

People and Health Overview Committee

9 November 2021

Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning of Places

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Vik Verma
Title: Corporate Director of Education and Learning
Email: vik.verma@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

That the Committee note and support the work being done to identify and place children with SEND at the new Dorset special school at the Dorset Centre of Excellence in Shaftesbury.

That the Committee provides challenge and support to ensure we meet the target to place children with SEND closer to home.

Reason for Recommendation:

The Council in its role as the Commissioner of provision for children and young people with SEND will seek to commission places for children for whom the new special school at the Dorset Centre of Excellence is appropriate. It is important to note that Commissioning alone does not guarantee a placement at any provision and every school has its own admissions arrangements. The new independent school at the Dorset Centre of Excellence will have its own admissions arrangements for how it will admit children. This paper does not seek to set out how the new company will make its own

decisions on the admission of children to the setting that it feels are appropriate to a child's age, ability, aptitude, special needs or their needs could be incompatible with the cohort of children that will be educated there.

This paper sets out how the council will work with children, young people and their families, to understand their needs and identify whether the school will be a suitable placement.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper sets out the cohort of children and young people that Dorset Council intend to place at the new special school at the Dorset Centre of Excellence. It includes the types of special educational needs that the setting will be able to provide for and the process of transition and induction.
- 1.2 There are approximately 3,000 children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Most children and young people with special education needs supported by an EHCP can have their needs met from within mainstream settings. The highest category of need is Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), the second is social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). The other specific areas of need which have high numbers are speech, language and communication, moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and Physical Difficulties (PD). Many children have needs across these areas and as a Council we recognised that the primary need is not always a helpful indicator of a child or young person's needs, however it does offer some useful context of the demographic of our school population.
- 1.3 Those with most complex needs that require specialist expertise and a personalised curriculum will require specialist settings. Currently within Dorset there is insufficient specialist provision for those with the most complex needs. In Dorset there are currently 4 maintained special schools and 1 academy special school, with a combined total of approximately 700 places. The Harbour School Dorset which was opened in 2019 under the Free School Programme will open fully in April 2022, increasing the special school places by a further 160. The Harbour school will take 96 High Functioning ASC and 64 High Functioning SEMH pupils, aged 9-19 (year 5-14).
- 1.4 Of the approximately 3,000 children with an EHCP, approximately 275 educated in an Independent Special School (ISP) and Independent Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) (with a mix of non-residential and residential placements). Of these 118 children and young people are aged 5-15 years old.

- 1.5 The most common primary need in the ISP cohort aged 5-15 years olds is social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and the second is Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC). Although ISPs and INMSS placements can meet the needs of our children and young people, it is not typically the most cost-efficient method of delivering provision putting pressure on the High Needs Block and reducing the overall amount of funding available for the wider cohort. The outcomes for children and young people are not improved by attending ISPs compared to keeping them in local settings. Keeping children and young people local improves the opportunities for them to access mainstream activities and education and aides' transition to adulthood and adult social care and health services. It increases their sense of belonging to local community in which they live. Alongside the work to increase sufficiency and resources in special schools it is crucial that we as an education system continue to work with mainstream settings to improve inclusive practice.
- 1.6 Dorset Centre of Excellence, established on the former St Mary's site in Shaftesbury will enable Dorset Council to provide high quality special educational provision for children and young people in Dorset, thereby reducing the demand and need to place children and young people in ISPs and INMSSs at some distance from their family home and local services.
- 1.7 Alongside this Dorset Council are investing in developing Dorset's maintained special schools and the provision within mainstream schools. This will increase the range of provision available demonstrating a graduated approach and providing more choice to families and our SEND teams.
- 1.8 It is important to note that not every child with special educational needs requires a special school place and not every student can have their needs met at every special school. This is because the provision available at the school may not be compatible with the child's age, ability, aptitude, special needs or their needs could be incompatible with the cohort of children that will be educated there.
- 1.9 Dorset Centre of Excellence Special Educational Needs provision
- A significant amount of work has been carried out to analyse the needs of children and young people in ISPs and INMSSs. The SEND Service and an Educational Psychologist have worked together reviewing EHCPs, having conversations with the SEND provision leads and team managers to identify the children and young people who could be placed at the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

1.10 Factors that were taken into consideration are travelling distance from their home to Dorset Centre of Excellence; age and whether the young person is within a transfer year i.e. year 6 or year 9; whether the setting they are attending has had an Ofsted judgement of requires improvement (RI) and whether they are placed in a residential placement and the factors around this residential placement.

1.11 Following the period of analysis, these are the categories of need that have been identified to support the development of the cohort for the new school and to ensure that the school can create an operating model that can support the children on roll to thrive:

- **SEMH externalized anxiety:** SEMH is usually listed as Primary Need on the EHCP. Children may have a range of abilities – mostly around average or achieving two years below age related expectations but it may not always be clear whether this is due to low ability or other factors. It may be that for children in this group that behavior is masking other SEN needs such as low cognition or difficulties with communication, despite additional support being provided already in a mainstream setting for multiple terms or academic years.
- **Underlying average ability with ASC and/or Social Communication difficulties:** Communication and Interaction usually listed as the Primary Need on the EHCP. Children may be broadly cognitively average and achieving within two years of agreed related expectations. It is likely the child would need specialist education due to an inability to manage the busy mainstream environment and needing more support around social communication and sensory input than can be offered, despite additional support being provided already in a mainstream setting for multiple terms or academic years.
- **Learning Difficulty, Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD):** Cognition and Learning or Communication and Interaction usually listed as Primary Need on the EHCP. Achieving at least three years below age-related expectations due to cognition difficulties, SpLD, however the child may not be displaying difficult behaviours typically or needing much sensory or emotional regulation support. The child is likely to be able to engage in larger class sizes if within a similar peer group. This level of need is likely to remain despite additional support being provided already in a mainstream setting for multiple terms or academic years.

1.12 Currently many of these children are placed in ISPs or INMSSs and in some cases they are out of school and their provision is being met through education other than at school (EOTAS) with the intention of progressing the child to be attending a suitable school setting.

- 1.13 The Council in its role as the Commissioner of provision for children and young people with SEND will work in partnership with the Dorset Centre of Excellence to ensure the Council continues to meet the needs of Dorset children and young people.
- 1.14 Additional factors will need to be considered alongside the child's special educational needs to ensure the right children are placed at the new school, including:
- The child is presently in an ISP or INMSS and home to setting travel is more suitable and economically efficient to place them at the Dorset Centre of Excellence
 - The child is attending an ISP or INMSS with an Ofsted judgement of requires improvement or lower
 - The child is in the Care (a relevant looked after or previously looked after child in accordance with the Admissions Code 2021) of Dorset Council
 - Has no education placement and is receiving education other than at school (EOTAS)
- 1.15 In identifying the cohort of children, the numbers of children that the setting will be able to admit has been considered. It will be 60 in the academic year of opening, growing typically by an additional 60 each year to a total of 280 day places for children aged 5 – 19.
- 1.16 The SEND Service having identified appropriate children and young people will take the following next steps. Where a child or young person has been determined as eligible by the Local Authority, their parents/carers will be contacted by phone to be provided with information about Dorset Centre of Excellence, the type of needs it will provide for, the curriculum and the support and provision that will be available, including the availability of relevant therapies.
- 1.17 The SEND Team, Educational Psychologist and the staff at the new school will work with the child or young person and their family to understand their needs and identify whether the school will be a suitable placement. It will be essential to identify what factors are needed to ensure young people continue to progress towards achieving their outcomes on their EHCP and whether Dorset Centre of Excellence will be able to provide the appropriate provision.
- 1.18 A meeting or Annual Review will be arranged with the child/young person, their family, the current setting, the new setting and professionals involved in order to gain updates on the current needs and presentation, and the provision required to ensure that the school will be a suitable placement.

- 1.19 If the Local Authority determines that the placement is suitable and can meet needs in discussion with the new school as the provider, the school will be named in the Education, Health and Care Plan, and transition arrangements will be put in place.
- 1.20 To ensure we have a successful start for both the child, family, and school there will be a planned transition process. The transition process and arrangements will be based on what we know works drawing on evidence and good practice. The first step will be to establish a relationship with the child and family and build confidence in the new provision. From January 2021 we will be able to start the process of staff meeting the child in their current setting and meeting with the family.
- 1.21 The building works have started on the school buildings which means when planning the transition process we will take account of any site visiting risks and make use of virtual tours, photographs, the school brochure and staff reaching out to the children and young people and their families in their current settings and homes. For each child we will take a personalised approach. We will be able to direct families to the website which is currently being developed.
- 1.22 We will work with the families of children and young people who are moving from a residential setting to identify the support needed to ensure a successful transition to living in the family home. Partner agencies and other services within Dorset Council will be drawn in if needed taking a team around the family approach.
- 1.23 When the child starts at Dorset Centre of Excellence the transition process will continue to embed practice and provide assurance until the child is settled.
- 1.24 The Dorset Centre of Excellence is in the process of getting the school ready to seek Ofsted registration producing policies, developing the curriculum and appointing staff. The Centre of Excellence will submit an application to the Department for Education to register as an independent school. The school will seek to register at the earliest opportunity, but it may not open to educate young people until an Ofsted inspection has been completed and the Secretary of State for Education has approved the school.
- 1.25 For children who are moving from one phase of education to another, their EHCP has to be finalised naming the new placement for the following academic year by 15 February 2022. The completion of the percentage of phase transfer reviews completed on time is a National measure which we are asked to report.
- 1.26 The school may only be named on an EHCP after it has been approved as an educational establishment. This may need some flexibility around the placement process for the first cohort of young people.

- 1.27 It should be noted that the process for admissions to the school itself remains the responsibility of The Dorset Centre of Excellence. Whilst the Council will support to ensure smooth transitions, the school itself will make its own arrangements for admissions, appeal of admissions and other policies and processes related to the admissions of children.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 Currently more than 250 Dorset children and young people with SEND are educated in expensive, privately operated independent provision, many far out of our county. This currently costs around £14 million a year. Travelling far from Dorset is not good for our children and young people and we want more of our children and young people to be educated closer to home.
- 2.2 The wider SEND Capital Strategy seeks to increase specialist provision by approximately 500 places. This will in turn reduce the Council's expenditure on independent settings but also positively impact both the spend on transport associated climate benefits.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

- 3.1 The impact of change and transition will have an impact on emotional health and wellbeing of the children and young people with SEND and their families. We are working with colleagues in the Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure we have the relevant services available to provide the necessary support. The school employ its own educational psychologist and other therapy staff who will provide consultation support to the school for the children, families, and staff.

4. Climate implications

- 4.1 The wider SEND Capital Strategy seeks to increase specialist provision by approximately 500 places. This will in turn reduce the Council's expenditure on independent settings but also positively impact both the spend on transport associated climate benefits.

5. Other Implications

- 5.1 No other implications have been identified.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1 Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been provided as the project has implications to advance equity for children and young people with SEND.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 There are no appendices.

9. Background Papers

- 9.1 There are no background papers.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.