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Heads (BASH), and via the Special School Headteachers Group
- Specific emails sent to key stakeholders to ensure all relevant parties were directly informed and invited to comment.
- Publication on the SEND Local Offer and schoolsweb for Buckinghamshire schools.

Summary of consultation responses

Profile of respondents

310 online survey responses were submitted and a further 5 printed questionnaires were returned and included for consideration. 214 responses were from parents and carers of which 190 (89%) have one or more children with an EHCP or on SEN Support.

17 parents (8%) were Electively Home Educating their child(ren).

Responses were received from families with children aged 0-25, with the majority of responses coming from those with primary (36%) and secondary (33%) age children.

Ages of children and young people	Total	%
Early Years (0-4 years)	20	7%
Reception (4-5 years) and Primary Years 1- 6 (aged 5 - 11)	132	43%

Years 7 -11 (Secondary aged 11- 16)	101	33%
Years 12-13 (Post-16 aged 16 -18)	34	11%
Year 14 (Post-16 aged 19) to age 25	20	6%
Total	307*	100%

*respondents could select more than 1 category

The 101 other respondents represented 56 different schools and other educational settings in Buckinghamshire (i.e. special and mainstream schools, pupil referral units, early years settings). 1 response was received from an education setting outside of Bucks. Respondents also represented social care and parent representative groups.

In addition to the survey responses, a further 5 email responses were received and as such these are not included in the tables but their content was considered as part of the free text consultation feedback.

Headline data

In response to the question “In your view, are the [6] proposals the right proposals?” the largest number of respondents (43%) said “partly”. Many more said “yes” (41%) than “no” (16%). Some of the “yes” respondents made suggestions for additional measures and some of the “no” respondents actually supported some proposals.

In your view, are the proposals the right proposals?				
	Parents/Carers	Schools/Settings	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	90	38	128	41%
Partly right	92	45	137	43%
No	32	18	50	16%
Total	214	101	315	100%

Almost three quarters (74%) agreed that more could be done to meet demand with nearly all of those making specific suggestions for other measures.

Are there further actions we should be considering to meet the growing demand?				
	Parents/Carers	Schools/Settings	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	159	75	234	74%
No	56	26	82	26%
Total	215	101	316	100%

8 of the 17 parents/carers (47%) who Electively Home Educated (EHE) their child(ren) felt the proposals would enable their child to attend an education setting, and a further 4 (24%) were unsure. It is recognised that this is not representative of the full EHE cohort given the small sample size.

The majority of respondents felt the draft strategy was easy to understand (72%). Where respondents struggled this was generally due to the use of technical language, the inclusion of too much data, the document being too lengthy, and the complexity of the proposals in relation to how they meet the identified needs. More clarity on the intended outcomes of the strategy was requested as well as a visual representation of where changes would happen geographically. Implications for specific schools were also sometimes felt to be unclear, and some respondents would have liked more detail.

Is the draft Buckinghamshire Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Education Sufficiency Strategy easy to understand?				
	Parents/Carers	Schools/Settings	Total	
	Number	Number	Number	%
Yes	152	74	226	72%
Partly	49	21	70	22%
No	13	6	19	6%
Total	214	101	315	100%

Qualitative feedback

Feedback by proposal

Feedback was varied and has been grouped by proposal.

Proposal 1: Develop nurture or other appropriate break-out spaces in all secondary settings to ensure consistency across the county. This may mean reconfiguring buildings in some cases where space is not available.

All respondents who commented on this proposal were supportive, with some identifying the need for nurture spaces in primary settings too.

It was felt by some that the current proposals do not go far enough to detail the support required for mainstream schools to develop their provision. Training, accountability and expansion of the capacity of mainstream schools were noted as areas for consideration to enable mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with a greater variety of SEN.

Proposal 2: Reconfigure/expand Additional Resourced Provision (ARP) and SEN unit provision to meet future demand:

Establish a new Communication and Interaction (Autism) 8 place ARP in a mainstream primary school in the Aylesbury Vale area.

Develop a new Communication and Interaction (Autism) 10 place ARP in a mainstream secondary school in the Aylesbury Vale area.

Close 1 Primary Physical Disability ARP due to reduced demand.

Reduce ARP capacity where demand is reduced.

Develop a new SEN unit for primary pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.

Respondents generally agreed that more provision of this type (ARP or SEN Unit attached to a mainstream school) was needed, particularly for children and young people with Autism.

Some respondents felt the proposed expansion of ARPs and SEN Units for SEMH/Autism would not create enough spaces to support primary and secondary age pupils and that there was a need for this in High Wycombe too. Some respondents recognised the lack of such provision currently in the north of the county and the impact this has on home to school travel times for many children.

Some comments centred around whether this proposal would lead to sufficient placements in the right locations to meet the range of needs. There was also some concern expressed about there being too much focus on SEMH/Autism. 3 other areas of need were particularly highlighted:

- moderate learning difficulties
- hearing impairment due to the lack of secondary ARPs for primary children with a hearing impairment to transition to
- pupils with a speech and language need, felt to be an increasing area of need following the pandemic.

Some respondents felt that Autism SEN units attached to grammar schools are needed instead of ARPs:

“provision [is needed] for academically able autistic children, who don’t need a reduced curriculum, who may be best suited to grammar schools, who want to do A levels, but who can’t cope with massive schools.”

Caution was expressed that ARPs will not work for everyone as they do not provide a “constant alternative environment” and the need therefore for specialist SEMH provision separate from mainstream schools.

“More standalone SEN units required as ARPS push autistic kids in mainstream too much”.

In particular expansion of such provision linked to Autism was highlighted as requiring to work as SEN units rather than ARPs, with children not having to be in the mainstream classes as often as they are currently, particularly within secondary provision.

Some felt there should be more than 1 new SEMH SEN unit and this proposal should be replicated in other areas to support recovery from the pandemic and the impact it has had on pupils’ mental health.

The proposed closure of a Physical Disability ARP was commented upon with some respondents disagreeing with the proposal due to the benefits for existing students and the implications of moving pupils. This was particularly from parents currently accessing the ARP, with consideration being requested for reduced capacity for a time, but to keep the ARP running.

Concern was expressed that schools may become too big for children with SEND to cope with, both in relation to children attending the mainstream setting full-time and those with ARPs where a percentage of time is spent within the mainstream setting. Respondents suggested the need for more specialist provision in the form of SEN units or Special Schools where the environment and class size is appropriate. This concern was also reflected in comments relating to the proposal to develop satellite classrooms linked to Furze Down School, with some parents fearing that integrating pupils into mainstream would not be workable.

Respondents highlighted the need to ensure flexibility in the approach as demand may change over time, the need to re-designate, rather than close existing provision and/or continue to run at reduced capacity. Some creative suggestions were put forward, including the need for a ‘short-stay’ ARP/Pupil Referral Unit type provision linked to a mainstream school for children with Autism, providing explicit teaching to enable children to be reintegrated into mainstream. This would focus on arousal and on *“interoception, proprioception, attention and concentration, emotional literacy and language and social communication”*. There was also a suggestion that ARPs should provide outreach support to the surrounding schools.

Proposal 3: Reconfigure/expand specialist provision for children with Communication and Interaction needs (Autism) and significant learning difficulties:

- Develop the capacity of Chiltern Wood and Vale Federation schools to accommodate the rise in young people with complex Autism with Severe Learning Difficulties expected in the secondary specialist sector from September 2022.
- Consider, alongside social care and health partners in the local area, the need for residential schooling provision linked to a current special school for Autism and complex learning difficulties.
- Develop satellite classrooms in the north of the county (primary and secondary) for children with Autism enabling pupils to gradually integrate into the mainstream setting over a 2-year period in line with their needs being met. This will also broaden the GCSE offer to these pupils. Approx. 25 places across primary and secondary, linked to Furze Down School.
- Increase capacity at Stony Dean and Pebble Brook Schools (subject to building works) to enable the school to support children with Moderate Learning Difficulties and Speech, Language and Communication Needs for whom it is evidenced will need long term support and preparation for independent adult living. This will increase placements by 16 places.
- Close the residential provision at Alfriston School (following a needs analysis) and examine the possibility of converting to day places which are currently oversubscribed.

Proposal 4: Review and expand the capacity of existing special schools to deliver a mainstream curriculum in a low arousal environment to cater for children with Communication and Interaction needs (Autism) for whom a mainstream curriculum offers the best possible foundation for their future. Approx. 80 places over the next four years.

In relation to proposals 3 and 4, respondents agreed that increased specialist provision in Buckinghamshire is needed:

“All of the mentioned propositions sound great and are, am sure, greatly needed.”

There was a view that special school provision was particularly lacking in the north of the county, impacting on current travel times for children and young people to access the right provision for them. Others felt that the south of the county had less such provision. The need to have more local specialist provision available was shared.

Some comments suggested that schools needed to be more explicit about the needs of children that they were able to meet, particularly Autism, and that the published Sufficiency Strategy should more explicitly take into account the needs of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Others recognised a need for supporting children who

are more high functioning but require a lower arousal environment to cater particularly for their sensory needs, that can be provided within a special school.

Concern was expressed that schools will become too big for children with SEND to cope with, both in relation to children attending the mainstream setting full-time and those with ARPs where a percentage of time is spent within the mainstream setting. Respondents suggested the need for more specialist provision in the form of SEN units or Special Schools where the environment and class size is appropriate. This concern was also reflected in comments relating to the proposal to develop satellite classrooms linked to Furze Down School, with some parents fearing that integrating pupils into mainstream would not be workable:

“There needs to be more special schools rather than integrating into mainstream.”

One respondent asked for more details of the plans for provision for the post-16 age group that shows relevant work opportunities and integration into wider society from which they've been separate from while in specialist education, and another asking for the provision in special schools to be less sensory/play based.

The proposal to close the boarding provision at Alfriston School generated a number of comments overwhelmingly against the proposal. Some respondents referred to the key life skills that the boarding provision enables and the positive impact on those attending in preparing them for adulthood:

“Girls are literally transformed by this experience. Their mental health improves, their sense of self-worth is visible and they are able to learn life skills which were not always available to them before.”

Respondents also expressed concern that the building would not lend itself to being converted into day placements:

“In order to make the space fit for its new purpose, you would have to invest a significant amount of money renovating the original, historic school building. I feel this would be much better spent investing in other proposals mentioned in the strategy rather than for the very few places you would gain by converting the boarding space at Alfriston School.”

Other respondents were open to changes at Alfriston School if those were part of an increased offer of residential provision across the county, saying that funding could be:

“better utilised where the need is, for more than just a minimal number.”

There were specific requests for residential provision for pupils with complex Autism, including respite and for those post 16. Similar facilities to those offered in residential

schools outside of Buckinghamshire were also requested by some parents/carers to avoid having to place their child(ren) out of county.

Proposal 5: Reconfigure/expand specialist provision for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

Enable Special Schools that do not ordinarily cater for Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs to provide support for children who present challenging behaviours as a result of their underpinning SEN. Designated Social, Emotional and Mental Health schools to provide for children who have severe Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs as their primary area of need.

Develop Secondary Social, Emotional and Mental Health specialist provision to offer a wider/vocational curriculum options.

Develop a new Special School which can provide therapeutically for children with identified attachment disorders and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.

Comments relating to proposal 5 were generally supportive with particular interest in the proposal to develop a new therapeutic special school, aligning with a number of comments made about the need for more Special Schools in Buckinghamshire. The increased need for provision for pupils with SEMH, exacerbated by the pandemic, was also referenced, including the need for earlier mental health support in schools. Respondents also felt:

“more focus needs to be on expanding the capability of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with a greater variety of SEN, particularly SEMH/ASCs.”

and

“there is absolutely a need to provide schooling for children with SEMH needs.”

The current situation was highlighted by some, with pupils having to travel long distances to attend high cost placements to access the right provision for them, particularly with SEMH and Autism linked needs (PDA and ADHD were mentioned specifically by some). There was a feeling that schools needed to be more flexible, rather than attaching one label to the children in relation to their needs, enabling provision for children that are “*neurodiverse in nature*”. Current SEMH special school provision was identified by some as “*inappropriate*” to meet their children’s needs.

Proposal 6: Develop the offer at Buckinghamshire College Group to meet the demand. This may include developing the skills and knowledge of staff in the areas of Social, Emotional and Mental Health and Autism, conducting a space analysis to ensure the site is fit for purpose (building on previous works and investment) and working in partnership to develop initiatives to meet the needs of particular groups.

Comments relating to proposal 6 focused on the need to have a broad post 16 offer for pupils with SEND that stretches beyond Bucks College Group and meets both demand and the needs of all young people with SEND. Some felt post 16 provision in mainstream schools needs broadening to include vocational and functional skills programmes; this would help to support vulnerable pupils including those who:

“struggle with change and are not able to independently travel further... to attend college if they don't meet 6th form entry requirements.”

Equally others felt specialist colleges were best placed to provide this, and a small-scale college for post 16 is needed. Further, a waking day A' level curriculum for children with SEMH was highlighted as a need.

Additional comments

In addition to the comments made about specific proposals, respondents made a number of other comments. These included:

- the importance of specialist support from professionals (including “direct” rather than “remote” or “delegated” support) to enable settings to meet the needs of a range of pupils. Educational Psychologists, specialist teachers and therapists were highlighted in particular with one respondent commenting *“they are worth their weight in gold.”* Collaboration across professions and with families was also identified as critical.
- the need to have a coherent and high-quality alternative provision offer
- the benefits of training to ensure settings are well-equipped to support pupils including but not limited to training on communicating well with families, understanding SEND law, and preparing for adulthood from the earliest years.
- the need to develop the culture in schools so that they can meet the needs of children without recourse to nurture spaces *“We need quiet, low arousal spaces in our classrooms so children can be secure within the learning environment”*
- The need for support for pupils with SEND within Grammar Schools.

Respondents also made suggestions that they felt would improve the experience of families in Buckinghamshire in relation to educational placements. These ranged from ensuring clear eligibility criteria for different settings, transparent and consistent decision-making processes, the need for family support in addition to support at the educational setting, the

need for more early intervention and staff training, the benefits of smaller classrooms, and reviewing how ARPs operate. It was suggested that establishing ARP social groups to encourage interaction and learning between parents/carers of pupils with Autism and settings could be helpful.

Finally, concern was expressed about whether there would be sufficient funding to support the proposals, the importance of value for money, and the need for ongoing review and analysis of projections.

Additional or alternative proposals

The online survey asked respondents to identify any other actions they felt should be taken. A number of suggestions were forwarded including requests for:

- more primary and secondary provision for complex needs, profound and multiple learning disabilities [PMLD], and wheelchair users, as current settings will not be able to accommodate future demand
- new purpose-built special schools to cater for specific needs (pathological demand avoidance [PDA], moderate learning difficulties [MLD], severe learning difficulties)
- a new secondary school for children with Autism who do not have learning difficulties, are very able, but cannot access a huge school
- primary schools suitable for children with Autism / social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and provision specially for girls
- increased primary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision in Chiltern and South Bucks and an Early Years PRU
- increased provision for students at home and refusing to attend school due to unmet needs
- a neurodiversity hub to support pupils with ADHD
- increased support for early years settings, including for SEMH
- primary ARPs that offer an interim space for children that cannot find a specialist secondary place so they can stay in Primary for another year(s), enabling a more successful transition when older
- an outreach hub based at Furze Down School for schools in the far north of the county to disseminate good practice and quality assure provision through peer review, with a focus on SEND Leadership Support and supervision for mainstream SENDCOs, maximising the impact of Teaching Assistants, making Autism research accessible to teachers, and training and support to ensure all schools confidently deliver ordinary available provision.
- opportunities for self-directed education and other more progressive education for those who struggle in current settings
- expansion of the Autism teaching team

- expansion of Kiteridge Pupil Referral Unit
- expansion of Woodlands primary Pupil Referral Unit to include placements for children with EHCPs and additional behavioural needs
- a short stay unit based in upper primary and covering transition into secondary to support young people's transition into mainstream or specialist settings at the right time and to the most appropriate environment.

Conclusion and next steps

The consultation feedback has been collated and is currently being considered. Discussions will continue during the early part of the Autumn term with all relevant parties including FACT Bucks, the parent/carer forum and those settings who have expressed an interest in taking forward some of the proposals or alternative suggestions identified. Demand data will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure plans are in line with the latest forecasts. Once decisions have been taken, a revised SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy for 2022 – 2027 will be published.